



For Immediate Release
Feb. 3, 2021

Mike Kern

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North Dakota State Picked To Repeat; NDSU Aims for 10th-Straight Missouri Valley Football Crown

North Dakota State has been tabbed as the Missouri Valley Football Conference pre-season favorite in a poll conducted by league coaches. NDSU has been picked first in the pre-season poll for nine-straight seasons. After winning its lone game in the fall, NDSU has won a league and FCS-record 38-straight games.

North Dakota State has earned the league title for nine-straight years, four times sharing it with another league school. This year, NDSU received 101 points in the coaches vote to edge UNI (92) and South Dakota State (91).

Illinois State and Southern Illinois round out the Top 5 in the poll with 80 points and 68 points, respectively. South Dakota (52) is next, followed by the newest member of the Conference, North Dakota, with 39 points for 7th. Youngstown State (39), Missouri State (23) and Western Illinois (23) round out the voting.

In 2019, four MVFC teams earned selection to the NCAA Division I Championship, and North Dakota State won its eighth national championship in nine years. Counting last year, an MVFC member has reached the FCS semifinals 24 times in the past 24 seasons (and 27 times overall), and the MVFC has had two semifinal teams in four of the past six seasons. In the last decade, MVFC teams were 67-28 in the playoffs, and only one other conference (the CAA at 44-39) had a winning record. Since 2004, league teams have combined for a 81-41 record in playoff games, with eight titles – both tops in the FCS. Notably, only the MVFC (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019), CAA Football (2016) and Big Sky Conference (2010) have an FCS title the past decade (2010-19).

A pre-season favorite has claimed the league crown 22 times (in 34 previous polls). North Dakota State was picked to win the league last season, and the Bison earned both the league title and the national title (following a 28-20 win over James Madison in the NCAA Division I Football Championship game in Frisco, Texas).

In 2019, the league fashioned a 27-19 non-conference record and won the Big Sky-MVFC Challenge Series for the third-straight year. The season featured another MVFC win against an FBS school as Southern Illinois handled UMass, 45-20. Valley schools have had at least one win against an FBS opponent in each of the past 10 seasons, had 19-such victories from 2010-19 and the league has a total of 46 FBS wins in MVFC history. Three MVFC teams (North Dakota State, Missouri State and Southern Illinois) played non-conference games this past fall, for a total of five contests. Every game was against a ranked opponent. Three of the five games were against #11 UCA; Southern Illinois beat #25 Southeast Missouri State; and Missouri State also tackled fifth-ranked FBS Oklahoma. After going 2-3 against ranked opponents in the fall, the MVFC has had at least one win against a non-conference ranked opponent every year since going 0-4 in that space in 2004.

In addition to today's team rankings, the Conference announced its preseason team, voted on by coaches, sports information directors, and a media panel. All 10 teams participating this spring have at least one honoree, topped by North Dakota State and South Dakota State with nine total selections each. NDSU has a league-best eight first-team pre-season picks. (Voting for the team took place last summer, and adjustments were made based on roster adjustments.) Notably, 35 players who were nominated this past summer for the projected 2020 fall pre-season team are not playing this spring. That figure includes 17 who would have garnered first-team honors.

Valley Football Preseason Poll 2021 Spring Season

Team	Points
1. North Dakota State	101
2. UNI	92
3. South Dakota State	91
4. Illinois State	80
5. Southern Illinois.....	68
6. South Dakota.....	52
7. North Dakota	39
8. Youngstown State	36
9. Missouri State.....	23
9. Western Illinois	23

Indiana State opted out of spring season



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2021 Missouri Valley Football Preseason Team (Spring Season)

