### Depth Chart

**Missouri Offense vs. Missouri State Defense**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>TR’VOUR SIMMS</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>TRYSTAN CASTILLO</td>
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<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>PAUL ADAMS</td>
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<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>TYLER HOWELL</td>
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<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>KEVIN PENDLETON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>JASON REESE</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>DAMAREA CROCKETT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>DREW LOCK</td>
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**Missouri State Offense vs. Missouri Defense**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Player</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>CALAN CROWDER</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>PEYTON HUSLIG</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>MALIK EARL</td>
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<td>ERIK FURMANEK</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>COLE CHRISTENSEN</td>
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<td>68</td>
<td>MARQUIS PROPHETE</td>
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<td>AARON CLARDY</td>
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<td>77</td>
<td>JORDAN TURNER</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td>COLEMAN CLANTON</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>DEION HOLLMAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>JALEN ESTERS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Special Teams**

- **Kicker:** 19 Tucker McCann
- **Punter:** 26 Corey Fatony
- **Long Snapper:** 86 James Workman

### Schedule

- 09/02 vs. Missouri State 11 a.m.
- 09/09 vs. South Carolina 6 p.m.
- 09/16 vs. Purdue 3 p.m.
- 09/23 vs. Auburn
- 10/07 at Kentucky
- 10/14 at Georgia
- 10/21 vs. Idaho
- 10/28 at Connecticut
- 11/04 vs. Florida
- 11/11 vs. Tennessee
- 11/18 at Vanderbilt
- 11/24 at Arkansas 1:30 p.m.
FAST FIVE
QUESTIONS WITH
CALE GARRETT

1 DO YOU HAVE A PREGAME RITUAL YOU DO BEFORE EVERY GAME?
“I put my pads on, I don’t know. I really don’t. I try to listen to my favorite song at the right before I go out.”

2 WHO IS THE ONE QUARTERBACK OR PLAYER YOU WOULD MOST LIKE TO SACK OR HIT?
“My boy (Missouri redshirt sophomore quarterback) Jack Lowary. Me and him were roommates. He’s my best bud.”

3 WHICH GAME ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS YEAR?
“The first one.”

4 WHICH OF THE LINEBACKERS IS THE BEST AT VIDEO GAMES?
“Terez (Hall) will say he is but it would probably be Rod Winters or Brandon Lee.”

5 WHERE IS THE BEST PLACE TO EAT IN COLUMBIA?
“Don’t do that to me. My favorite place is West Main Pizza.”

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Missouri opens its 2017 campaign against Missouri State at 11 a.m. Saturday at Memorial Stadium. The Tigers will be looking to bounce back from a 4-8 finish to 2016 and begin the new year with four straight home games against the Bears, South Carolina, Purdue and Auburn, respectively.

As is tradition, our Impossible Quiz is back again to test your knowledge of Missouri’s opponents, and Week 1 offers a special in-state take on Missouri State and its hometown of Springfield. From now-Bears head coach Dave Steckel’s bowl-game success during his 14-year tenure as member of the ‘Tigers’ coaching staff, to the name of the Western States Hockey League team that calls Springfield home and the famous actor who played football for the Bears, our quiz comes out of the starting gates strong and will hopefully teach you a thing or two you about the Show-Me State.

So, how well do you know the Missouri State Bears and the town of Springfield?

---

**IMPOSSIBLE QUIZ**

**10 THINGS YOU DON’T KNOW ABOUT MISSOURI STATE**

**1. HOW MANY CAREER HOME RUNS DID MISSOURI STATE ALUM RYAN HOWARD HIT DURING 13 YEARS (2004-16) IN THE MLB?**

A. 515  
B. 491  
C. 256  
D. 382

**2. WHAT FAMOUS MOBSTER DIED IN SPRINGFIELD?**

A. Al Capone  
B. Henry Hill  
C. John Dillinger  
D. John Gotti

**3. WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE WESTERN STATES HOCKEY LEAGUE TEAM THAT PLAYS IN SPRINGFIELD?**

A. Springfield Thunder  
B. Springfield Express  
C. Springfield Synergy  
D. Springfield Spartans

**4. SPRINGFIELD CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF THE NEW YORK TIMES FOR ITS FAMOUS VARIATIONS OF WHICH POPULAR CHINESE DISH?**

