



# Sports



Pat Christman

Minnesota State safety Mike Hinton celebrates an interception with defensive coordinator Joe Klenderman during the Mavericks' season-opening victory over Central Missouri on Aug. 23.

## Hinton happy to finally be back on field

Mavericks safety returns after transfer questions keep him on sidelines

By Chad Courrier  
Free Press Staff Writer

**MANKATO** — Mike Hinton was having a great time, playing football at Minnesota State, making two interceptions and six tackles in a season-opening victory against Central Missouri.

He sent a text message to coach Jeff Jamrog after that first game, talking about how sweet the victory was and how he appreciated being in this program.

But before Hinton could play his next game, issues arose about his transfer from Ohio University, and acting cautiously, Minnesota State didn't allow Hinton to play for four weeks.

"It's been tough," Hinton said. "But being around the team, the coaches and my teammates haven't allowed me to get down. The hardest part has been game day, but I've been coming to practice, staying focused and trying to support the guys."

The senior returns to the lineup at strong safety today as the Mavericks host North Dakota in the annual homecoming game at Blakeslee Stadium. Kickoff is scheduled for 3 p.m.

"It's going to be exciting," Hinton said.

## HINTON: Wants to play pro football

Continued from Page D1

"Homecoming, first game back. A mistake was made (in my transfer), and I had to suffer. The only way I can get it back is to take it out on the field."

Hinton, who grew up in North Carolina, spent a year at prep school and was recruited by several programs in the Atlantic Coast Conference, including North Carolina, North Carolina State and Wake Forest. But he chose Virginia Tech, where he redshirted one season and got as high as backup cornerback the next.

"I wanted to move to where I could play right away," Hinton said. "I wanted an opportunity."

So he transferred to Ohio University, where he sat out one season and played cornerback the next. However, in the transfer from Virginia, a school that uses semesters, to Ohio, which uses quarters, his credits weren't rec-

ognized at his new school.

When Hinton decided to leave for another school that uses a semester system, Ohio coach Frank Solich, Jamrog's former boss, and defensive coordinator Carl Pellini, who held the same position with the Mavericks in Jamrog's first season, suggested that Hinton look at Minnesota State. So in late July, Hinton arrived in Mankato, eager for another chance to play.

"It's been great for me to find a place where I can settle in," he said. "When I got here, it didn't matter what I'd been through. I was excited to play with these guys, there's a lot of quality guys on this team that can play."

Jamrog, fascinated by Hinton's athleticism, saw a strong safety, big enough at 6-foot-2 and 210 pounds, to patrol the middle of the field, yet fast enough to get to the sidelines, using the speed that allowed him to win a state championship in the 300-meter hurdles back in North Carolina.

"He's the most athletic guy on our football team," Jamrog said. "Not having him these last four games has been tough, he's a tremendous leader, very vocal, and you think that maybe he could have made one or two plays that would have been the difference in a loss."

"It's good to get players with Division I experience in your program; it allows other players to see how you need to practice."

Hinton harbors dreams of playing professional football, and Jamrog said that Hinton caught the eye of the Vikings' scouts while they were in town for training camp. There will also be scouts watching him the next few Saturdays, perhaps even today.

"The Lord blessed me with ability and determination," Hinton said. "I look forward to the rest of this season, being a team guy and doing the right things. That will help my chances even more."