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THE 1995 NCAA DIV. I-AA NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP HUNTINGTON, W.VA.

the Parthenon

Wednesday, Dec. 13, 1995



ns JOHNSON managing editor

Last night I watched a copy of the 1992 National Championship game in which Marshall defeated Youngstown State, 31-28.

For those who don't know the story, David Merrick kicked a field goal with just a few seconds left on the clock. The field goal was the first of his career as he was filling in for the Herd's regular placekicker, Willy Merrick (David's brother) who was suspended for that game because he broke a team rule.

All in all, that game is probably the most exciting football game I've ever seen. And I'm sure part of that excitement stems from how good it felt after the game to say 'We are national champions!' to anyone who cared to acknowledge the antics of me and my compan-

I usually watch that game once a year, and it is usually about this time of the year. The game gets me excited about the Herd's chances of winning another championship and what type of feeling that brings to this community.

Of course I didn't cover that game in 1992 as a journalist so maybe I'm not being objective about it. But I do know there are few words that describe the atmosphere a championship game presents. So those who have tickets, relish them, you won't be disappointed.

The bottom line isn't about how many times Chris Parker carries the ball, or the fact that Chad Pennington is a true freshman. Nor is it about how prolific a passer Dave Dickenson is or how dominant the Herd defensive line is.

All of that becomes so irrelevant because good players will make good plays and someone will surprise everyone by having the game of his

It's about who has the most heart and it is about two teams doing whatever it takes to simply be the best and have the title National Champion.

It's an aura that isn't noticed in September, because nothing is on the line. If you are in Marshall Stadium Saturday, you will feel it, you will see it and its something you will always remember.

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WEDNESDAY Dec. 13, 1995

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Herd looks to title game after McNeese win

by CHRIS JOHNSON managing editor

A lot of people didn't give Marshall much of a chance to beat the undefeated and No. 1 ranked Cowboys of McNeese State, especially in Lake

Charles, La., miles from the friendly environment of Marshall Stadium

But the Herd did win, 25-13, securing a berth to the national championship game for the fourth time in five years.

Herd linebacker Jermaine

Swafford said, "It was just a tremendous effort by our team. Anytime you come into a hostile environment, it is tough. The players had to step up because we had to win."

The Cowboys took an early lead on their first drive of the game. The 12-play, 66 yard drive was capped off by a one yard touchdown run by Henry Fields.

The Herd tied the score at 7-7 with 2:32 left in the first half. when Chad Pennington found Ricky Carter in the endzone for a 24-yard touchdown. The drive consisted of seven plays, six of which were Pennington

During its next possesion the Herd was forced to punt and Chris Hanson booted a 62-yard punt that was downed by MU's Jayson Grayson on the McNeese one yard line.

On the very next play Billy Lyon tackled Fields in the Cowboy endzone for a safety, giving the Herd a 9-7 lead.

McNeese regained the lead midway through the third quarter when Kerry Joseph ran for a 51-yard touchdown on a quarterback keeper making the score 13-9.

The Herd quickly responded with a 11-play 75-yard drive that ended when Pennington found Lavorn Colclough in the endzone for a two-yard score giving the Herd a 15-13 lead.

We lost a lot of players from last year, but we are in the championship game. That speaks well of our program."

> - Jim Donnan Head Coach

And a lead that would not disappear.

The Herd added a 23-yard field goal by Tim Openlander and a Chris Parker 18-yard rushing touchdown to make the final 25-13.

Herd Head Coach Jim Donnan said, "McNeese is a great football team, but you got to give our kids a lot of

The Herd offense may have caught the Cowboys a little offguard as Pennington used the short passing game effectively the entire game.

His longest pass was the 24yard touchdown to Carter.

"All week we talked about taking what they gave us," Pennington said.

I just threw short passes and let the receivers use their ability," he said.

Pennington also used a variety of receivers, seven of which caught one pass each. Jemaine Wiggins and Tharen

Todd led the way with eight receptions a piece.

McNeese Head Coach Bobby Keasler said, "There is no doubt about it, Marshall is a great team. They controlled the football and the breaks didn't go our way.'

