



MERCER BEARS

BACK-TO-BACK SOCON CHAMPIONS



2026 SCHEDULE (All times Eastern)

Aug. 29	^ East Texas A&M	W, 23-15
Sept. 5	Presbyterian	6 p.m.
Sept. 12	* Furman	6 p.m.
Sept. 19	at Georgia Tech	Noon
Sept. 26	at Abilene Christian	8 p.m.
Oct. 3	at VMI	1:30 p.m.
Oct. 10	* Western Carolina	3 p.m.
Oct. 17	* at Samford	7 p.m.
Oct. 31	* The Citadel	3 p.m.
Nov. 7	* at Chattanooga	1 p.m.
Nov. 14	* at Tennessee Tech	2:30 p.m.
Nov. 21	* East Tennessee State	3 p.m.

^ FCS Kickoff | * SoCon Game

ON THE AIR

TV: ESPN+

Play-by-Play:	Frank Malloy
Color Analyst:	Phil Cox
Sideline Reporter:	None

MU RADIO: MERCER SPORTS NETWORK

Flagship:	The Creek 100.9 FM
Free Online:	Sportsmic Network
Play-by-Play:	Rick Cameron
Color Analyst:	Billy Andrews
Sideline Reporter:	Bill Connelly

SOCIAL MEDIA: #ATTACK

Twitter/X	@MercerFootball
Instagram	@mercerfootball
Facebook	/mercerfootball

MU RADIO: MERCER SPORTS NETWORK

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Play-by-Play:	Rick Cameron
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SERIES HISTORY

Overall	Mercer leads, 11-6
In Macon	Mercer leads, 7-4
Last meeting:	Presbyterian 15, Mercer 10 (8/30/25)

#15 MERCER (1-0, 0-0 SoCon)



BEARS

Head Coach: Joel Taylor
Record at MU: 1-0 (1.000)
Career Record: 13-10 (.565)
Last: Def. East Texas A&M, 23-15

GAME 2

PRESBYTERIAN (1-0, 0-0 PFL)



BLUE HOSE

Head Coach: Matt Rahl
Record at PC: 1-0 (1.000)
Career Record: 1-0 (1.000)
Last: Def. UVa.-Wise, 47-37

Saturday, September 5 • 6 p.m. ET • Macon, Ga. • Five Star Stadium (10,200) • ESPN+

HARD COUNT

► Nationally-ranked Mercer (1-0, 0-0 SoCon) will continue its season-opening three-game home stand on Saturday evening when the Bears suit up to host Pioneer Football League rival Presbyterian under the lights of Five Star Stadium. Kickoff is scheduled for 7:02 p.m. and the game will be broadcast live with Frank Malloy (pxp) and Phil Cox (commentary) calling all of the action.

► Saturday's contest will mark the 18th meeting between Mercer and Presbyterian in a series that dates all the way back to the 1927 season. The squads have locked horns in Macon 11 times across that span, as well as once at a neutral site. The Blue Hose won that 1940 contest in Albany, Georgia, by a 3-2 final.

► Mercer is now 55-22 (.714) all-time in Five Star Stadium after last week's victory over East Texas A&M, including a 19-5 (.792) record against non-conference opponents. The Bears have captured 21 of their last 25 home games heading into Saturday's matchup with Presbyterian.

► The Orange & Black has posted a 29-21 (.580) record against non-conference competition since revamping its program in time for the 2013 campaign. The Bears are 21-9 (.700) against non-conference FCS foes, including a 12-5 mark in such games at Five Star Stadium. Mercer had its six-game win streak against FCS non-conference foes snapped in last year's season opener with Presbyterian.

► Senior Cameron Goggins was crowned Southern Conference Defensive Player of the Week on Monday afternoon. Goggins picked off a pass right and returned it 38 yards for a touchdown right before the halftime break on Saturday evening to give the Bears a 23-0 lead heading into the locker rooms. He also registered a trio of tackles.

► Saturday's contest will mark the 26th-straight time that Mercer has toted a national ranking into a game – the longest-such stretch in the history of the program. The Bears achieved a program-best No. 6 national ranking with the release of the Stats Perform FCS Top 25 on Nov. 17, 2025.

► Saturday's matchup at Five Star Stadium will mark the fourth time in the last three years that Mercer will play in front of a national audience. The Bears made their national television debut when they downed North Alabama in the 2023 FCS Kickoff in Montgomery, and made another national television appearance in the 2024 NCAA FCS Quarterfinals at North Dakota State (ABC). The Orange & Black returned to Montgomery for the FCS Kickoff last season, battling to a No Contest with nationally-ranked UC Davis on ESPN.



Senior Cameron Goggins was named the Southern Conference Defensive Player of the Week on Monday for his role in Mercer's 23-15 victory over East Texas A&M in the FCS Kickoff.

NUMBERS TO NOTE

73

Mercer began the 2026 season with 73 newcomers on its roster, including 39 transfers. The opening-day roster also included 34 freshmen as well.

4

The Bears returned four starters from last year's squad that registered a 9-3 record and another SoCon championship. That includes three starters on offense and one on defense.

6

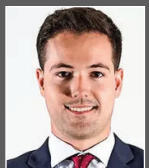
A league-high six Bears were named to the Preseason All-Southern Conference squad that was announced in July. All six donned first team honors.



X SOCON

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HEAD COACH JOEL TAYLOR

Alma Mater	South Carolina State, 2004
Career Record	12-8 (.600, 3rd Season)
Record at MU	0-0 (.000, 1st Season)
Record vs. SoCon Teams	3-0 (1.000)

ASSISTANT COACHES

Sumner Ellis (Associate Head Coach/DL)
* Austin Davis (Assistant Head Coach/OC)
* Tripp Weaver (Defensive Coordinator)
Brandon Taylor (Special Teams Coordinator/OLB)
* Barry Brown (Tight Ends)
* Joseph Eaglin (Nickels)
Bryant Foster (Cornerbacks)
Brian Greene (Offensive Line)
DJ Hazelray (Wide Receivers)
Cal King (Safeties)
Jordan Marshall (Running Backs)
Dustin Royston (Co-Defensive Coordinator/LB)
David Salmon (Quarterbacks)

* In Booth

TEAM INFORMATION

First Year:	1892 (this is 53rd season) <i>*program disbanded from 1942-2012</i>
All-Time Record:	212-229-14 (.481)
All-Time Conference Record:	103-127-6 (.431)
All-Time SoCon Record:	55-39 (.585)
All-Time FCS Playoffs Record:	2-3
FCS Playoff Appearances:	2023, 2024, 2025
Conference Championships:	2024, 2025
10+-Win Seasons:	1 (2024)

STADIUM/FIELD INFORMATION

Name:	Five Star Stadium <i>*renamed on Feb. 27, 2015</i>
Capacity:	10,200
Surface:	FieldTurf
Stadium First Year:	2013
Record at Stadium:	55-22 (.714)
Field Name:	Anderson Field

GENERAL INFORMATION

Location (Founded)	Penfield, Ga. (1833)
Conference	Southern (SoCon)
Enrollment	9,100
Colors	Orange & Black
Nickname	Bears
Mascot	Toby & Tot
Band	Mercer University Marching Band
President	Penny L. Elkins, Ph.D.
FAR	Dr. Jeffrey Huggdahl
Director of Athletics	Brian Gerrity
Ticket Office Phone	(478) 952-1740

MEDIA COVERAGE POLICIES

The following media policies are subject to change at any time.

WORKING CREDENTIALS

Requests for media credentials for Mercer University home games should be submitted via email to Assistant AD/Communications Todd Anderson at anderson_t02@mercer.edu. Only those requests submitted by the sports editor of a newspaper or the sports director of a radio or television station will be considered. Priority for the issuance of credentials will be given to daily print/digital media outlets and radio and television stations which cover Mercer football on a regular basis. A credential does not guarantee a seat and access to the team bench area is prohibited at all times.

Credential requests should be made no later than one week before each game. Organizations may request single-game credentials for the entire season, but requests may be evaluated on a game-by-game basis. Any organization that requests a single-game credential then does not use it might be prohibited from receiving another pass the remainder of the season. No credential requests will be granted after Wednesday of game week.

CREDENTIAL PICKUP (MU HOME GAMES)

Credentials may be picked up at media will call (Gate 2) at Five Star Stadium on game day beginning 60 minutes before kickoff. Each media representative must claim his or her pass by showing official identification. No group pickups are allowed on the day of the game.

