REINVENTING THE RIVALRY

Missoulian File

ABOVE: Drummond celebrates its first Class C state football title after defeating Big Sandy in 2003. **BELOW: The 1969** Philipsburg squad. The Prospectors' roots extend back to the early part of the 20th century, while Drummond High School first fielded a football team in 1969.

A choice nearly unthinkable

After years of dwindling enrollments, administrators at two longtime high school rivals in Granite County choose to combine their efforts on the football field this fall

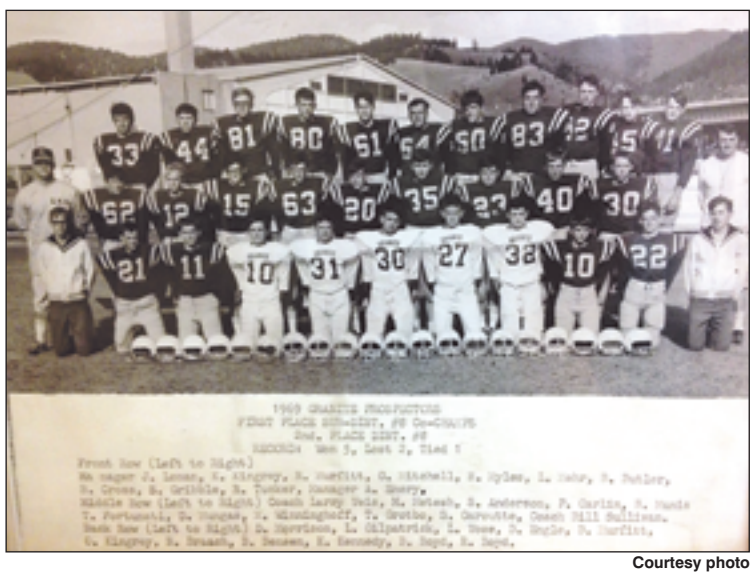
Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part series looking at the new Flint Creek Titans 8-man football team and the growing trend of small-school football co-ops in Montana.

By AJ MAZZOLINI
of the Missoulian

The veteran coach paced the sidelines of the 80-yard pitch tucked between a four-lane highway and a hillside with modest inset bleachers. While his eyes followed the play and his feet followed his Trojans' march toward the goal line yard by yard.

For each stride Jim Oberweiser took, 35 football players mirrored it behind him along Drummond High School's turf, still thawing in the late-morning sun. The huddled mass of shoulder pads and helmets flanked the 22-year coach, an impressive and intimidating show of unison from a school and a town on the verge of its first state football championship.

Mere moments separated Drummond from a Class C 8-man title, an eventual 48-8 drubbing of Big Sandy on this mid-November day in 2003.



Courtesy photo

ONLINE

■ How did the Flint Creek Titans get their new name? Go to **MissoulaPreps.com** to find out.

"I've spoke with some folks who say, 'I just couldn't believe that when I went to this really small town to watch this football game that you had football kids lined up from, gosh, 20-yard line to 20-yard line,' " Oberweiser recounted.

That victory, the 11th in a streak that reached 45 straight wins and spanned three state championships, marked the beginning of an 8-man football dynasty in the town of just more than 300 people 50 miles east of Missoula.

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> *You always want to circle one or two games on the calendar and you always want to be building to those goals. And one of those goals that we always had was to make the playoffs, first and foremost. The second would be to defeat Granite.*
>
> **– Former Drummond and current Flint Creek coach Jim Oberweiser, on the importance of the high school football rivalry in Granite County**

'We can't find anybody to replace him'

Punishing Griz FB Wilson delivers with selfless approach

By BILL SPELTZ
of the Missoulian

Jamal Wilson's coach calls him "the irreplaceable guy."

Yet the average Montana football fan doesn't know much about the junior fullback.

GrizTracks

Mainly because he never carries the football.

Wilson's job is to provide a lead block for the guy carrying the rock in the Griz pro set scheme. He packs such a wallop at 260 pounds that it makes more sense for him to blaze the trail than carry the mail.

"He makes a huge difference – when he's not in there you can feel it," said Wilson's position coach, Justin Green, after practice Thursday at Washington-Grizzly Stadium. "We can't find anybody to replace him.

"He's one of those unsung heroes. He's in a role he's happy with. His credit comes from the

MICHAEL GALLACHER/Missoulian

California native Jamal Wilson transferred from Boise State to Montana in 2013 and has been a welcome addition at fullback.

See **REPLACE,** *Page D4*

Cooper facing opponent unlike any other he's had

Former member of the 'Showtime' Lakers leads Dream into WNBA playoffs after cancer surgery

By PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

ATLANTA – Michael Cooper remembers the day well. The sun was shining bright, yet the notorious Atlanta heat wasn't too stifling. The sky was a brilliant blue, speckled with only a few puffy white clouds.

As he looked out the eighth-floor hospital window, all seemed right with the world. His job was going well. His wife and young son were good.

Then, the doctor delivered one word that changed everything.

Cancer.

"I'm like, 'OK, how long do I have to live?' " Cooper recalled. "That's the first thing that came into my mind."

The defensive stopper for the Los Angeles Laker during their glorious "Showtime" era of the 1980s was facing an opponent unlike any other.

"This lets you know that life is fragile, and it can be taken away from you at any moment," Cooper said. "Here I was, just going along, having a great time down here in Atlanta with a team that I know can win a championship, and the next thing you know, they tell me … 'You have cancer.' Now, tongue cancer isn't as bad some cancers. But cancer is cancer."

