

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN  
**TIGER KICKOFF: Maty Mauk  
is ready for his close-up**



MISSOURIAN/KEVIN COOK

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COLUMBIA — The Maty Mauk experiment effectively ended in Bloomington, Ind.

A few days after Missouri's 45-28 thumping of the Indiana Hoosiers on Sept. 21, coach Gary Pinkel was asked why his redshirt freshman quarterback didn't get his typical first-half series.

"In the heat of the battle, we just forgot," Pinkel said.

The plummet from potential starting quarterback to zero meaningful playing time was swift. And by this year's fifth game, senior James Franklin had erased all doubt that he was just as good or better than the sophomore version of himself who tossed 21 touchdowns and ran for 15 more.

Mauk watched from the sideline.

The 20-year-old was officially in the running to take Franklin's job until Aug. 15, but by then, the competition was somewhat of a joke. The young gun had struggled mightily in fall scrimmages, while Franklin made fewer and fewer mistakes as the season opener neared.

"He's really developed as a leader of this offense," Pinkel said of Franklin. "And we feel he's ready to be the difference-maker he was before all of the health challenges he dealt with last season."

Flash forward to this past Saturday in Athens, Ga.

Up by two points early in the fourth quarter of an eventual 41-26 upset victory, the Tigers were driving to extend its lead. Franklin, having another notable day in the pocket, rolled out to his left. The senior flipped the football out of bounds just as two Georgia Bulldogs smashed him to the ground.

Obviously hurt, Franklin shook his right arm, but he remained in the game for one more play — a curious scamper from the middle of the field to the sideline without being touched. The Tigers called timeout while doctors attended the senior.

Suddenly, all eyes were on No. 7.

"At first, I didn't know what was going on," Mauk said. "Nothing was going through my mind like, 'I'm going in.'"

Franklin laughed at the memory.

"It's funny because when I went off, he looked over at me like, 'Hey, what's up?'" Franklin said.

Quarterbacks coach Andy Hill told Mauk to start warming up, and the offensive linemen walked over to him and put their hands on his pads.

"Go out there and be you," they told Mauk. "Nothing else. Be calm. Be relaxed and just do what you do best."

Then, Mauk trotted onto the field to run the offense. Georgia had scored 16 straight points, and the crowd at Sanford Stadium was as loud as it would

get all day. If Mauk could not convert in the third-and-six situation, the Bulldogs would potentially turn around and completely erase what was once an 18-point lead for the Tigers.

"I got there, I gave 'em the play, and I took a deep breath," Mauk said. "Then I said, 'It's go time. I've got to be me.' That's what I did for the rest of the game, and I felt good about it."

The new quarterback took the snap and scampered to his left for 6 yards. First down.

Two plays later, Mauk lateraled the ball to wideout Bud Sasser, who connected for a 40-yard touchdown to L'Damian Washington. Missouri once again had the momentum, and Georgia failed to score again.

Its upset complete, the Tigers whooped its way off the field.

Franklin was one of the last players to get to the locker room, and he wasn't smiling. Doctors diagnosed him with a sprained shoulder, and Pinkel said he would be unavailable for at least three weeks.

Mauk was officially at the top of the depth chart.

### **Support system**

The last game Maty Mauk started was in Massillon, Ohio.

There were 10,329 people in attendance at Paul Brown Tiger Stadium for the 2011 Ohio Division II state championship between Kenton and Norwayne.

Mauk, the Kenton quarterback and two-time Gatorade Ohio Player of the Year, threw five touchdowns, but his final heave was intercepted at the goal line in a 48-42 loss.

"I know with the heart my guys have that we have a chance to score anytime we have the ball," Mauk said to local media after the loss that November.

Now, 1 1/2 seasons removed from his narrow state championship defeat, Mauk inherits another team with devastating scoring ability.

The Tigers have scored at least 38 points in all six victories, including a combined 92 points in the team's two Southeastern Conference road games. Franklin had plenty of weapons, including an NFL-ready trio of receivers (Dorial Green-Beckham, Marcus Lucas and Washington) as well as a threesome of speed backs (Henry Josey, Russell Hansbrough and Marcus Murphy).

