



Sports

Minnesota State spring football preview



John Gross

Minnesota State defensive coordinator Joe Klanderer puts linebackers Kevin Klug (front), Brandon Pete (middle) and Trey Roemhildt through an early morning workout this week at Myers Field House.

The defenseman

New coordinator Joe Klanderer wants players to 'take pride in playing smarter'

By Chad Courrier
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — Joe Klanderer started his coaching career at Minnesota State working with linebackers. Then he coached defensive linemen, and for the last two years, he's been the secondary coach.

Despite being just 28 years old and coaching for only five seasons, Klanderer feels he's ready to take on the role of defensive coordinator.

"It's a lot different," he said. "I have oversight of everybody on the defense instead of four or five guys. I have to make sure everything comes together. The role has changed, but the teaching, the preparation, the time, the effort, that remains the same."

About 80 players are expected to attend Minnesota State's first day of practice. Because of the weather, the practice will begin at 5:45 a.m. at Myers Field House.

"It feels different every year," Klanderer said. "But with a new job and a couple new staff members, it definitely feels different this time."

Klanderer replaces Ken Gordon, who along with defensive line coach Spence Nowinsky, took a new job at Emporia State. Brian Bell

(secondary) and Brett Dierson (defensive line) have joined the staff.

Head coach Jeff Jamrog considered outside candidates for the coordinator position, but he opted for Klanderer, who played defensive end for the Mavericks from 1997-2001.

"He understands all 11 positions," Jamrog said. "The best coaches are the best teachers, and he understands our concepts and how to teach them."

The Mavericks allowed 23.5 points and 368.8 yards per game, and Klanderer said the problems were mostly mental.

"I want players to take pride in playing smarter, to take pride in being more prepared," Klanderer said. "Last year, we didn't play hard, and that was evident on videotape. I think those problems have been addressed."

The defense returns four starters on the line: ends Randy Earl and Telem Bobmanuel and tackles Chris Brunkhorst and Spencer Dickinson. The linebackers are less experienced, with Tony Hunter still out following off-season knee surgery. Chad Breeden finished second last year with 63 tackles, and Trey Roemhildt made 34 tackles in a backup role. Brandon Pete played some as a true

freshman, while Kevin Klug — who contributed on special teams — will also get a look.

Safety Blake Freese, who led the team with 73 tackles, returns to anchor the secondary, which will include three new starters. Cornerbacks Thaddeus Gibbs, who cannot participate in spring practice, and Kelvin Rodgers each played in nickel situations.

Eric Taylor is a transfer from Saginaw Valley State. Ryan Weinzierl has the early edge at the other safety position.

"Our problems on defense had nothing to do with talent," Jamrog said. "We are focusing on accountability and dependability, being where you're supposed to be when you're supposed to be there."

Offensively, quarterback Ben King will be back this fall, but he won't be able to participate in spring practice. That leaves sophomore Ryan Fick and redshirt freshman Tyler Roebke to take the spring snaps. At running back, Julian Phipps is the only returning player with experience, gaining 71 yards on 24 carries with two touchdowns. Dante Steward and Craig Warminski were both red-shirted last season, and receiver Tory Chappell may get a look in the backfield.

Bryan Dalton — the team's leading receiver with

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JEFF JAMROG,
Minnesota State head football coach

73 catches — is back, along with freshman Chris Nowlin. Other receivers in the mix are Dante Shackelford, Marcus Hansen, Nick Haley, LaRon Wilder and Omar Balton.

Tight end Jeff Fielder — best known for returning a blocked field goal for the winning touchdown on the final play against South Dakota — is also back.

Jake Droessler, who started at right guard last season, is moving to center. Andy Schoonover — who missed all of last season because of an ankle injury — is at right guard, and Mike Ziedler is at left guard. Freshman Adrian Battles started all the games at left tackle, and redshirt freshman Jeremy Clark is at right tackle.

Josh Clausen will compete for a spot at center or both of the guard positions, and the Mavericks might have the biggest backup tackles in college football with at Eric Spiekerman at 6-foot-9, 405 pounds, and Matt Trinko at 6-8, 305.