



STATE FOOTBALL, PAGE D2

Small-statured Wiest plays big role for West

Sports

Buisman's program finally breaks through

By Chad Courrier
Free Press Staff Writer

ASHLAND, OHIO — For the last five seasons, Minnesota State athletic director Kevin Buisman has been a member of the Division II football committee, serving as the national chairperson the last two seasons. In that time, he's witnessed 19 playoff games.

Finally, he gets to watch his own team compete in a postseason game.

"You look back, when we had a 0-11 season (in 2003), (the playoffs) seemed like a faraway place," Buisman said, watching the Mavericks go through a 45-minute walk-through today. "You look at your program and the different programs (in the playoffs) and you compare facilities and communities and universities ... I kept think we're not that far off.

"I think coach (Todd) Hoffner has come in and instilled an attitude that we could be successful, and that's

MSU football notebook

made the difference."

Buisman said that if Minnesota State had not qualified for the playoffs, he would have likely been working at Chadron, Neb., today, watching Chadron State host Wayne State.

"Our goal when we changed conferences, that we could improve the football program," he said. "I think we're a little ahead of schedule and exceeded everyone's expectation, except for Todd."

Weather outlook

The forecast calls for a temperatures around 40, with heavy rain and brisk winds, perhaps gusting to 40 mph, but Hoffner said the game plan won't change, unless the playing surface is poor. The stadium has artificial turf, though the field seems uneven.

"If we get inclement weather, we won't do anything dras-

tic," Hoffner said. "The surface is a bigger deal, but we'll stay true to form."

Still hasn't sunk in

Walking off the field after Friday's workout, senior linebacker Blake Freese said it still feels like the middle of the season, that it hasn't sunk in that the Mavericks are playing in the national tournament and today's game could be his last at Minnesota State.

"It didn't look (like I'd ever get to the post-season) those first two seasons," Freese said. "But last year, it started to look like it was possible. After the coaching change, I expected it."

Today's captains

Hoffner said that the captains for today will be seniors Freese, Jake Droessler and Chris Brunkhorst, as well as junior Ryan Fick. The coaching staff meets each week and chooses captains based on leadership shown that week.

"Ryan has been a great leader all season," Hoffner

said. "Jake's been a great leader, even when he didn't play (because of injury). Blake has been more assertive lately, and Chris is a quiet leader. When he does say something, he commands respect."

Injury update

Leading rusher Julian Phipps, who injured his ankle last week, will be a game-time decision today, according to Hoffner. But senior Donte Shackelford, who's missed three games with a shoulder injury, is expected to start.

The Mavericks are thin at tailback, as they have been all season. Freshman Jake Aberg had surgery on his foot two weeks ago, and freshman Nyakanga Arisa missed the team flight Friday. His status for future games will be decided by the team's Unity Council after the Mavericks return to campus.

Droessler (leg), linebacker Kevin Klug (shoulder) and cornerback Kelvin Rodgers (ankle) all are expected to play today.



Blake Freese



Jake Droessler