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MAC: Chips have LeFevour, and only prescription is more defense

Aug. 11, 2009
By **Eric Kay**
CBSSports.com Staff Writer
Tell Eric your opinion!

It might not be the most complete team in its division. That would be Western Michigan. It might not be the most inspirational storyline. That would probably be Turner Gill and Part II of his worst-to-first Buffalo 180. It might not feature a fresh face. That would be, well, pick one of the five schools with new coaches.

But Central Michigan has the one name that will get even mid-major haters to tune in: Dan LeFevour.

"I'm glad we don't play him," said Temple coach Al Golden.



You can't blame the third-year Owls coach. That's because LeFevour, coming off a disappointing junior campaign, is still the heir to the throne that started with Chad Pennington and Byron Leftwich at ex-MAC school Marshall, and continued with Ben Roethlisberger at Miami University.

"That's a lot to put on him," said his coach Butch Jones.

It is, and it was the same story this time last year. Coming off one of the more remarkable, yet unrecognized sophomore campaigns in college football history, LeFevour's junior numbers didn't live up to the downtown Detroit billboards featuring his likeness, or lead him to the draft like it did Ball State quarterback Nate Davis (picked in the fifth round).

"After the season I had last year," LeFevour said, "and what this season has in store, it was the right

decision to stay here."

What's in store is a potential division and conference championship and if that falls in line, a comfortable spot in the Top 25 for the Chippewas. The team was picked by the media to win the West division and face off vs. Buffalo in the Mid-American Conference Championship Game in Detroit.

But that's all contingent on those numbers. LeFevour's junior-year totals: 2,784 passing yards, 27 total TDs, six INTs, 592 rushing yards. Nothing to scoff at, until you look at his sophomore totals: 3,652 passing yards, 46 total TDs, 13 INTs, 1,122 rushing yards. Open up the college football record books and you'll find LeFevour's name next to just one other quarterback: Vince Young.

• MAC: Conference page | All-Decade team | Bleacher Report

They're the only D-I players to pass for 3,000 yards and rush for 1,000. That's why he's the third-ranked quarterback of the class of 2010 and is expected to be picked in the second round after Tim Tebow and Colt McCoy, according to NFLDraftscout.com. Of course, that's dependent on a return to those sophomore stats and that's why the Chippewas are expected to contend for the conference title.

And how exactly will that happen? LeFevour's coach has spent the offseason reinforcing a simple edict.

"Dan knows the program, he knows what's expected of him," said Jones, entering his third year as Central Michigan's coach. "He's not going to go out there and carry the burden of expectations. Just play and enjoy the competition."

But for every mention of how potentially special this senior season could be, there's a pitfall awaiting LeFevour and the Chippewas. The team opens on the road at a resurgent Arizona and then heads to Michigan State. It faces defending MAC champion Buffalo on the road and it has a brutal three-game stretch in October where it travels to rival Western Michigan, Bowling Green and Boston College. If you're still trying to picture what their home slate is like, you

Preseason All-MAC

Pos	Player	Class	School
Offense			
QB	Dan LeFevour	Sr.	Central Michigan
RB	MiQuale Lewis	Sr.	Ball State
RB	James Starks	Sr.	Buffalo

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can count it one hand.

"Our kids have grown accustomed to having five home games ever since I've been here," Jones said. "But that's what makes when you do play at home, it makes those home games that much more special. It takes great leadership and perseverance to win on the road and within our 12-game schedule eight were bowl eligible, so you'd be hard pressed to find a more difficult schedule."

The schedule. What could present LeFevour with some golden national opportunities to showcase his talents could also cripple the Chippewas' chances to win the MAC West and crack the Top 25, a goal Jones says the program is feverishly trying to accomplish. It has flirted with the poll the past four years as it has boasted the best record in the state of Michigan. Its 32 wins are two more than Michigan and three more than Western over that span.