See **COOPER,** *Page D4*

FROM PAGE D1

Choice

Continued

But barely a decade later – those players long ago graduated – far fewer Trojan uniforms stood guard over the sidelines. A once burgeoning roster had shrunk to 18 boys, hardly enough for a full practice. With an estimated dip to as low as 13 bodies for the 2014 season, the Trojans made a choice nearly unthinkable 10 years prior.

Last November, following a 6-3 campaign, the Drummond School District filed the paperwork with the Montana High School Association to create a partnership with its chief geographic rival – the nearby Granite High Prospectors of Philipsburg.

Like Drummond, the equally enrollment-ravaged Pros – the school projected just 13 boys out for football this fall as well – faced a drop to the 6-man football ranks if not for a cooperative agreement to keep the program treading water in 8-man territory.

With an MHSA stamp of approval, the Flint Creek Titans were born, a team separated by 27 miles and decades of rival history.

Though Montana's population has swelled above the 1 million mark in recent years, rural residents in the Treasure State occupy a smaller percentage of the population than they once did. U.S. Census data shows what was once a 56-44 population percentage split in favor of smaller, rural communities has flipped the other direction in the last 50 years.

As school enrollments continue to diminish in these areas, sporting opportunities grow scarcer, MHSA Executive Director Mark Beckman said.

> *I feel like when I got into high school (in 2002), when I was a freshman, it was still there. We became so dominant – not being cocky or anything – but it's almost like it wasn't a rivalry anymore. Any time you have a rivalry, it's a game that you can get fired up over. I look back to when I played for the Griz; playing the Bobcats, you look forward to that game. It's a special game with fans and people getting together. It's more than a football game and that's the same way in high school. It's good for the soul, I think.*
>
> **– Former Drummond and Montana star Chase Reynolds**

More and more schools are falling into the MHSA's smallest classification, that of Class C. Home to institutions with 119 students or fewer, the number of Class C schools has increased 10 percent to 106 just since autumn of 2006.

That's 106 out of 179 total MHSA member schools.

By consequence, the number of co-ops has climbed as well as smaller schools pool their resources to field athletic teams. Beckman counted 172 co-ops across all sports – 29 of which are football, by far the most and nearly doubling that of girls' basketball (16). The total number of co-ops is up from 144 when he counted five or six years ago.

"That's concerning for the schools, but I think it's also a good thing because these students at schools with a dwindling enrollment still have the opportunity to participate in these sports and still stay in their local school," Beckman said. "And when you have to put 11, eight or six out (for football), it's even more difficult."

The combined enrollment of schools forming an 8-man football co-op cannot exceed the upper boundary of a regular Class C institution (119 students) by more than 10 percent. For this fall, Drummond and Philipsburg predict 131 combined students – exactly the cutoff point for a co-op – though that number is expected to shrink to 121 for the 2015-16 school year.

Enrollment drops have granted no immunities in athletic reorganization in Montana, though the western-most region of the state is only feeling the squeeze more recently. While Big Sky Country has supported 6-man football since 1982, the high-action open-field discipline didn't reach the area until 2010 when enough schools dipped low enough to warrant the game.

"The West (half of Montana) is behind the times as far as this movement," said Mike Cutler, Philipsburg School District superintendent and former Granite head football coach. "The Hi-Line has just been decimated."

The Philipsburg native previously taught and coached 8-man at Denton in north-central Montana. Denton now co-ops with Stanford and Geyser for football.

Cutler, along with Philipsburg's Wally Stanghill, will continue coaching with head man Oberweiser and Drummond's JC Holland for Flint Creek. He deferred to Oberweiser's experience for the head spot, though.

"Jim's been coaching for 1,050 years," Cutler said with a chuckle.

Drummond has nabbed the headlines and trophies in recent years with five state firsts since '03, but Philipsburg has the deeper history when it comes to football.

High atop Philipsburg Elementary, "1896" is carved into the gray stone monument that is the original Granite High School to represent the school's opening. Not long after, though the exact year varies depending who you talk to around Philipsburg, the Prospectors fielded their first football team.

There were lean years and there were squads that folks in town still discuss in earnest, said Sam Brown, 67, who played football at the school through his junior season in 1963. That last campaign in a Pros uniform for Brown falls under the latter.

"We went undefeated, scored hundreds and hundreds of points to our opponents' very few," Brown recalled, a spot of pride still present in his voice.

The game has changed dramatically since those days, noted Ron Paige, 78, a Granite grad from 1954. Football itself has always been important to the small town, though.

"Football was such a big part of our lives even then," Paige said, dusting off memories buried beneath decades of living. "We didn't have leather helmets – I'm not that old – but just one little plastic bar around the teeth.

"And unfortunately (with the nearby mines), the field was made out of manganese tailings," Paige continued. "You didn't want to get tackled because you had about a 50-50 chance of getting blood poisoning."

It wasn't until 1979, though, that the Pros made their first and only state title game appearance. A 56-25 defeat to Richey gave Philipsburg its best state finish.

A half-hour down Montana Highway 1, Drummond's program was born a decade earlier in 1969. That year, to help fill out an inaugural roster and stir up more interest in the sport, Drummond opened the field to eighth graders from its middle school.

Mike Bradshaw, a 1973 graduate of the school who recently retired as Drummond head girls' basketball coach after 36 seasons, joined the team for his first of five years in a Trojans uniform.

"We didn't have the program developed like they had recently and those first few years we took our lumps," Bradshaw laughed about it now. "We practiced on an old hay field down here, played our games up at the (current) field. But it was all dirt at that time."

It didn't take long for the one-sided affairs between the two schools to begin creeping toward equilibrium. By the time Coach Oberweiser took the whistle in the early '80s, the rivalry was well-established.