	Name	School	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown / High School
QB-	Will McElvain	UNI	5-11	200	So.	Des Moines (Iowa) Lincoln High
RB-	Kai Henry	South Dakota	5-8	200	Sr.	Miami (Fla.) Northwestern High
	Pierre Strong Jr.	South Dakota State	5-11	210	Jr.	Little Rock (Ark.) McClellan High
	Javon Williams Jr.	Southern Illinois	6-2	245	So.	Centralia (Ill.) High
FB-	Hunter Luepke	North Dakota State	6-1	245	So.	Spencer (Wis.) High
WR-	Avante Cox	Southern Illinois	5-10	170	Jr.	Rochester (Ill.) High
	Christian Watson	North Dakota State	6-4	200	Jr.	Tampa (Fla.) Plant High
	Isaiah Weston	UNI	6-4	210	Jr.	Albertville (Minn.) St. Michael-Albertville High
TE-	Brett Samson	South Dakota	6-2	240	Sr.	Oconomowoc (Wis.) High
OL-	Dan Becker	Youngstown State	6-5	295	Jr.	Cincinnati (Ohio) Indian Hill High
	ZeVeyon Furcron	Southern Illinois	6-2	327	Sr.	Crest Hill (Ill.) Joliet Catholic High
	Drew Himmelman	Illinois State	6-10	315	Sr.	Geneseo (Ill.) High
	Mason Scheidegger	South Dakota	6-5	330	Sr.	Fonda (Iowa) Newell Fonda High
	Cordell Volson	North Dakota State	6-7	310	Sr.	Balfour (N.D.) Drake High
LS-	Ross Kennelly	North Dakota State	5-11	213	Sr.	Superior (Wis.) High
PK-	Matthew Cook	UNI	5-11	180	So.	Cedar Falls (Iowa) High
DL-	Jared Brinkman	UNI	6-2	290	Sr.	Iowa City (Iowa) Regina High
	Anthony Knighton	Southern Illinois	6-4	251	Sr.	Fort Pierce (Fla.) Central High
	Spencer Waage	North Dakota State	6-5	274	Jr.	South Shore (S.D.) Watertown High
	Reece Winkelman	South Dakota State	6-4	245	Jr.	Marshall (Minn.) High
LB-	Logan Backhaus	South Dakota State	6-4	205	Sr.	Spirit Lake (Iowa) High
	Jack Cochrane	South Dakota	6-3	230	Sr.	Mount Vernon (Iowa) High
	Bryce Flater	UNI	6-1	230	Jr.	Grundy Center (Iowa) High
	Jackson Hankey	North Dakota State	6-1	219	Jr.	Park River (N.D.) High
DB-	Omar Brown	UNI	6-1	200	So.	Minneapolis (Minn.) North Senior High
	Qua Brown	Southern Illinois	5-11	206	Sr.	DeLand (Fla.) University High
	Don Gardner	South Dakota State	6-1	185	Sr.	Chicago (Ill.) Wendell Phillips High
	Josh Hayes	North Dakota State	5-11	185	Sr.	Lakeland (Fla.) Lake Gibson High
	Michael Tutsie	North Dakota State	5-11	192	Jr.	Indianapolis (Ind.) Warren Central High
P-	Brady Schutt	South Dakota	6-1	210	Sr.	Orange City (Iowa) MOC/FV High
RS-	Jake Coates	Youngstown State	5-10	180	Sr.	Warren (Ohio) Warren JFK High

Honorable Mention (Offense): QB J'Bore Gibbs, South Dakota State; FB Tim McCloyn, Illinois State; WR Caleb Vander Esch, South Dakota; WR Damoriea Vick, Missouri State; TE Josh Babicz, North Dakota State; LS Dalton Godfrey, South Dakota; OL Wes Genant, South Dakota State; OL Ryan Tobin, North Dakota; OL Nick Ellis, UNI; PK Mason Lorber, South Dakota

Honorable Mention (Defense): DL John Ridgeway, Illinois State; DL Xavier Ward, South Dakota State; DL DeMarko Craig, Youngstown State; LB Jaxson Turner, North Dakota; LB Makel Calhoun, Southern Illinois; LB Zeke Vandenburg, Illinois State; DB Jordan Canady, North Dakota; DB Michael Griffin II, South Dakota State; DB Charles Woods, Illinois State; DB Zack Sanders, Missouri State; P Adam Fellner, Western Illinois; RS Jaxon Janke, South Dakota State

