



2003

# SEASON PREVIEW

Senior Quarterback  
**ADAM HALL**





In the history of college football, the greatest success stories are not told about the traditional powers - those schools that have been celebrating football success since before World War I with ever-expanding trophy cases.

The great stories are told at the University of Miami, a program that was virtually unnoticed in the late 1970s before winning its first national championship in 1983 and starting its own history of success.

The great stories are told on the dusty plains, where Bill Snyder took over the worst pro-

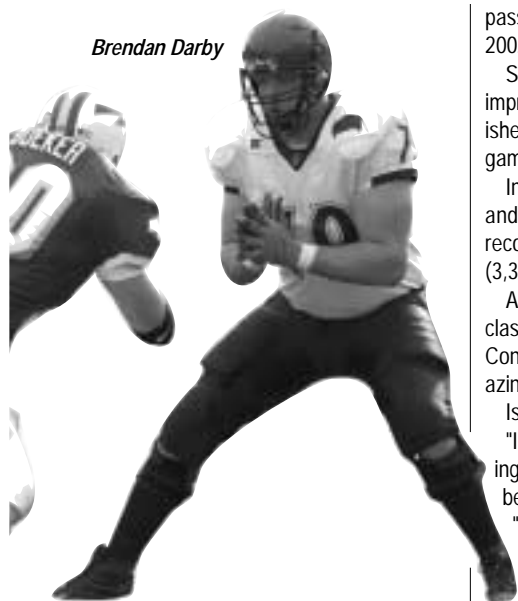
gram in college football history and turned Kansas State into a Big 12 powerhouse.

The great stories are told at the University of Florida where a program that did not own a conference title prior to 1984 is now one of the nation's elite.

The tough thing about these great stories, however, is knowing when you are at the beginning. They are easy to read in reverse. It's not hard to look in back into history and define the turning point on the road to success. The trick is realizing when the good times are just around the corner.



**Brendan Darby**



And maybe, just maybe, the stars are beginning to align for San Diego State and that success story is just about to begin.

The opening of the state-of-the-art Aztec Athletics Center has changed the image of the school in the eyes of recruits. And the hiring of head coach Tom Craft may have really put things in motion.

Unlike other histories at other schools, San Diego State has a strong football heritage. However, the long, sustained pile of championships the school enjoyed under the legendary Don Coryell have been replaced by pockets of success followed by rebuilding periods.

As an alum and former quarterback on a 10-1 Aztec team, Craft is aware of the successes and the failures, the challenges and the built-in advantages. And his arrival, timed with the opening of the new facilities, seems coincidental. The Aztec family hopes that it is fate.

There is little doubt that Tom Craft's first season left the school with one big dose of momentum.

Momentum can be a strange thing. And there is little doubt that the San Diego State football program is riding a wave of it for the first time in several years as it heads into the spring of 2003.

In their first year under Tom Craft, the Aztecs posted a 4-9 record. And while the 2002 team may not be immortalized with a banner wafting in the breeze atop Qualcomm Stadium, its list of accomplishments is impressive.

San Diego State's record came in a season in which the Aztecs played eight road games and faced eight teams that would end the season in a bowl game.

The Aztecs were predicted to finish last in the Mountain West Conference. Instead they finished third with a 4-3 mark, the best by the squad since the league was formed in time for the 1999 season.

San Diego State was the nation's most improved

passing team, rising from 89th in 2001 to fifth in 2002 at 330 yards per game.

San Diego State fielded the nation's fourth most improved offense, moving from 98th to 29th and finished the year with an average of 403 yards per game.

Individually, San Diego State receivers J.R. Tolver and Kassim Osgood set NCAA single-season records for catches (236) and receiving yards (3,337) by two teammates.

And to top things off, Tom Craft's 2003 recruiting class was ranked as the best in the Mountain West Conference and 38th nationally by *SuperPrep* magazine.

Is this how fate starts?

"I think we laid a foundation and brought the passing game back into the program," Craft said prior to beginning his second season at San Diego State.

"I think for a first year we accomplished some things. We threw for a school-record 4,302 yards with a quarterback in his first year as a starter. We established the way we want things done on the practice field, on game day and away from football."

And for an encore?