"You always want to circle one or two games on the calendar and you always want to be building to those goals," Oberweiser said. "And one of those goals that we always had was to make the playoffs, first and foremost.

"The second would be to defeat Granite."

Little changed by the time Coach Cutler, then a running back, came through the halls of Granite High, though he was coy with the details.

"I got into some trouble with Drummond kids, to put it that way," Cutler said with a sly smile. The 1988 grad also set a still-standing state record with 10 touchdowns in a game to beat Drummond in 1987 before going on to play at the University of Montana-Western.

The rivalry cooled by the late '90s as Drummond found its stride and Philipsburg began to lose footing. As the Trojans' trophy collection ballooned, the games against P-burg started to mean less and less to the players.

"I feel like when I got into high school (in 2002), when I was a freshman, it was still there," said Chase Reynolds, Drummond's record-setting running back and a future Montana Griz standout and NFL pro. "We became so dominant – not being cocky or anything – but it's almost like it wasn't a rivalry anymore."

Which is too bad, the 2006 graduate lamented.

"Any time you have a rivalry, it's a game that you can get fired up over," he said. "I look back to when I played for the Griz; playing the Bobcats, you look forward to that game. It's a special game with fans and people getting together.

"It's more than a football game and that's the same way in high school. It's good for the soul, I think."

The Trojans have made the state playoffs in all but one season dating back to 1998. The year before marked the Prospectors' last trip to the postseason.

"I've heard people say, 'Philipsburg doesn't have the tradition of football,' " said Granite County Sheriff Scott Dunkerson, a 1989 Granite grad and current Drummond resident. "Whoa, whoa, whoa, back up a few years. It's been going for such a long time and that's the sad part of it, to see that disappear."

Cooper

Continued

Cooper is in his first season as coach of the Dream, a team that finished first in the Eastern Conference after reaching the WNBA finals three of the last four years.

The Dream were dominating the East with a 15-6 record when Cooper went in to have a small spot on his tongue checked out. It seemed like a cut, but just wouldn't heal. It had become quite annoying, making it difficult for the 58-year-old to chew, drink or swallow.

The specialist knew right away it was cancer. Cooper underwent surgery six days later to have the lesion removed from his tongue. Also, his lymph nodes were taken out, reducing the risk of the disease spreading but leaving a gnarly scar down the left side of his neck.

The very day of his surgery, Cooper's 83-year-old father, Marshall, was buried. He had been in failing health, and the two were able to visit a few weeks before he died.

"I flew to L.A. on a weekend when we had some days off," Cooper said. "I told him I loved him, said all the things I wanted to say. We laughed and talked. I told him, 'Pops, if you're hanging around for me, don't hang. I'm OK.' That was the last time I saw him."

Instead of grieving, Cooper actually took a bit of comfort from his father's death as he was wheeled into the operating room.

"I knew I had another angel up there looking out for me," he said. "I knew things were going to be all right."

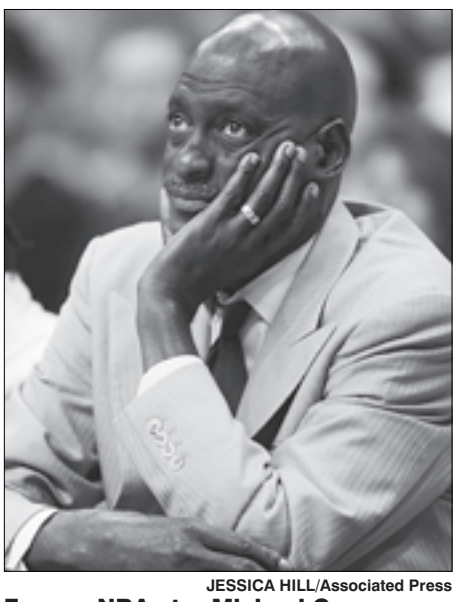
The cancer was caught in its early stages, according to Cooper, and the chances of a full recovery are good. He'll need to undergo about six weeks of radiation after the season, but hopes the worst of his ordeal is over.

He missed only six games, but the Dream took a definite turn for the worse while he was out, losing nine of 11.

"Anytime you're on a team, you want consistency, you want familiarity," said DeLisha Milton-Jones, a 15-year veteran. "When you're thrown a blow like that from the head coaching position – I mean, he's your first leader. When you don't have him there, of course the team may stumble a little bit. And we did."

Now, there's a chance to make it right.

A best-of-three series against the Chicago Sky begins Friday night. Atlanta is led by top scorer Angel McCoughtry and rookie star Shoni Schimmel. The Dream (19-15) are the favorite in the East, but no one outside their locker room really believes they can knock off the Western Conference champion Phoenix Mercury (29-5) or the Minnesota Lynx (25-9) – should they get that far.



JESSICA HILL/Associated Press

Former NBA star Michael Cooper watches play during the second half of the Atlanta Dream's game against the Connecticut Sun on Sunday in Uncasville, Conn. Cooper, in his first season coaching in the WNBA, had to miss six games due to surgery for cancer.

They believe they have a chance with Cooper, who is still adjusting since returning to the bench.

He tires more easily than he did before, and he's been told not to raise his voice while his tongue recovers. He talks just fine, other than swishing saliva around his mouth more frequently, but relays instructions during the games through assistant coach Karlene Thompson.

But this is where he wants to be, where he needs to be.

"It's been great to be around the team," Cooper said after a recent practice at Philips Arena. "With my wife and son back in Los Angeles, the team has been like a comforting thing for me. It's like family coming here. That's why it was important to come back as fast as I was able to come back."

His eye darted around the court. One player was getting in some extra free throws. Another was shooting from 3-point range.