Marshall's defense once again came up big. The Cowboys only had 79 yards through the air, after putting up 210 passing yards per game in the previous 13 games.

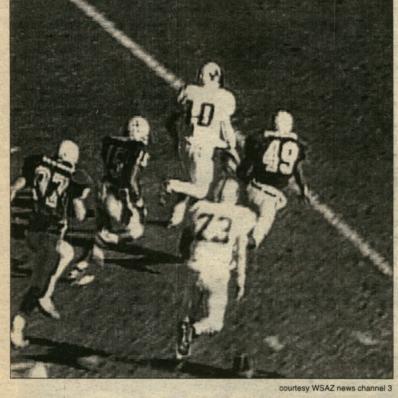
Joseph said, "Marshall has

the best defense I've played against at any level of football."

"The bottom line is players win games and players lose games, Donnan said.

"We lost a lot of players from last year, but we are in the championship game. That speaks well of our program.

"Now Montana has to come east of the Mississippi and it will be a different environment for them. "We are pretty tough to beat at home.'



Chad Pennington (10) had one of his best games as quarterback for the Herd against McNeese State. The freshman QB completed 26 of 34 pass attempts for 236 yards and threw two touchdowns.

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SC coach gives insight on championship game

by MIKE TAYLOR staff writer

If you thought handicapping Saturday's I-AA championship between Marshall and Montana was easy, think again.

Georgia Southern coach Tim Stowers has seen plenty of Marshall and Montana this year. Stowers' team lost 37-7 to Marshall in the third game of the season and lost 45-0 to Montana in the quarterfinals of the NCAA I-AA playoffs two weeks ago.

"Marshall has one of the best, if not the best, runners in I-AA," Stowers said.

He is speaking of Chris Parker. Parker has rushed for 1,739 yards and scored 16 touchdowns this season. Last week against McNeese State, Parker rushed for 112 yards and scored the touchdown that sealed the Herd's win.

Montana brings its own offensive star as well. Quarterback Dave Dickenson has thrown for 5,395 yards and 49 touchdowns this season. In last week's semi-final against Stephen F. Austin, Dickenson threw for 370 and five touchdowns. Both Dickenson and Parker are candidates for the Walter Payton Award which is given annually to the best player in I-AA football.

"He's [Dickenson] the catalyst...he's as hot as a firecracker," Stowers said.

Both teams use a pro set offense and average more than 30 points a game. In the three playoff games this year, the Grizzlies have scored 163 points. Stowers said playing the Grizzlies is like playing in a baskethall game because if you don't score on your chance, they'll score on theirs.

Defensively, Stowers mentioned first team All-American Billy Lyon as the player the Grizzly offense has to worry about, and he said right end Corey Falls was the Montana defender that impressed him the most.

"Their defense is not like what we've seen from Appalachian State and Marshall," Stowers said.

MU defense is ranked second in the country and against McNeese State last week, the Herd defense held Kerry Joseph to 79 yards passing and 108 yards rushing, which are both below his season averages.

For Lyon and the rest of the Herd defense to have success containing Dickenson, Stowers said the Herd must disrupt his rhythm which seems easier said than done.

"He's got good feet and a quick release," Stowers said.

Stowers said if anyone has a chance to beat Montana it would be Marshall because the Herd is playing at home with all the playoff atmosphere. Since Marshall Stadium opened in 1991, the Herd has a 45-3 record.

Experience also could be a

Playing on the road in the I-AA semifinals and going into that environment is definitely a feather in their cap."

-- Tim Stowers Georgia Southern coach

factor. Marshall has a 15-3 playoff record under coach Jim Donnan and it is making its fourth appearance in five years in the title game. Montana is making its first appearance in the championship game and has an 8-5 playoff record.

"Marshall's been building a lot of momentum," Stowers said.

"Playing on the road in the I-AA semifinals and going into that environment is definitely a feather in their cap," Stowers

Stowers said the Herd will be able to move the ball on Montana, but the question is, he said, will the Herd be able to score as much as Montana.