A. Cashew chicken  
B. Kung Pao chicken  
C. Chop suey  
D. Bourbon chicken

**5. WHICH FAMOUS ACTOR PLAYED FOOTBALL AT MISSOURI STATE, THEN KNOWN AS SOUTHWEST MISSOURI STATE?**

A. Ashton Kutcher  
B. John Goodman  
C. Carl Weathers  
D. Jon Hamm

**6. MISSOURI STATE COACH DAVE STECKEL SPENT 2001-14 ON MISSOURI’S COACHING STAFF. HOW MANY BOWL GAMES DID THE TIGERS GO TO DURING THAT SPAN?**

A. 8  
B. 10  
C. 5  
D. 12

**7. WHAT IS THE STATE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OF MISSOURI?**

A. Harmonica  
B. Saxophone  
C. Guitar  
D. Fiddle

**8. MISSOURI STATE WAS FOUNDED IN 1905 AS THE FOURTH DISTRICT NORMAL SCHOOL. WHEN DID ITS FOOTBALL PROGRAM BEGIN?**

A. 1915  
B. 1909  
C. 1905  
D. 1921

**9. MU LAST PLAYED THE BEARS ON OCT. 6, 1923, WHEN MSU WAS KNOWN AS SOUTHWEST MISSOURI STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE. WHO WAS THE U.S. PRESIDENT?**

A. Warren G. Harding  
B. Calvin Coolidge  
C. Woodrow Wilson  
D. Herbert Hoover

**10. WHAT COUNTRY MUSIC LEGEND DIED IN SPRINGFIELD AFTER A SHOW IN BRANSON?**

A. Conway Twitty  
B. Hank Williams Sr.  
C. Merle Haggard  
D. Johnny Cash

---

Answer Key: 1 (B); 2 (D); 3 (B); 4 (A); 5 (B); 6 (D); 7 (D); 8 (C); 9 (A); 10 (B)
**Hours**

**North**
- M - W 11am - 10pm
- Th - Sa 11am - 10:30pm
- Sunday 11am - 8pm

**Downtown**
- M - W 11am - Midnight
- Th - Sa 11am - 2am
- Sunday 11am - 8pm

**North**
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10 Minutes from Downtown

**Downtown**
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573-449-8788

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As running back Damarea Crockett helped interview freshman Larry Rountree III for an MU Athletics rookie feature video, he bit into the wrapper of a freeze pop. It took him multiple attempts to tear the plastic, and he yelled in relief when he broke the seal.

"Finally!" he said.

Watching Crockett struggle with a freeze pop was not a new sight for Vanessa Keener, his mother, and she laughed when she saw the video on Twitter. Growing up in Arkansas, Crockett constantly had trouble with the pesky plastic wrappers.

"I was clapping my hands saying, 'Yay! You finally did it after 19 years!'" Keener said.

Crockett had a childhood full of football, friends and funny moments, and his struggles with freeze pops still make his mother laugh. Keener constantly had to open the wrappers for Crockett, and he started using her scissors when she stopped helping him with his snack in sixth grade.

Although she occasionally had to clean up the tips of freeze pop seals around the house, Keener said Crockett was an easy child to raise. She was a single mother, and he never caused her any grief.

“I was afraid to have a second child because I knew that child would probably be a demon child,” she said. “You can’t get a good child two times in a row.”

Crockett was friendly with kids his age, and his classmates gravitated toward him, Keener said. She never saw him mad at a friend. Despite Crockett’s kind nature, he occasionally found himself in trouble for disrupting his class at school. Keener remembers receiving calls from her son’s teachers around the time he was in fourth grade.

“He just talked too much,” she said.

“I WAS CLAPPING MY HANDS SAYING, ‘YAY! YOU FINALLY DID IT AFTER 19 YEARS!’”

VANESSA KEENER, Crockett’s mom
“And I think that was because he was an only child at home — it was just him and I — so once he got to school he wanted to interact with other kids.”

Whenever she got a call from a teacher, Keener would sit her son down to talk. She’d give him a warning. If she heard from a teacher again, she told Crockett, he would get a spanking. Fortunately for the running back, his mother’s warnings did the trick.

“(The calls were) few and far between,” she said.

Keener said Crockett’s kind and chatty personality was paired with a distinct sense of persistence. Even as a child, the running back could never wait.

“If I told him that I was going to do something for him or take him somewhere, he would not let me rest until I got that done,” Keener said.

