

# Don't look back

After a historic season for Mizzou football, there's no time like the present.

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Photos by Rob Hill and Nicholas Benner

Mizzou football fans have had a habit of looking back to past success. They have talked endlessly about the Dan Devine era. They have spoken in reverent tones of the 1960 and 1969 teams, whose success they feared would never be duplicated.

Now, nostalgia need not reach so far back. The historic 2007–08 season makes living in the present a pleasant prospect. In the future, people will look back with reverence on this Tiger team and its big names, too.

"This is going to go down [in history]," said junior quarterback Chase Daniel after the team's dominant Cotton Bowl victory over Arkansas. "Mizzou has never won 12 games in a football season. You're going to see that. You're going to see the 2007–08 Missouri Tigers and that senior class. You can look back and say, the Martin Ruckers, the Zos [Lorenzo "Zo" Williams], the Will Franklins — all those guys, they helped do it."

Moments from this season will become "remember when" fodder: Kansas quarterback Todd Reesing rising with a face mask full of turf after senior defensive lineman Williams sacked him for a game-sealing safety on Nov. 24; senior safety Cornelius "Pig" Brown grabbing a fumble and going 100 yards for six points against Illinois on Sept. 1, back before anyone knew how good Missouri and Illinois would be; teammates happily hauling senior tailback Tony

Temple off the field after he shattered Cotton Bowl records despite a tweaked hamstring in what would be his last Mizzou game.

Although Coach Gary Pinkel has patiently built the program to this point, you won't hear him utter the words, "We have arrived." But if Mizzou football hasn't arrived, it's at least on the right highway.

"Our class, when we got here, we said we would be the class to turn this program around," said charismatic captain Williams the week before Mizzou's first-ever Big 12 Championship game.

"I knew the history of Missouri," Williams also said. "I knew that we hadn't had the best luck in the world in our football games — the fifth down, kicked ball, ineligible players, all that — everybody tells you about that stuff."

Now people have new stuff to talk about.

## The year of firsts and bests

Stat-geeks and sports writers needed a thesaurus to come up with different ways to say "first ever," "best ever" and "record-breaking" again and again in 2007.

The Tigers won 12 games for the first time in program history. After the victory over Kansas, they earned a No. 1 (AP and BCS) ranking for the first time since 1960 (AP). They won the Big 12 North title for the first time ever. They finished the season ranked No. 4 (AP), the highest finish of all time.

Individuals earned plaudits, too. Daniel became Mizzou's highest finisher (fourth)

in the Heisman Award voting since 1939 (Paul Christman, third) and the program's first-ever Big 12 Offensive Player of the Year, among other honors. Freshman receiver Jeremy Maclin and senior tight end Martin Rucker both earned consensus first-team All-America honors. Coach Pinkel shared Big 12 Coach-of-the-Year honors with KU Coach Mark Mangino and was named runner-up to Mangino for Associated Press Coach of the Year. Dave Christensen was named National Offensive Coordinator of the Year by Rivals.com, and both he and Defensive Coordinator Matt Eberflus garnered various coach-of-the-week honors.

