



Sports

Strowder keeps getting better for Scarlets



MSU HOSTS PERU STATE TONIGHT



Pat Christman

Having moved from safety to outside linebacker, Minnesota State's Blake Freese finds himself in the opponents' backfield a lot more this season.

The Freese is on

Mavericks moved leading tackler closer to line of scrimmage this season

By Chad Courrier
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — Blake Freese made 73 tackles last season, 10 more than any of his Minnesota State football teammates, but when coach Jeff Jamrog and coordinator Joe Klanderman looked at the defense last spring, they felt that Freese could make even more stops if he was moved closer to the line of scrimmage.

"I was kind of 50-50 on it," Freese said. "I was moving closer to the ball so I could be in on a lot more plays, which was exciting, but I love playing safety. You

can fly around and hit people, you're a little more of a head hunter."

Freese will make his third start at outside linebacker when the Mavericks host Peru State in a nonconference game at Blakeslee Stadium. Kickoff is scheduled for 7 p.m.

In two seasons, the junior from Eden Prairie has become the clear leader of the Mavericks defense. As a freshman reserve, he made 13 tackles but showed enough promise to generate comparisons to Jared Ziemke and Adam Stroik, two of the best tackling safeties in program history.

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"He's built like a linebacker," Jamrog said. "We knew he could do some things as a safety in coverage, but we also think he has the ability to blitz and be around the football."

This summer, Freese added 5 to 10 pounds, bringing him up to 224 pounds on his 6-foot-3 frame. He continued to work on speed, agility and strength, knowing that being closer to the line means having to deal with

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MSU: Freese has recorded 19 tackles so far this season

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offensive lineman and fullbacks.

"As a safety, you're trained to not let anything behind you," Freese said. "As a linebacker, sometimes you just have to smash up in there to make the play."

Freese already leads the team with 19 tackles, including 4½ tackle for loss and a sack.

"He should be involved, with his blitzing, in some minus-yardage plays," Jamrog said. "If he reads his keys correctly and quickly, and defeats the block, he should have a

chance to make a lot of tackles."

The Mavericks enter tonight's game with a 1-1 record, having defeated Central Missouri in the opener before losing last week at Northern Iowa. It's a somewhat predictable start to the season, which Freese thinks can turn out pretty well.

"We could be 2-0," he said. "But that's in the past. There are some things we can learn from, we were right there (with Northern Iowa) until the fourth quarter. We made some mistakes, but everybody's giving a real good effort."