This persistence helped make him into an elite-level football player by the time he finished his high school career at Little Rock Christian Academy. He chose Missouri over Arizona State and Boise State, as well as top-academic schools such as Yale and Vanderbilt.

The drive Keener saw in her son as a child is still present, but she has noticed a few changes. He has grown more patient and is better at controlling himself.

He can open a freeze pop now, too.

STORY BY PETER BAUGH

Celebrating 28 YEARS in Business!

Game Day Just Got Better.

FAR LEFT: Damarea Crockett runs the ball during a youth football game in Magnolia Ark. Photo courtesy of VANESSA KEENER

LEFT: Damarea Crockett poses for a portrait while wearing his youth football team uniform. Photo courtesy of VANESSA KEENER

ABOVE: MU played Florida on Oct. 15 in Gainesville, Fla. The Gators defeated the Tigers 40-14. EVAN COBB/Missourian file photo

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Terry Beckner Jr. and Jonah Dubinski couldn’t have taken more different routes to becoming members of the Missouri football team. Both linemen know nothing worth doing comes easy.

Beckner Jr., a top-rated defensive tackle prospect out of high school who garnered scholarship offers from Florida State, LSU, Michigan and Ohio State arrived in Columbia as a predestined heir to the “D-Line Zou” throne and delivered a freshman All-American 2015 season that ended with an ACL tear against BYU.

His 2016 season would meet the same fate, an ACL tear during Missouri’s homecoming loss to Middle Tennessee.

Dubinski, on the other hand, had just two Division I offers after competing against top-level talent on Rock Bridge’s offensive line for three years. The Columbia native decided to pass on full rides to walk on at his hometown university instead and worked for his father’s drywall business to help pay for school.

By the end of his redshirt freshman season, Dubinski had taken over the starting center spot and helped lead the Missouri offense to a record-setting performance in a loss to Tennessee and a comeback victory over rival Arkansas.

Both linemen enter 2017 with something to prove.

After a second round of rehab with Tigers head trainer Rex Sharp, Beckner Jr. has returned to full contact and is looking like “The Terry of old” as offensive lineman Kevin Pendleton said. The re-emergence couldn’t come at a more dire time, with the Missouri defense as a whole looking to rebound from a rough 2016.

Defensive coordinator DeMontie Cross knows it starts up front.

“(The defensive line) has been the heartbeat of the program for a while,” Cross said after Missouri’s first practice of the fall. “Those guys gotta figure out a way to come together through this camp, ’cause we rely on them to lead us.”

Dubinski earned a scholarship, but he entered the fall in a battle for his starting spot on an offense that has all the makings of a breakout year — an even more experienced Drew Lock and Damearea Crockett in the backfield and returning playmakers such as receiver J’Mon Moore on the
“Was it a good day today?”

“Yeah, it was a really good day today,” Dubinski answered, ready to clock in for another practice but unable to hide the big smile on his face until he went back home later in the day, told his mom the news and gave her a hug.

It was a fitting moment of unassuming celebration for the former walk-on, who, after playing in seven games during the 2016 season and earning the starting center spot for the season’s final two games, already considered himself on scholarship. But in the midst of position battles across an offensive line — center included — looking to realize its full potential and double its offensive production if the Tigers want to have a chance of making some noise in the SEC East Division, Dubinski had no choice but to treat the accomplishment as a minor milestone on the way to a greater purpose.

“It’s really cool when hard work pays off, but there’s still so much more on my mind that we still have to do,” Dubinski said. “Just kind of on to the next thing.”

METICULOUS AND MOTIVATED

Dubinski’s father, John Dubinski, said his son has been detail-oriented from a young age.

“If it’s something (Jonah’s) interested in and enjoys, he is all in,” John Dubinski said. “He likes to master something and understand the intricacies of it and the little things that separate you from other people.”

That disposition, combined with the hyper-competitiveness bred amongst Dubinski and brothers, Hudson and Jackson, continues to translate well on the offensive line, a position that rewards a meticulous approach to technique more often than it does flash and talent.

“We talk about it in the offensive line room, if we had 11 Jonah Dubinski’s on our offense, we’d probably be one of the hardest-nosed offensives of all time,” junior tackle Paul Adams said. “He’s one of those guys that’s going to grit his teeth; he doesn’t care who he’s going against — he’s just going to go and give it his all. He gets pissed off when he makes the wrong step, whether it’s an inch or 2 to the right. He just strives for greatness.”