But in order to maintain that edge, the program has some of its own statistics it will need to recalibrate. The defense gave up more points (30.2) than LeFevour and the offense could put up (29.5), with most of that damage occurring in the first quarter of games. The team was outscored 85-62 in that period. The program was also last in yards allowed in the MAC.

WR	Antonio Brown	Jr.	Central Michigan
WR	Naaman Roosevelt	Sr.	Buffalo
TE	Jimmy Scheidler	Sr.	Bowling Green
OL	Brady Minturn	Sr.	Bowling Green
OL	Jason Onyebuagu	Sr.	Northern Illinois
OL	Phillip Swanson	Jr.	Western Michigan
OL	Shane Steffy	Sr.	Bowling Green
OL	Collin Miller	Jr.	Central Michigan

Defense

DL	Brandon Crawford	Sr.	Ball State
DL	Andre Neblett	Sr.	Temple
DL	Almondo Sewell	Jr.	Akron
DL	Frank Zombo	Sr.	Central Michigan
LB	Nick Bellore	Jr.	Central Michigan
LB	Noah Keller	Jr.	Ohio
LB	Austin Pritchard	Sr.	Western Michigan
DB	Sean Baker	Soph.	Ball State
DB	Barry Church	Sr.	Toledo
DB	Brian Lainhart	Jr.	Kent State
DB	Davonte Shannon	Jr.	Buffalo

Special Teams

K	Mike Salerno	Sr.	Northern Illinois
P	Ben Armer	Soph.	Western Michigan
Ret	Antonio Brown	Jr.	Central Michigan

Much of that was due to injuries, but it will be another uphill battle on defense this season.

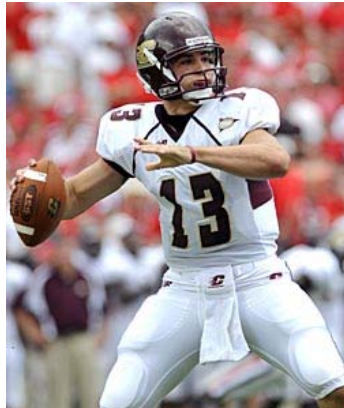
"The big thing for us is continuity," Jones said. "On defense we only had our basic starting 11 that we broke training camp with for three games. We have individuals on that side of the ball who played a lot of football for us, but we're a small senior team. So their leadership has to bleed over to the rest of the team."

That will be the responsibility of LeFevour's roommate, Frank Zombo. The senior defensive end recorded nine sacks last season and led the conference in tackles for loss with 15½.

"He brings a certain presence in the run and pass games," LeFevour said. "Having a pass rush like that can make up for a lot of run issues that can occur."

Even those run issues should start to shore up as nearly every defensive player returns, including linebacker Nick Bellore, who recorded 148 tackles last season.

But talking defense in Mount Pleasant is like talking about dialogue in a summer action blockbuster. In the end it's the special effects that take center stage. That's where LeFevour and the explosive offense step back in. While the offensive line -- featuring a freshman-sophomore tackle tandem -- remains suspect, LeFevour's top three options all return.



Antonio Brown (93 catches for 998 yards), Bryan Anderson (63 for 865 yards) and Kito Poblah (43 for 532 yards) give LeFevour one of the best trips in the conference and country. While he loses his running back from last year, that just might open up more mad-dash opportunities for Legs LeFevour.

"His biggest strengths are his instincts," Jones said. "He makes so many plays with his legs for us. He can feel the pocket collapse because he has that mental clock that lets him know where and when he can run with it if necessary."

It's that duel-threat capability that makes him the "top player in our conference," according to Buffalo's Gill, and it's why he was chosen by the university to be the subject of a billboard in downtown Detroit on the backside of the Comerica Park scoreboard. It features an image of LeFevour taking off with the football and reads "Run. Pass. Lead." In a state with the winningest program in college football, it's Central Michigan's star quarterback at the heart of Motown.

Downtown Motown is one thing, but LeFevour's aspirations are a bit bigger. Say New York in December sitting alongside quarterbacks from Oklahoma, Texas and Florida.