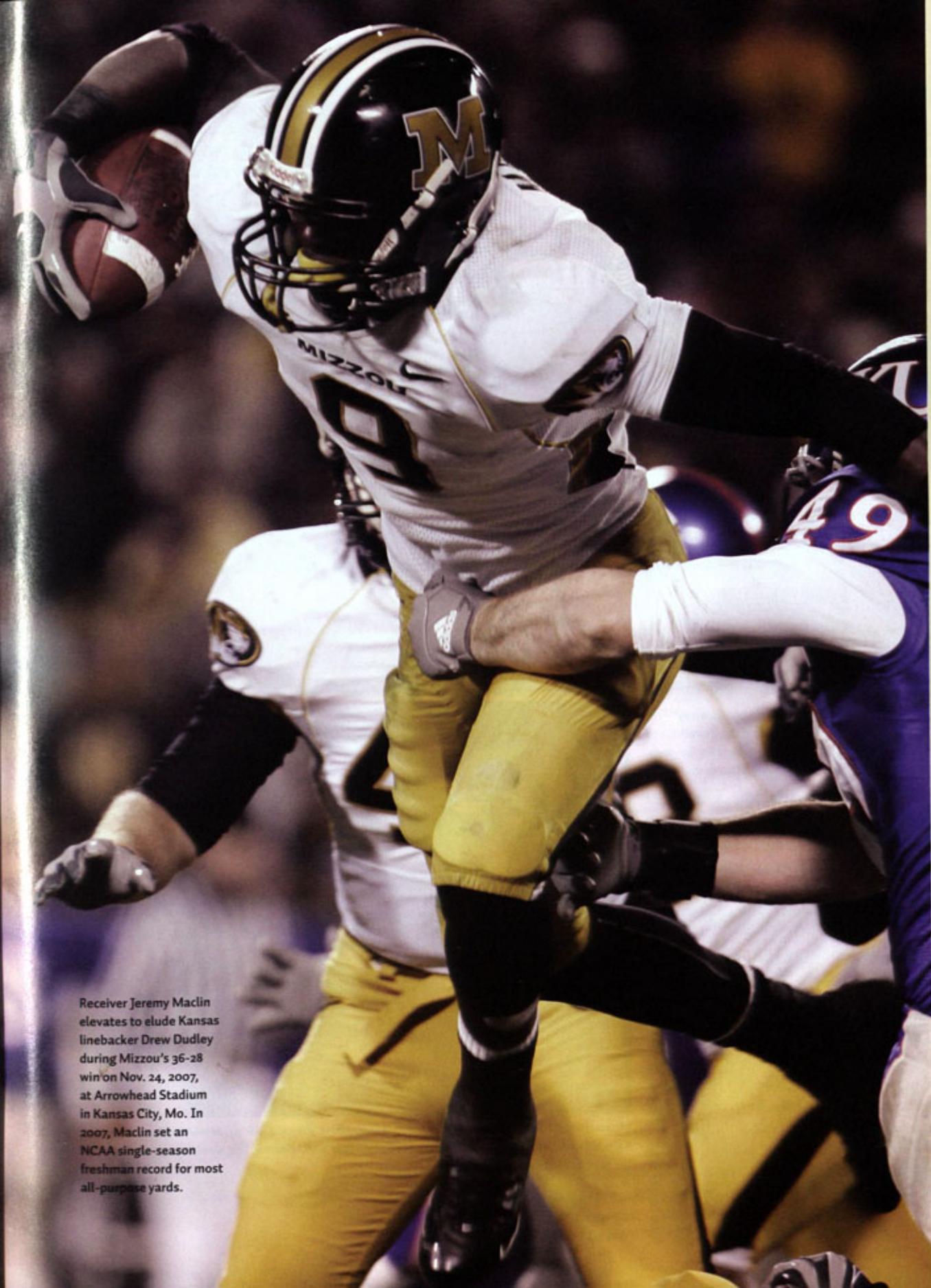
Achievements aside, Pinkel points to this team's unselfishness as the biggest reason for its success. Working in a spread offense, everyone gets a taste, but no one gets all the glory.

The 2007 team's other great attribute may be forgetfulness. Or ignorance. The team forgot or ignored the things people say Mizzou isn't supposed to do. Mizzou isn't supposed to win on the road at Colorado and K-State or win six straight games through late October and November, when the pressure is highest. This team did those things anyway.

## Everybody gets a piece

Pinkel remembers the apathy, the negativity, the feelings of futility — the atmosphere that ruled when he came to Mizzou in late 2000.

Things change. Recruiting doors open



Receiver Jeremy Maclin elevates to elude Kansas linebacker Drew Dudley during Missouri's 36-28 win on Nov. 24, 2007, at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Mo. In 2007, Maclin set an NCAA single-season freshman record for most all-purpose yards.



