



Sports

Next few games will say a lot about MSU, Gustavus football teams

The Minnesota State football team is off to a 3-1 start, somewhat surprising but certainly not shocking. The Mavericks have lost to the best team they've played (Northern Iowa), defeated a hapless team (Peru State) and beaten two teams (Central Missouri and Augustana) that are of similar talent.

Gustavus Adolphus is 3-0, again a little surprising but

not shocking. The Gusties have beaten two inferior teams at home and won an MIAC road game at St. Thomas, a program the Gusties have had trouble with recently.

Both programs are off to a nice start this season, but much more will be learned over the next few weeks than has been in the first month. We'll see if these good starts are an omen to future success or a mirage of victories against

lesser programs.

After taking a week off, the Mavericks now face the top two teams in the North Central Conference, playing at Nebraska-Omaha on Saturday and hosting North Dakota for homecoming Oct. 6.

The Mavericks are averaging nearly 400 yards of offense, only 53.8 yards by rushing, but Nebraska-Omaha and North Dakota will present serious challenges to Ben King and his corps of receivers. The play in the offensive line will

largely determine the team's success because if King gets time, those receivers will get open. Then it's up to King, who's made much better decisions since the four-interception game against Central Missouri.

Defensively, the Mavericks' defensive line will get tested by Nebraska-Omaha and North Dakota, who feature two of the North Central Conference's top three rushing teams. North Dakota, which has rushed for nearly 300 yards per game, is averaging 48.5 points.

Gustavus faces similar challenges over the next three weeks with games at St. Olaf (4-0), at Bethel (3-1) and at home against St. John's (4-0). The offense has been very good, averaging a league-best 338.3 yards while scoring 40.3 points. But St. John's ranks first in the MIAC in total defense, with Bethel third and St. Olaf fourth.

Offensively, St. Olaf is averaging 49.2 points and 566.8 yards of total offense,

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Bethel is a little less explosive at 448.5 yards and 36.0 points, and St. John's has its typical team, pounding teams for 47.5 points and 463.5 yards per game.

In the next three games, the Gusties will not likely reach its season average of 40.3 points,

but it's probably going to take 30 points or more to win.

The offense needs to help the defense by keeping the opponent on the sideline. Gustavus' spread offense will be tested because the flaw in that scheme is that it rarely leads to an edge in time of possession, unless you can control the line of scrimmage,

which will be much tougher in the next three games. The Gusties have been able to get ahead early in the first three games, but long, methodical, time-consuming drives aren't the norm when you average 45 passes per game.

The Mavericks are 3-1, and Gustavus is 3-0 ... there's plenty of reason for optimism for

those who follow each program. But if the teams still have winning records in three weeks, that will set up an exciting final month.

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