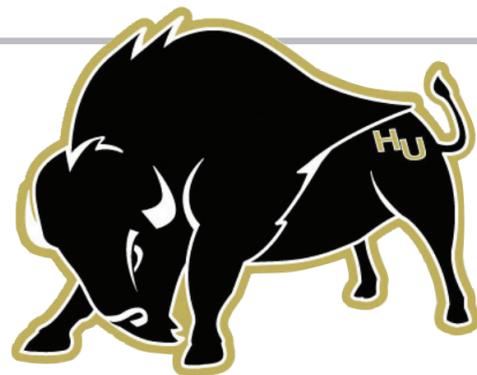


SECTION B BISON

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Bisons to rely on defense, transfers in 2010

by **STEPHANIE GREGORY**
student writer

The Harding Bison baseball team enters 2010 coming off of back-to-back GSC postseason appearances for the first time in school history. Despite losing a few top sluggers from a team that hit over .300 collectively, the Bisons are projected to finish fourth in the Gulf South Conference West Division, which would once again send them to the conference tournament in Millington, Tenn. Harding will have to get there using different methods than in 2009, however. The Bisons will look to an improved defense and a solid pitching staff to lift them through the season.

"This is the best defense I've put on the field," head coach Patrick McGaha said.

The Harding infield will be anchored by All-America honorable mention third baseman Chase Presley along with Heath Boyd and Charles Bradley up the middle.

"Boyd and Bradley can put together a great double play," McGaha said.

The ability to do so has come by no accident.

"Defensively, we have been working on communication with each other and making the routine plays as a fielder," sophomore shortstop Heath Boyd said. "I've been taking extra ground balls and turning double plays with (Bradley)."

The improved defense will back up a pitching staff that boasts the Bisons' other

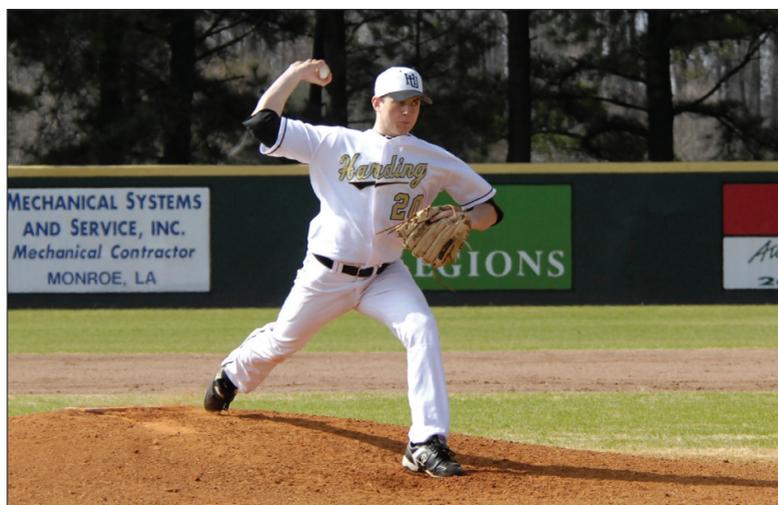


Photo by CRAIG RAINBOLT | The Bison
Senior pitcher Troy Keith throws a pitch during a game at Jerry Moore Field last season. Keith is one of several starters in an improved rotation for the Bisons.

honorable mention All-America selection. Sophomore pitcher Kyle Cline will anchor the staff and be an important asset in the weekend conference series. Harding will have to turn to the rest of their staff to replace senior pitcher Brodie Brumley, who, although being named honorable mention All-American, will miss 2010 after surgery.

McGaha will look to a handful of transfers

to fill voids such as those left by Brumley and Darby. Headlining those transfers are Jason and Patrick Nappi, brothers who transferred from division one schools. Jason Nappi is a senior catcher from Mississippi State who will fill the spot left by long time starter Ryan Moody. Patrick comes to Harding by way of the University of Alabama and will likely take Brumley's spot in the rotation. Other

transfers include outfielders Clay West and Adam Roberston.

Although Harding is projected fourth in their division of the Gulf South Conference, 2010 will prove to be anything but easy. The Bisons open their season in Texas visiting perennial powerhouse Abilene Christian University and will have to fight their way through perhaps the toughest conference in division two baseball.

"We're really going to get a tester out of the gate," McGaha said.

While the Abilene series will be good for the Bisons to gauge where they are, March will be the true test. That month holds what should be the three key series for Harding this season, two on the road against Southern Arkansas and Ouachita Baptist, and a home series against Delta State.

"This year we as a team know that anybody that we play we can beat," Boyd said. "We need to win every series in conference play and play every game likes it's our last."

Like any good team, Harding knows that their home crowd will dictate much of their success.

"We love to have as much fan support as we can when we play the nice weather games out here," McGaha said. "Our team has been working hard and would like the support."

The Bisons will host their first home game Tuesday, Feb. 9, when they welcome the University of North Alabama for a double header.

A recent Rhodes Rowdies revival

by **KYLIE AKINS**
assistant news editor

A passionate piece of Harding University's tradition was reincarnated last Saturday night when over 1,500 students blacked out the stands of the Rhodes Field House for the men's basketball game against Ouachita Baptist University. Although attendance has dwindled in recent years, a number of dedicated students have decided this is the season the Rowdies will come back in full force.

"I think sometimes when you have something going for a long time, sometimes it just needs to be reborn itself," Jeff Morgan, head coach of the men's basketball team, said. "It came from some students who really wanted to come in, make a difference, have fun and get a lot of people involved. I think because of that, it was a good thing. It wasn't like we were pulling teeth trying to get people to come and have a great time. I think this came of

something building from within. That was huge."