Junior receiver Tommy Saunders breaks away from defenders during Mizzou's victory over Kansas. Saunders caught eight passes for 82 yards and was one of five receivers with five or more catches in the game.

wider than ever. Media coverage yields more hope than bitterness. And the fans — long-suffering die-hards and bandwagon-jumpers alike — can't stop talking about the year that was (and what coming years might bring).

"I feel good that everybody is grabbing a piece of this," Pinkel says. "This is really the kind of environment — from the fan standpoint especially — that I thought about the day I got this job."

The black-and-gold faithful have been thinking about it, too. Average attendance at home games topped 60,000 for the first time since 1981. Even with disappointment at inexplicably being left out of the BCS picture, Mizzou fans helped the Cotton Bowl become a sellout within a day's time. An estimated 35,000 Tigers showed up in Dallas.



Mizzou fans Albert Black, BS '69, MBA '71, and daughter Johanna, BS '97, celebrate, but Albert's stepson, Kansas fan Adam Preston, can barely watch. This year's MU-KU meeting went beyond state pride and into the realm of national significance.

## The 2007-08 season: The road to the history books

### Mizzou vs. Illinois, Sept. 1, St. Louis

Two unranked teams (but not for long) meet in a neutral-site border rivalry. Chase Daniel throws for three touchdowns, Jeremy Maclin returns a punt 66 yards for a touchdown, and Pig Brown makes a name for himself with a 100-yard fumble return and a game-saving interception. **Mizzou wins 40-34. 1-0**

### Mizzou vs. Ole Miss, Sept. 8, Oxford, Miss.

The Tigers head to SEC country. Chase Daniel throws five touchdown passes on five consecutive series. Will Franklin catches eight passes for 105 yards and two touchdowns. **Mizzou wins 38-25. 2-0**

### Mizzou vs. Western Michigan, Sept. 15, Columbia

Maclin collects 275 all-purpose yards, and Tony Temple gets the team's first rushing touchdown of the season, plus a second. **Mizzou wins 52-24. 3-0**

### Mizzou vs. Illinois State, Sept. 22, Columbia

The quick-fire Mizzou offense brings its average scoring time of possession to 2:08, and the improving Tiger defense allows its fewest points of the season so far. **Mizzou wins 38-17. 4-0**

### Mizzou vs. Nebraska, Oct. 6, Columbia

Big 12 play begins as the AP No. 17 Tigers take on the No. 25 Cornhuskers. Chase Daniel passes for 401 yards, and the Mizzou defense holds the Huskers to a mere six points in front of a sellout Memorial Stadium crowd of 70,049. **Mizzou wins 41-6. 5-0**

### Mizzou vs. Oklahoma, Oct. 13, Norman, Okla.

The No. 11 Tigers face the No. 6 Sooners on the road. Mizzou actually captures the lead by a point in the third quarter, but three interceptions and a key fumble help the game slip away. **Oklahoma wins 41-31. 5-1**

### Mizzou vs. Texas Tech, Oct. 20, Columbia

Homecoming brings expectations of a high-octane shootout. No. 15 Mizzou's offense delivers with 422 yards. So does Mizzou's defense, which holds No. 22 Texas Tech to 388 yards and 10 points; the Red Raiders entered the game averaging 582 yards and 50 points per game. **Mizzou wins 41-10. 6-1**

### Mizzou vs. Iowa State, Oct. 27, Columbia

The Tigers look for their 14th win in their last 15 home games. A fumble recovery by Lorenzo Williams for a touchdown helps Mizzou earn another key Big 12 victory. Senior captain Pig Brown suffers a season-ending injury. **Mizzou wins 42-28. 7-1**

### Mizzou vs. Colorado, Nov. 3, Boulder, Colo.

November crunch time begins with the No. 9 Tigers getting their first win in Boulder since 1997. Chase Coffman has a highlight day with three touchdown receptions (out of Chase Daniel's five TD passes). **Mizzou wins 55-10. 8-1**