Total picks (First Team denoted in parentheses), includes honorable mentions, by school:

Illinois State - 5 (1); Missouri State - 2 (0); North Dakota - 3 (0); North Dakota State - 9 (8); Northern Iowa - 7 (6); South Dakota - 8 (5); South Dakota State - 9 (4); Southern Illinois - 6 (5); Western Illinois - 1 (0); Youngstown State - 3 (2). *[Indiana State opted out for the spring.]*

PREVIOUS YEAR VALLEY FOOTBALL PRESEASON POLLS

1986

1. UNI (12)	90	t2nd
2. Eastern Illinois (1)	67	1st
3. Illinois State	53	4th
4. Southern Illinois	52	t2nd
5. Indiana State	42	t6th
6. Western Illinois	40	5th
7. Missouri State	20	t6th

1987

1. UNI (13)	96	1st
2. Southern Illinois	82	t5th
3. Illinois State	68	7th
4. Western Illinois (1)	43	2nd
5. Eastern Illinois	40	t3rd
6. Indiana State	38	t5th
7. Missouri State	25	t3rd

1988

1. UNI (10)	87	4th
2. Missouri State (2)	82	t2nd
3. Western Illinois (1)	64.5	1st
4. Eastern Illinois	51.5	t5th
5. Indiana State	40	t2nd
6. Southern Illinois	34	t5th
7. Illinois State	22	7th

1989

1. Missouri State (5)	86	1st
2. Indiana State (3)	81	5th
3. Western Illinois (5)	80	t6th
4. Eastern Illinois (1)	51	t2nd
5. UNI	43	t2nd
6. Southern Illinois	29	t6th
7. Illinois State	22	t2nd

1990

1. Missouri State (5)	85.5	t1st
2. Eastern Illinois (3)	73	t3rd
3. Illinois State (2)	72.5	t3rd
4. UNI (4)	70	t1st
5. Indiana State	35	t6th
6. Western Illinois	28	t3rd
7. Southern Illinois	28	t6th

1991

1. UNI (10)	93.5	1st
2. Missouri State (3)	79.5	4th
3. Illinois State	61.5	7th
4. Eastern Illinois (1)	56	t5th
5. Indiana State	43.5	t5th
6. Western Illinois	29	t2nd
7. Southern Illinois	29	t2nd

1992

1. UNI (25)	191	1st
2. Missouri State	131	t2nd
3. Western Illinois (2)	122	t2nd
4. Southern Illinois (1)	109	t4th
5. Illinois State	98	t4th
6. Eastern Illinois	85	t4th
7. Indiana State	48	t4th

1993

1. UNI (16)	184	1st
2. Missouri State (7)	160	t2nd
3. Western Illinois (2)	133	t2nd
4. Eastern Illinois (2)	105	t4th
5. Illinois State (1)	87	t4th
6. Indiana State	69	6th
7. Southern Illinois	51	7th

1994

1. UNI (20)	173	1st
2. Illinois State (4)	145	4th
3. Missouri State	120	t5th
4. Western Illinois (2)	108	t2nd
5. Eastern Illinois	79	t2nd
6. Indiana State	74	t5th
7. Southern Illinois	29	7th

1995

1. UNI (18)	184	t1st
2. Illinois State (3)	144	t3rd
3. Western Illinois (6)	141	t5th
4. Missouri State	105	7th
5. Eastern Illinois (1)	93	t1st
6. Indiana State	81	t3rd
7. Southern Illinois	36	t5th

1996

1. UNI (18)	128	1st
2. Missouri State	91	t2nd
3. Indiana State (1)	82	t2nd
4. Western Illinois (2)	64	t2nd
5. Illinois State (1)	52	6th
6. Southern Illinois	45	5th

