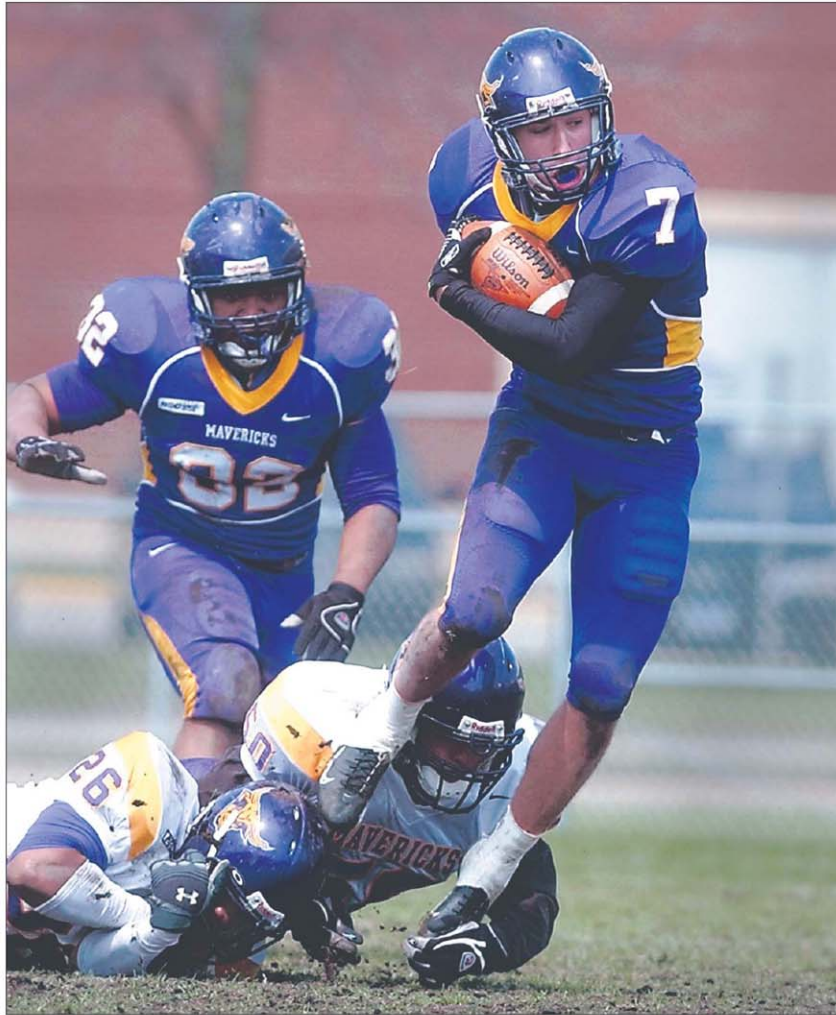




# Sports

## Mavericks cap spring practice with intrasquad game



Pat Christman

Minnesota State freshman Jake Aberg (7) rushed for 151 yards and three touchdowns in the annual spring football game Saturday at Blakeslee Stadium.

# MSU brings balance to '0'

### Running backs Shackelford, Aberg figure to be 1-2 punch in new-look offense

By Chad Courrier  
Free Press Staff Writer

**MANKATO** — In 16 seasons as offensive coordinator at Wisconsin-Whitewater, Stan Zweifel coached a 1,00-yard rusher 14 times. Twice, he had a 2,000-yard rusher, and in two seasons, he had two backs rush for more than 1,000 yards.

But when he came to Minnesota State a couple of months ago, he wasn't expecting to find much rushing talent, considering the pass-dominated offense of the last

few seasons.

"We have a very talented group of running backs," Zweifel said. "It's a deep position, they fit really well into what we want to do."

The Mavericks wrapped up spring practice Saturday with the annual intrasquad game at Blakeslee Stadium. The new-look, old-style offense, featuring a balance of rushing and passing, has been a work in progress as Zweifel tries to emphasize the running game.

"We're trying to develop physi-

cality," he said. "We want to show the kids what it's going to be like. Deep down, every player knows you have to run the football to win championships."

The runners to emerge so far this spring are senior Donte Shackelford and redshirt freshman Jake Aberg. Shackelford lined up at many positions last year, most often at receiver, where he caught 38 passes for 598 yards and eight scores. He rushed 40 times for 192 yards and three touchdowns.

"He is so great in space, and you can create more touches for him at tailback than you can at receiver," Zweifel said. "He has three things

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Photos by Pat Christmar

Minnesota State receiver Vincent Fleury makes a grab while getting hit by defensive back Myles Easter on Saturday.



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# Sports

## MSU: Aberg excels at scrimmage

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that I like: pure speed, explosiveness and he's tough."

Shackelford, 5-foot-11 and 185 pounds, has been getting more comfortable in the backfield, and his biggest problem has been getting to the line too fast.

"As a receiver, you know where you're supposed to be, and you try to get there as quickly as you can," Shackelford said. "I'm in a hurry to get the ball and get out of there. It takes time for the holes to open."

Shackelford, who split time this spring between football and track and missed Saturday's game to compete at the Drake Relays, isn't worried that size will be a factor. He's seen other backs his size succeed, and once he gets into the open field, speed is more important.

"It's not about size," he said. "You have to use your brain."

Aberg, 5-11 and 190 pounds from Winterset, Iowa, was redshirted last season, spending time with the scout team. While replicating the opponents' offense, he actually got more reps running the ball than the Mavericks' starters.

"I'm happy now that we get to run," Aberg said. "I don't have to pass-block all the time."

Zweifel said Aberg's strength are patience and visions, which he said are the toughest things to teach. In Saturday's spring game, Aberg rushed 14 times for 151 yards and three touchdowns, including scores from 66 and 33 yards.

"He just has a feel for the game," Zweifel said. "He has the innate ability to cut back, to feel the openings.



Minnesota State running back Jake Aberg (7) bulls through the defensive line during Saturday's spring game.

He could be real special, I'm excited about him."

Zweifel said that both backs could be on the field at the same time, maybe with Shackelford in the slot and Aberg in the backfield. He said that he hopes to run the ball 450 to 550 times next season, which might be too much for one back.

"Both guys have put themselves in position to be the No.1 back," Zweifel said. "You want to put your best 11 players on the field, and both bring something to the table."

The emphasis on the running game has also allowed the Mavericks to develop some depth. Junior fullback Ernest Walker, at 235 pounds, has looked good at tailback, as has senior Julian Phipps, who is coming off a knee injury. Redshirt freshman Craig Warminski has been bothered by a hamstring injury, but Zweifel is excited about his potential. Head coach Todd Hoffner said he was happy with the production of the backs, especially the show put on by Aberg on Saturday.

"We knew he was special," Hoffner said. "He has another gear, the top-end speed that you need to take it the distance. Right now, he and (Shackelford) are a tremendous 1-2 punch."

Hoffner said the biggest improvement in the team is with attitude.

"We're trying to change the culture, trying to develop winning ways," Hoffner said. "People have bought into what we're doing. We need to take that momentum into next fall. Nobody's keeping score right now."