PARKING PASSES

Parking passes will be available to credentialed media on a game-by-game basis. MU will, again, utilize digital parking passes for the 2024 season. More information will be shared directly with media members who request parking passes.

SIDELINES

Mercer University follows NCAA and Southern Conference rules regarding media representatives on the sidelines.

- Credentials must be visible to gain access to the field.
- All photographers/videographers must be in attendance in a working capacity with proper equipment.
- Photographers are not permitted to shoot between the 25-yard lines.
- Affiliate television stations are not allowed the services of a grip, and credentials will not be provided for grip operations.
- No one under 18 years of age with be issued a credential for sideline access.
- Photographers/videographers are considered working members of the media, and they are to refrain from cheering or conversing with student-athletes, coaches or officials.
- Photographers may send/edit photos from the field level of the Homer & Ruth Drake Fieldhouse which is located in the south end zone. Contact Todd Anderson to reserve space.
- Not conforming to any of the above-listed guidelines will result in the immediate dismissal from the stadium by game operations staff.

STATISTICS SERVICES

Live stats for the 2026 season will be available at the following website: MercerBears.com/Stats. Media members are encouraged to use this site as their main reference point for statistics. Updated game notes for both teams and Southern Conference notes and statistics will be available at MercerBears.com. Upon request, a final statistics book can be e-mailed to media members approximately 90 minutes after the conclusion of the game. To be added to the list, please e-mail football contact Rylee Bamberger at rylee.m.bamberger@live.mercer.edu.

INTERNET ACCESS

Wireless Internet is available for the working media in the press box. Ethernet connections are available at designated seats in the press box, but only a limited number of cords are available.

FOOD

A complimentary pregame meal will be served two hours prior to kickoff. There will also be concession stands open on the concourse level for media to purchase food on game day. Soft drinks will be available in the pressbox throughout the game.

MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Practices: Mercer's practices during the regular season are closed to media. Media are not permitted to observe practices or workouts from any location without approval from the MU Athletic Communications Office.

Monday: Head Coach Joel Taylor will hold his weekly press conference on the second floor of the Homer & Ruth Drake Fieldhouse. Lunch for those in attendance will follow. Taylor will be joined by selected player(s) at the press conference which will begin promptly at 12:30 p.m.

Coach/Player Availability: Outside of the weekly press conference, interviews during the week with head coach Joel Taylor or any players should be arranged through the MU Athletic Communications Office. The only times available for player interviews is following practice on both Tuesday and Thursday. Please contact the MU Athletic Communications Office for all player interview requests at least 24 hours in advance.

Game Day: Postgame availability only. Interview requests will be collected at the beginning of the fourth quarter. The Mercer locker room, home or away, is closed to media at all times. For games in Macon, head coach Joel Taylor, as well as requested coordinators and MU players, will be brought to the team's designated interview area for press conferences and breakout interviews. A representative from the MU Athletic Communications Office will be on hand to assist media in finding these areas. Contact the visiting team SID for postgame coach and player availability.

MERCERBEARS.COM

The official website of Mercer Athletics, MercerBears.com, is the most complete source of information on the Bears, featuring news releases, schedules, rosters, bios, statistics, game notes, photos, videos, archives and more. A complete video from the weekly press conference is available on the website Monday evening; weekly releases will be made available on Tuesday mornings.

JOEL COACH'S SHOW

Hosted by the Voice of the Bears, Rick Cameron, the Joel Taylor Coach's Show recaps the last game for Mercer and looks ahead to the coming week. The show will be broadcast live from 7 to 8 p.m. every Thursday throughout the season at the Wild Wing Café (Shoppes at River Crossing location). Fans are encouraged to attend the show and also submit questions to be asked by tagging #AskCoachTaylor on Twitter and Instagram posts. The show will broadcast on both 100.9 The Creek and SportsMic Radio.

MERCER RADIO NETWORK

Radio coverage of each game will begin on Saturday with a one-hour pregame show and a 30-minute postgame show. Each of the games will be carried on WNEC, The Creek, 100.9 FM, in Macon, and the SportsMic Network. The SportsMic team will provide a one-hour tailgate show as well beginning one hour before the radio broadcast begins. Mercer fans can listen to the games directly at 100.9 FM or can listen from anywhere on their computer, smartphone or tablet by downloading the SportsMic app.

PRESS CONFERENCE/POSTGAME INTERVIEW FILES

Broadcast-quality video files for television newscasts of press conferences on Monday, as well as home and road postgame interviews, will be available for use by contacting Todd Anderson at (662) 312-1829 or by email at anderson_t02@mercer.edu.



Presbyterian racked up more than 410 offensive yards and scored the go-ahead touchdown with 56 seconds left to hand Mercer a rare home defeat in the 2025 season opener for both sides.

NCAA RANK COMPARISONS

	MU	PC
Scoring Offense	72	14
Scoring Defense	34	89
Total Offense	71	7
Total Defense	66	92
Rushing Offense	40	49
Rushing Defense	61	53
Passing Offense	82	3
Passing Defense	60	103
1st Downs	85	2
1st Downs Allowed	24	54
Tackles For Loss/Game	48	63
Tackles For Loss Allowed/Game	32	92
Sacks/Game	54	13
Sacks Allowed/Game	35	85
Passes Intercepted	2	20
Passes Had Intercepted	1	50
Fumbles Lost	1	100
Fumbles Recovered	n/a	3
Turnovers Gained	5	5
Turnovers Lost	1	94
Turnover Margin	3	46
Defensive TDs	1	n/a
Fewest Penalties Per Game	36	94
Fewest Penalty Yards/Game	21	90
3rd Down Offense	102	19
3rd Down Defense	32	95
4th Down Offense	1	1
4th Down Defense	52	1
Red Zone Offense	68	49
Red Zone Defense	15	47
Punt Return Average	75	61
Punt Return Defense	10	10
Kickoff Returns	97	33
Kickoff Return Defense	62	73
Net Punting	54	52
Time Of Possession	62	23



MERCER BEARS

(1-0, 0-0 SoCon)
Head Coach: Joel Taylor (South Carolina St, 2004)
Record at Mercer: 0-0 (.000), 1st year
Overall Record: 13-10 (.565), 3rd year

Aug. 29	EAST TEXAS A&M	W, 23-15
Sept. 5	PRESBYTERIAN	6 p.m.
Sept. 12	* FURMAN	6 p.m.
Sept. 19	at Georgia Tech	Noon
Sept. 26	at Abilene Christian	8 p.m.
Oct. 3	* at VMI	1:30 p.m.
Oct. 10	* WESTERN CAROLINA	3 p.m.
Oct. 17	* at Samford	7 p.m.
Oct. 24	BYE	
Oct. 31	* THE CITADEL	3 p.m.
Nov. 7	* at Chattanooga	1 p.m.
Nov. 14	* at Tennessee Tech	2:30 p.m.
Nov. 21	* EAST TENNESSEE ST	3 p.m.

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) game

2026 Team Statistics	MU	Opp
Scoring	23	15
Points per game	23.0	15.0
Rushing Yardage	167	148
Average per rush	4.8	3.9
Average per game	167.0	148.0
TDs rushing	0	1
Passing Yardage	189	235
Comp.-Att.-Int.	17-30-0	16-31-3
Average per game	189.0	235.0
TDs passing	1	1
Total Offense	356	383
Average per game	356.0	383.0
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
3rd Down Conversions	4-16	5-17
3rd Down Conversion %	25.0	29.4
Sacks By-Yards	1-7	1-2

2026 Mercer Leaders				
Rushing	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Zahmari Palode-Gary	8	87	10.9	0
Jaylen King	11	34	3.1	0
Micah Bell	7	19	2.7	0

Passing	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Jaylen King	17-30-0	56.7	189	1

Receiving	Rec.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Brayden Smith	9	131	14.6	0
Travion Solomon	3	23	7.7	0
Eric Rasheed	2	20	10.0	0

Tackles	Solo	Asst.	Total	TFL
Jyarius Carter	3	5	8	0.5
CJ Favors	3	4	7	0.5
Justin Ferguson	7	0	7	0.0

Tackles For Loss	Solo	Asst.	Total	Yds
Kobe McInnis	1.0	0.5	1.5	3
Cam Moore	1.0	0.0	1.0	4
Eric Brantley Jr.	1.0	0.0	1.0	1

Miscellaneous	Int	BU	FF	FR
Justin Ferguson	1	1	0	0
Mike Polke	1	0	0	0
Cameron Goggins	1	0	0	0



PRESBYTERIAN BLUE HOSE

(1-0, 0-0 PFL)
Head Coach: Matt Rahl (Missouri Southern St., 2002)
Record at Presbyterian: 1-0 (1.000), 1st year
Overall Record: 1-0 (1.000), 1st year

Aug. 27	UVA WISE	W, 47-37
Sept. 5	at #15 Mercer	6 p.m.
Sept. 12	at Western Carolina	2:30 p.m.
Sept. 19	BYE	
Sept. 26	* at Marist	Noon
Oct. 3	* ST. THOMAS	1 p.m.
Oct. 10	* DAVIDSON	5:30 p.m.
Oct. 17	* at Stetson	2 p.m.
Oct. 24	* at Valparaiso	Noon
Oct. 31	* BUTLER	1 p.m.
Nov. 7	BYE	
Nov. 14	* at Morehead St.	Noon
Nov. 21	* DAYTON	1 p.m.