"This is what I love," Cooper said, smiling like a man whose life is back in order. "Being in a basketball gym. The smell of hoops."

Cancer couldn't take that away.

Replace

Continued

guys that run behind him and from the front when he picks up protection and from the coaching staff. We know how much value he has to our team."

A transfer from Boise State where he played sparingly in 2012, Wilson made a big splash in his first season as a Grizzly. Opposing coaches took notice and voted No. 34 onto the all-Big Sky Conference third team.

Wilson expects to be even better with a year of experience in Montana's offense under his belt.

"It helps a whole bunch because last year you come in and you maybe have a little half-step (hesitation) and it doesn't help the offense flow as good as it does now," the California native said. "Being able to go full speed without that half-step, knowing exactly who you have, makes it that much easier."

Green uses words like gritty and smart to describe Wilson, a political science major and member of the all-Big Sky academic team. Wilson is also an optimist, encouraged by the way Montana's run game is coming together.

"It's been kind of rough losing those three (linemen) from last year," he said of Danny Kistler, William Poehls and Kjelby Oiland. "They were incredible dudes.

"Just working this new line in, those guys are getting better every single day. From the start of spring until now, it's just incredible how much better those guys got. Today they were flying around and we were getting holes we probably didn't even see last year. We're looking good in the run game."

While Wilson did not have a carry in 2013, he did have five catches for 23 yards. Don't be surprised if he tops those numbers in 2014.

ONLINE VIDEO

■ Missoulian sports reporters Bill Speltz and AJ Mazzolini look at injury fill-ins and the wide receiver position. **Missoulian.com**

"He's done a great job working on some of his weaknesses in the offseason, working on his flexibility and ability to catch the ball," Green said. "He's by far our leader. Guys trust him. They believe in him.

"I know our linebackers are tired of hitting him and ready to hit somebody else. I know he's tired of hitting them. He's just a guy who brings his lunch pail every day."

Wilson is a humble man proud to make an impact without making headlines. And yet, the one big question surrounding his Griz career still begs to be answered.

So how about it, Jamal: We all want to know why you didn't have any carries last season.

"You and me both," said Wilson as he laughed. "There's been lots of times when I thought, 'Hey, I could have gotten the ball on that play!' or something like that.

"No, really I'm just looking forward to this year. I've been working hard, trying to get that first touchdown."

Whether he strikes paydirt or not, you can bet he'll score high with Montana's coaching staff.

"When he's done with his career here I'm going to use his name as, 'You need to be like Jamal Wilson,' " Green said. "He's by far our highest grader (among the running backs) when we grade games."

The Grizzlies wore full pads for Thursday's practice and the three challengers for starting place-kicker were prominent. Veteran Chris Lider worked with the No. 1 unit and newcomer Daniel Sullivan with the No. 2 group.

Early in practice Lider missed from 42 yards with a swirling wind. Sullivan and Harrison Greenberg hit from that distance and the former showed off his superior leg strength.

The problem for Montana's three kickers has been consistency. Thursday was a good example.

When the kickers took the field for a second time, all three hit from 38 yards with Sullivan showing the most lift. They moved back to 40 where Lider had his kick blocked, Sullivan was wide left and Greenberg knocked it through off the upright. Later Lider, Sullivan and Greenberg all hit from 43 yards.

Montana coach Mick Delaney has his work cut out naming a starter. He said last weekend he would hold off until the end of this week.

Griz quarterback Jordan Johnson looked good in a two-minute drill Thursday, completing passes to Jamaal Jones, Marq Rogers and Mike Ralston. Later in 7-on-7 competition, Montana's defense gained a measure of revenge when linebacker Herbert Gamboa made a one-handed interception on a pass thrown by Shay Smithwick-Hann.

When scrimmage action resumed, tight end Mitch Saylor made two nice catches on passes from Johnson. Running back Jordan Canada showed a quick burst in running for a first down and the defense finished strong with sacks by Zack Wagenmann and sophomore backup end Ryan Johnson.

The Griz will practice once on Friday, a morning session.

REINVENTING THE RIVALRY

TOM BAUER/Missoulian

Danny Mannix, left, of Drummond High School and Chase Comings of Granite High School run through drills during the first football practice for the two schools' combined team, the Flint Creek Titans. Mannix and Comings are both seniors and four-year starters going into this first year of the combined team.

Fighting forward

Former rivals Drummond, Philipsburg navigate an unfamiliar landscape in hopes of reclaiming football success

Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part series looking at the new Flint Creek Titans 8-man football team and the growing trend of small-school football co-ops in Montana. Part 1 ran in Friday's Missoulian.

By AJ MAZZOLINI
of the Missoulian

DRUMMOND – The bright yellow school bus rumbles up Main Street, kicking up a cloud of muted dust on a parched August afternoon. The transport zooms past the local high school, its course set for the football field beyond the school grounds under the eponymous, white-painted "D" emblazoned on the hillside.

There 13 boys pile off the Philipsburg School District bus, black matte helmets and worn cleats in hand. As Granite High gridders have done for generations, they lace up their spikes under the scoreboard, a blue-and-white billboard that still claims the field for Drummond as the "Home of the Trojans."

This time, though, the dozen-plus boys sauntering up from the school aren't the enemy. On this day, the first official fall practice of the inaugural 8-man football Flint Creek Titans, the former rivals are allies.

Any tentativeness or awkward sentiments melt away under the late-summer sun as all 28 players – once divisively Trojans and Prospectors – take to warm-up drills as teammates. The mass of athletes almost overwhelms for two programs that have so battled enrollment declines in recent years.

"Never once had this many," says Philipsburg senior quarterback and safety Eric Bohrnsen, his eyebrows raised in emphasis and excitement. "Or really even close to this many."