1997

1. UNI (10)	155	2nd
2. Western Illinois (8)	139	1st
3. Youngstown State (6)	137	3rd
4. Missouri State (1)	115	4th
5. Indiana State	68	5th
6. Illinois State	56	7th
7. Southern Illinois	30	6th

1998

1. Youngstown State (14)	161	t3rd
2. UNI (6)	148	t3rd
3. Western Illinois (5)	138	1st
4. Missouri State	92	t3rd
5. Indiana State	61	6th
6. Illinois State	57	2nd
7. Southern Illinois	43	7th

1999

1. Illinois State (15)	160	1st
2. UNI (8)	154	3rd
3. Youngstown State (1)	133	2nd
4. Western Illinois (2)	94	t4th
5. Missouri State	85	t4th
6. Indiana State	73	t4th
7. Southern Illinois	29	7th

2000

1. Illinois State (17)	172	t2nd
2. UNI (6)	144	4th
3. Youngstown State (2)	143	t2nd
4. Missouri State (2)	114	t5th
5. Western Illinois	88	1st
6. Indiana State	48	7th
7. Southern Illinois	47	t5th

2001

1. W. Kentucky (14)	213	t2nd
2. Youngstown St. (12)	202	t2nd
3. Western Illinois (1)	166	4th
4. Illinois State (1)	139	t6th
5. UNI	127	1st
6. Missouri State (1)	110	5th
7. Southern Illinois	51	8th
8. Indiana State	36	t6th

2002

1. UNI (24)	242	t6th
2. Youngstown St. (5)	213	t3rd
3. W. Kentucky (2)	191	t1st
4. Western Illinois	160	t1st
5. Missouri State (1)	132	8th
6. Illinois State	91	t3rd
7. Indiana State	68	5th
8. Southern Illinois	55	t6th

2003

1. Western Illinois (24)	247	t3rd
2. W Kentucky (6)	218	t3rd
3. Youngstown State	171	6th
4. UNI (1)	139	t1st
5. Illinois State	131	5th
6. Southern Illinois	130	t1st
7. Missouri State (1)	74	7th
8. Indiana State	42	8th

2004

1. Southern Illinois (25)	244	1st
2. UNI (6)	212	3rd
3. W. Kentucky (1)	186	2nd
4. Western Illinois	174	t5th
5. Illinois State	110	t5th
6. Youngstown State	102	t5th
7. Missouri State	81	4th
8. Indiana State	43	8th

2005

1. Southern Illinois (18)	237	t1st
2. W. Kentucky (9)	223	t4th
3. UNI (5)	206	t1st
4. Western Illinois	124	6th
5. Missouri State	119	7th
6. Youngstown State	104	t1st
7. Illinois State	91	4th
8. Indiana State	48	8th

2006

1. UNI (22)	239	t2nd
2. Youngstown St. (7)	208	1st
3. Illinois State (2)	190	t2nd
4. Southern Illinois	160	t4th
5. W. Kentucky (1)	141	t4th
6. Western Illinois	103	6th
7. Missouri State	79	t7th
8. Indiana State	32	t7th

2007

1. UNI (11)	166	1st
2. Illinois State (7)	160	t5th
3. Youngstown St. (9)	159	t3rd
4. Southern Illinois (1)	127	2nd
5. Western Illinois	82	t3rd
6. Missouri State	55	t5th
7. Indiana State	35	7th

2008

1. North Dakota St. (13)	289	t4th
2. UNI (15)	275	t1st
3. Youngstown St. (1)	209	t6th
4. Western Illinois (4)	202	t4th
5. Southern Illinois (2)	201	t1st
6. South Dakota State	149	3rd
7. Missouri State	105	t6th
8. Illinois State	104	8th
9. Indiana State	41	9th

2009

1. UNI (26)	314	t3rd
2. Southern Illinois (9)	281	1st
3. South Dakota St.	231	2nd
4. North Dakota St. (1)	206	7th
5. Western Illinois	174	9th
6. Youngstown State	171	t5th
7. Missouri State	111	t5th
8. Illinois State	90	t3rd
9. Indiana State	42	8th

