

## MAC Football Preview- Kent State

Written by {ga=mikeperry}

Monday, August 30 2010 6:00 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, September 01 2010 8:39 AM

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Kent State

Head coach: Doug Martin (Kentucky)

The past is the past, and that's exactly where Kent State football coach Doug Martin wants to keep it.

Martin, in his seventh season at the helm of the Golden Flashes, is not worried about Kent's almost four decades of incompetence on the gridiron. In fact, he sees the 2010 season as a chance for his players to achieve something very special and put those bad memories to rest.

Following the 1972 season the Golden Flashes, led by hall of famer Jack Lambert, played in the Tangerine Bowl. Two seasons later Dennis Fitzgerald replaced Don James at the helm of the Flashes' program and compiled an 18-16 record in three seasons.

Fitzgerald left Kent after the 1977 season to accept an assistant coaching position at Syracuse, and the program hasn't been the same since. First came Ron Blackledge (8-25 overall, 6-20 in the MAC in three seasons). Ed Chlebek replaced Blackledge for the 1980 season and won four games in two years, losing 18 and losing 15 of 18 in the conference. Dick Sesniak came next and matched Blackledge's three futile years with the same 8-25, 6-20 record.

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Glen Mason replaced Sesniak and brought a glimmer of hope to the Flashes. With stud running back Eric Wilkerson and mobile quarterback Pat Young, Mason posted a 12-10, 10-6 season in two seasons, '86 and '87.

Mason flew the coop for Kansas, leading to the forgettable Dick Crum (7-26, 5-19 in three seasons), Pete Cordelli (3-30, 3-23 in three seasons), Jim Corrigan (8-35-1, 6-26-1 in four seasons) and Dean Pees (17-51, 13-35 in six seasons) eras. All told, since 1978 Kent has suffered through losing streaks of 21, 17 (twice), 16, 11 and 10 games.

Martin, the longest-tenured coach in the conference, looks at Kent's painful history as more of an opportunity than a burden.

"I look at it as our staff has the chance to do something no staff has done in 38 years. That's a big deal," he said. "Our players have the chance to do something that no players have been able to do in 38 years. If you can do that it doesn't matter what happens to you the rest of your football career, you can take that with you wherever you go. That is a huge goal that's out there. It's no pressure; it's just something we can attain."

With the talent Martin has on his roster this season he can afford to look at things with this perspective. Arguably, the Flashes have the most talented roster in the conference. With 18 returning starters, nine on offense, seven on defense and his placekicker and all-conference punter, Kent is poised to make a strong run at the MAC-East title.

Along with a load of returning talent, Martin and Kent got an additional bonus when the NCAA granted former all-conference running back Eugene Jarvis, who suffered a lacerated kidney in the second game on the '09 season at Boston College, a sixth season of eligibility. Jarvis set the school record for rushing yards in '07 with 1,669 and is just 522 yards away from unseating Astron Whatly as the leading rusher in Golden Flashes history.

"I can't tell you how much this means to Eugene and to our program," Martin said on the day the ruling was announced.

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Junior Jacquise Terry filled in admirably for Jarvis last season, rushing for 649 yards on 138 carries. Terry and Jarvis, running behind a big, experienced offensive line with nearly 60 combined starts under its belt.

Center Chris Anzevino, a 6-2, 305-pound junior that was named to the Rimington Award watch list for the award that recognized the top FBS center in the nation. Anzevino has started all 24 games in his Kent career. Sophomore Brian Winters, at 6-5, 305lb, started all 12 games at right tackle as a true freshman in '09, and will move over to left tackle this season.

Redshirt sophomore Josh Kline (6-3, 304) will hold down the right guard position after seeing action in all 12 games last season while another sophomore, Kent Cleveland (6-4, 294), who started the opener last season, will start at right tackle.

The line will be charged with keeping sophomore quarterback Spencer Keith healthy, something it was unable to do last season. In fact, the only reason Keith saw playing time last year was because junior signal-caller Georgio Morgan suffered a severely sprained ankle in the season opener. Keith then went down with three games left in the season when he injured his throwing shoulder.

“We have to keep our quarterback healthy. I think we’ve played nine different quarterbacks in three years, and that’s what you can’t do,” Martin said. “It debilitates your entire offense because you have to start looking for different ways to get the ball to people. You may have a great receiver, but if you can’t get him the ball without that starting quarterback it really hampers everything. And it streams on down. Your defense has to play a little bit more aggressive because they have to find ways to give you field position or to score themselves. It really puts a tremendous amount of stress on your entire football team.”

Keith, a playmaking quarterback with a big arm, completed 168-of-294 passes for 2,147 yards and 14 touchdowns in seven starts last season. He came to Kent from one of the most prestigious high school programs in the nation, Arkansas’ Pulaski Academy, where he put up video game-type offensive numbers his senior season (5,310 passing yards to lead the nation with 70 touchdown passes) to lead his Bruins to a 13-1 record and the 5A state championship.

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Keith said he is fully healed from the shoulder injury that ended his '09 season.

"I've recovered well from it and have been lifting and throwing for the last four months or so," he said. "I went through spring ball and it felt fine and didn't cause me any trouble. Once I get that first game under my belt I'll be fine for the year."

With plenty of talent, experience and speed out wide, Keith will have a lot of weapons to choose from, led by sophomore split end Tyshon Goode. Goode (6-1, 182) rewrote the Kent State freshman receiving record books last season with 53 receptions for 755 yards and five touchdowns ... all school frosh records. He went over 100 yards in three consecutive games, breaking the century mark against Ohio, Western Michigan and Akron.