"There's so many people I don't even know what to do," adds Drummond senior wideout and linebacker Danny Mannix, before jogging out to the crowded turf.

TOM BAUER/Missoulian

Titans players walk past Philipsburg's bus parked on Drummond's field during their first practice together. Home games will alternate between the two towns.

ONLINE VIDEO

■ Get a look inside the Flint Creek Titans' first practice together at **Missoulian.com**.

Across Montana, the stagnation of rural population has created an increasing need for cooperative agreements among small high school athletic departments. But what happens when natural rivals are forced into cooperation?

"We're all holding our breath and wondering what's going to come out of it," said 1954 Granite graduate Ron Paige, his hope for a smooth transition still weighted by uneasiness.

Luckily, a slew of towns in the state have already worn the path smooth that Granite County now embarks upon – most recently the short-lived St. Regis-Alberton combo, the Clark Fork Timberwolves, though rebounding enrollments nullified that agreement after one season last fall.

None has fought rural decay with more success than the 6-man football programs from Geraldine and Highwood.

See **FORWARD,** *Page D6*

> *I didn't like it. I've always wanted to be rivals against Drummond. But then I actually took time to think about it, and I realized how good it's going to be for the team.*
>
> **– Flint Creek senior lineman Bob Immenschuh, on teaming up with Philipsburg's rivals from Drummond**

Moya just misses no-no as O's split twin bill

Billings breaks up no-hitter bid in its final at-bat of nightcap

Mustangs 5, Osprey 0

Osprey 3, Mustangs 1

Saturday
Missoula at Billings
Dehler Field
7:05 p.m.
Radio: ESPN Montana (102.9 FM)

Missoulian

BILLINGS – Not just one out away, but one strike.

Missoula Osprey pitcher Gabriel Moya allowed his first hit of the night with two outs in the bottom of the seventh, the final inning of the game because it was being played as part of a doubleheader with the Billings Mustangs. Though Moya left without a no-hitter Friday, he earned the win in the O's 3-1 victory and Missoula split the twin bill in Billings.

The Mustangs took the opener 5-0.

Moya (4-4) turned in by far his best outing with the Osprey this season. He tossed 112 pitches over 6 2-3 innings and struck out 10.

His one hit allowed, a single to center field by Garrett Boulware, came just after the lefty hurler walked Taylor Sparks on a full count. Sparks would come around to score on a Cory Thompson two-out single off of Anthony Bazzani after Moya exited the game.

Moya allowed three base runners before the seventh, two on walks and one thanks to an Osprey throwing error.

Missoula got on the board in the fourth when four straight O's reached base with two outs. It was Yosbel Gutierrez's single that scored the run.

The visitors made it 3-0 in the fifth. Taylor Ard doubled home two after Trevor Mitsui got the rally going with a double and Stewart Ijames walked.

The Osprey (12-13 second half, 29-34 overall) remain three games back of first-place Billings (15-10, 32-31) in the Pioneer League's North Division with the Friday's finals.

Billings held the Osprey to their own two-hitter in the early game in a Tyler Mahle (4-4) seven-inning

See **MOYA,** *Page D6*

Griz Tracks

Griz opt for a familiar foot at kicker

Lefty Chris Lider wins 3-man battle for the job, but all have struggled with accuracy

By BILL SPELTZ
of the Missoulian

He's going with the lefty.

Montana football coach Mick Delaney said Friday that junior Chris Lider will be his place-kicker when his team opens at Wyoming next Saturday. Lider started the entire 2012 season but lost the job to Ben Worst early last year after missing three extra point attempts.

Worst left town in the spring and is now a member of the Idaho Vandals. For the past three weeks Lider has been battling for the No. 1 spot with transfer Daniel Sullivan, Wyoming's starter in 2011, and sophomore upstart Harrison Greenberg.

"We'll go with Chris it looks like because he's been on the field," Delaney said. "Unless something drastic were to happen in the next week.

"We'll try to give Daniel some opportunities that are meaningful and start to make a decision there. Harrison came out of spring the No. 1 guy and he's still battling like heck. He was very good yesterday and today."

All three place-kickers have struggled with consistency in camp. Lider stood out in practice last week before missing an extra point on the weekend in Montana's second and final scrimmage.

This week has brought more inconsistency. On Friday morning all three place-kickers hit from 35 yards. Then Lider went into a funk, missing wide left from 40 yards and wide right from 44. Greenberg was

See **GRIZ,** *Page D6*

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Season starts on Eastern's Inferno

No. 1 E. Washington hosts No. 17 Sam Houston State in FCS Showcase

Missoulian

ESPN, 1:30 p.m.

A sold-out stadium. A national television audience – the only college football game of the day, meaning that it's the only option to watch. A pregame show streamed nationally on ESPN's online platform.

Heady stuff even for teams in NCAA Division I's Football Bowl Subdivision. And even more so for two of the top programs in FCS.

The 2014 college football season kicks off Saturday afternoon – not at South Bend, or Ann Arbor, or Baton Rouge, but on The Inferno at Eastern Washington's Roos Field in Cheney, Washington – when

See **INFERNO,** *Page D4*

GRIZZLY GAME DAY

■ The Big Sky teams are all chasing Eastern Washington. **Inside today's Missoulian**

FROM PAGE D1

Moya

Continued

shutout. The Mustang pitcher struck out seven and walked two, allowing singles to Mitsui and Dane McFarland.

The Mustangs roughed up Osprey hurler Touki Toussaint for three runs in a short 1 2-3 innings pitched.

Kevin Franklin singled home a run in the first and Jociel Veras and Ty Washington had RBI in the third to chase Toussaint (1-2), who struck out four in his limited stay.

