

Sam Houston State No.1 In TSN Poll; ASU 6th

Written by Craig Haley
Monday, 13 August 2012 13:31

Sam Houston State's motto this season is "Finish." That's what North Dakota State did last year when it defeated Sam Houston State in the NCAA Division I Football Championship Game. Both programs could return to Frisco, Texas,

for this season's FCS title game. If so, voters in The Sports Network FCS Top 25 believe Sam Houston State will finish the job.

On Monday, the voters installed Sam Houston State as the preseason No. 1. The Bearkats gained 79 of the 151 first-place votes and 3,708 points in the national poll. North Dakota State was the second choice, totaling 59 first-place votes and 3,625 points. Voters have reason to favor Sam Houston State should there be a rematch in the championship game. The Bearkats, the Southland Conference champion which finished 14-1 last season, have an overflow of returning talent - perhaps more than North Dakota State.

Not only does Sam Houston State return eight starters on offense and nine on defense, but 19 of its players were named to the Southland's two preseason teams. The list includes the 2011 conference player of the year in running back Timothy Flanders, the offensive player of the year in wide receiver Richard Sincere and the defensive player of the year in safety Darnell Taylor.

"We had a great season last year. But that season is over," third-year coach Willie Fritz said. "Every year is a new season. We have a lot of great players coming back, but we lost 12 quality seniors who provided outstanding leadership for us. I think we have seniors this year who are capable of filling those roles and we're looking forward to the opportunity."

Although North Dakota State, which also finished 14-1 last season, graduated more key players than Sam Houston State, 10th-year coach Craig Bohl is confident in his hard-nosed squad.

The defending Missouri Valley Football Conference champion has 13 returning starters, led by All-America cornerback Marcus Williams. On offense, quarterback Brock Jensen and 1,100-yard running back Sam Ojuri highlight the returnees.

"We're going to play defense and run the football and work on turnover margin. I think that's the hallmark of our program," Bohl said. "I know in today's age of scoring tons of points and spread offenses and all these other things that we're a little bit of throw-back, blue-collar team, and it worked this (past) year."

The title picture in the FCS is much more than a two-team race. Defending Southern Conference champion Georgia Southern (11-3), which has reached the national semifinals in each of the past two seasons, was picked third in the preseason poll, gaining six first-place votes.

Two-time defending Big Sky Conference co-champion Montana State (10-3) was fourth and had three first-place votes. No. 5 James Madison (8-5), from CAA Football, also had three first-place votes.

The rest of the Top 10 was No. 6 Appalachian State (8-4), which gained one first-place vote; No. 7 Towson (9-3); No. 8 Old Dominion (10-3); No. 9 Northern Iowa (10-3); and No. 10 Wofford (8-4).

Montana (11-3), a national semifinalist last season, checked in at No. 11. The Grizzlies have had a tumultuous offseason and enter the season with a new coach, Mick Delaney.

One of Montana's Big Sky Conference rivals, Eastern Washington (6-5), is No. 12. The Eagles,

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the 2010 FCS champions, hope to rebound from a subpar season.

Next up was No. 13 Youngstown State (6-5), which gained one first-place vote. The Penguins were the only team to defeat North Dakota State last season.

New Hampshire (8-4) was No. 14, followed by No. 15 Delaware (7-4), No. 16 Lehigh (11-2), No. 17 Stony Brook (9-4), No. 18 Eastern Kentucky (7-5), No. 19 Illinois State (7-4) and No. 20 Stephen F. Austin (6-5).

Rounding out the Top 25 were No. 21 Maine (9-4), No. 22 Jacksonville State (7-4), No. 23 Indiana State (6-5), No. 24 Central Arkansas (9-4) and No. 25 Harvard (9-1).

CAA Football had the most teams in the Preseason Top 25 with six, followed by the Missouri Valley Conference with five. The Big Sky, Southern and Southland conferences had three each, while the Ohio Valley Conference had two, and the Big South Conference, Ivy League and Patriot League one each.

A national panel of sports information and media relations directors, broadcasters, writers and other dignitaries select the Top 25 each season. A first-place vote is worth 25 points, a second-place vote 24 points, all the way down to one point for a 25th-place vote.

During the regular season, the Top 25 will be released every Monday afternoon, except for the final weekend of the regular season, when it will be released Sunday morning, Nov. 18, prior to the selection of the FCS playoff field.

The Sports Network will release a final Top 25 following the FCS championship game, which will be held Jan. 5 in Frisco.

The Sports Network FCS Top 25 College Football Poll

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Team (First-place votes) 2011 □ □ □ □ Record Points Previous Rank

1. Sam Houston State Bearkats(79) 14-1 3708 2
2. North Dakota State Bison (59) 14-1 3625 1
3. Georgia Southern Eagles (6) 11-3 3249 4
4. Montana State Bobcats (3) 10-3 3217 7
5. James Madison Dukes (3) 8-5 2812 15
- 6. Appalachian State Mountaineers (1) 8-4 2800 □ □ □ □ 12**
7. Towson Tigers 9-3 2674 9

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8. Old Dominion Monarchs	10-3	2484	10
9. Northern Iowa Panthers	10-3	2168	6
10. Wofford Terriers	8-4	2080	13
11. Montana Grizzlies	11-3	2018	3
12. Eastern Washington Eagles	6-5	1897	NR
13. Youngstown State Penguins (1)	6-5	1860	NR
14. New Hampshire Wildcats	8-4	1857	11
15. Delaware Blue Hens	7-4	1810	17
16. Lehigh Mountain Hawks	11-2	1514	5
17. Stony Brook Seawolves	9-4	1339	18
18. Eastern Kentucky Colonels	7-5	1055	24
19. Illinois State Redbirds	7-4	1052	20
20. Stephen F. Austin Lumberjacks	6-5	863	NR
21. Maine Black Bears	9-4	721	8
22. Jacksonville State Gamecocks	7-4	625	NR
23. Indiana State Sycamores	6-5	522	NR
24. Central Arkansas Bears	9-4	508	14
25. Harvard Crimson	9-1	477	16

Others receiving votes: Murray State 292, Northern Arizona 259, Norfolk State 222, Chattanooga 191, Liberty 150, South Carolina State 137, Bethune-Cookman 134, McNeese State 127, Grambling State 87, Tennessee Tech 77, Portland State 73, North Dakota 68, Alabama State 66, Jackson State 63, Southern Illinois 63, William & Mary 59, Southern Utah 54, Georgia State 49, Furman 43, Albany 39, Richmond 31, Villanova 30, Penn 16, Duquesne 14, South Dakota State 10, San Diego 9, Elon 9, Drake 8, Holy Cross 7, Prairie View A&M 6, South Dakota 6, Alabama A&M 4, Southeast Missouri 4, Georgetown 3, Idaho State 3, Sacramento State 3, Cornell 2, Bryant 1, Eastern Illinois 1, Jacksonville 1, Missouri State 1, Samford 1, UT Martin 1, The Citadel 1, Western Illinois 1.

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Photo Courtesy: Jamal Jackson, ASU Athletics