LeFevour is joined only by Vince Young in the 3,000 yards passing, 1,000 rushing club. (Getty Images)

"Not to sound arrogant or cocky, but I expect to be in that group," he said. "It will come, but it's not like after a game I go to a website and check out their stats compared to mine. They're great quarterbacks, but I'm not in awe. It's something I expect to be in."

Offensive Player of the Year

Dan LeFevour, Central Michigan: This time last year the award was his to lose. And lose he did. Ball State's Davis emerged as the top MAC quarterback, parlaying that into a fifth-round pick to the San Francisco 49ers. If LeFevour returns to his '06 form (4,744 total yards), he will have an outside shot at a trip to New York City in December and be picked well ahead of Davis' spot. With Antonio Brown and Bryan Anderson back and the emergence of Kito Poblah, he has three legitimate options to help his cause. Rival Tim Hiller of Western Michigan could be this year's Nate Davis.

Defensive Player of the Year

Barry Church, Toledo: It's between safeties Church and Davonte Shannon of Buffalo. The edge is to Church since he has less help on defense and will probably produce the gaudier stats. Andre Neblett is a load for opponents, but the Temple defensive lineman won't have the same statistical impact as the secondary players in this pass-happy conference.

Predicted order of finish

East

1. Buffalo Bulls: Before Turner Gill's arrival the Bulls averaged 1.7 wins per season. Since, the program has averaged five wins per year. "No doubt about it this is our most experienced, most overall talented team in the four years I've been here," Gill said. The team returns six starters on offense, including explosive tailback James Starks, who had 16 touchdowns despite missing three games with injury. "He could play for any team in the country," Gill said. On defense nine starters return, including Davonte Shannon, an All-MAC performer. The only question is at quarterback, where Zach Maynard takes over for the departed Drew Willy. **Must-see game:** Sept. 12 at Pitt. The Bulls lost 27-16 to Pittsburgh last season in this budding rivalry. This time they host the Panthers on national TV.



Turner Gill guides the Bulls in their quest to defend the MAC crown. (US Presswire)

with 95 tackles last season. **Must-see game:** Sept. 26 vs. Boise State. After falling on the Smurf Turf last season 20-7, the Falcons host Boise with a chance to put a dent in the Broncos' annual BCS-buster run.

4. Ohio: Since arriving from Nebraska, Frank Solich just can't seem to establish any consistency with the program. Coming off a 4-8 season, the team features a solid group of linebackers and depth and experience at quarterback. Whoever wins out between senior Theo Scott and Boo Jackson will have a pretty good wide receiver in senior Taylor Price to connect with. **Must-see game:** Sept. 5 vs. UConn. The Bobcats host the Huskies, and will look to avoid starting off 0-4 again while making headlines by knocking off a bowl team.

5. Akron: Quarterback Chris Jacquemain looks to build on his 20-touchdown junior campaign. He'll have his top two targets back in Deryn Bowser and Andre Jones to improve on the conference's fourth-highest scoring offense. On defense there's standout defensive lineman Almondo Sewell, who enjoys tackling opponents for losses and [watching Quentin Tarantino's finest film](#). **Must-see game:** Sept. 19 vs. Indiana. The Zips welcome their first-ever Big Ten opponent, the Hoosiers, to Akron and break in their new stadium all in one fell swoop.

6. Miami: New coach Mike Haywood comes over from Notre Dame where he ran the offense the past four years. There's not a single RedHawk on the roster entering his fourth letter-earning year. The team's inexperience will either be its biggest hindrance or unlikely asset when it heads to downtown Cincinnati's Paul Brown Stadium to face Kentucky for its opener. Haywood's biggest project will be senior quarterback Daniel Raudabaugh, who has shown flashes of promise. **Must-see game:** Oct. 3 vs. Cincinnati. The RedHawks host the rival Bearcats in the Battle for the Victory Bell, a trinket they haven't had in three seasons.