The Aztecs have two legitimate All-America candidates in quarterback Adam Hall and middle linebacker Kirk Morrison.

On offense, the running game figures to be improved for many reasons as does the tight-end position. San Diego State is woefully inexperienced at receiver but will be blessed with speed and athleticism that hasn't been seen on Montezuma Mesa in some time.

The secondary is sound in every way possible. Starters return at both safeties and at one corner and SDSU has a load of youth and athleticism waiting in the wings.

The linebacker corps is fast, experienced and still young throughout the two deep with only one senior on the depth chart. The defensive front will have a new look but could be improved.

Overall, yeah, momentum is still around and perhaps success isn't far behind.

## Aztec Offense

### Quarterback

Last year Adam Hall entered spring drills looking to win the job as the starting quarterback. This year he is established as one of America's best signal callers after a season in which he threw for 3,253 yards in less than 11 games. He completed 60 percent of his passes and was the trigger for SDSU's new prolific attack and the nation's fifth-ranked passing offense. He suffered a concussion and missed half of the Colorado State game and all of the contests at Air Force and Hawai'i when the Aztecs ripped the opposition for 78 points behind Lon Sheriff.

"For a new quarterback in a new system with basically new receivers, Adam had a phenomenal year," Craft said. "He played with a torn labrum for much of the season but remained very accurate. He continued to work and study even when he was out the last two games with a concussion.

"The things that are so important at that position are mental and physical toughness and Adam has that. He's got the arm strength to go with those qualities. He's got some spontaneity and resourcefulness in the pocket that makes him unique. He's a very accurate thrower and he's got some qualities that will make him appealing to people at the next level."

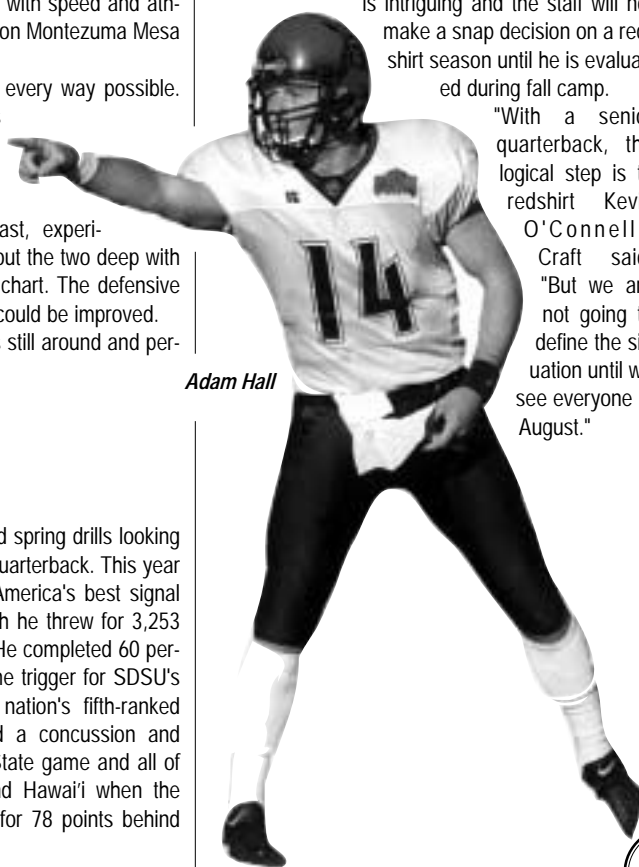
Illinois transfer Matt Dlugolecki is waiting in the wings behind Hall. The strong-armed sophomore was heavily recruited out of California as a prepster and had a nice year with the scout team and was impressive during San Diego State's abbreviated spring drills. His development in the "Air Craft" attack could be a critical element in 2003.

"We won't feel totally secure about the second-team quarterback until we can see Matt in our offense for an extended period of time. He did progress during the spring and he executed well with a couple of touchdown passes in our final scrimmage."

Walk-on Kevin Pierce, who is entering his sophomore season, also figures to get a number of reps in the fall and the Aztec staff is eager to see incoming freshman Kevin O'Connell on campus. His potential is intriguing and the staff will not make a snap decision on a redshirt season until he is evaluated during fall camp.

