



Eastern Kentucky Picked as 2012 Ohio Valley Conference Football Favorites

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NASHVILLE -- For the first time since the 2009 season **Eastern Kentucky** has been picked the favorite in the Ohio Valley Conference football race. The Colonels picked up 12 of the 18 first-place votes in the 2012 poll which is a vote of league head coaches and sports information directors.

Eastern Kentucky totaled 124 points to top the poll. The only other school to receive first-place votes was **Jacksonville State**, who picked up the remaining six votes and had 117 total points. **Murray State** was picked third (85 points) and followed closely by **Tennessee Tech** in fourth (83). The poll was rounded out by **Tennessee State** (69), **UT Martin** (67), **Southeast Missouri** (44), **Eastern Illinois** (42) and **Austin Peay** (17).

It marks the 12th time in the last 25 years that Eastern Kentucky has been picked the preseason favorite in the OVC race. Last season Eastern Kentucky finished in a three-way tie for the OVC Championship, winning its 21st league title, which is the most conference championships by one team in Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) history. The Colonels also received an at-large bid to the FCS Playoffs, marking its 20th appearance in the event, which is the second most in NCAA history. This season the Colonels return 10 offensive and seven defensive starters from that team that lost to James Madison by three points in the playoffs. Among the returning starters for head coach **Dean Hood** is senior running back **Matt Denham**, who is one of 20 players on the Walter Payton Award Watch List. Despite not starting until the fifth game of the season, Denham rushed for 1,570 yards and nine touchdowns in earning All-American honors. Over the final eight games of the season Denham ran for 100 or more yards in each contest (the only player nationally to do so) and averaged 184.5 yards/game (the most nationally over that stretch). Senior quarterback **T.J. Pryor** is poised to become ECU's all-time passing leader this season; Pryor needs just 622 yards to set the all-time record. Among the team's defensive returning stars is junior **Anthony Brown** who is making the switch from defensive line to linebacker in 2012. As a lineman last year Brown had 72 tackles, 10.5 tackles-for-loss and 3.5 sacks. Overall ECU had 10 of the 26 total players selected to the Preseason All-OVC squad.

Jacksonville State also finished in the tie for the OVC Championship last year, claiming a share of its first Conference crown since the 2004 season. The Gamecocks finished 7-4 overall but were left out of the FCS Playoffs after earning an at-large bid in 2010. Following the retirement of Eastern Illinois Hall of Famer Bob Spoo, JSU head coach **Jack Crowe** takes over as the "Dean" of OVC coaches, entering his 13th year overall with the Gamecocks. Crowe has compiled a 67-34 record since his program joined the OVC in 2003; the 67 wins rank him eighth in OVC history. Crowe has the advantage of having not one but two returning starting quarterbacks this year, as redshirt senior **Marques Ivory** and junior **Coty Blanchard** both return this season. The duo split time in 2010, including pulling off a double overtime win at Ole Miss, but Ivory suffered a season-ending injury in the 2011 opener, leaving Blanchard to start the remainder of the schedule. During the 2010 season Ivory passed for 2,248 yards and 18 touchdowns, including throwing for a school record 444 yards against Eastern Kentucky. No matter which quarterback is under center they will have the luxury of handing the ball off to senior All-American **Washaun Ealey** who rushed for 1,082 yards and eight touchdowns in his debut season with the team last year. Ealey, who was the leading rusher at the University of Georgia for two seasons before coming to Jax State, was named a Preseason All-American this season. The Gamecocks have a challenging non-conference schedule this year that is bookended by a pair of SEC teams: Arkansas in Week 1 and Florida in Week 12.

Murray State head coach **Chris Hatcher** has seen his program break numerous school and OVC records in the first two years of his "Hatch Attack" offense. The gaudy numbers have also led the team to wins, as the squad won six games in 2010 and seven games a season ago, marking the first back-to-back winning seasons for the program since 1999-2000. The Racers return eight offensive and eight defensive starters this season including senior All-American quarterback **Casey Brockman**. Brockman has put together two outstanding seasons under Hatcher, including passing for 3,276 yards and 25 touchdowns last season (he also rushed for four touchdowns and caught two touchdown passes during the year); those numbers have earned him the nod as OVC Preseason Offensive Player of the Year and landed him on the Walter Payton Award Watch List. Brockman has a chance to set the OVC's all-time passing yards and total offense marks this year. The Racers will look at Preseason All-OVC selection **Qua Huzzie** to anchor the defense from the linebacker position. Huzzie transferred to Murray State prior to last season and led the OVC in tackles-for-loss (14.0) while also adding 80 tackles and 3.0 sacks.