7. Kent State: Entering his sixth season, Doug Martin shares the honor of being the longest-tenured coach in the conference with Akron's J.D. Brookhart. Fifteen starters return, including tailback Eugene Jarvis, or as he likes to be called, [Captain Hembad](#). **Must-see game:** Sept. 19 vs. Iowa State. The Cyclones come to Dix Stadium looking to issue another beatdown to the team that ruined the school's acceptance of the [CBSsports.com Most Dominant College Mascot on Earth award](#). Does it get any better?

West

1. Western Michigan: The Broncos have a standout quarterback in Tim Hiller, a shifty running back in Brandon West and a good offensive line. But only four starters return on defense and the secondary is green. Here's why they get the nod over Central in the West, though: They get Buffalo and the Chippewas at home and their nonconference games are at Michigan, at Indiana and hosting Hofstra. Ten wins is a real possibility. **Must-see game:** Sept. 5 at Michigan. The Broncos head to Ann Arbor and look to take advantage of the rebuilding Wolverines.

2. Central Michigan: Applaud them for taking on all challengers, but their schedule is the biggest challenge. Road games at Arizona, Michigan State and Boston College don't help the Top 25 cause. A three-game stretch in October where the Chips go to Kalamazoo, Bowling Green and BC will be a big-time challenge. Coach Butch Jones says it best, "everybody has to play above and beyond their potential." Keep an eye on star wide receiver Antonio Brown, who has arguably the best [profile page headshot](#) in college football. **Must-see game:** Oct. 3 at Buffalo. The Chippewas travel to Buffalo in what many are predicting will be a preview of the MAC title game.

3. Northern Illinois: Clearly 2007 was an aberration. The MAC's most consistent program this decade, the Huskies rebounded nicely in 2008 and even found their way into the Independence Bowl. Expect similar results despite a tough schedule that includes two Big Ten opponents on the road. The offense isn't where the defense is, but the defense isn't where the kicking game is. That's because it's a one-man gang known as Mike Salerno handling all duties involving the foot. He was all-MAC last season, and he's our pick for top kicking honors this season. **Must-see game:** Nov. 27 at Central Michigan. The Huskies finish their season visiting the Chips, where they'll look to avenge a 33-30 OT loss last season and throw their hat into the West title ring.

4. Toledo Rockets: Life after longtime coach Tom Amstutz begins in northwest Ohio. First-year coach Tim Beckman has senior quarterback Aaron Opelt at his disposal and safety Barry Church, who is [just plain crazy](#) good. Keep an eye on 6-5 receiver Stephen Williams, who brings down anything thrown within his area code. **Must-see game:** Sept. 19 vs. Ohio State. While the Rockets upset Michigan last season, don't expect the same as they "host" the Buckeyes in Cleveland.

5. Eastern Michigan: New coach Ron English doesn't have a bare cupboard as his offensive line has some depth, his top running back returns and disrupter Brad Ohrman is back on defense. But the season will hinge on the progress of

Andy Schmitt, who looks to solidify his place alongside LeFevour and Hiller in the state's quarterback conversation. "It's a very talented group [of quarterbacks]," said CMU's Jones. "We have the greatest respect for both those individuals [Hiller and Schmitt] and what they've done for their institutions. They are good character individuals, just great people, great representatives of their schools." **Must-see game:** Sept. 19 at Michigan. English returns to Ann Arbor, where he was the defensive coordinator under Lloyd Carr.

6. Ball State: From flirting with the top 10 last season to last in the West? Coach Brady Hoke is gone, as is quarterback Nate Davis and a slew of other All-MAC recipients. It's a rebuild job for new coach Stan Parrish, who will rely on redshirt freshman Kelly Page to keep things afloat. The team does have defensive lineman Brandon Crawford, who comes from the same town that produced a slew of football players. **Must-see game:** Oct. 24 at Eastern Michigan. The Cardinals head to Eastern Michigan in a battle to avoid last in the division.