"With a senior quarterback, the logical step is to redshirt Kevin O'Connell," Craft said. "But we are not going to define the situation until we see everyone in August."

**Adam Hall**





## Offensive Line

After a season of shuffling, injuries, position changes and growing pains, the offensive line could be one of the most improved areas of the team in 2003. The Aztecs return three players who could be considered returning starters in seniors Brendan Darby and Gerald Sykes and sophomore Jasper Harvey. Mike Kracalik and Shawn Dickie are experienced reserves and two redshirts that figure to be in the mix are Nephi Penerosa and Patrick Justman. Squad member Danny Negrete also appears ready for duty.

Darby is the leader of the group and returns as the starting tackle. His backup could be a newcomer to the offensive line. Converted tight end David Gorman made the move to the front wall late in the spring and the coaching staff is intrigued by his athleticism on the corner.

Shawn Dickie, who has been in and out of the starting lineup the last two seasons, is listed as a starter at left guard entering fall camp with Justman serving as his backup.

Harvey has solidified things in the middle and is listed as the starter at center.

"Jasper had a great spring and we think he's got a chance to be an outstanding center here for the next three years," Craft said. "Our concern is developing depth at that position."

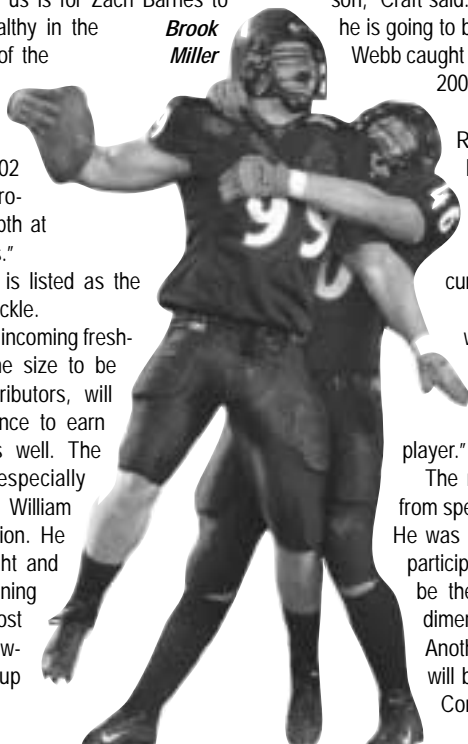
Sophomore Danny Negrete is listed as the second-team center entering fall camp, but he is yet to see any game action in his brief Aztec career.

Gerald Sykes returns as the starter at right guard and he has a chance to be a standout for San Diego State. His backup is Steve Nevarez, who sat out most of the spring with a hamstring injury.

"A big key for us is for Zach Barnes to return to us healthy in the fall," Craft said of the senior-to-be who suffered an ankle injury early in the 2002 season. "He provides quality depth at several positions."

Mike Kracalik is listed as the starter at right tackle.

In the fall, five incoming freshmen, all with the size to be immediate contributors, will be given a chance to earn playing time as well. The coaches are especially anxious to see William Robinson in action. He has added weight and inches since signing day and is the most athletic of the newcomers up front.



**Brook Miller**

## Receiver

A year ago San Diego State had just one proven receiver in J.R. Tolver, followed by a lot of question marks with potential.

Needless to say, things sorted themselves out with Tolver and Kassim Osgood posting record numbers and earning first-team all-Mountain West honors. Another senior, Ronnie Davenport, caught 56 passes. The bad news, of course, is the departure of that senior trio and filling their shoes will be a priority during the spring.

In fact, San Diego State returns just 40 of 352 receptions from last season.

"I feel like that our group of receivers made the biggest advances during spring practice," Craft said. "As a group, we are more athletic and we have more speed than a year ago. We have to make up for a lot of experience."

At the flanker position, Lonnell Penman and Wesley Williams complete the two-deep. Both had good springs and both look the part.

Jermaine Moore is listed as the starter at split end with Jeff Webb, coming off a redshirt season, listed as the second teamer.

"Jermaine played a lot on special teams and he will be a much bigger part of our offense this season," Craft said. "Jeff Webb had a great spring and he is going to be on the field somewhere."