Entering last season not a lot of attention was on Tennessee Tech and head coach **Watson Brown**. But Brown, who enters his sixth season with the program in 2012 (and 28th year as a Division I head coach), led the Golden Eagles to a 6-2 OVC mark and a share of the program's first OVC Championship since the 1975 season. The team also earned the league's automatic bid to the FCS Playoffs, marking the first play-off appearance in Tennessee Tech history. This season the Golden Eagles return seven offensive and seven defensive starters with senior quarterback **Tre Lamb** leading the way. Last season Lamb completed 65.2 percent of his passes for 2,342 yards and 17 touchdowns and also rushed for an additional six touchdowns. Defensively, Tech had three players selected to the Preseason All-OVC Team, including senior lineman **Marcus Edwards**, senior defensive back **Will Johnson** and sophomore defensive back **Austin Tallant**. Edwards had 9.5 tackles-for-loss and 5.0 sacks last year to go along with his 41 tackles. Johnson added 45 tackles and an interception in eight games, while Tallant led the team with 92 tackles in his freshman season.

After going winless in Conference play during his debut OVC in 2010, Tennessee State head coach **Rod Reed** got the Tigers on the right track last year, going 4-4 in the Conference, including an exciting 42-40 win over eventual OVC Champion Tennessee Tech. That victory helped TSU win the Sgt. York Trophy, which goes to the winner of the quadrangular season series between the four OVC schools from the state of Tennessee. This season Reed, a TSU alumnus, returns nine offensive and five defensive starters. The offense will be led by sophomore quarterback **Michael German** who was a finalist for the Jerry Rice Award last season (the award is given to the top freshman in the FCS). After taking over the starter's role German completed 140 passes for 1,889 yards and 12 touchdowns in helping TSU to a 4-2 record down the stretch. Junior defensive end **Antonio Harper** earned a spot on the Preseason All-OVC team this season after registering 44 tackles, 9.0 tackles-for-loss and 6.5 sacks a season ago. Sophomore return specialist **Weldon Garlington** is one of just two sophomores on the Preseason All-OVC Team; Garlington returned both a kickoff and a punt for a touchdown last season.

UT Martin dropped the final three games of last season, all of which were on the road, to finish 5-6 overall and 4-4 in Conference play (tied for fifth place). Now in his seventh season, head coach **Jason Simpson** has never had a losing season in Conference play; this season his squad returns seven offensive and eight defensive starters. The offense is led by senior signal caller **Derek Carr** who threw for 2,482 yards and 25 touchdowns last year for the high-octane Skyhawk offense. The team also returns the running back tandem of **Jason McNair** and **Tevin Barksdale** who combined for 1,467 yards and 13 touchdowns last year. Returners on the defensive side of the ball for UTM include linebacker **Ben Johnson**, who had a team-best 96 tackles last season, and space-eater **Montori Hughes**, who had 30 tackles and 6.5 tackles-for-loss a year ago after transferring from the University of Tennessee.

After winning the OVC Championship in 2010, Southeast Missouri finished 2-6 in OVC play last season under now seventh year head coach **Tony Samuel**, who won the Eddie Robinson Award as the National Coach of the Year in 2010. Despite losing starting quarterback Matt Scheible, who became the first player in OVC history to having 4,000 passing and 2,000 rushing yards in a career, the Redhawks do return nine offensive and seven defensive starters. Among the returning starters on offense are four linemen, including All-American tackle **Evan Conrad**. The Southeast Missouri defensive unit will be keyed by senior linebacker **Blake Peiffer** who was named OVC Preseason Defensive Player of the Year and is on the Sports Network's Buck Buchanan Award Watch List (the award is given to the top defensive player in the FCS). A season ago Peiffer ranked third nationally with 13.7 tackles/game, netting 151 total tackles, which set a Southeast Missouri single-season record.