Not to mention an offensive line that, while a little banged up, is much improved after its injury-riddled train wreck of a 2012 season.

"I know our receivers that are going to be in the game are some of the best in the country," Mauk said. "So I have all the confidence in them, and then our offensive line is doing great this year. We have confidence in each other. We're going to execute and do our thing."

Suffice to say that Mauk has help. And, if it's possible, he might have more assistance off the field than on it.

Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Chase Daniel texted Mauk with confidence boosters and good wishes as the Missouri plane touched down Saturday night, but another former college standout was also in the young quarterback's ear.

Mauk's older brother Ben was a record-setting quarterback at Kenton who threw for 31 passing touchdowns as a senior for Cincinnati in 2007.

In fact, Ben Mauk held the national high school records for passing yards and passing touchdowns before Maty Mauk's career totals (18,932 yards and 219 touchdowns) eclipsed him. The two are often compared for their sneaky rushing ability and pocket elusiveness, but the younger brother knows he has a lot to learn before he attains the same success at the NCAA level.

"We've already talked more in the last three days than we have in the last three weeks," Maty Mauk said. "So he's gonna be doing everything he can to help me."

"He gives me something to think about, and then when I go out there, I'm looking for it. Is the safety doing this? Is the corner doing this? Is he pressed? Stuff like that. It's more mental."

Franklin, hoping to return to health before the end of the season, knows he has to help Mauk through the tough SEC schedule.

He doesn't want to give too much advice, though.

"You definitely don't want to overdo it," Franklin said. "It's important and everything, but I don't want to overhype or make him think it's a bigger deal than it is."

Perhaps the best adviser thus far has been Green-Beckham, who urged Mauk to simply throw it in his direction when under stress — the 6-foot-6-inch receiver promised to make the play.

Fellow wideout Lucas isn't worried about the quarterback change. Chemistry isn't a problem.

"He is pretty quiet," Lucas said of Mauk. "But at the same time, he's a jokester when he gets to know you. He's one of our brothers, and he acts like it. He fits in with us, and we're definitely excited for him to be out there."

### **The game plan**

Andy Hill has seen them before.

The nervous wrecks. The scared sillies. The guys who wish they were anywhere but No. 2 on the depth chart after the starter goes down.

"I've been on the sideline when guys have been in panic situations," Hill said. "And they get cottonmouth and wide-eyed and like, 'Oh my gosh, what am I doing?'"

Hill, the quarterbacks coach, didn't see that Saturday in Athens.

"Maty came out, was very calm, got everything right, all the signals we were trying to do," Hill said. "I think it's really going to help him going forward just because he has confidence."

When a new quarterback takes the reins, teams tend to shorten the playbook and proceed with extreme caution on offense. Not the Tigers.

"We're just gonna run our offense," Pinkel said. "He'll make some mistakes, like all kids do. But you don't want him to be a robot out there. You want him to be able to do what he does and play quarterback the way he plays quarterback."

Given his four-star recruit status as a pass-first quarterback and his plethora of passing records coming out of high school, Mauk's "way" of playing quarterback involves airing the ball out.

"That's why I'm here," Mauk said. "They recruited me to come do that."

The redshirt freshman doesn't plan to simply hand the ball off and control the game Saturday against Florida. He wants to make the same electrifying plays that Franklin has been making all season, be them with his arm or his legs.

"I feel like me and James like the same stuff," Mauk said. "He likes to run the ball. I like to run the ball. He likes to go deep, so we're real similar in that. I don't expect anything to change. We're going to play Missouri football this week."

Confidence aside, Mauk has a lot to prove to a Missouri fan base reenergized by an unexpected 6-0 start. Will he play like he did in the fourth quarter against Georgia? Or look lost on the field, as he did through most of spring and fall practice?

"I think he can do a really good job," Franklin said. "I know he needs the confidence and support from everyone on the team, and we're gonna give that to him."