Talk Back

brbradford August 11, 2009 7:39 pm Log-in to rate: Score: 141
 Reputation:96
 Level:Superstar
 Since:Sep 30, 2008
Everything MAC
 After 5 bowl teams, a few wins against the Big-Ten, and Ball State's undefeated regular season and rise to 12th in the BCS, this year the MAC could be even more exciting than last year. Dan LeFevour and Central Michigan have everything in the making to be a potential BCS buster for the Mid-American Conference. I see the MAC shaking down a little differently than Eric Kay predicts.

My ...(more) [Reply to this thread](#)

parkernutws05 August 12, 2009 3:56 am Log-in to rate: Score: 153
 Reputation:91
 Level:All-Star
 Since:May 18, 2008
Lefevour for President
 More and more in the NFL they are looking for the mobile quarterback, I dont watch alot of MAC football but from what I have seen Lefevour is a legitimate pro prospect. Everything I have read there is no mention of arm strength being an issue. He is smart hardworking guy who has gotten better every year and he did not play quarterback until his senior year of high school. H ...(more)
[Reply to this thread \(1 reply\)](#)

MadMitch August 11, 2009 9:34 pm Log-in to rate: Score: 112
 Reputation:96
 Level:Superstar
 Since:Jan 28, 2008
Kay's a Redhen
 Kay your MiamiOH Redhen education is showing..... you're an idiot..... even about your own league.
 How can you call WMU the most complete team in the West when they only return one starter on defense and only 9 overall compared to CMUs 16 returning starters?
 No way BSU goes from 1st to last in the West..... not with the success they have had on the recruiting trail. ...(more)
[Reply to this thread](#)

MadMitch August 11, 2009 10:05 pm Log-in to rate: Score: 113
 Reputation:96
 Level:Superstar
 Since:Jan 28, 2008
Serious?
 LeFevour thinks he's going to get an invite to New York? Maybe for Letterman's Stupid Human Tricks.
 He's a very good college QB, but he will not be with the group invited to New York I guarantee it. Heck... he won't get drafted as high as Nate Davis either. LeFevour is very good, but he is not a NFL QB. He doesn't have the arm strength. He's best on the ru ...(more)
[Reply to this thread \(6 replies\)](#)

MadMitch August 11, 2009 10:22 pm Log-in to rate: Score: 100
 Reputation:96
 Level:Superstar
 Since:Jan 28, 2008
Kay's East
 The more I read this article..... the more I hope Kay is working for free.
 The Redhens have no chance against UK or UC. Both games will be beatdowns for the Redhens.
 The Victory Bell is a trinket to be "hosted"? How about hoisted there genius? Doesn't matter..... the trinket is staying with UC.
 When you were at MiamiOH..... did ...(more)
[Reply to this thread \(5 replies\)](#)

johnnyzip84 August 11, 2009 3:10 pm Log-in to rate: Score: 97
 Reputation:92
 Level:All-Star
 Since:Mar 13, 2008
Zips Will Explode to the Top
 You mean to tell me that ONE of UA's returning 4 offensive lineman didn't make your 1st team? This gaffe will be exposed during the season. You can count on it. The Zips open up the Info against Morgan St on Sept 12 by the way. I'm not sure how you missed THAT one. Go Zips!!!
 10-3 and MAC Champs!
[Reply to this thread](#)

teos7 August 11, 2009 2:00 pm Log-in to rate: Score: 81
 Reputation:97
 Level:Superstar
 Since:Sep 12, 2007
Lefevour the real deal
 I was fortunate enough to see LeFevour in person two years ago and he is as good as Pat White.
[Reply to this thread \(5 replies\)](#)

larojoes August 12, 2009 4:01 am Log-in to rate: Score: 64
 Reputation:89
 Level:All-Star
 Since:Jun 26, 2007
Along with the other blunders mentioned here...
 ...is that the "writer" misspelled "dependent." Is this the best CBS can do for journalists? Or is it just an indication that hack jobs are the order of the day in corporations? Jesus Christ. Pathetic.
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