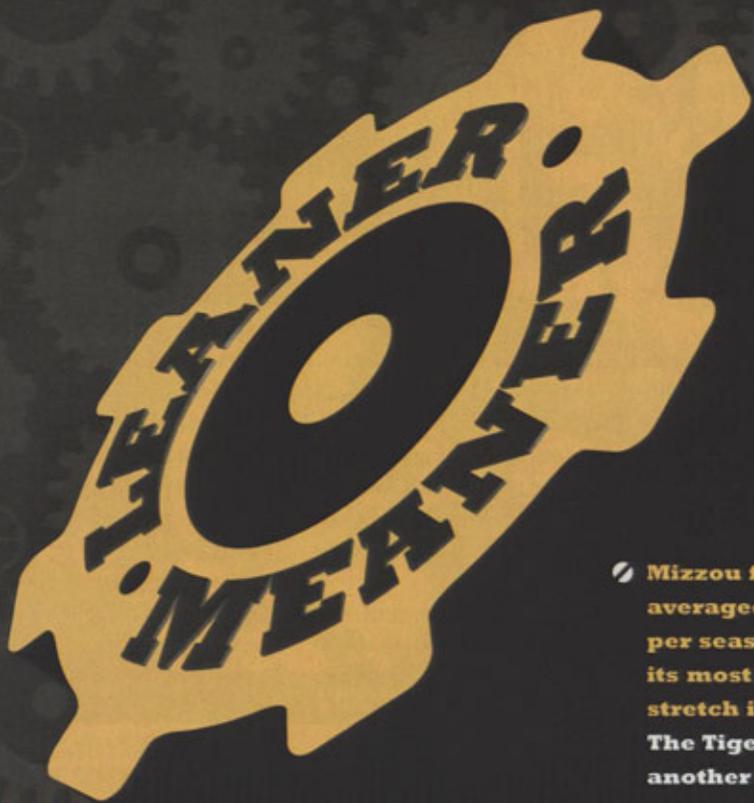




**BLAINE GABBERT >**

A healthy and more mature junior quarterback Blaine Gabbert is poised to lead the Tigers on another run at the Big 12 North title.



● **Mizzou football has averaged nine wins per season since 2005, its most successful stretch in decades. The Tigers plan to find another gear in 2010.**

**BY  
MARCUS  
WILKINS**

**For three years, Mizzou's football schedule has begun with an Illini brawl in St. Louis and concluded with a KU collision in Kansas City. The contests in Missouri's two largest metropolitan areas are rife with emotion and consequence. The former can be a catapult for a successful campaign while the latter has divined division championships, bowl destinations and No. 1 rankings between century-old rivals. Success on both sides of the state is key to recruiting top regional talent.**

**BUT FROM** a 2010 perspective, Mizzou's schedule mimics what was an offseason roller coaster. It's fitting that it launches with Big Ten rival Illinois on Sept. 4 after eight months of drama surrounding conference realignment (see story on Page 12). The season surges through nonconference opponents (including the Mountain West's San Diego State on Sept. 18), races toward the eight-game Big 12 loop and summits with an Arrowhead adrenaline rush against a most familiar foe.

Fear of the unknown can make for a scary ride, and with so much up in the air this offseason, many Missouri fans will be relieved to see the Kansas Jayhawks on Nov. 27. Until kickoff, that is.

### **BUCKLE YOUR SEATBELTS**

**THE TIGERS** appeared in their fifth straight bowl game in 2009, a result of winning seasons under head Coach Gary Pinkel. It's the longest such streak at Mizzou since Coach Warren Powers' six consecutive winning seasons led to appearances in two Liberty Bowls, a Hall of Fame Classic, a Holiday Bowl and a Tangerine Bowl between 1978-83.

Only as good as its last game, Mizzou has ample room for improvement after a 35-13 loss to Navy in the Texas Bowl Dec. 31, 2009, in Houston. Midshipman quarterback Ricky Dobbs ran the flexbone offense to perfection, personally rushing for 166 yards while the Tiger offense stalled repeatedly.

But Pinkel has been around long enough to know better than to evaluate 2009 based solely on the ultimate contest.