Webb caught 19 passes in 2001 before sitting out 2002 to concentrate on academics.

The slot position is headed by Robert Ortiz. The walk-on is SDSU's leading returning receiver with transfer Devin Pitts listed second.

Pitts is the younger brother of former Aztec offensive lineman and current Houston Texan Chester Pitts.

"Ortiz is a very solid player while Pitts is eye-catching. His frame, coupled with his ability, helped him to really stand out to us. He could be a very good player."

The receiving corps figures to get help from speedster Ramal Porter during the fall. He was around for spring drills but did not participate due to a finger injury. He could be the fastest Aztec and brings a new dimension to the program.

Another freshman, redshirt Brian Spinks, will be looking to contribute as will Kyle Conerly, who made most of his contri-



**Michael Franklin**

butions a year ago as a special-teams player.

## Tight End

The Aztecs lose a starter in the form of Tyson Thompson but the coaching staff is confident that SDSU can still show improvement at a position that caught just nine passes a year ago.

*Journeymen* Jason Dion and Mike Lynch had encouraging springs.

"Jason Dion was impressive and he will enter the fall as the starter," Craft said. "Mike

Lynch was a surprise as well and showed that he can be a contributor."

Transfer Adam Watson is still making the transition but he figures to have his day in the sun.

"Adam has as much potential as any tight end we've got," Craft said. "We also want to take a long look at newcomer Jeremy Justice. He is a player that can be a wide-receiver threat, line up at tight end or at the H-back."

Mid-year enrollee Sione Fifita was slowed by a knee surgery during the spring.

## Running Back

The Aztecs will spend some extra time during the spring looking to improve their running game and there were plenty of candidates in the backfield.

Sophomores Frederick Collins and Michael Franklin are both considered starters. Collins is the power back and Franklin is a stop-and-start specialist.

"They are both returning players and I think they are both talented," Craft said.

Also back are Jason Van, DeAngelo Nedd and Fale Poumele. All three players have missed playing time for various reasons but all three have been counted on to contribute in the past. Van was a highly-decorated local prepster, Nedd was a starter during the spring last season and Poumele could see time in the backfield as a running back or at H-back.

The Aztecs ran for just 948 yards as a team and Franklin's 346 yards top the returning players. However, he averaged 5.6 yards per carry and his 55-yarder at Hawai'i was the longest by an Aztec last season.

Collins, meanwhile, ran for 333 yards in eight games.

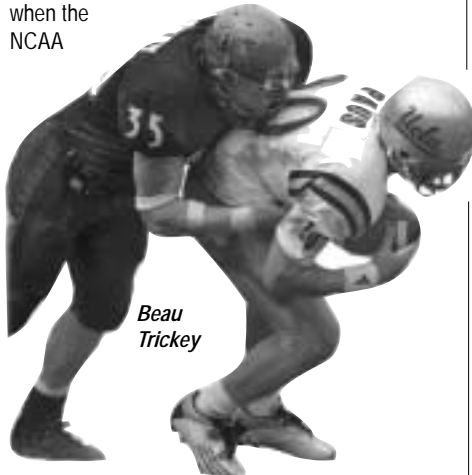
And, of course, joining the fray in the fall will be Lynell Hamilton, one of the nation's top prep running backs a year ago and the brightest star in SDSU's top 40 recruiting class.



## Aztec Defense

### Defensive End

The Aztecs' situation here improved immediately when the NCAA



*Beau Trickey*

granted a sixth year of eligibility to Ryan Iata. The senior was off to a strong start when he was lost to a knee injury in the first half of last season's Arizona State game. It marks the second straight year that the Aztecs will feature a sixth-year starter at defensive end after Akbar Gbaja-Biamila's career ended in December.

"If Ryan remains healthy he can have a tremendous year," Craft said. "He will be a real leader for us on the defensive side."

On the opposite end, Brandon Rager figures to replace Gbaja-Biamila.

"Brandon is having an impressive off season," Craft said. "We expect big things from him. He is becoming a very stabilizing force for us and we feel like we have two quality starters."

Rager had 18 tackles and three quarterback sacks last season with both numbers expected to increase.