The only new head coach in the OVC calls Charleston, Ill. home as former Baylor assistant coach **Dino Babers** was named the 22nd head coach in Eastern Illinois history on Dec. 9, 2011. Babers replaces OVC Hall of Famer Bob Spoo who retired last season after 25 seasons. It was Spoo who hired Babers as an assistant coach on his first EIU staff in 1987. Babers will bring a fast-paced offensive attack to the Panthers program, employing a style Baylor used to help Robert Griffin III win the Heisman Trophy a year ago. Junior **Jimmy Garoppolo** returns for his third season as a starter in 2012; a year ago he completed 62.2 percent of his passes for 2,644 yards and 20 touchdowns. His favorite target from a year ago, **Chris Wright**, also returns this season. Wright caught 42 passes for 735 yards and 11 touchdowns in 2011. Also returning are the tight end tandem of **Von Wise** (32 catches, 348 yards, 2 touchdowns) and **Sam Hendricks** (17 catches, 194 yards, 3 touchdowns). On the defensive side of the ball EIU returns Preseason All-OVC selection **Artavious Dowdell**, who had 45 tackles, 7.5 tackles-for-loss and 5.0 sacks a season ago.

Austin Peay head coach **Rick Christophel** has 60 letterwinners back, including seven offensive and nine defensive starters, from last year's squad that was 3-8 overall and 2-6 in the OVC. Senior quarterback **Jake Ryan** returns for his fourth season as a starter after throwing for 1,476 yards and 12 touchdowns a season ago. His favorite target, senior **Devin Stark**, is also back after catching 52 passes for 622 yards and seven touchdowns last season. Defensively senior safety **Antwaun Majors** will key the defensive unit; Majors finished last season with 88 tackles, ranking eighth in the OVC in stops (8.0/game).

All-OVC Preseason Football Team

Murray State senior quarterback **Casey Brockman** was named 2012 Ohio Valley Conference Preseason Offensive Player of the Year while Southeast Missouri State senior linebacker **Blake Peiffer** was tabbed OVC Preseason Defensive Player of the Year in a vote of by the league's head football coaches and sports information directors. Eastern Kentucky led the way with 10 selections on the preseason team while Murray State, Tennessee State and Tennessee Tech had three picks apiece.

Returning players who were first-team All-OVC selections last season (13 in total) were automatic selections to the preseason team this year. The squad also included nine players who were second-team selections in 2011. Of the 26 total selections, 18 were seniors, six were juniors and two were sophomores.

The offensive unit was led by Brockman who was tabbed Preseason Player of the Year for the second-straight season. Brockman set numerous OVC records last season while throwing for 3,276 yards and 25 touchdowns, rushing for four touchdowns and even catching a pair of touchdown passes. He enters this season with a chance to become the OVC's all-time leader in passing yards. He is joined on the team by Eastern Kentucky senior running back **Matt Denham** (1,570 rushing yards, 9 TDs) and Jacksonville State tailback **Washaun Ealey** (1,082 rushing yards, 8 TDs), Eastern Kentucky senior **Tyrone Goard** (39 receptions, 627 yards, 11 TDs) and UT Martin senior **Quentin Sims** (54 catches, 712 yards, 10 TDs) at the wide receiver spot and Eastern Illinois senior tight end **Von Wise** (32 catches, 348 yards, 2 TDs). The offensive line included three Eastern Kentucky players, senior center **O.J. Enabosi** and senior tackles **Aaron Adams** and **Patrick Ford**. The line was rounded out by Jacksonville State senior guard **Tori Mobley** and Tennessee State junior guard **Kadeem Edwards**.

Defensively Peiffer ranked third nationally in tackles/game last season (13.7), finishing the year with 151 total stops, which set the school's single-season record. Four linebackers joined Peiffer on the team including Eastern Kentucky juniors **Anthony Brown** (59 tackles, 10.5 RFL, 3.5 sacks) and **Ichiro Vance** (78 tackles, 9.5 TFL) and the Murray State duo of senior **Sam Small** (115 tackles, 9.5 TFL) and junior **Qua Huzzie** (80 tackles, 14.0 TFL, 3.0 sacks). The three defensive linemen selected to the squad were Tennessee Tech senior **Marcus Edwards** (41 tackles, 9.5 TFL, 5.0 sacks), Eastern Illinois senior **Artavious Dowdell** (45 tackles, 7.5 TFL, 5.0 sacks) and Tennessee State junior **Antonio Harper** (44 tackles, 9.0 TFL, 6.5 sacks). The four defensive backs on the team included the Tennessee Tech duo of senior **Will Johnson** (45 tackles, 2.5 TFL, 1 INT) and sophomore **Austin Tallant** (92 tackles, 2.0 TFL) and Eastern Kentucky senior teammates **Justin Bell** (48 tackles, 2 INTs) and **Brooklyn Fox** (80 tackles, 3 INTs).