"You have to look at the entire season," he says. "We had a big win over KU, which got us another eight-win season. Of course, if we win that bowl game and get nine, I'd be sitting here a lot happier."

Blaine Gabbert — arguably the most touted quarterback recruit in Pinkel's 10-year tenure — gave the coach plenty to smile about in 2009. The Ballwin, Mo., junior posted a 140.45 passing-efficiency rating, second in the Big 12 only to Heisman Trophy finalist Colt McCoy of Texas.

But the 6-foot-5, 240-pounder was hampered by a severely sprained ankle suffered in a 27-12 loss to Nebraska on Oct. 8 in Columbia. Now that he's completely healed and a few pounds lighter, Gabbert is poised for a better 2010.

"I rehabbed all winter, and now my ankle is back to 100 percent," Gabbert says. "I've been right around 240 since I've been here, but we've been working this offseason to drop two or three pounds, which helps your body and your movement."

Also lighter is Derrick Washington (Raymore, Mo.), who was already nimble and one of the most prolific pass-catching running backs in Mizzou history. The senior saw his production dip in 2009, but he impressed coaches, teammates and sports writers this spring.

"Coach told me, 'D-Wash, lose a little weight, and you'll be just like you were your sophomore year,'" Washington says. "I took that to heart, and I feel a little quicker on my feet."

Junior De'Vion Moore (St. Louis) and sophomore Kendial Lawrence (Rockwall, Texas) will share the load with Washington in the backfield, completing a trio that rushed for 1,342 yards in 2009.

Offensive linemen are typically less concerned about their svelte figures, and the Tigers' bunch will be formidable in 2010. Mizzou returns preseason All-Big 12 senior center Tim Barnes (Longwood, Mo.), along with four juniors: Elvis Fisher (St. Petersburg, Fla.), who recovered from offseason shoulder surgery, and Dan Hoch (Harlan, Iowa) at the tackle positions, and guard Austin Wuebbels (Troy, Ill.). Along with guard Jayson Palmgren (Kansas City, Mo.), the early leader to take over for graduated three-year starter Kurtis Gregory, Mizzou's O-line tops 300 pounds at every position.

At wideout, the tallest order will be replacing All-American Danario Alexander, whose NCAA-best 1,781 receiving yards set a Mizzou single-season record last year. Juniors Jerrell Jackson (Houston) and Wes Kemp (St. Louis) and sophomore Rolandis Woodland (St. Louis) saw game action in 2009, and redshirt freshman L'Damian Washington (Shreveport, La.) and sophomore T.J. Moe (O'Fallon, Mo.) are expected to contribute more.

Mizzou fans noticed the numbers slip at the tight end position last season, something Pinkel says could change with a healthy Andrew Jones (Smithville, Mo.) and a more experienced Michael Egniew (Plainview, Texas), both juniors. Missouri's offense typically allows for four receivers, sometimes including the tight end. According to Pinkel, the coaching staff employed the position less frequently than in previous years because of abundant wide-out talent.