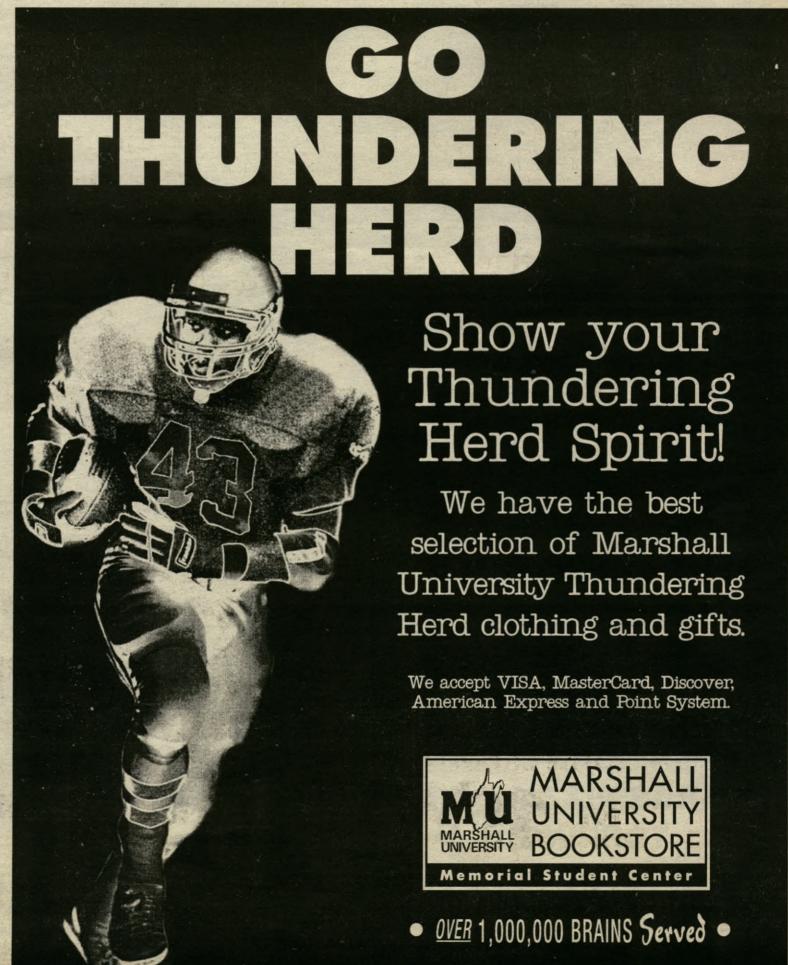
So coach Stowers, who's going to win?

"I'm kind of dumbfounded," Stowers said. "Something's got to give."



Courtesy of WSAZ News Channel 3

Montana quarterback Dave Dickenson is the front-runner for the Walter Payton Award which is given annually to the best player in I-AA football.



Herd fans keep the faith

by CHRIS **JOHNSON** *managing editor*

What better to do on a Saturday than to travel 1,000 miles away to watch a football game that many said couldn't be won by the team you are supporting.

Nearly 500 die-hard Herd fans made the journey to Lake Charles, La., to watch the Herd defeat McNeese State. Some travelled with the team, some travelled by the chartered flight through Travel Doctors Travel Agency and some made the trip on the ground.

Bill Fish, president of Auto Station, said, "A lot of people told me I was crazy for going to this game because McNeese was going to beat us. I just said, 'You're wrong' and I'm glad I went because Marshall proved once again what type of program it has."

Fish was one of 180 Herd fans who traveled via Travel Doctors on the flight chartered by Sunway Airlines out of Minneapolis. The cost of the trip was \$313 which included a game ticket, two free meals and access to a hospitality tailgating area at the game.

Patty Hearst, manager of Travel Doctors, said the 180 seats were sold in about a day and a half, which was a good example of how loyal some Herd fans are. "The trip was a Christmas present for some of the fans," Hearst said. "A lot of people bought tickets for people as a gift"

Travel Doctors also sponsored a trip to last season's semi-final game against Boise State. Hearst said many of the same people were on both flights. Fish said he went to Boise, but said the atmosphere on this year's flight was a lot better. "Travel Doctors has done a great job both times, but the return flight from Lake Charles was a lot less somber," Fish said.

