New Hampshire senior linebacker Matt Evans has the opportunity to become only the second two-time winner of the Buck Buchanan Award. Of course, there is a stellar list of players on the Buchanan Watch List whom he has to compete against this season. They, too, are anxious be named the outstanding defensive player in the Football Championship Subdivision. Their candidacy began Thursday when The Sports Network announced 20 players, including six finalists from last season, in the race for the 18th annual award. This season's winner will join a list of Buchanan Award greats such as Dexter Coakley, Jared Allen, Rashean Mathis and Kroy Biermann. Coakley, the original Buchanan recipient in 1995, won again a year later and remains the only two- time winner of the award.

Evans hopes to follow in the footsteps of the former NFL linebacker. The 6- foot, 226-pound native of Hanover, Mass., led the FCS in tackles during the regular season and finished second overall with nearly 13.8 per game. In 2010, he finished fourth in the Buchanan Award voting as a sophomore.

The other 2011 finalists returning to the Watch List are Georgia Southern nose tackle Brent Russell, Indiana State defensive end Ben Obaseki, Howard outside linebacker Keith Pough, Northwestern State inside linebacker Derek Rose and Alabama State safety Kejuan Riley.

Like Evans, Russell already is a two-time Buchanan finalist. Last season, he posted 67 tackles, including 16.5 for loss, with 6.5 sacks, and finished sixth in the voting. Obaseki is a game-changer on the outside, posting 7.5 sacks and nine quarterback hurries last season. Pough has made 49.5 tackles for loss over the last two seasons, while Rose has 153 solo tackles in that time. Only one player in the FCS had more than Riley's nine interceptions last season.

The newcomers to the Watch List are defensive tackle Zach Minter of Montana State; defensive ends Willie Jefferson of Stephen F. Austin, Joseph LeBeau of Jackson State and Blake Oliaro of San Diego; linebackers Clarence Bumpas of Northern Colorado, Wes Dothard of Chattanooga, Jeremy Kimbrough of Appalachian State, Blake Peiffer of Southeast Missouri State and Tyler Starr of South Dakota; cornerbacks Demetrius McCray of Appalachian State, B.W. Webb of William & Mary and Marcus Williams of FCS champion North Dakota State; and safeties Malcolm Bronson of McNeese State and Darnell Taylor of Sam Houston State.

Kimbrough and McCray are the only teammates on the list. Kimbrough had 105 tackles and McCray five interceptions to lead Appalachian State last season.

Among the FCS leaders last season, LeBeau ranked second in sacks per game and fourth in tackles for loss per game, while Peiffer and Bumpas ranked third and fourth, respectively, in tackles per game. Oliaro and Jefferson tied for fourth in sacks per game. Williams had seven interceptions and 22 passes defended for the national champions.

Webb, like Williams, is a shutdown cornerback. He has earned All-CAA Football first-team honors in each of the last two seasons. Minter was one of the FCS' best interior defensive linemen last season with 52 tackles, including 7.5 sacks. Only one player had more than Starr's seven forced fumbles, although Dothard wasn't far behind with five.

The Southland Conference boasts Bronson, already a three-time All-Southland Conference first-team selection, and Taylor, the conference's defensive player of the year last season.

The Buchanan Award Watch List can undergo revision during the 2012 season. Ballots will be sent to a panel of about 175 sports information and media relations directors, broadcasters, writers and other dignitaries following the regular season on Nov. 19. The top three vote-getters

will be invited to The Sports Network FCS Awards Presentation.
The Sports Network also presents the Walter Payton, Jerry Rice and Eddie Robinson awards. The Payton Award honors the FCS player of the year, the Rice Award goes to the FCS freshman of the year and the Robinson Award honors the FCS coach of the year.