With Iata and Rager penciled in as starters, attention will be paid to developing depth at defensive end and SDSU has a couple of darkhorse candidates that are taking away some of the anxieties.

The Aztec coaching staff is big on sophomore Kurt Kahui, who flashed some play-making ability a year ago. He is listed second on the depth chart behind Rager.

"He is undersized but he really has a motor," Craft said of the walkon from Hawaii. Another player that raised some eyebrows during spring was Robert Miller.

"Robert has added some weight and he was dynamic at times during the spring," Craft said. "I think right now we would be pretty comfortable with him on the field."

LeAndrew Stewart is a redshirt freshman who is 6-7, 215 and should only improve.

"Right now we seem him as a special-teams player and a pass-rush specialist until he grows into a

more permanent role," Craft said of the Stockton frosh.

The Aztecs lost a pair of starters at defensive end, including second-team all-conference performer Amon Arnold. Still, this position could show little fall-off from a year ago and could once again be a strength.

### Defensive Tackle

The Aztecs return a starter here in Brook Miller and will be looking to replace a steady hand in Jared Ritter. One potential starter is Blake Lobel, who has been a contributor at defensive end but saw his first interior assignments last season. He ended the season with 34 tackles, primarily in relief.

Another candidate is sophomore Freddie McCutcheon. He saw action in six games as a freshman and has the ability to plug the middle.

The Aztecs could get some immediate help in the fall from newcomers Va'ati Maka and Johnathan Bailes.

"Several of the newcomers could help us inside," Craft said. "Maka could help immediately and Bailes, too, depending on what kind of shape he's in when he reports."

Derick Durbin is another newcomer that could be in the rotation early in fall camp.

"Those guys will add some depth, size and strength up front," Craft said. "We could be better in the middle than we were a year ago."

### Linebacker

San Diego State returns six starters in its back seven of the defense and talent and experience is abundant at linebacker.

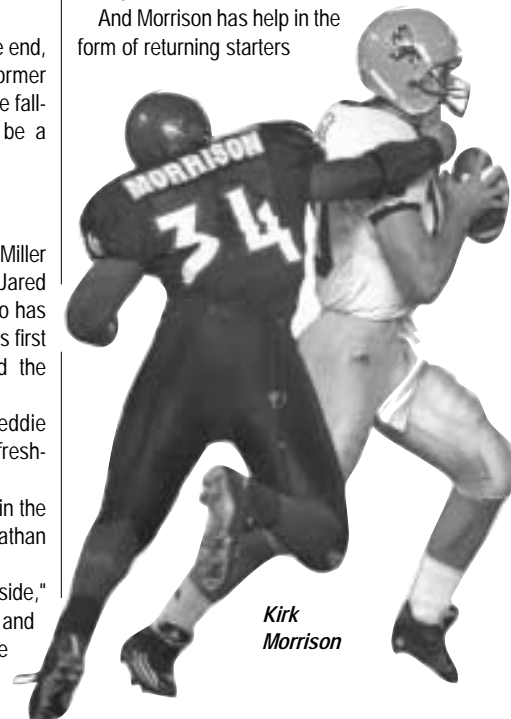
"It is one of our most talented areas," Craft said of the corps. "We have experience and we are still pretty young. Some of the new linebackers could contribute early as well - either at linebacker or on special teams."

The Aztec linebacker corps is led by the man in the middle, Kirk Morrison. A first-team all-league pick last season as a sophomore, Morrison ended 2002 with a team-leading 97 tackles. He also led San Diego State in fumble recoveries with five and tied for the lead in interceptions with three (including 91 yards in returns).

"It isn't very often you can say someone has already proven themselves when they are just going into their junior season, but Kirk Morrison is already one of the best players in the Mountain

West," Craft said.

And Morrison has help in the form of returning starters



*Kirk Morrison*

Stephen Larsen and Heath Farwell on the wings. In addition to that trio of juniors, San Diego State has two more outside linebackers in senior Beau Trickey and sophomore Matt McCoy who have both been starters.

"Stephen Larsen may have been the best linebacker during the spring," Craft said of the junior from Arizona. "Larsen and Heath Farwell have a real battle going there and both are players."