* = Pioneer Football League (PFL) game

2026 Team Statistics	PC	Opp
Scoring	47	37
Points per game	47.0	37.0
Rushing Yardage	169	134
Average per rush	3.8	4.5
Average per game	169.0	134.0
TDs rushing	3	2
Passing Yardage	407	338
Comp.-Att.-Int.	34-48-1	20-42-1
Average per game	407.0	338.0
TDs passing	3	3
Total Offense	576	472
Average per game	576.0	472.0
Fumbles-Lost	2-2	3-2
3rd Down Conversions	9-16	9-16
3rd Down Conversion %	56.3	56.3
Sacks By-Yards	3-13	3-11

2026 Presbyterian Leaders				
Rushing	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Landon Sharpe	18	94	5.2	1
Damion Moate	13	48	3.7	1
Jackson Burleson	11	34	3.1	1

Passing	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Landon Sharpe	30-43-1	69.8	367	3
Max Holtzclaw	4-5-0	80.0	40	0

Receiving	Rec.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
Anton Smith	6	105	17.5	0
Caleb Johnson	7	92	13.1	1
Deverious Abercrombie	5	73	14.6	0

Tackles	Solo	Asst.	Total	TFL
Andrew Ruppe	5	4	9	1.0
Tymaries Durant	3	4	7	0.0
Luke Armstrong	2	3	5	1.0

Tackles For Loss	Solo	Asst.	Total	Yds
Andrew Ruppe	1.0	0	1.0	1.0
Langston Cook	1.0	0	1.0	1.0
Jalyn Turner	1.0	0	1.0	1.0

Miscellaneous	Int	BU	FF	FR
Braylon Carstarphen	1	0	0	0
Luke Armstrong	0	0	1	0

2026 HONORS

BRODY BALLIEW (Sr, OL)
Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st)
Phil Steele Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st)

JYARIUS CARTER (So, LB)
Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st)
Phil Steele Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st)

JUSTIN FERGUSON (So, CB)
Southern Conference Defensive Player of the Week (8/31)

CAMERON GOGGINS (Sr, CB)
Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st)
Phil Steele Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st)

KOBE MCINNIS (So, DL)
Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st)
Phil Steele Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st)

TYLER MURRAY (Jr, OL)
Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st)
Phil Steele Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st)

BRAYDEN SMITH (Sr, WR/RS)
Walter Payton Award Preseason Watch List
FCS Football Central Preseason All-America (2nd, AP)
Phil Steele Preseason All-America (3rd, WR)
Phil Steele Preseason All-America (3rd, AP)
Preseason SoCon Offensive Player of the Year
Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st, WR)
Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st, RS)
Phil Steele Preseason SoCon Offensive Player of the Year
Phil Steele Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st, WR)
Phil Steele Preseason All-Southern Conference (1st, AP)
Phil Steele Preseason All-Southern Conference (2nd, KR)
Phil Steele Preseason All-Southern Conference (3rd, PR)

PRESBYTERIAN COMES CALLING ON SATURDAY

► Mercer has captured 11 of the previous 17 meetings with Presbyterian in a series that dates all the way back to the 1927 season. The squads have locked horns in Macon 11 times across that span, as well as once at a neutral site. The Blue Hose won that 1940 contest in Albany, Georgia, by a 3-2 final.

► Presbyterian has strung together consecutive wins in the series, but has not done so since the 1939 and 1940 seasons. The Blue Hose blanked Mercer, 7-0, on Sept. 29, 1939 in Macon, and then doubled up the following season with a 3-2 neutral site victory in Albany, Georgia.

► Conversely, Mercer boasts a pair of 3-game win streaks in the nearly 100-year-old series with the Blue Hose. The Bears won each meeting with PC from 1934-36, as well as home matchup in 1941, coupled with modern-era victories in 2019 and 2024.

PLENTY OF NEW FACES ON MERCER'S ROSTER

► The Bears **return four starters and 26 other letterwinners** from last year's squad that posted a 9-3 clip, including an 8-0 mark in Southern Conference play, on the way to staking claim to their second-straight outright conference championship. Mercer dropped a 15-10 contest to Presbyterian to open the 2025 campaign, but rebounded with nine-straight victories on the way to securing its third-straight trip to the NCAA FCS Playoffs.

► **Three offensive starters return** for the Bears, including wide receiver Brayden Smith, offensive lineman Tyler Murray and tight end Samuel Albee. The lone returning defensive starter for Mercer is defensive lineman Kobe McInnis who played in 11 games for the Orange & Black last season, including seven starts.

► The 113-man roster features 72 newcomers, including 38 transfers with previous collegiate playing experience, as well as 34 freshmen. The **transfers ventured to Macon from 15 different previous schools**, including a dozen from West Georgia where head coach Joel Taylor spent the 2024 and 2025 campaigns.

MERCER PICKED TO 3-PEAT IN SOCON, JOIN ELITE LIST OF FORMER CHAMPS

► The two-time reigning league champion Bears were picked to complete a task that has not been accomplished in more than 40 years when **Bears nestled themselves atop the preseason coaches poll** as the Southern Conference kicked off its annual Football Media Day on July 21. Points were awarded on a 10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1 basis and coaches were not permitted to vote for their own teams.

► In addition to the preseason team prognostication, **Mercer matched a league-best with six Preseason All-SoCon awards**, led by Preseason Offensive Player of the Year in wide receiver/return specialist Brayden Smith (two awards). The six first team honors (league best) also included offensive linemen Brody Balliew and Tyler Murray, defensive lineman Kobe McInnis and linebacker Jyarius Carter.

► Should the foreshadowing hold true, the Bears would become **the first team since Appalachian State (2005-07)** to claim three-straight SoCon championships, including a shared title (Wofford) by the Mountaineers in 2010. West Virginia (1953-56) and Furman (1980-83) are the only other current or former SoCon squads to capture the league title outright for three or more consecutive seasons.

BRAYDEN SMITH HAS RAKED IN A SLEW OF PRESEASON ACCOLADES

► Wide receiver/return specialist Brayden Smith, who picked up postseason all-America accolades from both FCS Football Central (AP) and Stats Perform FCS (PR) following a stellar sophomore campaign, **has already added a pair of preseason all-America nods** to his awards stable this season. FCS Football Central included the Macon native among its second team preseason all-America candidates on July 24, while Phil Steele doled out a pair of third team nods to Smith at both wide receiver and all-purpose.

► Smith was included as one of 30 players named to the preseason watch list for the 2026 Walter Payton Award in mid-July which is presented annually to the **national offensive player of the year in Division I FCS college football**. He joined Tennessee Tech senior MJ Flowers as one of just two Southern Conference representatives in the announcement. It is the second time in four seasons that a Mercer standout has adorned the preseason watch list.

► The electric wide receiver and return specialist was tabbed as the Southern Conference Preseason Offensive Player of the Year by both Phil Steele and the league's head coaches. Smith was named as a first team preseason all-conference selection by the SoCon head coaches at both wide receiver and return specialist, while Phil Steele decorated him with preseason all-conference accolades at wide receiver (1st team), all-purpose (1st), kick returner (2nd) and punt returner (3rd).

► A two-time All-SoCon selection, Smith has amassed more than 2,900 all-purpose yards through his first three campaigns in the Orange & Black, including a 2025 season that watched him account for 1,262 all-purpose yards. Smith hauled in a team-best 60 catches for 712 yards and seven touchdowns last season, while also ranking 21st among FCS return specialists with 554 kick return yards.