"That's going to be an area where there's

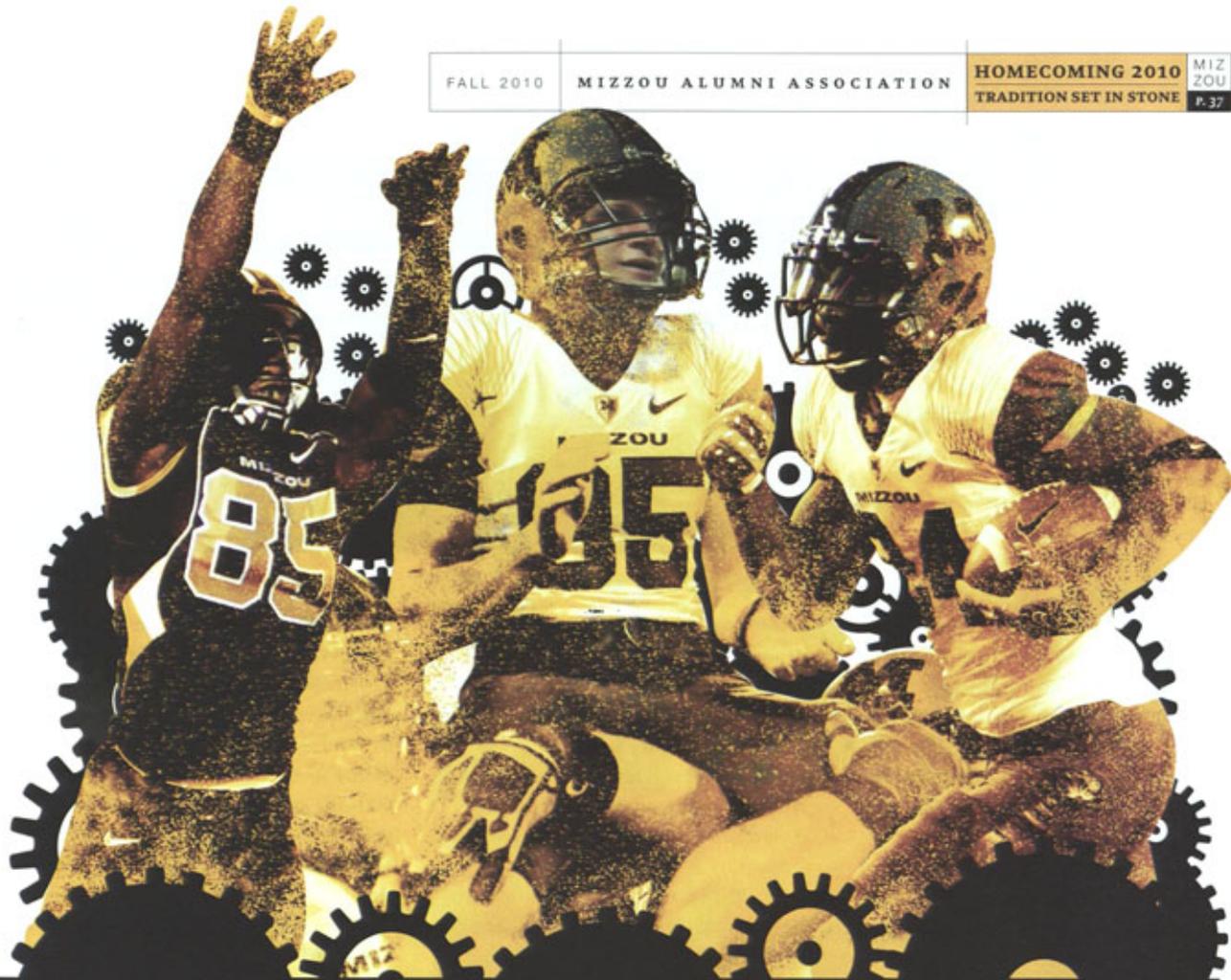


Illustration by Blake Desdale

**ALDON SMITH**

SOPHOMORE, DEFENSIVE END  
RAYTOWN, MO., 6-5, 255 POUNDS

**Signature moment:** Sacked Colorado quarterback Tyler Hansen three times in the Tigers 36-17 victory over the Buffs on Halloween 2009 in Boulder, Colo.

- Holds the Mizzou single-season record with 11.5 sacks in 2009, a record previously held by Justin Smith, AFNR '01, (11 in 2000)
- Finished 2009 ninth in the NCAA in sacks and 14th in tackles for loss
- Named 2009 Associated Press Big 12 Defensive Newcomer of the Year and Big 12 Coaches Defensive Freshman of the Year

**GRANT RESSEL**

JUNIOR, PLACEKICKER  
JACKSON, MO., 6-1, 190 POUNDS

**Signature moment:** Kicked a 27-yard field goal as time expired to beat Kansas 41-39 on Nov. 28, 2009, at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Mo. He was carried off the field on his teammates' shoulders.

- Holds the NCAA record for combined accuracy, making 65 of 66 kicks overall, including 26 of 27 field goals in 2009
- Going into the 2010 season, Mizzou kickers have made 237 consecutive extra points since their last miss in 2005. The Tigers need 26 more to break the NCAA record set by Syracuse from 1978 to 1989.

