

[After back-to-back 2-9 seasons, UMaine football coach says 2024 will be different](#)

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By Sam Canfield

For each of the past two seasons, the University of Maine football team has finished with a 2-9 record and parted ways with its starting quarterbacks — Joe Fagnano in 2022 and Derek Robertson in 2023 — who left Orono through the transfer portal.

Needless to say, Maine's flagship college football program is on the hot seat, and third-year head coach Jordan Stevens recognizes the instability his team has endured.

"We need to have less surprises of what we're getting out of our team," Stevens said on Wednesday. "It's the sense of urgency going back to [the start of] spring practice — we can't beat ourselves."

Entering the second half of Stevens' four-year, \$980,000 tenure, UMaine's fanbase is desperate to see improvement on the gridiron, and Stevens is confident that his team will turn the corner this season. Specifically, the former Black Bear cited a stronger running game and team identity as reasons for optimism headed into August.

Last season, UMaine ranked 119th of 122 Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) schools in rush yards per game (79.7), and 115th in yards per carry (3.01), resulting in a predictable offensive attack that was exacerbated by Robertson's inability to run the ball (-104 yards in 29 attempts).

To replace [Robertson](#), Stevens landed fifth-year quarterback [Carter Peevy](#) of Mercer, who ran for 324 yards and 12 touchdowns last year, in addition to throwing for 2,284 yards and 11 touchdowns en route to a 9-4 quarterback record.

[In the backfield](#), UMaine has added fifth-year Jaharie Martin (5-foot-11, 230 pounds) of Montana State via the transfer portal, and will return three of its four most productive running backs: sophomore Tristen Kenan (688 yards and six TDs in 137 touches last year), fifth-year Tavion Banks (189 yards in 46 touches) and sophomore Brian Santana-Fis (112 yards in 27 rushing attempts).

"We need to be more balanced on offense and have a run game that can be sustainable throughout the season," Stevens said. "Unlike before, we have the ability to run the football with our running backs and quarterbacks. What that looks like is to be determined, but we're closer to that answer than we have been in the past two years."

Stevens added that UMaine's starting quarterback is yet to be named, saying "we have a great quarterback room." Additionally, Kenan left the team in early spring due to personal issues, and is not listed on UMaine's roster. He is expected to return prior to the end of training camp.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding Peevy and Kenan's roles, Stevens maintains that the team is in a better spot now than it was this time last year.

“We needed to have more answers going into camp, and we do this year. Roster management is a big piece of it — we’ve been able to do the majority of our offseason training with our team intact,” Stevens said. “We put the roster together [earliest] this year. We’re in the best place we’ve been.”

Peevy committed to UMaine in January, roughly one month after Robertson entered the portal.

Robertson had previously served as Fagnano’s backup for two years before assuming the starting spot for one season, and Fagnano had started for UMaine for four seasons before transferring to the University of Connecticut in 2023.

“I’m optimistic about the people we have here, and them being difference makers. Our players are embracing each other and truly understand how we’re gonna play,” Stevens said. “Any game we go into, we’re always gonna come out on top in terms of physicality, and in terms of execution.”