Sparks homered in the fifth to extend the Mustangs' lead and Argenis Aldazoro gave the game its final score with a run-scoring single in the sixth inning.

The teams are back at it Saturday in Billings for the finale of the four-game series.

First game
Billings 5, Missoula 0

Missoula	ab	r	hbi	Billings	ab	r	hbi
Ozuna ss	3	0	0	Wshingtn 2b	4	1	3
Castillo 2b	2	0	0	Aldazoro dh	3	0	1
Mitsui 1b	3	0	1	Aquino rf	4	0	0
Ijames rf	2	0	0	Franklin 1b	3	0	1
Baker c	3	0	0	Sparks 3b	3	1	1
McFarlnd cf	3	0	1	O'Grady lf	3	0	0
Robinsn dh	3	0	0	Thompsn ss	3	1	1
Hmphrys 3b	2	0	0	Long c	2	1	1
Smith lf	2	0	0	Veras cf	3	1	2
Totals	**23**	**0**	**2**	**Totals**	**28**	**5**	**10**

E – Toussaint (1). LOB – Missoula 4, Billings 7. 2B – Washington. HR – Sparks (8). S – Aldazoro. SB – Long (2).

Missoula	**000**	**000**	**0**	**–**	**0**	
Billings	**120**	**011**	**x**	**–**	**5**	

	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Missoula						
Toussaint L, 1-2	1.2	5	3	3	1	4
Simmons	4.1	5	2	2	0	1
Billings						
Mahle W, 4-4	7.0	2	0	0	2	7

WP – Toussaint, Mahle 2. Umpires – HP: Shane Hardy. 1B: Jesus Gonzalez. T – 1:46. A – 2,379.

Second game
Missoula 3, Billings 1

Missoula	ab	r	hbi	Billings	ab	r	hbi
Alcntara ss	4	0	1	O'Grady cf	3	0	0
Ozuna 2b	4	0	0	Aldazoro lf	3	0	0
Mitsui 1b	4	1	1	Aquino dh	3	0	0
Ijames rf	2	1	0	Franklin 1b	3	0	0
Ard 3b	4	1	2	Sparks 3b	2	1	0
Castillo dh	3	0	2	Boulware c	2	0	1
McFrlnd cf	1	0	0	Thmpsn ss	2	0	1
Gutierrez c	3	0	1	Greer rf	2	0	0
Ehmcke lf	3	0	0	Chavez 2b	3	0	0
Totals	**28**	**3**	**7**	**Totals**	**23**	**1**	**2**

E – Ard (2), Sparks (9). LOB – Missoula 8, Billings 5. 2B – Mitsui, Ard. SB – Alcantara (8), Castillo (1).

Missoula	**000**	**120**	**0**	**–**	**3**	
Billings	**000**	**000**	**1**	**–**	**1**	

	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Missoula						
Moya W,4-4	6.2	1	1	1	3	10
Bazzani S,2	0.1	1	0	0	1	0
Billings						
Kivel	3	2	0	0	0	4
Sterner L,2-1	1	3	1	1	1	0
Williams	1	2	2	2	1	0
Hunter	2	0	0	0	2	2

WP – Sterner, Hunter 2. Umpires – HP: Jesus Gonzalez; 1B: Shane Hardy. T –2:08 . A – 2,379.

PIONEER LEAGUE STANDINGS

All Times MDT
North Division

	W	L	Pct.	GB
Billings (Reds)	15	10	.600	–
Missoula (D-backs)	12	13	.480	3
x-G.Falls (CWS)	10	14	.417	4½
Helena (Brewers)	9	15	.375	5½
South Division				
	W	**L**	**Pct.**	**GB**
G.Junction (Colo.)	16	9	.640	–
Ogden (Dodgers)	13	11	.542	2½
Idaho Falls (Royals)	13	12	.520	3
x-Orem (Angels)	10	14	.417	5½

x-clinched first half

Friday's Games

Idaho Falls 13, Grand Junction 1, 2nd game, comp. of susp. game
Billings 5, Missoula 0, 1st game
Orem at Ogden, ccd., rain
Great Falls 12, Helena 11
Idaho Falls 2, Grand Junction 1, 7 innings
Missoula 3, Billings 1, 2nd game

Saturday's Games

- Grand Junction at Ogden, 7 p.m.
- Idaho Falls at Orem, 7:05 p.m.
- Missoula at Billings, 7:05 p.m.
- Great Falls at Helena, 7:05 p.m.

Sunday's Games

Missoula at Great Falls, 1 p.m.
Grand Junction at Ogden, 4 p.m.
Idaho Falls at Orem, 4:05 p.m.
Billings at Helena, 4:05 p.m.

Senators call for AFA assaults review

DENVER (AP) – Two U.S. senators called for an outside investigation of how the Air Force Academy handles sexual assaults, including an allegation that agents were blocked from speaking to football coaches.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and Sen. John Thune of South Dakota asked the Defense Department inspector general and the civilian U.S. Office of Special Counsel on Wednesday to look into claims by a former Air Force criminal investigator, Staff Sgt. Brandon Enos.

In a 12-page memo to members of Congress dated May 17, Enos alleged that former academy superintendent Michael Gould barred military investigators from speaking to football coaches about allegations of sexual assault and illegal drug use by players.

Gould, who retired as a three-star general, has denied doing anything improper. He did not immediately respond to a message left by The Associated Press with family on Thursday.

Enos also said the Air Force's criminal investigation arm, the Office of Special Investigations, undermined an academy initiative that encouraged cadets to report if they were sexually assaulted.