**DERRICK WASHINGTON**

SENIOR, RUNNING BACK  
RAYMORE, MO., 6-0, 225 POUNDS

**Signature moment:** Rushed for a then career-high 130 yards on 19 carries in a 52-42 win over Illinois Aug. 30, 2008, at the Edward Jones Dome in St. Louis

- With 2,085 yards, Washington ranks 10th on the Mizzou career rushing list and is only the 12th player to eclipse 2,000 yards in Tiger history.
- Fumbled only six times in 468 career touches
- His 503 yards receiving is third all time among Mizzou running backs, 210 yards behind record-holder Ronnell Kayhill, BS '94.

a lot of competition, and it will bring the best out of everyone," Pinkel says.

### CRASH COURSE

AS BRIGHT as NFL first-round draft choice Sean Weatherspoon was on defense last season, a star was born in sophomore Aldon Smith (Raytown, Mo.), owner of the new single-season sack record at Mizzou with 11.5 in 2009. After the spring Black and Gold Game, the preseason All-Big 12 defensive end humbly, then honestly, answered the question: Can you be stopped?

"Sure ... maybe."

Also returning to the defensive line are juniors Dominique Hamilton (El Paso, Texas) and Jacques Smith (Dallas) in front of a solid linebacking corps that features the team's leading returning tackler, senior Andrew Gachkar (Overland Park, Kan.), junior Will Ebner (Friendswood, Texas) and senior Luke Lambert (Brookfield, Mo.)

The secondary has taken more criticism than any unit in recent years, but the group improved statistically in yards and completions allowed from 2008. Senior cornerbacks Carl Gettis (O'Fallon, Mo.) and Kevin Rutland (Houston) return, as do senior safeties Jasper Simmons (Pensacola, Fla.) and Jarrell Harrison (Las Vegas). In the pass-happy Big 12, the experience should pay off.

Second-year defensive coordinator Dave Steckel is also a little wiser. Mizzou improved overall on defense last season, and many players credit the former Marine's discipline and intensity.

**'We had a big win over KU, which got us another eight-win season. Of course, if we win that bowl game and get nine, I'd be sitting here a lot happier.'**

**— Coach Gary Pinkel**

### KICK IT INTO GEAR

TIGER FANS have been spoiled recently by quality kicking and punting. Junior Grant Ressel (Jackson, Mo.) broke the NCAA single-season record for combined kick accuracy in 2009, connecting on 65 of 66 kicks. Most memorably, his marksmanship broke Jayhawk hearts with a 27-yard game-winner on Nov. 28, 2009, in Kansas City.

"I coach kickers," jokes Pinkel, referring to the surprising careers of Ressel, former standout kicker Jeff Wolfert and former punter Jake Harry, whose 42.1 yards-per-kick set a Mizzou career record.

Pinkel says he plans to emphasize special-teams play this fall.

"If the other team returns it to the 40-yard line, you've given up that momentum. But if you put the ball down on the 22, your defense takes the field with momentum."

### SHIFTING GOALS

THE 2009 Missouri Tigers were Pinkel's youngest group to date, with 34 of their top 44 players either freshmen or sophomores. Pinkel agrees with pundits who have called the 2010 recruiting class his best yet. Some of that youth will immediately compete for roster spots. But now that last year's youngsters have become the wily veterans, Mizzou has realistic designs to compete for the Big 12 North and a trip to the championship game at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on Dec. 4.

With a trimmed-down Big 12 on its way in 2011, the Tigers are gearing up for what could be the last conference title game for the foreseeable future.

"Our highest goal as a program is to win the national championship," Pinkel says. "But you can't win the national championship or the Big 12 championship unless you win the Big 12 North." ■

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### TIGER FOOTBALL 2010 SCHEDULE

SEPT. 4	ILLINOIS (ST. LOUIS)
SEPT. 11	MCNEESE STATE*
SEPT. 18	SAN DIEGO STATE
SEPT. 25	MIAMI (OHIO)
OCT. 9	COLORADO
OCT. 16	AT TEXAS A&M
OCT. 23	OKLAHOMA (HOMECOMING)
OCT. 30	AT NEBRASKA
NOV. 6	AT TEXAS TECH
NOV. 13	KANSAS STATE**
NOV. 20	AT IOWA STATE
NOV. 27	KANSAS (KANSAS CITY)

Times TBA. Dates subject to change. Home games highlighted gold.

\* GOLD RUSH \*\* BLACKOUT