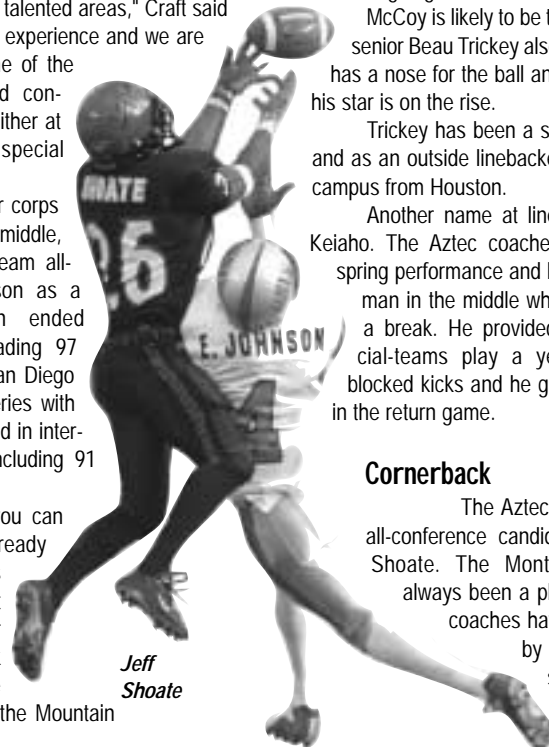
McCoy is likely to be the third starter with senior Beau Trickey also in the mix. McCoy has a nose for the ball and as a sophomore, his star is on the rise.

Trickey has been a starter in the middle and as an outside linebacker since arriving on campus from Houston.

Another name at linebacker is Freddie Keiaho. The Aztec coaches raved about his spring performance and he figures to be the man in the middle when Morrison needs a break. He provided outstanding special-teams play a year ago with two blocked kicks and he gave SDSU new life in the return game.

### Cornerback

The Aztecs return a sure-fire all-conference candidate in senior Jeff Shoate. The Montana transfer has always been a playmaker but Aztec coaches have been impressed by his improved decision-making. He was a sec-



*Jeff Shoate*



ond-team all-league selection last season. Shoate had two interceptions a year ago but was also responsible for 11 break-ups and three of his 57 tackles were behind the line of scrimmage.

Jacob Elimimian will enter spring drills second on the depth chart behind Shoate. The sophomore from Los Angeles has good feet and seems unfazed by his surroundings.

Across the way, a battle will rage for the other starting spot. Senior LaVance Ray tops the depth chart for now, in front of junior Hubert Caliste. Ray is a physical player who started slowly last season but showed big-hit and big-play capabilities in limited time.

Caliste is very athletic but has struggled with injuries his first two years on campus.

Redshirt freshmen Carl McCullough, Donny Baker and Terrell Maze will be given their first extensive looks in the secondary this spring. All three players are athletic and are part of the reason San Diego State signed just one defensive back in February.

"We feel like we have a lot of options back there," Craft said. "And we're still very young. Jeff Shoate is in line for a big year and we like the battle that's taking place across the field."

## Safety

The Aztecs went through the growing pains a year ago with two first-year sophomore starters in the secondary. They were predominantly spelled by a true freshman. This season, that group is a year older and deeper.

Josh Dean is the strong safety. He had 56 tackles last year and is a physical player that the coaching staff feels is a star waiting to blossom.

Keith Ellison climbed the depth chart quickly last season and the coaching staff is comfortable enough with the sophomore to consider some

position changes in the backfield for other players.

Another potential backup at strong safety is sophomore Reggie Grigsby. He impressed the staff quickly upon his arrival last fall and may be hard to keep out of the lineup. Like Dean, Grigsby is a physical player with playmaking ability.

The free safety spot is manned by Marviel Underwood. He was second on the team last fall with 83 tackles. He tied for the team lead with three interceptions and rare is the receiver that he can't run down.

Behind Underwood, sophomore Marcus Demps appears ready for more duty at the free safety position.

"We have two proven starters in Underwood and Dean," Craft said. "They are juniors and yet they will be pushed for playing time by three sophomores in Marcus Demps, Keith Ellison and Reggie Grigsby. We have a lot of options and experience and we don't have a senior in the group."