2010

1. Southern Illinois (30)	313	t3rd
2. South Dakota St. (2)	252	t3rd
3. Illinois State (3)	249	t3rd
4. Northern Iowa (1)	244	1st
5. Missouri State	164	t3rd
6. North Dakota State	151	t3rd
7. Youngstown State	130	9th
8. Western Illinois	70	2nd
9. Indiana State	47	t3rd

2011

1. UNI (29)	316	t1st
2. North Dakota St. (6)	275	t1st
3. Southern Illinois (1)	207	t7th
4. South Dakota State	172	t4th
5. Illinois State	169	3rd
6. Indiana State	168	t4th
7. Western Illinois	151	9th
8. Youngstown State	88	t4th
9. Missouri State	74	t7th

2012

1. North Dakota St. (37)	379	1st
2. UNI	300	t6th
3. Youngstown State	291	t6th
4. Illinois State (1)	287	t3rd
5. Indiana State	228	t3rd
6. South Dakota State	182	2nd
7. Southern Illinois	167	t3rd
8. South Dakota	97	10th
9. Western Illinois	90	9th
10. Missouri State	69	8th

2013

1. North Dakota St. (39)	390	1st
2. South Dakota St.	323	t2nd
3. UNI	269	t7th
4. Illinois State	264	6th
5. Youngstown State	253	t2nd
6. Indiana State	197	10th
7. Southern Illinois	188	t2nd
8. Missouri State	123	t2nd
9. Western Illinois	77	9th
10. South Dakota	61	t7th

2014

1. North Dakota St. (24)	370	t1st
2. South Dakota St. (8)	330	4th
3. UNI (7)	324	3rd
4. Youngstown State	240	t5th
5. Southern Illinois	237	t7th
6. Illinois State	197	t1st
7. Missouri State	180	9th
8. South Dakota	121	10th
9. Western Illinois	96	t7th
10. Indiana State	50	t5th

2015

1. North Dakota St. (32)	389	t1st
2. Illinois State (8)	366	t1st
3. UNI	300	t3rd
4. Youngstown State	265	t6th
5. South Dakota State	251	t3rd
6. Indiana State	190	t6th
7. Southern Illinois	143	9th
8. Western Illinois	139	t3rd
9. Missouri State	91	10th
10. South Dakota	66	t6th

2016

1. North Dakota St. (37)	388	t1st
2. UNI (2)	343	t4th
3. South Dakota State	284	t1st
4. Illinois State	274	t4th
5. Youngstown State	254	3rd
6. Western Illinois	176	t6th
7. South Dakota	146	t6th
8. Southern Illinois	124	t8th
9. Indiana State	115	t8th
10. Missouri State	41	t8th

2017

1. North Dakota St. (21)	380	1st
2. South Dakota St. (19)	379	t2nd
3. Youngstown State	290	t5th
4. UNI	255	t2nd
5. Illinois State	246	t5th
6. Western Illinois	188	4th
7. South Dakota	182	t5th
8. Southern Illinois	132	t8th
9. Missouri State	81	t8th
10. Indiana State	67	10th

2018

1. North Dakota St. (39)	390	1st
2. South Dakota St.	340	2nd
3. UNI	270	t3rd
4. Youngstown State	258	t6th
5. Illinois State	248	t6th
6. South Dakota	206	t6th
7. Western Illinois	163	5th
8. Southern Illinois	139	10th
9. Missouri State	90	9th
10. Indiana State	41	t3rd

2019

1. North Dakota St. (32)	392	1st
2. South Dakota St. (4)	348	t3rd
3. Illinois State (3)	289	t3rd
4. Indiana State (1)	279	7th
5. UNI	266	2nd
6. South Dakota	176	6th
7. Youngstown State	153	8th
8. Western Illinois	128	t9th
9. Southern Illinois	89	t3rd
10. Missouri State	80	t9th

Column at far right indicates ultimate finish in the league standings for that season. No preseason poll conducted for the first season (1985).