

Smith Named to Butkus Award Watch List

Written by Mike Flynn
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Appalachian State University linebacker D.J. Smith is one of 51 college football players — and the only one from the NCAA Division I Football Championship Subdivision (FCS — formerly Division I-AA) — on the official watch list for the 2010 Butkus Award, which was announced on Tuesday. In its 26th year, the Butkus Award annually recognizes the nation's top linebackers at the professional, collegiate and high-school levels.

A three-year starter at linebacker, the 6-1, 235-pound Smith enters his senior campaign on pace to join three-time NFL Pro Bowl selection Dexter Coakley as the only players in ASU history to amass 500 career tackles. He has tallied at least 120 tackles in each of his first three collegiate campaigns, including 137 a year ago, en route to first-team all-America recognition. His 381 career tackles are the second-most among all active FCS players going into this season, behind only 386 for Scott Lewis from St. Francis (Pa.).

Smith is the second member of the Mountaineer defense this year to be recognized among college football's elite players, regardless of division. Defensive back Mark LeGree is also the only non-Division I FBS (Football Bowl Subdivision — formerly Division I-A) representative on the official watch list for the Bronko Nagurski Award, which recognizes college football's top defensive player.

The 51-player Butkus Award watch list (51 matching the jersey number worn by Dick Butkus as an eight-time All-Pro for the Chicago Bears from 1965-73) will be narrowed to semifinalists on Oct. 21 and finalists on Nov. 23, with the winner announced on Dec. 8.

Smith and the No. 3-ranked Mountaineers open the 2010 season on Sept. 4 at SoCon rival Chattanooga. Kickoff is set for 3 p.m. with the game televised across the Southeast on SportSouth.