John Montanez, who works at Panoramic Photo, said, "I've been telling everyone who walks through the door the story about the trip and the game. I was elated by the outcome. The win against McNeese State was a more emotional win than the 1992 national championship game win."

Montanez said there will be panoramic championship photos available to buy early next week, for people who would like to make them Christmas gifts. More information is available by calling 529-0648 or 757-1755.

The 180 fans on the Travel Doctor's flight would probably be considered the best of the die-hard Herd fans. Fish said everyone he talked to on the plane was very positive and really believed the Herd would win against the Cowboys and make it back for this week's championship game.

Montanez said he was impressed with the McNeese State fans. "They are as devoted to their football team as we are back in Huntington." He said some of the fans were overconfident but by the end of the fourth quarter most fans were wishing Marshall the best of luck against Montana.

Both Fish and Montanez expect the Herd's winning to continue this Saturday.

Fish said, "There isn't a game film out there that can prepare Montana for what they are going to be going up against. I don't want to take anything away from them, but Marshall has hit its stride. Our defense is just phenomenal, our coaching staffis great and there just isn't enough you can say about the job Chad Pennington has done."

Montanez said, "It seems as if in 1992 we were destined to be in the championship game. In 1995, it seems as if we were grateful to just get into the playoffs. If Coach Donnan doesn't win Coach-of-the-Year, then the people that select that award can go to hell. The job he has done is just incredible and Saturday the icing will be put on the cake."

HERD enough?

- ♦ At least 2,500 of the 30,000 tickets allotted for Saturday's game have been sold to Montana fans.
- Montana fans have chartered 11 planes for the trip to Huntington.
- The Grizzlies are 0-2 on the road so far this season.





Chad Pennington stepped in after injuries to the first two QBs and responded by being named SC Freshman-of-the-Year.



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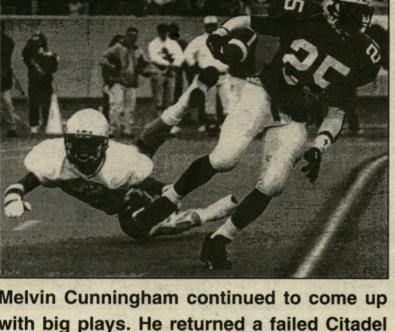
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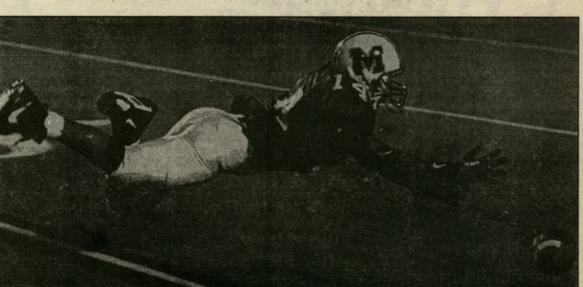
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Melvin Cunningham continued to come up with big plays. He returned a failed Citadel two-point conversion 100 yards giving the Herd two points, which turned out to be the margin of victory.





(Above) Freshman wide receiver Damone Williams is another one of the young, talented receivers in the Herd's offensive stable. In limited action this year, Williams has caught five passes this year for 66 yards.

(Left) What hasn't Chris Parker done this year? The senior All-American running back now owns every major rushing record in the Southern Conference. Before the game against Montana, his carrer rushing total is 5,837 yards and he has scored 69 touchdowns.



Crunch...