► Smith lived up to his preseason hype in Mercer's season-opening 23-15 win over East Texas A&M in the FCS Kickoff, matching a career-best with nine catches on the way to finishing his night with a team-best 131 receiving yards. Four of his receptions went for 13 or more yards, including a 47-yard catch in the second quarter that set up Mercer's second score of the evening.

CLASS BREAKDOWN

	Total	Transfers
Freshmen	34	-
Sophomores	24	12
Juniors	23	5
Seniors	20	12
5th Year	12	9
Totals	113	38

SOCON PRESEASON POLL

Team (1st Place)	Points
1. Mercer (6)	76
2. Tennessee Tech (3)	70
3. East Tennessee State (1)	61
4. Western Carolina	58
5. Chattanooga	48
6. Furman	46
7. Wofford	36
8. Samford	23
9. The Citadel	22
10. VMI	10

NATIONAL POLLS

STATS PERFORM FCS TOP 25 (WEEK 1)

#	School (1st Place)	Rec	Pts	Prev
1	Montana State	1-0	1425	1
2	South Dakota State	1-0	1333	3
3	Montana	1-0	1303	2
4	Illinois State	1-0	1228	4
5	Tarleton State	1-0	1163	5
6	Rhode Island	1-0	1070	7
7	UC Davis	1-0	1006	6
8	North Dakota	1-0	1004	10
9	Youngstown State	1-0	981	9
10	Lehigh	1-0	927	11
11	South Dakota	1-0	860	12
12	Tennessee Tech	1-0	810	14
13	Stephen F. Austin	1-0	806	13
14	Lamar	1-0	626	20
15	Austin Peay	1-0	574	17
16	Yale	0-0	415	18
17	William & Mary	1-0	408	NR
18	Villanova	0-1	406	8
19	Mercer	1-0	381	21
20	Ablene Christian	0-1	282	15
21	South Carolina State	1-0	247	24
22	Northern Arizona	1-0	217	25
23	Idaho State	1-0	184	NR
24	Western Carolina	1-0	165	NR
25	West Florida	1-0	110	NR

Receiving Votes: Southern Illinois 99; Alabama State 64;Harvard; Central Arkansas 60; Southern Utah 46; UTRGV 32; Houston Christian 28; Cal Poly 27; Delaware State 24; Jackson State 21; Elon 19; Southeast Missouri 19; Southeastern Louisiana 19; Richmond 18; Monmouth 16; Chattanooga 8; UAlbany 6; Prairie View A&M 4; UT Martin 2.

AFCA TOP 25 (WEEK 1)

#	School (1st Place)	Rec	Pts	Prev
1	Montana St. (26)	1-0	650	1
2	South Dakota State	1-0	604	3
3	Montana	1-0	599	2
4	Illinois St.	1-0	563	4
5	Tarleton State	1-0	554	5
6	UC Davis	1-0	493	6
7	Youngstown State	1-0	466	9
8	Rhode Island	1-0	463	8
9	North Dakota	1-0	421	10
10	Lehigh	1-0	382	11
11	Stephen F. Austin	1-0	374	13
12	South Dakota	1-0	354	12
13	Tennessee Tech	1-0	330	15
14	Austin Peay	1-0	284	18
15	Mercer	1-0	267	17
16	Lamar	1-0	230	21
17	Villanova	0-1	185	7
18	Yale	0-0	158	19
19	William & Mary	1-0	137	NR
20	Northern Arizona	1-0	120	24
21	ACU	0-1	118	14
22	South Carolina State	1-0	87	25
23	Richmond	1-0	71	NR
24	Central Arkansas	1-0	63	NR
25	Southern Illinois	0-1	231	16

Receiving Votes: Western Carolina 47; UT Martin 31; Idaho State 29; Wofford 29; Southeast Missouri State 24; Alabama State 22; Maine 20; Southeastern Louisiana 20; Monmouth 17; Furman 16; Harvard 16; Prairie View A&M 14; Southern Utah 14; Chattanooga 13; UT-Rio Grande Valley 13; West Florida 13; Cal Poly 11; Elon 11; Houston Christian 10; Incarnate Word 10; Delaware State 9; Dartmouth 8; Idaho 7; Jackson State 7; Campbell 6; East Tennessee State 3.



THERE REALLY IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME

► Mercer is now **55-22 (.714) all-time in Five Star Stadium** after its Week 0 victory over visiting East Texas A&M in the FCS Kickoff. The Bears have turned in at least four wins inside their home stadium in each of the last five seasons, and have now captured 21 of their last 25 home games heading into Saturday's contest with East Texas A&M.

► Mercer **has won 10-straight games against SoCon foes** in Five Star Stadium, and boasts a 21-3 clip against league foes since the end of the 2019 campaign. The Bears are 31-17 all-time against SoCon opponents in Macon.

► Mercer's setback to Presbyterian in Week 1 last season **snapped a school record 10-game home win streak**. At the time, the skein ranked as the fourth-longest active home win streak among FCS schools. The Bears out-scored opponents 358-181 across the streak and won those 10 games by an average of 17.7 points an outing.

ZEIDAN USES DEBUT TO ETCH HIS NAME INTO RECORD BOOK

► Sophomore Simon Zeidan used the initial kick of his Mercer debut to permanently etch his name into Mercer's record book in the season opener. The West Georgia transfer gave the Bears the lead for good midway through the first quarter with a **school record 55-yard field goal** that carried plenty of extra distance.

► Zeidan's **field goal was four yards longer than the previous school record** (51 yards), bettering both Devin Folser who originally established the previous program superlative with a 51-yard boot at Western Carolina on Oct. 9, 2021, as well as Reice Griffith who matched that distance with a 51-yarder at The Citadel on Sept. 20, 2025.

► Only four kickers in program history **have managed to register field goals of 50 or more yards**, with Devin Folser and Reice Griffith both hitting the milestone twice. Cole Fisher (50-yarder at Samford in 2016) was the only other kicker to connect on a 50+-yard field goal until Simon Zeidan crossed that mark in Week 0.

OTHER MERCER STORYLINES

► The Bears **picked off a trio of passes in their Week 0 victory** over East Texas A&M in the FCS Kickoff. It marked the 16th time in program history that Mercer has turned in three or more interceptions, but the first time that the Orange & Black has accomplished that task since doing it three times in 2024. MU posted three interceptions against both Samford (10/19/24) and East Tennessee State (11/2/24) that season, while also matching a school record with four pickoffs against Princeton (10/12/24).

► Mercer **has connected on 191 consecutive extra-point kicks** dating back to former standout Devin Folser's third-quarter PAT against The Citadel on Sept. 17, 2022 - the second-longest streak in FCS history ... Folser closed out his Mercer career by connecting on his last 44 point-after attempts, while former kicker Reice Griffith was a perfect 145 for-145 over the last three seasons. Mercer's last missed extra-point was Folser's wide-left attempt in the fourth quarter of its loss at Auburn on Sept. 3, 2022. Northern Iowa currently holds the FCS record with a streak of 235 consecutive extra point kicks. The Panthers missed their first extra point since 2017 in the fourth quarter of their 28-16 loss to Illinois State on Nov. 1, 2025.

MERCER 2-DEEP (vs Presbyterian)