### Mizzou vs. Texas A&M, Nov. 10, Columbia

The team earns its first nine-win season since 1969 and fourth in school history. On Senior Day, Williams gets a big safety sack, and Martin Rucker grabs six catches and a rock from the giant "M" as a souvenir of his stellar senior season. Freshman Maclin aids his elders with 146 yards receiving. **Mizzou wins 40-26. 9-1**

### Mizzou vs. Kansas State, Nov. 17, Manhattan, Kan.

The Tigers silence naysayers again by earning their first victory in Manhattan since 1989. Heisman contender Chase Daniel throws four TD passes and no interceptions. An early interception by William Moore sets up the first of Maclin's three touchdowns. **Mizzou wins 49-32. 10-1**

### Mizzou vs. Kansas, Nov. 24, Kansas City, Mo.

The No. 3 Tigers and No. 2 Jayhawks battle at Arrowhead Stadium for the Big 12 North title. Daniel breaks his own school season record for total yards by the end of this game, and Danario Alexander leads receivers with eight catches for 117 yards. Williams seals the deal with another crucial safety sack. **Mizzou wins 36-28 and earns its first No. 1 ranking since 1960. 11-1**

### Mizzou vs. Oklahoma, Big 12 Championship, Dec. 1, San Antonio

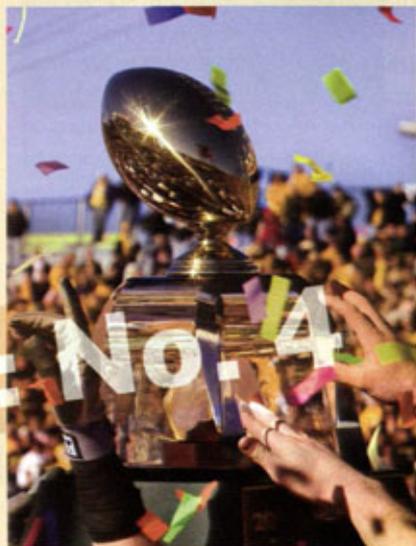
Mizzou makes its first-ever trip to the Big 12 Championship but leaves empty-handed. Mizzou settles for three field goals and only one touchdown on four trips within the 20-yard line, but Oklahoma scores five touchdowns and one field goal on six "red zone" trips. **Oklahoma wins 38-17. 11-2**

### Mizzou vs. Arkansas, Cotton Bowl, Jan. 1, 2008, Dallas

It's supposed to be a battle between Heisman finalists Daniel and Darren McFadden. Confounding prognosticators again, Mizzou racks up 38 points without a single touchdown pass but with a bowl-record performance by Temple (281 yards and four touchdowns). Moore and the Tiger D stifle McFadden and company. **Mizzou wins 38-7 in its first New Year's Day bowl since 1970. 12-2**

# Final AP ranking:

Players hoist the Cotton Bowl Field Scovell trophy for fans to see after a dominant victory over the Arkansas Razorbacks on Jan. 1.





**ABOVE:** Mizzou's Sean Weatherspoon and Castine Bridges (top) shut down a play at the Cotton Bowl. Heisman runner-up Darren McFadden and company averaged nearly 40 points per game this season; Mizzou held them to seven.

Bill Cocos, BS BA '53, of St. Louis, hasn't missed a home game since 1948 and has missed just two road games since 1969. The former University of Missouri System Board of Curators member and president has seen teams and coaches come and go. He has seen jubilation and devastation. As a reward for his loyalty through low times, he got to experience one of the highest highs inside a dank and steamy Arrowhead Stadium locker room as he celebrated the victory over Kansas and the Big 12 North title with players and coaches.

"Out of all the teams I've seen, this one is the best," Cocos says. The success snuck up on him. "I think these are years that you don't anticipate, but all of the sudden they just start developing."