The Rhodes Rowdies experience that junior Brett Fielder remembers from his visit in seventh grade is a packed gym of cheering students, energy coming from every corner of the stands.

"That was back when they were in their prime and everything," Fielder said. "And so, that's my biggest memory of it: seeing it when it was really good and right when it had just started."

Fielder appealed to several social clubs, especially pushing his own club TNT, to join the effort to revive the Rowdies. He also created a Facebook group to supplement the word-of-mouth buzz he surrounded the Saturday game with, which accrued over 450 members.

Junior Harrison Dell, also a member of TNT, said he had noticed the diminishing enthusiasm in the audience since he began attending Harding.

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Photo by NOAH DARNELL | The Bison
Rhodes Rowdies filled the Rhodes Fieldhouse Saturday, Jan. 30, for the Bison basketball game against Ouachita Baptist University. Attendance at Harding games has resurged this season.

Super Bowl XLIV a toss-up with two equal teams

CHRIS O'DELL

The Leadoff



With the showdown in Miami only days away, Super Bowl XLIV is the hot topic of the week. The expected shootout between the New Orleans Saints and the Indianapolis Colts could be one of the most exciting Super Bowls in recent memory.

The game will feature two No. 1 seeds for the first time since 1993 when the Dallas Cowboys met the Buffalo Bills. For whatever reason, No. 1 seeds have had trouble winning Super Bowls in the past decade. The last top seed to win the championship was in 2003 when the New England Patriots defeated the Carolina Panthers. However, this won't be the only storyline to keep an eye on during Super Bowl XLIV.

Peyton Manning, MVP of the regular season, will be facing the team he grew up watching. In fact, Manning will be playing against his father's former team, which will be making its first Super Bowl appearance in team

history. Manning's father, Archie, is still regarded as one of the Saints' top quarterbacks to ever play the game.

Drew Brees and the Saints come in with the league's No. 1 offense. Brees threw for a league-high 34 touchdown passes to 10 different receivers in the regular season. The quick-scoring attack of the Saints will battle one of the league's most dangerous possession offenses. The duel between Brees and Manning could ultimately go down as one of the greatest quarterback matchups in Super Bowl history. A few I would rank above it are Terry Bradshaw vs. Roger Staubach in Super Bowl XIII and Joe Montana vs. Dan Marino in Super Bowl XIX.

With Brees and Manning under center, each team's defense will have its hands full from the time Carrie Underwood gets done singing the National Anthem until the stadium lights are turned off.

The city of New Orleans will finally get to see their Saints in the league's ultimate game after finishing 7-9 and 8-8 the past two seasons. This is the Saints' first Super Bowl appearance after the team ended its 43-year drought by beating Brett Favre and the Minnesota Vikings 31-28 in overtime

during the NFC Championship game Jan. 24. Residents of New Orleans have spent the last few years watching their city rebuild after the destruction left from Hurricane Katrina. Now, its residents will get to watch their team as a Super Bowl contender in Miami this weekend.

Everyone knows these two teams have two of the top passing attacks in the NFL. This further proves that the league has changed from one that is geared toward defense and running the ball to one that puts an emphasis on passing the football.

The Colts could have started this trend with their Super Bowl win in 2006. With the Colts' victory over the Bears, Indianapolis became the first team to win the title ranked outside the top 10 in scoring defense since 1983. Both teams win with their offense, not their defense. So who has the edge on the defensive side of the ball?

I would take the Saints' defense over the Colts' for the fact that New Orleans can change any game with its takeaway potential. Saints defensive coordinator Greg Williams has an in-your-face coaching style that has given the Saints' defense a swagger it never had under previous defensive

coordinator Gary Gibbs. That is probably because the Saints were plus-11 this season in turnover ratio. That was good for third-best in the NFL and a huge improvement from the team's minus-4 ratio last season.

New Orleans is plus-6 in the turnover department this postseason, making them capable of changing the outcome of any game it plays. The unit led the NFL in defensive touchdowns with eight and scored 141 points this season after takeaways. Their 39 takeaways were second to only the Green Bay Packers' 40, and nearly double the 22 the team had last season. Williams' relentless emphasis on creating turnovers has made the Saints' defense one of the scarier ones to go up against.

The Saints would also have to get the edge in the running game. Although neither team will come out running on every play, the Saints have more potential to break the game open with a huge run. Running backs Pierre Thomas, Mike Bell, Reggie Bush and Lynell Hamilton have to strike more fear into a defense than Joseph Addai. The Saints have shown more of a willingness to have a balanced attack than Indianapolis.

One factor to keep an eye on is how Dwight Freeney's ankle will hold up. The All-Pro pass rusher is the heart and soul of the Colts' defense. If Freeney can't overcome the pain in his ankle, the Saints could have a field day against that Indianapolis pass defense. I mean, who really thinks Raheem Brock will have the same kind of impact as Freeney?

Three years ago this week, in the same city and stadium where they'll face the Saints, the Colts won their first championship of the Peyton Manning era by defeating the Bears 29-17. The Colts come into Super Bowl XLIV as the popular pick, dubbed as four-point favorites over the Saints. Although I feel this is truly anyone's game, I see the Saints as the four-point winners in this one. I see Brees winning his first championship by defeating Manning and the Colts 35-31. The city of New Orleans will finally be able to call their team champions.

CHRIS O'DELL serves as the sports editor for the 2009-2010 Bison. He may be contacted at codell@harding.edu