

Lindenwood Football

**By Scott Elliott,
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The 2009 football season will serve as the year the Lindenwood football program took its place among the NAIA's elite.

The prior year, the Lions strung together a magical playoff run that ended with a disappointing loss to Carroll College in the national semifinals. That loss set the tone for 2009.

The Lions promptly opened the season with a pair of blowout victories against Evangel and Central Methodist, but the first real test came in week three at Missouri Valley.

Trailing 31-30 late in the fourth quarter, quarterback Philip Staback engineered a nine play, 69

yard game winning drive that ended on a Matt Bramow touchdown reception with 20 seconds remaining. On that drive, Staback converted a key fourth and long situation, and Lindenwood emerged victorious 45-37. With his performance, Staback had quickly established himself among the best in the country.

The following week, the third-ranked Lions hosted No. 7 MidAmerica Nazarene in a game with national implications. Both teams were ranked among the top offensive units in the country, and most assumed a shootout was in store. Lindenwood had other ideas.

The Lions scored 21 consecutive points in the opening five minutes, and went on to win 55-14. Staback tossed three touchdown passes, and

freshman sensation Denodus O'Bryant finished with three scores of his own.

Lindenwood closed out the regular season slate with six more victories and won the HAAC championship for the second time in three years.

O'Bryant nabbed HAAC Player of the Year honors after scoring 17 touchdowns in nine games, and Jeff Hynes, Rudy Fleming, and Logen Wright were all first team selections.

The Lions drew Langston in the opening round of the NAIA Football Championship Series, and won 42-14.

Staback was tabbed Offensive Player of the Game after throwing for

three touchdowns, and Wright logged seven tackles, including a sack and two tackles for a loss to earn the defensive award. He also blocked a field goal and point after try.

In the second round, Lindenwood hosted Ottawa and the nation's top passing unit. Leading 20-10 at halftime, the Lions erupted for 37 points in the third quarter and went on to win by a 64-26 margin.

O'Bryant was named Offensive Player of the Game, rushing for two scores and tied a NAIA record with his fourth kickoff return for a touchdown.

The Lions' defense forced seven turnovers, led by Defensive Player of the Game, Parks Peterson, who

recorded 11 tackles and forced a fumble.

For the second straight year, Lindenwood traveled to Helena, Mont., to play the Carroll College Saints in the NAIA Football Championship Series Semifinals. The Lions relished the chance to avenge their loss from the year before.

Playing in a driving snow storm for the majority of the contest, Lindenwood jumped out to a quick 14-0 lead on a Staback one-yard run and a Matt Bramow touchdown reception. O'Bryant scored on runs of three and 43 yards in the second quarter, but the Lions only led 28-21 at halftime.

Lindenwood pushed the lead to 35-21 when Staback found O'Bryant from ten yards out. Carroll

responded with 14 unanswered points, tying the game at 35 early in the fourth quarter.

The score would remain that way late into the game as the defenses took over for much of the quarter. With just over two minutes remaining, the Lions would have the ball at their own 12 yard line.

On the first play, Staback connected with Marcel Thompson for a 49 reception that put the team in Saints' territory. O'Bryant rushed for 29 yards on the next play to take the ball to the 10 yard line. Three plays later, Staback hooked up with Bramow for the second time to put the Lions up 42-35 with just 49 seconds to play.

After picking up a quick first down, Carroll failed to

advance the ball any further and Lindenwood earned its first ever trip to the NAIA National Championship game.

O'Bryant gashed the nation's top rushing defense for 157 yards to earn Offensive Player of the Game honors, and Brandon Gould recorded a team-high eight tackles to grab the defensive award.

Lindenwood met defending national champion and No. 1 Sioux Falls in the title game in Rome, Ga. The matchup pitted the two highest scoring offenses in the nation against each other.

Lindenwood trailed 8-0 midway through the second quarter when the offense began to click. Bramow made a leaping catch in the back of the endzone to cap a 10 play

drive that cut the lead to 8-7. Later in the quarter, Staback hit Bramow from nine yards out to put the Lions ahead for the first time.

Sioux Falls would advance inside Lindenwood's 10 yard line on its next possession. Facing a fourth-and-one situation, the Lion defense stood tall, turning back the Cougar offense, and took a 14-8 lead into the break.

Sioux Falls returned the second half's opening kickoff for a score to retake the lead 15-14. Lindenwood responded when O'Bryant broke free for a 45 yard touchdown run, and Staback converted the two-point conversion to put Lindenwood ahead 22-15. Another long kickoff return set up the Cougars' next score that tied the contest at 22.

Early in the fourth quarter, Sioux Falls settled for a 42 yard field goal to move ahead 25-22. Neither team would muster much offensively after that until the Cougars mounted a 13 play, 68 yard drive that was meant to ice the clock. The drive ended when the Lindenwood defense forced its third turnover of the game.

Staback narrowly missed Thompson on a deep pass on first down, and three plays later the Lions turned the ball over on downs. Sioux Falls took a knee and the Lions fell, 25-22.

For a game that was being hyped for its offensive firepower, it was the defense that stole the show. Both teams were held to a season low in points. The Lindenwood defense allowed only one offensive touchdown to the

second-highest scoring team in the nation.

Lindenwood ended the best season in school history with a 13-1 record and a HAAC Championship.

Jeff Hynes was named an All-American by the AFCA (American Football Coaches Association). It marked the second consecutive season in which Hynes was named the first team center.

Lindenwood is one of 11 current NAIA schools that has had a player selected consecutive years.

College Fanz selected seven different Lions to its All-American list. Hynes and O'Bryant were first-team selections, Wright was a second-team pick, and honorable mention honors went to Staback, Fleming,

and Halley Ferrell.

Lindenwood finished the season averaging a staggering 53 points a game and scored 104 touchdowns in 14 games. The team had nine games in which it scored 50 or more points.

Patrick Ross was named the HAAC Coach of the Year for the third time in his career.

Lindenwood University
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