## Special Teams

San Diego State lost punter/kicker Brian Simjanovski and placekicker Tommy Kirovski to graduation and filling their roles will be a big priority in the fall. SDSU will also take a hard look at the return game.

The Aztecs seemed to have found an answer on kick returns when linebacker Freddie Keiaho got into the act. He averaged 22.3 yards per return a year ago.

Kyle Conerly was an honorable mention all-Mountain West punt returner in a role he was not scheduled to play. He averaged 15.7 yards on 11 returns and is back for his junior season.

Ramal Porter and Donny Baker, a pair of red-shirt freshmen, will get looks in the return game as well.

Clinton Arial-Ryan was a junior college All-America kicker at San Bernadino Valley and will be called upon to handle the placekicking duties. Incoming freshman Michael Hughes averaged 48.1 yards on punts a year ago and is the favorite to replace three-year starter Simjanovski.

Kyle Conerly



## 2003 PRE-SEASON DEPTH CHART

### Offense

TE	83	Jason Dion (6-3, 255, Sr.)
	81	Mike Lynch (6-1, 245, Sr.)
LT	79	Brendan Darby (6-7, 295, Sr.)
	75	Patrick Justman (6-5, 300, Fr.)
LG	77	Shawn Dickie (6-5, 310, Sr.)
	60	Anthony Foli (6-5, 280, Sr.)
C	72	Jasper Harvey (6-3, 300, So.)
	50	Danny Negrete (6-1, 310, So.)
RG	78	Gerald Sykes (6-1, 320, Sr.)
	54	Nephi Penerosa (6-2, 300, Fr.)
RT	74	Mike Kracalik (6-9, 325, Jr.)
	75	Patrick Justman (6-5, 300, Fr.)
FL	88	Lonnell Penman (6-2, 200, Jr.)
	84	Wesley Williams (6-3, 210, Jr.)
SE	1	Jermaine Moore (6-0, 200, Sr.)
	19	Jeff Webb (6-2, 200, So.)
SLT	80	Robert Ortiz (6-1, 185, So.)
	11	Devin Pitts (6-3, 195, Jr.)
RB	4	Frederick Collins (5-11, 190, So.)
	20	Michael Franklin (5-7, 180, So.)
QB	14	Adam Hall (6-3, 220, Sr.)
	5	Matt Dlugolecki (6-4, 215, So.)

### Defense

DE	90	Ryan Iata (6-5, 270, Sr.)
	95	Robert Miller (6-6, 240, So.)
DT	99	Brook Miller (6-4, 280, Sr.)
	55	Freddie McCutcheon (6-0, 280, So.)
DT	46	Blake Lobel (6-3, 260, Jr.)
	55	Freddie McCutcheon (6-0, 280, So.)
DE	98	Brandon Rager (6-3, 250, Sr.)
	97	Kurt Kahui (6-1, 240, So.)
WLB	35	Beau Trickey (6-1, 240, Sr.)
	43	Matt McCoy (6-0, 220, So.)
MLB	34	Kirk Morrison (6-2, 240, Jr.)
	52	Adam Nyssen (5-11, 215, Jr.)
SLB	45	Stephen Larsen (6-1, 235, Jr.)
	44	Heath Farwell (6-0, 225, Jr.)
CB	15	LaVance Ray (5-11, 170, Sr.)
	39	Jacob Elimimian (5-11, 175, So.)
CB	26	Jeff Shoate (5-11, 175, Sr.)
	10	Hubert Caliste (6-2, 190, Jr.)
FS	5	Marviel Underwood (5-11, 200, Jr.)
	30	Marcus Demps (6-0, 195, So.)
SS	42	Josh Dean (6-1, 210, Jr.)
	38	Keith Ellison (6-1, 210, So.)

### Specialists

KO	37	Clinton Arial-Ryan (5-8, 175, Jr.)
PK	37	Clinton Arial-Ryan (5-8, 175, Jr.)
P	17	Michael Hughes (5-10, 170, Fr.)
DS	53	Casey Naylor (6-2, 220, Jr.)
	59	Robbie Ryan (6-4, 225, Jr.)
Hold	12	Adam Gray-Hayward (6-1, 210, Jr.)



Josh Dean