Under former Rock Bridge coach A.J. Ofodile, now Barry Odom’s director of recruiting, Dubinski held his own at the varsity level against top in-state and out-of-state teams for the Bruins as a sophomore onward. John Dubinski said his son competing and succeeding against Division I prospects is what started making a football career at Missouri look like more of a possibility.

“The kids know ahead of time, ‘Hey, I’m going against this kid. I’m blocking a guy, and he’s playing at Florida State next year.’ Or, ‘I’m going against this guy, and he’s going to Clemson,’” John Dubinski said. “I think he started to understand, ‘If I can do these things, get a little bit bigger and stronger — work on these things — I feel like I can go and play on the Division I level.’”

But his 6-foot-2 frame attracted offers from only Austin Peay — a Division I FCS program — Air Force and Division II schools. Both Dubinski and his parents raved about the Air Force Academy when they took a recruiting visit to Colorado Springs, Colorado, during his senior year at Rock Bridge, but it was during the final dinner of the visit that Dubinski told his mom and dad he wanted to walk on at his hometown university.

It came as a surprise to John Dubinski. He thought taking the scholarship at Air Force made sense financially and would set his son up for a better chance at seeing the field versus the uphill battle that usually awaits any walk-on competing for playing time.

“(Air Force) just seemed like that was the most solid offer, and so I just assumed, ‘Hey, this is where you’re going,’” John Dubinski said. “He had talked to me about (walking on at Missouri); he and I definitely just did not have detailed discussions about it. It could be that he was just trying to feel me out and be a people-pleaser, as well. If your family’s not behind you, you don’t want to turn around and say, ‘This is what I’m doing. It’s totally different than what everybody thinks.’”

Ultimately, John Dubinski said he knew the decision was his son’s to make, and he supported the decision to stay in Columbia. And between seeing former Rock Bridge players on Missouri’s roster, talking over his walk-on potential with Ofodile and hearing firsthand testimony from Tigers wide receivers coach Andy Hill — who walked on at Missouri in 1980 and earned a scholarship during his time with the program — Jonah Dubinski was more than sold on following the #MizzouMade track set before him.

“There had been a history of some guys like Max Copeland doing well walking with the program,” Dubinski said. “(Brandon) Gerau from Rock Bridge walked on here. There’s been success, and (Hill) was like, ‘It’s all about your attitude.’ That kind of got me on board. I was like, ‘I’ve got the atti-
HANGING SHEETROCK AND BREAKING INTO THE STARTING LINEUP

Dubinski excelled at maintaining an indifference to his status as a walk-on when competing against Missouri's scholarship players, but his arrival to college football wasn't without some setbacks.

After playing every other position on the offensive line at Rock Bridge and learning their intricacies, he had to master a new position: center. He tore a meniscus during his freshman season then fell ill and lost weight during a time where he needed to be packing on the pounds if he wanted a shot at playing in the SEC. For the first time since his freshman year at Rock Bridge, he didn't contribute on the field when it mattered.

On top of that, to help contribute toward his school bills when he began at Missouri, he took a bigger role in helping run Dubinski Drywall Company, the family construction business. This was on top of balancing class and football.

Having his father for a boss worked in Dubinski's favor in the mental demands of Division I football and go hang sheetrock, set up scaffolds and paint.

Dubinski admitted to feeling some nerves before the offense hung 740 total yards on the Volunteers in a 63-37 loss. But he said his teammates and position group provided all the reassurance he needed to getamped up in the moments before the team left the locker room and entered a stadium full of 101,012 mostly orange-clad fans.

"The 10 other dudes around me, especially the four other guys on the offensive line," Dubinski said, "they were like, 'Hey, you've practiced for this all year. You got this. You've done this in practice. You've ran this play X amount of times.' Eventually, you get comfortable within the game."

Dubinski was the next man up and snapped the ball for all 110 of Missouri's plays from scrimmage. The Tigers' offensive line paved the way for Damarea Crockett to rush for 226 yards and break the school's freshman single-season rushing yards record, while Ish Witter added 163 yards on the ground. Drew Lock threw for 320 yards and was only sacked once.

Afterward, Dubinski texted older brother Jackson saying he never had been more tired after a game in his life.