X	#0 Eric Rasheed • 5-9 • 185 • Sr. • Fletcher, N.C. #23 McCord Purdy • 6-1 • 195 • Fr. • Pickens County, Ga.	#15 Kobe McInnis • 6-2 • 255 • So. • Marietta, Ga. #16 Marquis Williams • 6-2 • 255 • So. • Quitman, Ga.	DE
LT	#77 Brody Balliew • 6-5 • 305 • Sr. • Calhoun, Ga. #71 Luke Schultz • 6-7 • 295 • Jr. • Birmingham, Ala.	#4 Cam Moore • 6-2 • 290 • Jr. • Atlanta, Ga. #11 Delano Marcelus • 6-2 • 275 • 5th • Columbus, Ga.	NT
LG	#63 Kelan Washington • 6-3 • 295 • So. • Defuniak Springs, Fla. #73 Roman Mock • 6-4 • 290 • Fr. • Venice, Fla.	#54 Ke'Vion Wellington • 6-3 • 275 • Sr. • Indianapolis, Ind. #55 Ean Johnson-Kelley • 6-1 • 290 • So. • Bradenton, Fla.	DT
C	#57 Tyler Murray • 6-2 • 295 • Jr. • Altavista, Va. #67 Pierson Sears • 6-1 • 280 • Jr. • Canton, Ga.	#10 Eric Brantley Jr. • 6-0 • 240 • Sr. • Valdosta, Ga. #14 Ethan McDowell • 6-2 • 245 • Sr. • Newnan, Ga.	DE
RG	#55 Abiathar Curry • 6-3 • 305 • 5th • Jamesville, Wisc. #79 Bryson Wilson • 6-7 • 350 • Sr. • Adel, Ga.	#24 Nigel Gay • 5-10 • 190 • Jr. • Kernersville, N.C. #21 Shareef Jackson • 5-10 • 180 • Fr. • Jacksonville, Fla.	STRK
RT	#58 Jacorey Wright • 6-5 • 305 • Jr. • Americus, Ga. #76 Lucas Tselentis • 6-4 • 290 • Fr. • Charlotte, N.C.	#0 Jyarius Carter • 6-1 • 240 • So. • Douglas, Ga. #48 Ronin Dangler • 6-0 • 220 • Fr. • Bradenton, Fla.	LB
TE	#18 Samuel Albee • 6-5 • 245 • Sr. • Dunwoody, Ga. #14 Jackson Kostmayer • 6-6 • 255 • 5th • Biloxi, Miss.	#3 CJ Favors • 6-0 • 225 • So. • Manchester, Ga. #26 Jase Jordan • 6-2 • 220 • Fr. • Warner Robins, Ga.	LB
SLOT	#9 Brayden Smith • 5-10 • 185 • Sr. • Macon, Ga. #84 Zachary Lowe • 5-8 • 175 • Jr. • Apex, N.C.	#30 Javious Bond • 5-10 • 185 • Sr. • Macon, Ga. #18 Justin Ferguson • 6-0 • 185 • So. • Winston-Salem, N.C.	CB
Z	#1 Travion Solomon • 6-1 • 190 • 5th • Macon, Ga. #4 Kel Calixte • 6-4 • 210 • So. • Orlando, Fla.	#1 Brandon Gunn • 5-11 • 190 • So. • Decatur, Ga. #9 Javonte Walker • 6-2 • 190 • Sr. • Lacey, Wash.	S
QB	#2 Jaylen King • 6-4 • 210 • Sr. • Folkston, Ga. #19 JP Pickles • 6-1 • 215 • Jr. • Tallahassee, Fla.	#13 Mike Polke • 6-0 • 200 • So. • Toombs County, Ga. #5 Jeremy Richardson • 5-11 • 200 • Jr. • Waynesboro, Ga.	S
RB	#27 Micah Bell • 5-10 • 210 • 5th • McDonough, Ga. #7 Zahmari Palode-Gary • 5-8 • 190 • 5th • Kansas City, Mo.	#8 Cameron Goggins • 6-2 • 195 • Sr. • Hampton, Ga. #25 Evin McDowell • 6-2 • 185 • Fr. • Snellville, Ga.	CB
PK	#37 Simon Zeidan • 6-2 • 200 • So. • Kennesaw, Ga. #92 Sully Croker • 6-0 • 185 • Sr. • Auburn, Ga.	#96 Senin Seymour • 6-0 • 175 • Fr. • Melbourne, Australia #97 Kody Arnold • 5-10 • 175 • Sr. • Brunswick, Ga.	P
HO	#97 Kody Arnold • 5-10 • 175 • Sr. • Brunswick, Ga. #19 JP Pickles • 6-1 • 215 • Jr. • Tallahassee, Fla.	#30 Javious Bond • 5-10 • 185 • Sr. • Macon, Ga. #0 Eric Rasheed • 5-9 • 185 • Sr. • Fletcher, N.C.	KR
LS	#56 Jaiden Hamilton • 6-2 • 215 • Sr. • Carrollton, Ga. #91 Ben Porter • 6-1 • 210 • Fr. • Chapel Hill, N.C.	#9 Brayden Smith • 5-10 • 185 • Sr. • Macon, Ga. #30 Javious Bond • 5-10 • 185 • Sr. • Macon, Ga.	PR

2026 SOUTHERN CONFERENCE FOOTBALL STANDINGS

	Conf	Pct.	Ovr	Pct.	Home	Away	Neu	Strk
Wofford	1-0	1.000	1-0	1.000	1-0	0-0	0-0	W1
Chattanooga	0-0	.000	1-0	1.000	0-0	1-0	0-0	W1
Furman	0-0	.000	1-0	1.000	1-0	0-0	0-0	W1
Mercer	0-0	.000	1-0	1.000	1-0	0-0	0-0	W1
Tennessee Tech	0-0	.000	1-0	1.000	1-0	0-0	0-0	W1
Western Carolina	0-0	.000	1-0	1.000	1-0	0-0	0-0	W1
East Tennessee State	0-0	.000	0-1	.000	0-1	0-0	0-0	L1
Samford	0-0	.000	0-1	.000	0-0	0-0	0-1	L1
VMI	0-0	.000	0-1	.000	0-0	0-1	0-1	L1
The Citadel	0-1	.000	0-1	.000	0-0	0-1	0-1	L1



LAST WEEK'S RESULTS

THURSDAY
Chattanooga 24, West Georgia 10
Furman 20, Anderson 3
SATURDAY
Campbell 39, at East Tennessee State 37
Idaho State 38, VMI 10
Wofford 42, The Citadel 14
Mercer 23, East Texas A&M 15
Tennessee Tech 38, Monmouth 14
Western Carolina 45, Eastern Kentucky 21
North Alabama 22, Samford 10

THIS WEEK'S SCHEDULE

THURSDAY
Southern Illinois at Samford, 7 p.m.
SATURDAY
Gardner-Webb at Wofford, 1:30 p.m.
Western Carolina at Campbell, 3:30 p.m.
The Citadel at Charlotte, 3:30 p.m.
Furman at Tennessee, 3:30 p.m.
Tusculum at East Tennessee State, 5:30 p.m.
Tennessee Tech at Chattanooga, 6 p.m.
Presbyterian at Mercer, 6 p.m.
VMI at Virginia Tech, 7:30 p.m.

CHATTANOOGA

Date	Opponent	Time
8/27	at West Georgia	W, 24-10
9/5	* Tennessee Tech	6 p.m.
9/12	at Eastern Kentucky	6 p.m.
9/19	* Wofford	6 p.m.
9/26	* at The Citadel	2 p.m.
10/3	* at East Tennessee State	3:30 p.m.
10/10	* Samford	1 p.m.
10/17	BYE	
10/24	* at Western Carolina	2:30 p.m.
10/31	* VMI	1 p.m.
11/7	* Mercer	1 p.m.
11/14	* at Furman	1 p.m.
11/21	at Alabama	3 p.m.

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) Game

EAST TENNESSEE STATE

Date	Opponent	Time
8/29	Campbell	L, 49-37
9/5	Tusculum	5:30 p.m.
9/12	at North Carolina	Noon
9/19	West Georgia	Noon
9/26	* Western Carolina	3:30 p.m.
10/3	* Chattanooga	3:30 p.m.
10/10	* at The Citadel	2 p.m.
10/17	BYE	
10/24	* at VMI	1:30 p.m.
10/31	* Tennessee Tech	3:30 p.m.
11/7	* Samford	1 p.m.
11/14	* at Wofford	1:30 p.m.
11/21	* at Mercer	3 p.m.

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) Game

FURMAN

Date	Opponent	Time
8/27	Anderson	W, 20-3
9/5	at Tennessee	3:30 p.m.
9/12	* at Mercer	6 p.m.
9/19	South Carolina State	7 p.m.
9/26	at Richmond	2 p.m.
10/3	* Wofford	2 p.m.
10/10	* at Tennessee Tech	3:30 p.m.
10/17	BYE	
10/24	* Samford	2 p.m.
10/31	* Western Carolina	2 p.m.
11/7	* at The Citadel	2 p.m.
11/14	* Chattanooga	1 p.m.
11/21	* at VMI	TBA

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) Game

MERCER

Date	Opponent	Time
8/29	East Texas A&M	W, 23-15
9/5	Presbyterian	6 p.m.
9/12	* Furman	6 p.m.
9/19	at Georgia Tech	Noon
9/26	at Abilene Christian	8 p.m.
10/3	* at VMI	1:30 p.m.
10/10	* Western Carolina	3 p.m.
10/17	* at Samford	7 p.m.
10/24	BYE	
10/31	* The Citadel	3 p.m.
11/7	* at Chattanooga	1 p.m.
11/14	* at Tennessee Tech	2:30 p.m.
11/21	* East Tennessee State	3 p.m.