Sophomore Sam Kirkland is a converted defensive back that had two starts at flanker last season. He saw action in all 12 games and ended up with 18 receptions, and is penciled in as the starting flanker this season.

Leneric Muldrow, at 5-7, 178, is a shifty runner who will be the starting H-back this season. The fifth-year senior was limited to 10 games last season with a minor knee injury, but demonstrated his versatility by connecting on a pair of halfback option touchdown passes.

"The talent level is a lot higher than people think," Keith said. "We have guys on our team running 4.3's, and I'm sure that's how it is around the conference. The talent level and the size are a lot different than people might perceive if they aren't familiar with the MAC."

Though Kent's offense is expected to be much-improved from last season, the Golden Flashes expect to be special on the defensive side of the ball. Led by all-America candidate Brian Lainhart at safety and tackling machine Cobrani Mixon at linebacker, the Flashes have a host of talent and depth all over the field defensively.

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It all starts with Lainhart, as well as fellow senior safety Dan Hartman, two ballhawks that roam Kent's defensive backfield. The duo has 54 career starts (Lainhart 32, Hartman 22) and 405 career tackles (Lainhart 256, Hartman 149) between them, and plenty of experience playing together. They also have a thorough understanding of defensive coordinator Pete Rekstis' defense.

"We believe we'll be the top defense in the MAC. No disrespect to any other teams, but we have eight guys coming back, and we've all been playing together since we were freshmen," Lainhart said. "The biggest thing I noticed in the spring was that Spencer would throw a touchdown or the offense would have a big play, and we'd come off the field and could fix it ourselves. The defensive coordinator wouldn't have to come in, we would fix it ourselves. That's why I think we have the chance to be something special on defense."

Mixon, a fifth-year senior transfer from Michigan, earned first team all-MAC honors last season after recording 108 tackles. His average of 9.9 tackles per game was good enough for 34<sup>th</sup> nationally. Senior Dorian Wood (6-1, 235) saw significant playing time last season. He started nine games and recorded 58 tackles, including a career-high 13 stops against Eastern Michigan.

Monte Simmons (6-3, 226) is a small linebacker, but his quickness and energy have produced heavy results. He earned second team all-conference honors last season by recording 56 tackles, including eight sacks and 16 tackles for a loss. He enters 2010 with 16 career sacks, just nine shy of Justin Parrish's school record 25.

Luke Batton (6-0, 220) was one of nine true freshmen to letter for the Flashes last season, and he will round out the linebacker corps in Kent's 4-3 scheme. Batton saw action in 10 games last season, including a start against Eastern Michigan, and recorded 26 tackles. He had eight stops against Iowa State.

Kirk Belgrave did not play last season while focusing on his studies, but he will be back and starting at one cornerback position in 2010. Junior Josh Pleasant, who started all 12 games last season, will start at the other corner. Pleasant was third on the team with 73 tackles and fourth in the conference with 12 passes defended last year. He also forced three fumbles.

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Junior Lee Stalker (6-2,254) is expected to win the battle for the starting defensive end position. Stalker saw action in all 12 games last season. Junior Ishmaa'ily Kitchen (6-3, 304) has earned the nod at defensive tackle. The former Cardinal Mooney star saw action in 12 games last season as well.

Senior Quinton Rainey (5-11, 235) is one of the smallest nose guards in major college football, but he has excelled at the position. In 10 starts last season Rainey chalked up 29 tackles (11 tackles for a loss) and a pair of sacks.

Lainhart, one of the team captains, thinks his defensive teammates have learned from their past mistakes and will focus on doing the small things this season.

"There are the little things the coach has been preaching all off-season, mental toughness, winning in the fourth quarter, winning the last drive," he said. "Those are things we took through summer workouts, spring workouts and are going to carry into the season."

Last season the Flashes ended up just 12 points from finishing the season at 8-4, 6-2 in MAC play. The Flashes allowed 13 points in the final 4:29 to suffer a one-point loss to Bowling Green. Kent also suffered a last-second loss at home to Buffalo, 9-6, when A.J. Principe kicked a game-winning field goal with :05 showing on the clock. Throw in an eight-point loss to rival Akron at InfoCision Stadium and what could have been a successful season went up in smoke.

Martin has higher expectations for his team this season, as does the Mid-American Conference media, which picked Kent to finish third in the Eastern Conference this season in its preseason poll.

"I would hope the expectations would be high because that means you're making progress," Martin said. "We've been close, been knocking on the door, but we really haven't gotten over that hurdle yet of getting to a winning season, a bowl game or playing for a championship. That's the goal for our players, where we're trying to get to."

Kent's schedule is not kind at the beginning of the season. The Flashes open with a home

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game against Murray State Thursday, Sept. 2 under the lights at Dix Stadium. The Flashes then must hit the road for five of their next six games, travelling to Boston College (Sept. 11), Penn State (Sept. 18) and Miami (Oct. 2) before a home game against Akron (Oct. 9). Kent then heads to Toledo (Oct. 16) and Bowling Green (Oct. 23) before coming home for three straight...Ball State (Oct. 30), Temple (Nov. 6) and Army (Nov. 13). The Flashes close out the regular season with a road game at Western Michigan (Nov. 20) and a home date with Ohio (Nov. 26).

SportsTime Ohio has entered into an agreement with the Mid-American Conference this season, and as part of that agreement STO will televise six live MAC games this year. The Akron-Kent match-up from Dix Stadium Oct. 9 will be one of the network's televised games. For a full schedule of STO's MAC football coverage please visit [www.sportstimeohio.com](http://www.sportstimeohio.com) .

STO will also air an in-depth Kent State season preview with Matt Underwood and Frank Stams Wednesday, Sept. 1 at 9 p.m