"The great thing about it, with people competing so closely, every single rep matters," Dubinski said. "You have to take every single rep seriously, so you can't come and be lazy. You know what, I don't want to practice today, so I'm just going to be lazy. 'Cause if you do that, there you go — your job's gone."

Dubinski said the competition with Castillo is as friendly as the battles waged at other positions across the line and throughout the team. The two bonded during the 2016 fall camp and continue to help each other learn the position, and they understand Elarbee's mantra: "Best man plays."

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Dubinski will start 2017 on the sidelines cheering on Castillo in his first start and waiting to get his turn on the field to prove why he should be the Week 2 starter when South Carolina comes into his hometown to

SOMETHING WAS TELLING ME TO COME HERE

JONAH DUBINSKI
Missouri offensive lineman

Getting to stay at home for school, though, has been worth the obstacles.

"I really don't know sometimes how the (out-of-town) guys do it," Dubinski said. "I get to go home every day to my family and see all the people I love. It's a great support system. Can't say enough about it. I have a great girlfriend, I have great parents, great grandparents, great brothers. It's the best environment I could be in."

When he finally got the call to make his first collegiate start, however, the environment couldn't have been any more hostile. Missouri was set to face Tennessee at Neyland Stadium, and the Tigers were without Bailey and then-redshirt junior Alec Abeln, who were both injured.

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NOW MORE THAN EVER, NOTHING IS GUARANTEED

Dubinski is on scholarship now, but with seven linemen who saw the field in 2016 — plus redshirt freshman center Trystan Castillo — competing to fill five starting spots ahead of Saturday's season opener against Missouri State, nothing is guaranteed, and there was little time for celebration.

"I knew coming into (camp) that if you focus on (a scholarship), it's just going to be a distraction," Dubinski said. "I really just wanted to be able to focus on fighting for the center position and us getting as good as we can get as fast as we can get. It really wasn't something I was too worried about. I had faith in all my coaches, and I really do think, if you do the right thing in life, good things will happen to you."

That's why he waited to tell his teammates, and Odom eventually confirmed the scholarship to local media with a simple, "Yeah, (Jonah's) on aid," after an Aug. 14 practice. When Dubinski did finally break the news to the offensive line, he said his teammates showed more outward excitement than he did.

"We were like, 'Hell yeah, Jonah. That's what I'm talking about. We were wanting this for a long time for you,'” Adams said. There's not another man on the offensive line who deserves it more."

On Monday, Castillo edged out Dubinski for the No. 1 spot on the Week 1 depth chart, but both Odom
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open conference play. Regardless, he’s right where he belongs: as scholarship player representing a place he commemorated with a tattoo on his upper right arm.

It’s a big, black outline of the Show-Me State with “Dulcis” written above it and “Domus” underneath. Translation, from Latin: “Sweet home Missouri.”

T this time, Terry Beckner Jr. ended up staring at a blue sky instead of a black one.

A year before, Beckner was in the same position on the 20-yard line at Arrowhead Stadium. Now, the defensive tackle lay on his back on Faurot Field’s 5-yard line.

The opponents were different. Instead of Brigham Young’s left guard diving into his legs, Beckner was topped when Middle Tennessee’s right guard went low to cut him down.

This time, the pop came from his left knee instead of right.

Weeks before the one-year anniversary of when he tore his right ACL against the Cougars, Beckner Jr. lay on the ground with a blown out knee. While he was able to limp off the field, he did not kid himself with the severity of his injury.

“Right at that moment when it happened, I knew what happened because I had that feeling before,” Beckner Jr. said. “I just knew I had to go attack it.”

Beckner Jr. was diagnosed with another torn ACL, meaning he would have to go through another arduous rehabilitation process, all the while hoping he would be the same football player again.

But instead of the uncertainty that came with his original tear, Beckner Jr. was determined to attack the rehab with full effort and come back a stronger player than he was before. By all accounts, he has.

TEARING SCAR TISSUE

In the immediate aftermath of an ACL repair, the leg is kept immobilized in a full-leg cast, sometimes for up to six weeks or more, to protect the graft — a piece of living tissue that is transplanted into the knee surgically — from any unnecessary movements. Although the cast prevents the leg from sliding and re-tearing the repair, it does not prevent the leg from becoming just as useless.