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) Game

SAMFORD

Date	Opponent	Time
8/29	at North Alabama	L, 22-10
9/3	Southern Illinois	7 p.m.
9/12	* at Tennessee Tech	7 p.m.
9/19	BYE	
9/26	* VMI	3:30 p.m.
10/3	at UAB	3:30 p.m.
10/10	* at Chattanooga	1 p.m.
10/17	* Mercer	7 p.m.
10/24	* at Furman	2 p.m.
10/31	* Wofford	7 p.m.
11/7	* at East Tennessee State	1 p.m.
11/14	* Western Carolina	3:30 p.m.
11/21	at Auburn	3:30 p.m.

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) Game

TENNESSEE TECH

Date	Opponent	Time
8/29	Monmouth	W, 38-14
9/5	* at Chattanooga	6 p.m.
9/12	* Samford	7 p.m.
9/19	BYE	
9/26	* at Wofford	1:30 p.m.
10/3	* at Western Carolina	6 p.m.
10/10	* Furman	3:30 p.m.
10/17	Eastern Kentucky	2:30 p.m.
10/24	* at The Citadel	2 p.m.
10/31	* at East Tennessee State	3:30 p.m.
11/7	* VMI	2:30 p.m.
11/14	* Mercer	2:30 p.m.
11/21	at Mississippi State	1 p.m.

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) Game

THE CITADEL

Date	Opponent	Time
8/29	* at Wofford	L, 42-14
9/5	at Charlotte	3:30 p.m.
9/12	Charleston Southern	6 p.m.
9/19	BYE	
9/26	* Chattanooga	2 p.m.
10/3	at South Carolina State	2 p.m.
10/10	* East Tennessee State	2 p.m.
10/17	at Texas A&M	1 p.m.
10/24	* Tennessee Tech	2 p.m.
10/31	* at Mercer	3 p.m.
11/7	* Furman	2 p.m.
11/14	* at VMI	TBA
11/21	* at Western Carolina	1 p.m.

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) Game

VMI

Date	Opponent	Time
8/29	at Idaho State	L, 38-14
9/5	at Virginia Tech	7:30 p.m.
9/12	Bucknell	1:30 p.m.
9/19	at Davidson	1 p.m.
9/26	* at Samford	3:30 p.m.
10/3	* Mercer	1:30 p.m.
10/10	BYE	
10/17	* at Wofford	1:30 p.m.
10/24	* East Tennessee State	1:30 p.m.
10/31	* at Chattanooga	1 p.m.
11/7	* at Tennessee Tech	2:30 p.m.
11/14	* The Citadel	TBA
11/21	* Furman	TBA

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) Game

WESTERN CAROLINA

Date	Opponent	Time
8/29	Eastern Kentucky	W, 45-21
9/5	at Campbell	3:30 p.m.
9/12	at Cincinnati	7 p.m.
9/19	Presbyterian	2:30 p.m.
9/26	* at East Tennessee State	3:30 p.m.
10/3	* Tennessee Tech	6 p.m.
10/10	* at Mercer	3 p.m.
10/17	BYE	
10/24	* Chattanooga	2:30 p.m.
10/31	* at Furman	2 p.m.
11/7	* Wofford	1 p.m.
11/14	* at Samford	3:30 p.m.
11/21	* The Citadel	1 p.m.

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) Game

WOFFORD

Date	Opponent	Time
8/29	* The Citadel	W, 42-14
9/5	Gardner-Webb	1:30 p.m.
9/12	at Kent State	Noon
9/19	* at Chattanooga	6 p.m.
9/26	* Tennessee Tech	1:30 p.m.
10/3	* at Furman	2 p.m.
10/10	at Elon	2 p.m.
10/17	* VMI	1:30 p.m.
10/24	BYE	
10/31	* at Samford	7 p.m.
11/7	* at Western Carolina	1 p.m.
11/14	* East Tennessee State	1:30 p.m.
11/21	at Ole Miss	Noon

* = Southern Conference (SoCon) Game

ALPHABETICAL ROSTER		
No.	Name	Pos.
99	Kehinde Akintunde	DL
18	Samuel Albee	TE
97	Kody Arnold	P
19	Aaryn Askew	OLB
51	Jake Atha	OL
77	Brody Balliew	OL
17	Christian Barrett	CB
27	Micah Bell	RB
87	Cooper Berry	TE
81	Wayne Blake II	WR
30	Javious Bond	CB
53	Jayden Bowden	LB
34	Mac Bradley	LB
10	Eric Brantley Jr.	OLB
28	Amari Brown	S
86	Nick Buggie	TE
33	Antonio Butts Jr.	LB
21	Devon Caldwell	RB
4	Kel Calixte	WR
0	Jyarius Carter	LB
41	Brian Clark II	OLB
3	Apollos Cook	TE
92	Sully Croker	K
55	Abiathar Curry	OL
48	Ronin Dangler	LB
44	Jaise Davis	LB
23	Roman Douthit	CB
38	Malik Dryden	RB
3	CJ Favors	LB
18	Justin Ferguson	CB
31	Jayvyn Frazier	S
85	Jayden Futrell	WR
24	Nigel Gay	S
5	Javarius George	WR
47	Kaiden Gibson	S
8	Cameron Goggins	CB
17	Asa Gregg	WR
1	Brandon Gunn	S
56	Jaiden Hamilton	LS
88	Kaden Hanson	TE
52	Wyatt Hester	LB
8	Cam Hill	QB
74	Jamarcus Hill	OL
90	Aiden Holewski	DE
72	Michael Horton	OL
21	Shareef Jackson	S
25	Bryson James	RB
59	Macin James	OL
55	Ean Johnson-Kelley	DL
26	Jase Jordan	LB
35	Jacob Joseph	OLB
22	Carter Kermott	S
2	Jaylen King	QB
62	Gavin Kirkland	OL
14	Jackson Kostmayer	TE
2	Emmanuel Lane	CB
84	Zachary Lowe	WR
42	Thomas Lubben	OLB