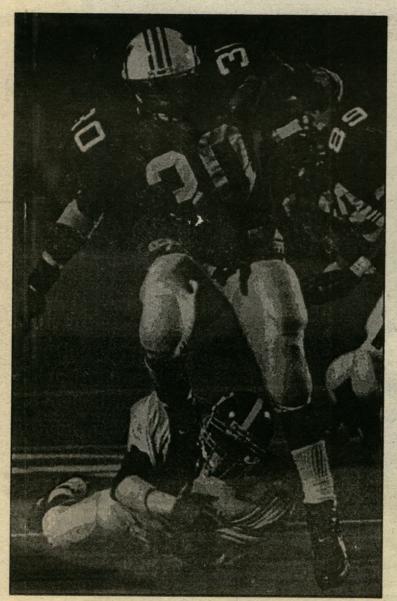
The Herd defense has been ganging up on opposing offenses all season long.

Through the first 14 games, Marshall is only giving up 116 rushing yards per game, 134 passing yards per game and 16 points per game.

The defense recorded a shutout Nov. 4 against East Tennessee State, 52-0. The Herd has seven times kept its opponent from scoring more than 20 points.

The defense has also forced 35 turnovers so far in 1995.



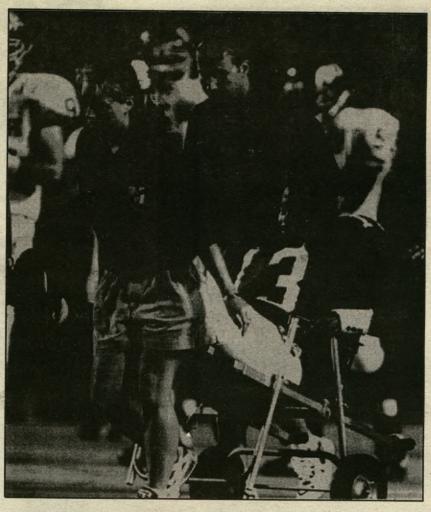


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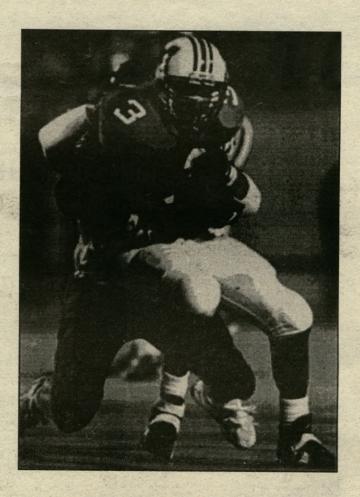
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Olandis Gary emerged as an explosive running back and along with Erik Thomas and Chris Parker combined to give the Herd the most potent rushing attack the in Southern Conference. Gary has seen limited action in the past few games due to injuries. He has rushed for 495 yards and nine touchdowns.



This was supposed to be Larry Harris' year, but the sophmore quarterback went down with a season-ending knee injury in the third quarter of the second game of the season.



Erik Thomas was a secret weapon of sorts for the Herd early in the season. But even after opposing defenses became aware of him, Thomas still produced. He has rushed for 606 yards and nine touchdowns and has 10 receptions for 124 yds and a TD.

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Thundering Herd From Your Friendly Huntington Kroger Employees



Grizzlies not talking trash

by BRETT GIBSON staff writer

Not only is Montana I-AA national championship rookies the coaches and, more surprisingly the players, even talk like it.

"Our work is cut out for us," said head coach Don Read. "They are an outstanding team, and we will have to overcome some obstacles, with respect to being a home site for them, and the environment will be a tough one for us."

"The tackles are the best we've seen," said Grizzly quarterback Dave Dickenson. "They're defensive backs are very aggressive. Talent-wise they're the best we've played." No smack talkers, these Griz-

But it's not like Montana would have to speak in Lou Holtz-ese.

UM has pasted its playoff opponents (Eastern Kentucky, Georgia Southern and Stephen F. Austin) by a combined score of 163-14. It has posted some offensive numbers worthy of some, at least confident comments.

Dickenson, a Walter Payton Award nominee, has thrown for 5,395 yards — that's 3.06 miles — and 49 touchdowns this season. Running backs Josh Branen and Brian Gales have scampered for a combined 15 scores. Even punt returner Joe Douglass has returned two

"Every time we take the field,

our goal is to score," said offensive tackle Eric Simonson, a 6-foot-5, 291-pound senior. "Our confidence level is real high right now."