Sexual assaults at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs and at the Army and Navy academies are under close congressional scrutiny. A Department of Defense report in January identified sports and club teams as an area where the academies needed to expand training on preventing sexual misconduct.

Enos belonged to an Office of Special Investigations unit based in Colorado Springs responsible for investigating crimes at the academy and other facilities.

Enos wrote that he received credible information from people he did not identify that football coaches were aware of sexual assault and drug allegations involving players. He did not say when the alleged incidents occurred.

"These sources further stated the coaching staff held a meeting with the football players in approximately December 2012 and told them to lay low and they would take care of them while this investigation 'blew over,' " Enos wrote. Gould would not let investigators interview football coach Troy Calhoun or his staff but said he would speak to them himself, Enos wrote.

FROM PAGE D1

Forward

Continued

From 1988 to 2010, the two central Montana schools notched 23 Class C 6-man championship game appearances and combined for 15 titles. The rivals faced each other in five of those finals.

"That last weekend of the season it seemed to always come down to us and Geraldine," 2004 Highwood graduate Brandon Gondeiro said. "Then we just counted on seeing each other again in the playoffs."

But like Drummond and Philipsburg soon to follow, the schools watched their student bodies sink in numbers. In 2011, the 6-man powerhouses, separated by 40 miles of wheat fields near Fort Benton, created a football co-op and adopted a new nickname.

The Rivals.

"It was one thing where we were so passionate about the rivalry, it was one of the last things you wanted to do," said Gondeiro, who now teaches at Highwood and came on as a co-head coach with Geraldine's Rod Tweet that year. "But at the same time if you don't do it, you're taking away the opportunity to play the game."

When the Rivals opened at "home" in Geraldine in the third week of the season, the new program forced together not only polarized players but two contrary communities. Some parents were supportive, helping blend the game crowds between Highwood and Geraldine supporters.

Many others were not, Gondeiro remembers.

Several times that first season, the home sideline looked of perfect division: Highwood fans from midfield to one goal line, Geraldinians spread out toward the other.

"Oftentimes that's more complicated than bringing the kids together, because the kids just want to play," Gondeiro said. "They recognize that without each other, there's not enough for them to do that."

After semifinals appearances in each of the first two years of the co-op, Geraldine-Highwood won its first state championship as a combined program last fall to cap an undefeated season.

But the largest obstacles are the ones few people see: paperwork, planning and communication, all of which can derail unprepared co-ops before the team takes the field.

Drummond and Philipsburg have waded through the opening sea of bureaucracy – tackling school board meetings and applications, complete with $250 fees from each school, and the formation of a co-op advisory board.

The schools hammered out a schedule, another hang-up. Practice sites are set to rotate between the towns on a weekly basis during the season, though Drummond will host the first two weeks consecutively to ease its students who began school this week ahead of Philipsburg's start on Sept. 2.

Games will alternate location, as well. Flint Creek makes its local debut Sept. 12 against Noxon in Philipsburg. The next week's contest with Darby will be in Drummond.

None of that was foreign territory for the former adversaries. Drummond already draws high school students from nearby Hall and Helmville and understands the issues surrounding travel for practice, and the two schools already host a co-op for wrestling.

That existing relationship, which has also now adopted the Flint Creek Titans moniker, helped abate the taxing process for some on the football team as well.

"I'm sure for some of the kids it's a pretty big shock, but I've wrestled with some of the kids from P-burg on the team," said Drummond senior Tony Bergerson, a quarterback for the Titans. "Well, it works out for wrestling and it's been good there, so I started thinking about (a football co-op) and it sounded pretty good, too."

With an aligned code of conduct in place, the only major hurdle remaining may be unifying the two communities. That will come in time, said former Drummond and Montana Grizzly great Chase Reynolds, as long as both sides can focus on the necessity of the move and the possibilities it generates for students on both sides.

"You look at it, you're all Granite County," said Reynolds, who still holds the state's all-time rushing record. "You can put other things aside, the Trojans (and) the Prospectors, put that aside for a better cause."

"The Prospectors are all gone anyway," quipped Paige, the 78-year-old Philipsburg football fan, in agreement. "I don't know if any Trojans are still around either."

Time is a good start to healing old wounds, but success on the field is a more powerful bandage. In fact, just the idea of winning has already helped unite some on the team who were once unconvinced.

"I didn't like it. I've always wanted to be rivals against Drummond," said Bob Immenschuh, a senior lineman from Philipsburg. "But then I actually took time to think about it, and I realized how good it's going to be for the team."

Of all factors beyond the control of any football team and its coaching staff, numbers may have the biggest impact on a squad's ultimate success.

A greater pool of players yields a greater number of strong athletes, simple as that, said Flint Creek head coach Jim Oberweiser. More importantly, a burgeoning roster improves and conditions all the players even beyond the stars.

"The big thing is we'll have eight kids that we can practice against each night," said Oberweiser, who previously led the Trojans for 32 years – the last few without the benefit of a junior varsity squad. "And I know that's a luxury that some of the teams in our conference don't always have."

By adding depth to a unit that features a handful of returning all-conference players and an all-stater, Mannix, the Titans could continue Drummond's run of five straight playoff appearances. The potential is there at least, said Pete DesRosier, a former football coach at Drummond.

"When you take two programs like Drummond and Philipsburg and combine them – wow, that's some pretty good football," said DesRosier, who coached in the mid-1970s before putting a pair of sons and a grandson through the program.

It's not just those in Granite County expecting tenacity from the Titans. The rest of 8-man's Western Division has kept a trained eye on the goings-on along Flint Creek as well.

