

The Free Press



Friday,
October 7, 2005
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Sports

PREP FOOTBALL, PAGE D4

Helland has helped
Le Center to 5-0 start



MSU's frustrating season gets tougher with road game at South Dakota

To err is sportswriting, to forgive is the readers' option.

Last month, it seemed that the Minnesota State football team appeared to be ready to shed the nonconference cupcakes, ready to step up the level of its nonconference schedule, ready to compete with the bigger boys of Division II football.

Wrong. In fact, if anybody's got the phone number for the Oklahoma Panhandle State athletic director, it might not be too late to get that squad back on the schedule. Or Minnesota-Crookston. Or Macalester.

This season has fallen apart

faster than the Minnesota Vikings' Super Bowl hopes, with the optimism and enthusiasm after a 1-1 start replaced with the frustration and disappointment of four straight losses, each of which was a winnable game.



CHAD COURIER
Free Press

It's tough to find fault with the defense, which has often asked to be on the field too much, defending a short field. The Mavericks held high-powered St. Cloud State to just 18 points, though no team should ever make two touchdown drives in the fourth quarter on your home field.

The defense allowed just

three touchdowns to Minnesota-Duluth, the first of which came after a turnover deep in the Mavericks' end. The third touchdown came on a blocked punt.

The offense has been an enigma, with big-play talent unable to convert opportunities into consistent production. There have been breakdowns in the line, at quarterback, in the backfield, at the receiver position. Following an interception Saturday, the Mavericks had a first down at the Minnesota-Duluth 9 early in the third quarter, trailing 21-0. A touchdown in that spot certainly would have changed the momentum, given life to the home team, perhaps spark-

ing a comeback victory.

But there was no touchdown, no field goal. The offense left the field still trailing 21-0, with no momentum, no spark, no hint of a rally.

It's very clear that Minnesota State is at least another top-notch recruiting class away from turning around this program, which has slipped as low as at any other time in school history.

Now, the Mavericks head for South Dakota, taking on the highest-scoring team in the North Central Conference, one of the top offensive teams in all of college football and possibly the most confident. It's homecoming weekend at Vermilion, with a crowd of several thou-

sand expected to fill the DakotaDome.

It has all the makings of a very lopsided game.

But one of the characteristics of coach Jeff Jamrog's teams has been that the Mavericks usually play better when their chances of winning are slimmer. This team has been atrocious as a favorite, competitive as an underdog.

Which is good because the Mavericks are a huge underdog Saturday, much more so than anybody could have predicted just a month ago.

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