But by talking to these Grizzlies, the level of confidence doesn't sound as high as their big sky.

Maybe one reason the bears from the mountains aren't loose at the lips is because they have yet to win a post-season game on the road.

Montana lost to Youngstown State 28-9 last year in the semi-finals. The Grizzlies also lost at Georgia Southern in the final fours in 1989. Losses at Idaho in 1988 and '82 round out the Grizzly road woes in the playoffs.

In fact, Montana lost both regular season games away from Grizzly Stadium, a 38-21 loss to I-A Washington State and 55-43 setback at playoff participant Idaho.

This has yet to deter the 2,500 fans from Montana.

"The Great Grizzly Airlift," they call themselves, are coming in droves. In fact, the fans have scheduled a dozen charter flights.

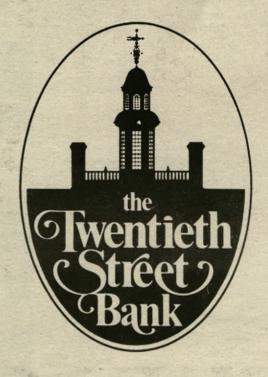
"Planes are coming out of the woodwork," said Kelly Brehm, an agent at Budget Travel in Missoula. "This is big."

Montana Sen. Max Baucus is even bringing 50 of his friends from Washington, D.C., called the "Grizzly Express."

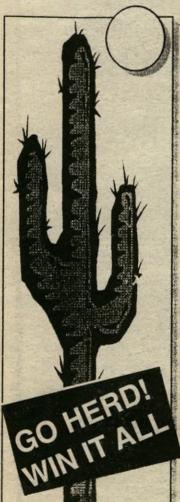
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National Championship Montana vs MARSHALL Dec. 16

Herd to try and stop potent air attack of Montana Grizzlies

by Mike Taylor

Marshall's defense has been the rock for the Herd and the eye of the hurricane for opposing teams this season and that trend will likely continue Saturday in the NCAA I-AA Championship game at Marshall Stadium.

The Herd defense has kept opposing teams in check all season and has taken pressure off of freshman quarterback Chad Pennington.

"They have no weaknesses defensively. We're gonna have to play the game of our lives," Montana coach Don Reed said.

Leading the way for the Herd defense is tackle Billy Lyon. Lyon, who was named first team All-American last week, has 89 tackles this season. More importantly, Lyon is tied for first with fellow defensive lineman B.J. Cohen with 19 tackles for losses.

When asked to name a Herd defensive player who stands out, Reed began to name each player on the Herd defense.

"They don't make a lot of mistakes," Reed said.

The task for Lyon and the rest of the Herd defense this week is to stop a Grizzly offense that is averaging 45 points a game. And the majority of those points come through the air. "We can't turn this game into a scoring fest," Lyon said.

Marshall's secondary has also been consistent this season. The last two weeks, the Herd secondary has faced two of the top receivers in the country. Cornerbacks Melvin Cunningham and Jayson Grayson have limited both receivers to below season averages.

The Herd, however has yet to see a passing attack as versatile as Montana's. The Grizzlies have two receivers who have more than 1,000 yards receiving.

"Defenses aren't used to seeing this many guys out there," Grizzly quarterback Dave Dickenson said.

The same can be said of the Herd's offense. Grizzly defensive coordinator Jerome Sowers said the Herd has plenty of talent at the receiver positions.

"They can flood the field with speed if they want to," Sowers said.

Earlier in the season, not much noise came from Herd receivers. The Herd relied more on its running attack of Chris Parker, Erik Thomas and Olandis Gary. But in the past two Herd playoff wins against McNeese State and Northern Iowa, Herd receivers have been seeing more balls come their way.

"Martin [Tim] can read coverages well and Ricky Carter has a lot of explosiveness," Sowers said.

Last week against McNeese State, Carter scored the Herd's first touch-down when Pennington found him for a 24-yard score. Martin caught four passes for 36 yards against the Cowboys.