**On to the next one**

Yes, Pinkel admits he has allowed himself a

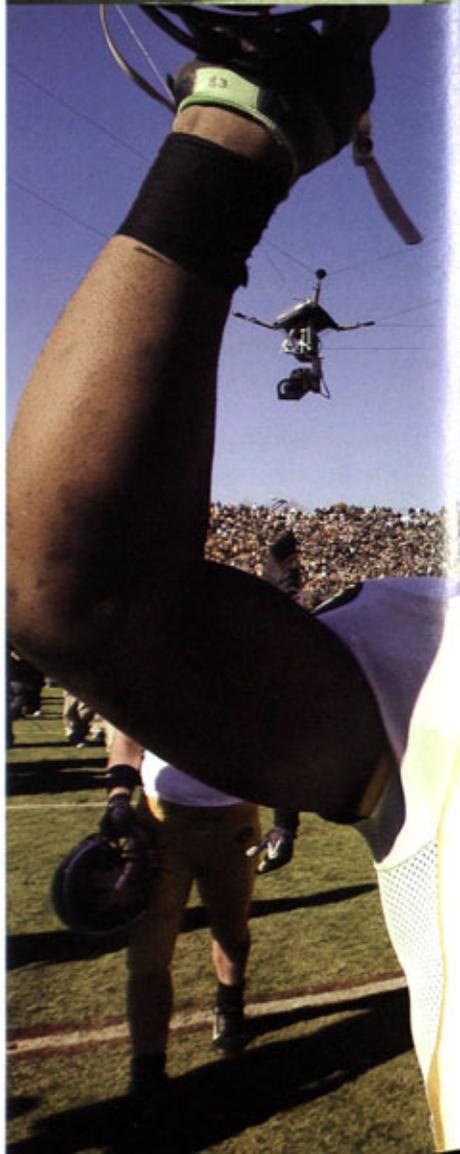
few moments to reflect on his success. Yes, he seems genuinely happy these days, but shifting a school's football disposition from blushing to gushing will do that to you. (So will a contract extension through 2012.)

Don't mistake him for complacent, though. A mere two weeks after the Cotton Bowl victory, he was talking about how the past season means little if the team can't win at a high level consistently. "We're where we were a year ago," he says. "We haven't done that yet."

It doesn't mean they can't. This year's seniors will be sorely missed, but now the coaching staff will groom the next group of leaders and develop next year's plan. Daniel will be back. So will tight end Chase Coffman, William Moore and many other top players on both sides of the ball.

"They've had a taste of it," Pinkel says. "They want to get back there." ■

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Tailback Tony Temple dodges an Arkansas defender on his way to Cotton Bowl records and Outstanding Offensive Player honors. **RIGHT:** Safety William Moore earned bowl Outstanding Defensive Player honors and the right to celebrate by making 13 tackles and returning an interception for a touchdown.





## Tigers in the media

When you talk about “coverage” in relation to Mizzou football in 2007–08, defensive schemes aren’t the only things that come to mind. The Tigers were all over local, regional and national media this year.

Player profiles popped up everywhere. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and others told the tale of all-purpose All-American Jeremy Maclin’s rough childhood and his de facto adoption by a youth football coach/urologist and his wife; by the week of the Nebraska game, *The New York Times* ran a similar story. Throughout the season, fans were treated to print, online and broadcast pieces on how senior safety Cornelius “Pig” Brown got his nickname (yes, he ate abundantly and sloppily as a child), plus countless headlines using “Chase” as a pun.

ESPN’s *College GameDay* featured Mizzou not once (which the show had never done before) but three times: before the Oklahoma game Oct. 13 in Norman; before the Nov. 24 game against KU at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Mo.; and again in front of the Alamo before the Dec. 1 Big 12 Championship against Oklahoma in San Antonio.

Yes, the MU-KU game is always a big deal to fans, but the national significance of the game this year led to more previews and hype for this “Border Showdown” than ever before. After beating KU, Mizzou landed a big one, with Chase Daniel gracing the cover of the Dec. 3, 2007, *Sports Illustrated*.

More than a month later, newspaper headlines trumpeted a dominant Cotton Bowl victory and, by the end of bowl season, a historic No. 4 finish for the Tigers.