Specialists selected to the preseason team included UT Martin senior kicker **Cody Sandlin** (14-of-17 FGs, 45-of-48 PATs), Eastern Kentucky junior punter **Jordan Berry** (41.0 yards/punt) and Tennessee State sophomore return specialist **Weldon Garlington** (20.9 yards/kickoff return, 1 TD; 19.4 yards/punt return, 1 TD).

2012 Preseason All-Ohio Valley Conference Football Team

(Selected by OVC Head Football Coaches and Sports Information Directors)

Preseason Offensive Player of the Year: Casey Brockman (QB), Murray State

Preseason Defensive Player of the Year: Blake Peiffer (LB), Southeast Missouri

OFFENSE

<u>Pos.</u>	<u>Player, School</u>	<u>Ht.</u>	<u>Wt.</u>	<u>Yr.</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
QB	Casey Brockman, Murray State *	6-2	215	Sr.	Murray, Ky.
RB	Matt Denham, Eastern Kentucky *	5-11	181	Sr.	Rineyville, Ky.
RB	Washaun Ealey, Jacksonville State *	5-11	215	Sr.	Stillmore, Ga.
WR	Tyrone Goard, Eastern Kentucky **	6-5	194	Sr.	Charleston, W.Va.
WR	Quentin Sims, UT Martin **	6-3	202	Sr.	Cincinnati, Ohio
TE	Von Wise, Eastern Illinois **	6-4	209	Sr.	Cincinnati, Ohio
C	O.J. Enabosi, Eastern Kentucky *	6-3	284	Sr.	Villa Rica, Ga.
OG	Kadeem Edwards, Tennessee State **	6-4	290	Jr.	Sanford, Fla.
OG	Tori Mobley, Jacksonville State	6-3	280	Sr.	Columbus, Ga.
OT	Aaron Adams, Eastern Kentucky *	6-6	290	Sr.	Lake Worth, Fla.
OT	Patrick Ford, Eastern Kentucky *	6-6	306	Sr.	Richmond, Ky.

DEFENSE

<u>Pos.</u>	<u>Player, School</u>	<u>Ht.</u>	<u>Wt.</u>	<u>Yr.</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
DL	Marcus Edwards, Tennessee Tech *	6-1	245	Sr.	Alabaster, Ala.
DL	Artavious Dowdell, Eastern Illinois **	6-2	230	Sr.	Belle Glade, Fla.
DL	Antonio Harper, Tennessee State **	6-3	245	Jr.	Memphis, Tenn.
LB	Anthony Brown, Eastern Kentucky *	6-1	240	Jr.	Cincinnati, Ohio
LB	Ichiro Vance, Eastern Kentucky *	6-1	234	Jr.	LaGrange, Ky.
LB	Blake Peiffer, Southeast Missouri *	6-1	225	Sr.	Jackson, Mo.
LB	Qua Huzzie, Murray State **	5-11	237	Jr.	LaGrange, Ga.
LB	Sam Small, Murray State **	6-1	230	Sr.	Winona, Miss.
DB	Will Johnson, Tennessee Tech **	6-2	205	Sr.	Nashville, Tenn.
DB	Austin Tallant, Tennessee Tech	5-10	190	So.	Alcoa, Tenn.
DB	Justin Bell, Eastern Kentucky *	5-11	184	Sr.	Tampa, Fla.
DB	Brooklyn Fox, Eastern Kentucky	6-4	221	Sr.	Tulsa, Okla.

SPECIALISTS

<u>Pos.</u>	<u>Player, School</u>	<u>Ht.</u>	<u>Wt.</u>	<u>Yr.</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
K	Cody Sandlin, UT Martin *	6-2	180	Sr.	Goodlettsville, Tenn.
P	Jordan Berry, Eastern Kentucky *	6-5	195	Jr.	Essendon, Victoria, Australia
RS	Weldon Garlington, Tennessee State	5-10	160	So.	Antioch, Tenn.

* - 1st team All-OVC team in 2011

** - 2nd team All-OVC team in 2011

2012 OVC Football Predicted Order of Finish

(Selected by OVC Head Football Coaches and Sports Information Directors)

	<u>Order of Finish</u>	<u>Points</u>
1.	Eastern Kentucky (12 first-place votes)	124
2.	Jacksonville State (6)	117
3.	Murray State	85
4.	Tennessee Tech	83
5.	Tennessee State	69
6.	UT Martin	67
7.	Southeast Missouri	44
8.	Eastern Illinois	42
9.	Austin Peay	17

Note: 8 points awarded for a first-place vote, 7 for second, etc. - Coaches and SID's could not vote for their own teams