The Herd also got a boost last week for receiver Tharen Todd. Todd frustrated McNeese defenders all game by catching eight passes for 75 yards, most of which came over the middle between coverages.

In each week of the playoffs, the Herd offense has gotten a strong performance from a player whomay not be consider-ed an offensive star.

"We don't think that any of our players are any less important than any others," Herd offensive coordinator Chris Scelfo said. That's the type of attitude that could bring Marshall its second National Championship in five years.

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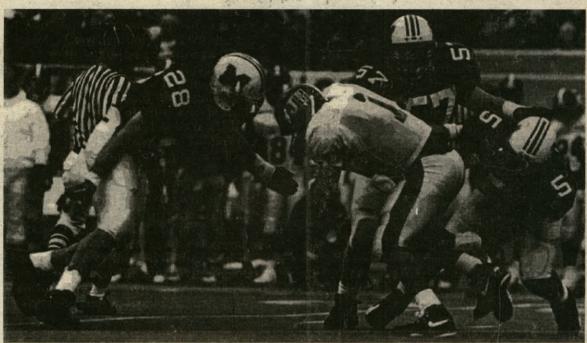


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Brett Hall/The Parthenor

Larry McCloud (28), Will Edwards (57) and B.J. Cohen (5) will try to apply this kind of pressure to Montana quarterback Dave Dickenson. If the defense can shut down the Grizzly passing attack the Herd will have a great shot of winning its second championship.





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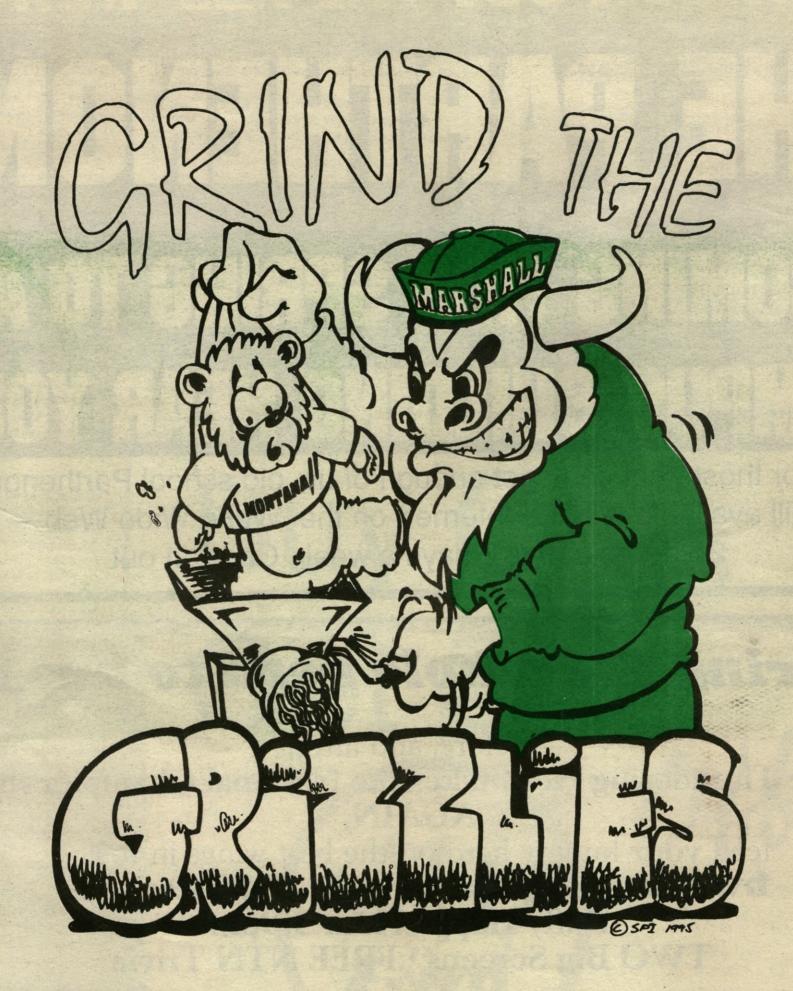
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