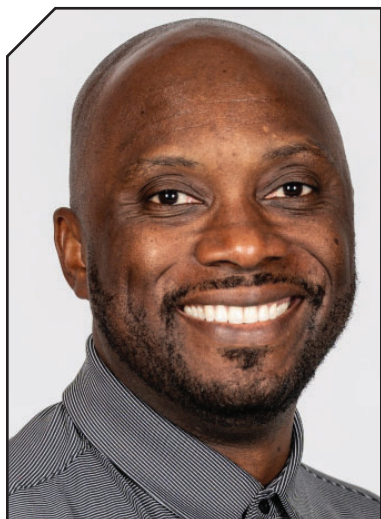
2026 NUMERICAL ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.	Hometown / High School (Previous School)
0	Jyarius Carter	LB	6-0	240	So.	Douglas, Ga. / Coffee County HS (West Georgia)
0	Eric Rasheed	WR	5-11	185	Sr.	Fletcher, N.C. / Hendersonville HS (North Greenville)
1	Travion Solomon	WR	6-1	190	5th	Macon, Ga. / Northeast HS
1	Brandon Gunn	S	5-11	190	So.	Decatur, Ga. / Southwest Dekalb HS (West Georgia)
2	Jaylen King	QB	6-4	210	Sr.	Folkston, Ga. / Charlton County HS (Florida State)
2	Emmanuel Lane	CB	6-2	185	Sr.	Willingboro, N.J. / Salem HS (Monmouth)
3	Apollos Cook	WR	6-3	210	Sr.	Lexington, S.C. / Airport HS (Duke)
3	CJ Favors	LB	6-0	225	So.	Manchester, Ga. / Manchester HS (West Georgia)
4	Cam Moore	DL	6-2	290	Jr.	Atlanta, Ga. / Maynard Jackson HS (West Georgia)
4	Kel Calixte	WR	6-4	210	So.	Orlando, Fla. / Dr. Phillips HS (Florida Atlantic)
5	Javarius George	WR	5-10	185	Jr.	Dallas, Ga. / North Paulding HS
5	Jeremy Richardson	S	5-11	200	Jr.	Waynesboro, Ga. / Burke County HS (Shorter)
6	Adrian Parker	QB	6-2	225	5th	Manchester, Conn. / Manchester HS (Franklin Pierce)
6	Sam Martin Jr.	S	5-10	190	5th	Staten Island, N.Y. / Curtis HS (Wagner)
7	Zahmari Palode-Gary	RB	5-8	190	5th	Kansas City, Mo. / Raytown HS (Pittsburg State)
8	Cam Hill	QB	6-3	200	Fr.	Thomasville, Ga. / Thomasville HS
8	Cameron Goggins	CB	6-2	195	Sr.	Hampton, Ga. / Hampton HS (Florida Atlantic)
9	Brayden Smith	WR	5-10	185	Sr.	Macon, Ga. / Tattnall Square Academy
9	Javonte Walker	S	6-2	190	Sr.	Lacey, Wash. / Timberline HS (Central Washington)
10	Eric Brantley Jr.	OLB	6-0	240	Sr.	Valdosta, Ga. / Valdosta HS (Florida Atlantic)
11	Delano Marcelus	DL	6-2	275	5th	Columbus, Ga. / Colts Neck (N.J.) HS (West Liberty)
12	Jake Wilson	QB	6-2	205	Sr.	Trophy Club, Texas / Byron Nelson HS (Purdue)
12	McKaden Smith	CB	6-0	175	So.	Ellenwood, Ga. / Cedar Grove HS (West Georgia)
13	Mike Polke	S	6-0	200	So.	Toombs County, Ga. / Toombs County HS
13	Braylon Stewart	WR	6-0	190	So.	Raleigh, N.C. / Middle Creek HS
14	Ethan McDowell	OLB	6-2	245	Sr.	Newnan, Ga. / Trinity Christian School [Miami (Ohio)]
14	Jackson Kostmayer	TE	6-6	255	5th	Biloxi, Miss. / St. Patrick HS (Central Arkansas)
15	Kobe McInnis	DE	6-2	255	So.	Marietta, Ga. / Wheeler HS
15	Karlise Price	RB	5-10	180	Fr.	Tallahassee, Fla. / Rickards HS
16	Jake Maxwell	QB	6-3	210	Jr.	Bonaire, Ga. / Veterans HS
16	Marquis Williams	DE	6-2	255	So.	Quitman, Ga. / Brooks County HS (West Georgia)
17	Asa Gregg	WR	6-1	190	Sr.	Waldorf, Md. / St. John's College HS (Alabama State)
17	Christian Barrett	CB	6-3	190	So.	Tallahassee, Fla. / Gadsden County HS
18	Samuel Albee	TE	6-5	245	Sr.	Dunwoody, Ga. / Fellowship Christian School
18	Justin Ferguson	CB	6-0	185	So.	Winston-Salem, N.C. / West Forsyth HS
19	JP Pickles	QB	6-1	215	Jr.	Tallahassee, Fla. / North Florida Christian HS (UTEP)
19	Aaryn Askew	OLB	6-3	230	Fr.	Moore Haven, Fla. / Moore Haven Middle HS
20	Ryan McNally	S	5-9	170	Jr.	Winder, Ga. / Winder-Barrow HS
20	Colby Smith	RB	5-10	185	Fr.	Brooklet, Ga. / Southeast Bulloch HS
21	Shareef Jackson	S	5-10	180	Fr.	Jacksonville, Fla. / Raines HS
21	Devon Caldwell	RB	5-9	190	Fr.	Dacula, Ga. / Hebron Christian Academy
22	Carter Kermott	S	5-11	195	Jr.	Carlsbad, Calif. / La Costa Canyon HS
23	Roman Douthit	CB	5-10	170	Jr.	Atlanta, Ga. / Lakeside HS
23	McCord Purdy	WR	6-1	195	Fr.	Pickens County, Ga. / Pickens HS
24	Nigel Gay	S	5-10	190	Jr.	Kernersville, N.C. / East Forsyth HS (Catawba)
25	Bryson James	RB	5-9	180	Sr.	Cross Hill, S.C. / Clinton HS (Anderson)
25	Evin McDowell	CB	6-2	185	Fr.	Snellville, Ga. / South Gwinnett HS
26	Jase Jordan	LB	6-2	220	Fr.	Warner Robins, Ga. / Houston County HS
27	Micah Bell	RB	5-10	210	5th	McDonough, Ga. / Ola HS (Charlotte)
28	Amari Brown	S	5-9	195	5th	Lovejoy, Ga. / Lovejoy HS (Mars Hill)
29	Evan Taylor	CB	6-2	195	Jr.	Charlotte, N.C. / Cuthbertson HS (Nebraska)
30	Javious Bond	CB	5-10	185	Sr.	Macon, Ga. / Jones County HS (Austin Peay)
31	Jayvyn Frazier	S	6-2	205	So.	Dunnellon, Fla. / Dunnellon HS
32	Kai Reyes	S	5-11	195	Jr.	Jacksonville, Fla. / Fletcher HS
33	Antonio Butts Jr.	LB	6-1	230	Jr.	Savannah, Ga. / Effingham County HS
34	Mac Bradley	LB	6-2	235	So.	Bogart, Ga. / Prince Avenue HS
35	Jacob Joseph	OLB	6-1	230	So.	Davie, Fla. / Western HS (West Georgia)
37	Simon Zeidan	K	6-2	200	So.	Kennesaw, Ga. / Harrison HS (West Georgia)
38	Malik Dryden	RB	5-11	210	Jr.	Hoschton, Ga. / Flowery Branch HS (Stetson)
39	Billy Martin	RB	5-8	190	Jr.	Kite, Ga. / David Emanuel Academy
40	CJ Peoples	CB	6-1	170	Fr.	Dacula, Ga. / Bethlehem Christian Academy
41	Brian Clark II	OLB	6-4	210	Fr.	Palo Alto, Calif. / Pace (Ga.) Academy
42	Thomas Lubben	OLB	6-2	225	Sr.	Woodstock, Ga. / The King's Academy
44	Jaise Davis	LB	5-11	205	So.	Forsyth, Ga. / Mary Persons HS (Shorter)
45	Gerald Walker Jr.	LB	5-11	225	Fr.	Dahlonega, Ga. / Lumpkin County HS
47	Kaiden Gibson	S	5-8	190	Fr.	Gray, Ga. / Baldwin HS
48	Ronin Dangler	LB	6-0	220	Fr.	Bradenton, Fla. / Manatee HS

ALPHABETICAL ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.
11	Delano Marcelus	DL
89	Andrew Marsden	WR
39	Billy Martin	RB
6	Sam Martin Jr.	S
16	Jake Maxwell	QB
82	Reid McCollum	TE
14	Ethan McDowell	OLB
25	Evin McDowell	CB
80	Connor McGeehan	WR
15	Kobe McInnis	DE
20	Ryan McNally	S
61	Kwaku Mensah	DL
73	Roman Mock	OL
4	Cam Moore	DL
57	Tyler Murray	OL
49	Kanon Nelson	LB
7	Zahmari Palode-Gary	RB
6	Adrian Parker	QB
40	CJ Peoples	CB
19	JP Pickles	QB
13	Mike Polke	S
91	Benjamin Porter	LS
15	Karlise Price	RB
23	McCord Purdy	WR
0	Eric Rasheed	WR
94	Patrell Reddick	DL
69	Patrick Reddick	DL
32	Kai Reyes	S
5	Jeremy Richardson	S
66	Emanuel Rumanura	OL
70	Jayce Sanker	OL
71	Luke Schultz	OL
67	Pierson Sears	OL
96	Senin Seymour	P
83	Camauri Simmons	WR
9	Brayden Smith	WR
20	Colby Smith	RB
12	McKaden Smith	CB
1	Travion Solomon	WR
13	Braylon Stewart	WR
50	Batu Subasi	DL
29	Evan Taylor	CB
76	Lucas Tselentis	OL
45	Gerald Walker Jr.	LB
9	Javonte Walker	S
63	Kelan Washington	OL
95	Rashawn Washington	DL
64	Garrett Weisgerber	OL
54	Ke'Vion Wellington	DL
98	Louis Wilkenson III	DL
16	Marquis Williams	DE
79	Bryson Wilson	OL
12	Jake Wilson	QB
58	Jacorey Wright	OL
37	Simon Zeidan	K

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JOEL TAYLOR

**NAMED MERCER'S 22ND FOOTBALL HEAD COACH ON DECEMBER 11, 2025
LED WEST GEORGIA TO 12 WINS IN WOLVES' FIRST TWO SEASONS ON FBS LEVEL
PREVIOUSLY SERVED AS MERCER'S DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR FROM 2020-23**

A 21-year collegiate coaching veteran with a wake of defensive dominance throughout each stop of his storied career, Joel Taylor was announced as the 22nd head coach in the history of the Mercer football program on Dec. 11, 2025.