"There's some people who think they're going to be really, really good," said Allan Labbe, a 30-year veteran football coach in Superior. "They've got a good team coming back anyway and now add six really good kids from P-burg …

"I'm excited for 'em; I'll hate to play them."

Potential is all and well, but it can't win state trophies, and Coach Oberweiser isn't ready to look that far ahead anyway. The soft-spoken – up until it's time for blocking drills, that is – and articulate coach immerses himself in the task at hand. Today, that's playbook basics.

He and assistant coach Mike Cutler, Granite's former head man and the district's superintendent, line eager players up in formations on Day 1 of practice. The coaches demonstrate play calls and bark out gap assignments while – for the first time in years – searching for a way to keep nearly 30 teenage boys' attention.

Minds wander on a warm and windy day, but eyes hidden behind facemasks light up once it's their turn to execute the play.

It's an excitement common among preseason players, but there's something a little different this year. The season opener, a Sept. 5 road clash with Seeley-Swan, is more than just the first game of the year.

It's a brand new beginning, the true birth of the Flint Creek Titans.

"Kids are already talking about it," Cutler says.

He smiles, all the struggles and pain of Philipsburg football's past few frustrating years washed away by a future with hope in it once again.

" 'I wanna be the one to make the first touchdown; I wanna be the one to make the first tackle,' " he echoes his insistent players. "It'll be monumental."

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Missoulian needs prep questionnaires

Questionnaires for football, volleyball and soccer were emailed by the Missoulian sports department to athletic directors in western Montana recently.

The questionnaires will be used to write fall sports previews that will begin appearing soon.

Coaches need to complete the questionnaires and return them to the Missoulian no later than Aug. 26 in order for their team to be included in the previews.

If you did not receive a questionnaire, contact the Missoulian sports department at *sportsdesk@ missoulian.com.*

Missoulian

Griz

Continued

the only one to hit from all three distances (35, 40 and 44).

"We'll continue to work on that through next week," Delaney said. "That's one of the great things about preseason.

"But I don't want to have a kicker who they think has a short hook on them and you're going to jerk them out of there as soon as something goes wrong. Right now one of our guys (Greenberg) has never competed in a college football game and one (Sullivan) has been away for two years, so we're going to have to put them in some game situations here the next few weeks to see really where we think we're at."

Sullivan appears to have the strongest leg when lining up in field goal situations. He probably gives the Griz the best shot to hit from 50 yards or more. But Lider has had fewer knuckle balls the last three weeks.

Friday marked the final competitive practice of camp. The Griz will go through a dress rehearsal on Saturday, wearing workout clothes and helmets.

Just as he has all month, Griz senior rush end Zack Wagenmann was impressive in scrimmage action Friday. He made several touch sacks on veteran quarterback Jordan Johnson and spent a lot of time in the offensive backfield.

Johnson was also impressive, especially at the end of practice.

He directed the offense on a sustained drive that included two long completions to tight end Mitch Saylor and a short completion to wideout Ryan Burke. The topper was a 14-yard touchdown toss to Jamaal Jones on a fade route over Montana's most experienced cornerback, Nate Harris.

"They're anxious to play," Delaney said of his troops. "You don't want to get too anxious you know and wish your life away here in the next week. There's still a lot of work left to do.

"But our guys are mature enough. Even though we're young in some spots, we've got a lot of maturity in key places and they understand every day we come out is a work day. We didn't even turn our thoughts directly to Wyoming until today as far as schemes go."

Delaney says his team is fortunate in that Wyoming's offensive and defensive schemes are similar to those of Montana. Both teams run a pro set offense, although the Cowboys' attack has some West Coast flavor.

"We've spent our time preparing against each other in practice, which will be a great carry-over for what we at least anticipate Wyoming will be doing," Delaney said.

Asked if he's concerned the Cowboys may keep a little spread attack in the playbook since they ran the offense the past several years, Delaney responded with conviction.

"That's not the type of guys they are," he said. "Coach (Craig) Bohl and his staff won three national championships at North Dakota State and they're going to do what they believe in.

"That is line up and run the ball at you on offense and be real physical and throw a lot of play-action pass, a lot of vertical game."

Likewise, Wyoming figures to be a no-nonsense team on defense with nine returning starters.

"Their defensive coordinator worked with us for five years at Colorado State as our coordinator," Delaney said of Steve Stanard, alluding to the fact he and Stanard coached for the FBS Rams a decade ago. "He's a base four-man front guy with quarter coverage and half coverage."

The Griz have had very few scuffles in preseason practice but one did break out late in Friday's workout. Delaney stressed to his team the importance of poise.

"As you get into this week you can't allow it," he said of fighting. "Those are situations that will get you beat if you're not disciplined enough to walk away from somebody shoving you in the back or holding you.

"But I think our team chemistry is outstanding. That's because of the senior and junior leadership. Our guys have embraced the new guys. They're helping them work through some things that are difficult for every freshman."

Friday's practice ended with the Griz marching band serenading the football team with three songs. Following the last number, Griz starting cornerback Joshua Dennard and snapper Aaron Held took center stage to showcase their drum skills with the help of the band.

The scene, which also featured representatives of the cheerleading squad, was festive.

"Joshua has been doing that every year since he's been here, a very talented young man," Delaney said. "It's something to have fun with. We appreciate what the band and cheerleaders and dance squad do for football and all Montana athletics."

QUICK KICKS: Offensive tackle John Schmaing will miss the 2014 season due to academic issues. A 290-pound junior from Billings, Schmaing would have been starting for the second season in a row this year. Last year he started all 13 games at left tackle and was an honorable mention All-Big Sky Conference selection.

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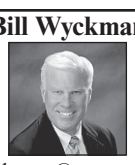
Bill Wyckman



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