The longer the leg stays straight, the more time scar tissue has to form. The scar tissue can be just as dangerous as re-tearing the ligaments. If scar tissue forms quickly, it can prevent the leg from ever being able to regain its full range of motion, effectively ending any hopes a person has of ever being able to regain full use.

Beckner Jr. came very close to that possibility during the early months of his first recovery.

“Every freshman one, I almost didn’t make it through because I waited too long as far as getting my range of motion back,” Beckner Jr. said. “It got stiff on me, so I had to push through. It was painful, but I did that to myself.”

There is a good chance Beckner Jr. would have continued on that track had it not been for Rex Sharp, Missouri’s head athletics trainer.

“That first month and a half or two, he didn’t do very well,” Sharp said. “There was a day where he sat in here, in this office, and I challenged him pretty well with, ‘You know, I want you to be the very best player you can possibly be, and right now your attitude sucks. I need you to attack the rehab just like you would attack the opponent on the football field.’ And he got it.”

From that point forward, Beckner Jr. gave everything he had to making sure he would be able to regain full use of his knee. By the time Missouri’s first game against West Virginia rolled around, he was back to his old self.

Fast forward a month and a half, and Beckner Jr. was determined not to repeat the mistakes of his past.

“I knew when this one happened that I wasn’t going to let that happen to me again,” Beckner Jr. said. “So I just attacked it with everything I could, and I got better day by day.”

Beckner Jr. had surgery the week after the tear. Six months later, he was participating in spring practice, only skipping contact drills on Sharp’s orders.

“I think just having gone through that once before was a huge help, because we were at least two months ahead the whole time,” Sharp said. “I intentionally held him out of full contact drills. Could he have played? Yes, absolutely. But he was way ahead, mentally and physically from where he had been the prior injury.”

GETTING ONE THING TO MATCH THE OTHER

Once the patient has re-established his or her range of motion, the focus shifts to equalizing strength in both legs.

Progress is slow, with initial exercises only allowing for cycling without resistance and low-weight-bearing lifts. Running, jumping and anything sports-related is out of the question.

However, this process can be accelerated depending on the patient’s commitment to getting better. Sometimes, that means applying what works in other patients’ progression to his or her own recovery.

This is where Markell Utsey comes into the picture.

Utsey filled in for Beckner Jr. after the Middle Tennessee game but suffered the same fate as his predecessor when the Tigers played another team from the Volunteer State. In the penultimate game of the season, against Tennessee, the then-freshman suffered a torn ACL.

Utsey’s tear was subtly different than Beckner Jr.’s, as he tore his posterior capsule along with the ligament. This forced his reconstruction to be delayed nearly a month after the injury, as doctors could not operate because of the tear, which would have allowed fluid used in the surgery to drain down Utsey’s leg.

So Utsey waited. When his surgery was finally completed, he found...

The two spent hours together on the training tables and machines, building their knees and each other back up to the level they were capable of.

“It was fun in here with them,” Sharp said. “They were in here a lot together, which helped. … I think it’s created a pretty special bond between the two of them.”

As the two moved forward in their strengthening process, they found another source of motivation besides seeing the field again. They both wanted to outdo the other.

“We were close before, but when we got injured, during the whole rehab process, we just were in there every day, working together and motivating each other,” Utsey said. “It’s just a lot of things that he does, and I just look at it like I can do those same things. Then he just motivated me, and we just stayed on each other and made sure we were doing things right.”

As a result, the two stayed on schedule with their rehabilitation. When Beckner Jr. suited up for spring practice, Utsey was right alongside him.

However, the biggest impact Beckner Jr. had on Utsey wasn’t physical. He instead focused on making sure Utsey didn’t fall into the mindset trap he had dealt with.

“I was an older guy, so I talked to him a little bit, told him what was going to happen, what he needed to take (on) to make his leg better for him,” Beckner Jr. said. “When that stuff happens to you, you’re really going to get scared and not know what to do. I just told him little things here and there.”

The bond between the two has lasted outside the sports medicine center. Now, instead of working together in gym shorts, the two look to benefit each other while wearing pads.

“Those guys are definitely connected at the hip, probably a little bit more than the rest of those guys, because they had the knee injury,” defensive coordinator DeMontie Cross said. “It’s a special bond, and I think those guys are looking forward to suiting up together.”

MOVING FORWARD

The end of the road for ACL rehabilitation usually comes around nine months after the surgeon made the initial cuts. By that point, the graft has taken hold in the knee and the patient has had enough time to strengthen the leg back up to its former shape.