Taylor, who led West Georgia to a dozen victories in the program's first two seasons at the NCAA Division I FCS level, returns to Mercer after serving as the defensive coordinator for the Bears from 2020-23. He is fresh off of an 8-win campaign in 2024 that garnered him both United Athletic Conference and American Football Coaches Association Region 3 Coach of the Year accolades.

West Georgia showcased an offense that tacked up more than 355 yards of total offense per game, while yielding just 122.9 rushing yards and 21.2 points an outing, on the way to an 8-3 campaign in 2025, doubling the program's win total from his first year at the helm. The Wolves won each of their first five games in 2025, including victories over Southern Conference foes Samford and East Tennessee State, and climbed as high as No. 16 in both the AFCA and Stats Perform national rankings. The early-season winning skein also included a dominant 34-10 road triumph over then-No. 22 Nicholls.

Prior to trekking to Carrollton, Ga., Taylor constructed a dominant defensive unit in Macon from 2020-23 – one that helped the Bears register 28 victories, including a 9-4 mark in 2023 that culminated with the program's first berth into the NCAA FCS Playoffs. Mercer yielded just 142.1 rushing yards and 24.7 points per game in 45 games with Taylor as defensive coordinator, and boasted one of the nation's top total defenses in both the 2021 and 2022 campaigns. The 2022 squad also paced all 126 FCS squads with 17 interceptions as well.

Defensive success has followed Taylor throughout each step of his storied coaching career. In 2019, he engineered a defense at Lenoir-Rhyne that registered an NCAA Division II-best 50 sacks, while also forcing 31 turnovers and limiting opponents to just 17.4 points per game. The Bears tallied a 13-1 record on the way to an appearance in the NCAA quarterfinals where they dropped a five-point decision to eventual national champion West Florida.

Taylor has stints on the coaching staffs at three other institutions as well, including one as the defensive backs coach for The Citadel from 2014-18. The Bulldogs compiled a 29-19 mark with Taylor roaming the sidelines, including back-to-back SoCon championships in 2015 and 2016. The Citadel picked off 20 passes (3rd FCS) in 2016 on the way to its second-straight appearance in the NCAA postseason, as well as a



THE TAYLOR FILE

Hometown.....Irmo, South Carolina
High School.....Irmo (S.C.) High School (Class of 2000)
College.....South Carolina State, 2004
Family.....Wife, Mechelle

AS A FULL-TIME COACH

Years.....20th in 2026
Combined Record.....137-79 (.634)
NCAA Postseason Appearances/Bowls.....7
Record As Head Coach.....13-10 (.565)
Years As Head Coach.....3rd in 2026
NCAA Playoff Appearances.....7

No. 9 ranking in the final national polls.

He opened up his collegiate coaching career as a graduate assistant at his alma mater, South Carolina State, for the 2005 and 2006 campaigns, before accepting a full-time role as the defensive backs coach during the 2007 and 2008 seasons.

Taylor kickstarted his collegiate career as a graduate assistant at his alma mater, South Carolina State, for the 2005 and 2006 seasons before diving into a full time role as the defensive backs coach for the Bulldogs for the 2007 and 2008 campaigns. He exited Orangeburg, S.C., briefly to coach the defensive ends and outside linebackers at Lenoir-Rhyne in 2009, but returned to his role as defensive backs coach at SC State from 2010-13. He was a part of three Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) Championships (2008, 2010, 2013) and as many NCAA Playoff Appearances in his time at South Carolina State, and added an NCAA Division II Playoff Appearance at Lenoir-Rhyne in 2019.

Taylor had a very productive career as a defensive back at SC State, reaping several honors across his four year (2001-04) career in the Red & Blue. A four-year letterwinner, he served as team captain on the way to defensive most valuable player honors as a senior in 2004, and was a starter in the secondary for the 2003 Bulldog squad that led the nation in pass efficiency defense.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Taylor was raised in Irmo, S.C., where he was a standout at Irmo High School from 1996 to 1999. He earned his bachelor's degree in computer science at South Carolina State in 2004, and completed his graduate work in rehabilitation counseling at SC State in 2008.

Taylor is married to the former Mechelle Robertson.

COACHING HISTORY

2026-Present: Mercer

Head Coach

2024-25: West Georgia

Head Coach

2020-23: Mercer

Defensive Coordinator

2019: Lenoir-Rhyne

Defensive Coordinator

2014-18: The Citadel

Defensive Backs

2010-13: South Carolina State

Defensive Backs

2009: Lenoir-Rhyne

Defensive Ends, Outside Linebackers

2007-08: South Carolina State

Defensive Backs

2005-06: South Carolina State

Offensive Line

NCAA POSTSEASON

2023... Mercer.....FCS Playoffs

2019... Lenoir-Rhyne ... NCAA II Playoffs

2016... The CitadelFCS Playoffs

2015... The CitadelFCS Playoffs

2013... South Carolina St ...FCS Playoffs

2010... South Carolina St ...FCS Playoffs

2008... South Carolina St ...FCS Playoffs



COACHING STAFF QUICK GLANCE



**JOEL
TAYLOR**

Head Coach



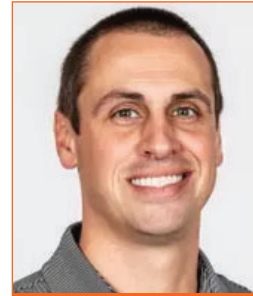
**SUMNER
ELLIS**

Associate Head Coach
Defensive Line



**AUSTIN
DAVIS**

Assistant Head Coach
Offensive Coordinator



**TRIPP
WEAVER**

Assistant Coach
Defensive Coordinator



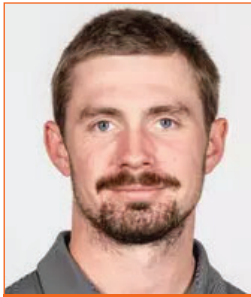
**BRANDON
TAYLOR**

Assistant Coach
Special Teams/OLB



**DUSTIN
ROYSTON**

Assistant Coach
Co-Defensive Coordinator/LB



**BARRY
BROWN**

Assistant Coach
Tight Ends



**JOSEPH
EAGLIN**

Assistant Coach
Nickels



**BRYANT
FOSTER**

Assistant Coach
Cornerbacks



**BRIAN
GREENE**

Assistant Coach
Offensive Line



**DJ
HAZELRAY**

Assistant Coach
Wide Receivers



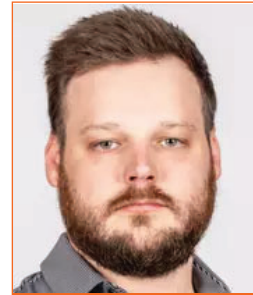
**CAL
KING**

Assistant Coach
Safeties



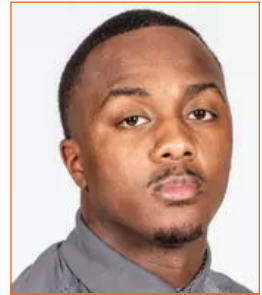
**JORDAN
MARSHALL**

Assistant Coach
Running Backs



**DAVID
SALMON**

Assistant Coach
Quarterbacks



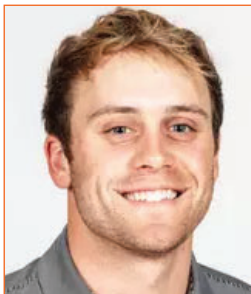
**DERWIN
BURGESS**

Assistant
Wide Receivers



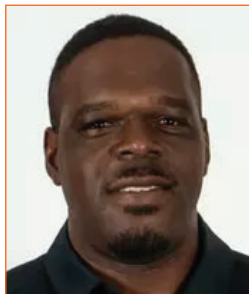
**NICK
HUDGENS**

Assistant
Offensive Line



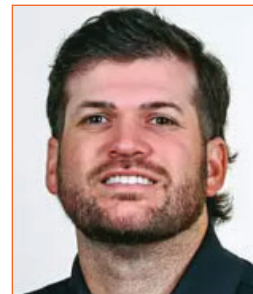
**RICHIE
LANKFORD**

Assistant
Quarterbacks



**DERRICK
BROWN**

Assistant
Linebackers



**BENNETT
HOUSTON**

General Manager



**BRANDON
WRIGHT**

Director of
Football Operations