However, the timeline can be altered drastically depending on the patient and he would be dealing with his first ACL tear in his new home, he immediately contacted the team physician, Pat Smith, with his proposition.

“I said, ‘If you’ll allow me, I would like the opportunity to have him ready by the fall,’” Sharp said. “He said, ‘I’ll let you try it. I don’t look for that to succeed.’ All I asked for was permission.”

Within three months, Sharp and Odom completed the process of regaining full range of motion and strength to have the future Missouri coach back out on the field for Missouri’s season opener. Twenty years later, Sharp has another key piece to the Tigers defense ready to go for the start of Missouri’s season. This time, he has had a longer period to work with the player and is confident that the defensive tackle will be in the best shape of his life heading into his junior season.

“I don’t know if (Beckner Jr.’s) played any better — ever — than he is right now, and that’s exciting for me,” Sharp said.

But, the player taking the field in 2017 is not the same one who came back from injury his sophomore season or the high-profile recruit who arrived in Columbia in 2015. With two major knee injuries in two years, there will always be concern that another could be right around the corner.

But at this point, the last person who shares that concern is Beckner Jr. Everything he has gone through has forced him to become mentally tougher than he was when he arrived on campus. If he can apply the mental side with the physical side of his game, he will be able to live up to the expectations once placed upon him.

“It made me stronger without a doubt,” Beckner Jr. said. “As far as mental-ly-wise, it made me so much stronger.

Now I know that you’ve just got to push through.”

Beckner Jr.’s repeated comebacks have inspired both his teammates and coaches. Cross hopes that the rest of the Missouri defense can emulate Beckner Jr. when it comes to overcoming adversity.

“(I’m impressed by) his resilience to fight back, claw back, be positive,” Cross said. “That’s not easy to do. … He wants to be the best Tiger he can be right now. He’s trying to get back and lead his team and his defense.”
OPPONENT PREVIEW
BACK FOR BUSINESS

MSU’s Steckel and his fellow former Tigers on the Bears’ staff are eager for their homecoming

STORY BY ANNE ROGERS

For the first time in 94 years, Missouri and Missouri State will face each other on the football field.

And Bears head coach Dave Steckel will step back onto Faurot Field for the first time since taking over at Missouri State in 2015 after 14 years on the Tigers coaching staff.

Is he excited? It depends on what part of the return visit you ask him about.

“I mean, yes and no,” said Steckel, who spent his final six years with Missouri as the defensive coordinator. “I had 14 great years of my life there, so hopefully I’ll get to see a couple of people here and there. But I’m coming for my job. I’m coming up for a football game, and it’s going to be a tough game because I’m going against not only (head coach) Barry (Odom), but Andy (Hill) and Cornell (Ford), who are dear, dear friends of mine in the coaching profession.”

Odom reciprocated his former colleague’s mixed emotions. During a teleconference on Monday, he compared coaching against Steckel to when he faced his younger brother, Brian, when the two coached on different teams.

“I didn’t like (coaching against Brian),” Odom said. “To be frank, I don’t like this one either, to be going up against guys that you care about and you’ve known for a long time.”

For Steckel and his three assistant coaches who played at Missouri — Jason Ray, Munir Prince and Kenji Jackson — stepping onto the field they called home for more than a few years will bring back memories.

That includes the 2007 team, which will be honored at halftime on Saturday for its breakout season that featured a 12-2 record, a No. 1 ranking in the Associated Press Poll, a Big 12 North championship and a Cotton Bowl title.

Ray, a senior wide receiver on the 2007 team, received the reunion invitation in the mail. It detailed all of the events happening for that team this upcoming weekend.

But, like Steckel, Ray will be in Columbia for his job on Saturday, as the Bears’ wide receivers coach.

“I think it’s fantastic for the people. Now I’m just hoping and praying every night that we can go toe-to-toe with (Missouri) and not embarrass ourselves.”

DAVE STECKEL, Missouri State head coach

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“I loved Faurot Field,” Steckel said. “I loved the crowd, The Antlers, the student body, those idiots who were all painted up in the cold weather without shirts on. It was just awesome. The fan base in Columbia is very special.”

Ray referred to himself as a “Big 12 Tiger,” and he said he’s excited to visit an SEC venue and play an SEC team.

But — again — the Bears, who play the Missouri Valley
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