

New Minnesota State recruits get defensive coordinator all jacked up

You want to talk linebackers? Ken Gordon is your guy.

The exuberant Minnesota State defensive coordinator's eyes sparkle and his smile gets wider when you talk to him about linebackers.

Wednesday afternoon, as he pondered the list of high school players signing with the Mavericks, he was pumped up because there were four linebackers on that list.



CHAD COURIER
Free Press

"A linebackers needs three things," Gordon said.

"He has to be aggressive, he has to run and he has to play smart. I can teach them to play smart, but they need to have the other two."

Gordon knows a thing or two about linebacking. He was a standout for two seasons at Northwest Missouri State, earning all-conference honors and leading the



MSU defensive coordinator Ken Gordon has been coaching linebackers since 1998.

team to the national quarterfinals. He's been coaching linebackers since he got into the profession in 1998.

In two seasons with Minnesota State, he's already

coached two All-Americans, Adam Stroik and Jimmie Gunn. But in each case, he had only one season with those players.

"We'll be young (at linebacker), but that's great," Gordon said. "I get a chance to mold these players. I feel we have a real good future at linebacker."

"Football means something to these guys, it's important. (In the past), some of the guys were doing this as a way to pay for school or something to do

while you're here. When we lost last year, I think it hurt more for the young guys that it did for some of the older guys."

Last season's freshman class produced three defensive starters — lineman Chris Brunkhorst, safety Blake Freese and linebacker Tony Hunter — as well as a couple of reserves and a few redshirts that will likely contribute in the upcoming season.

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Hunter was the most noticeable, playing in all 11 games. He ranked ninth on the team with 42 tackles, which included six tackles for loss and 1½ sacks. He also made two interceptions, one of which he returned for a touchdown.

Of the 22 players who signed Wednesday, 10 are defensive players, a couple whom Gordon thinks could play right away. He's especially hyped about the four linebackers that he will work with very closely: Ryan Becker, John Jones, Kevin Klug and Brandon Pete.

Becker, who is 6-foot-2 and 225, is from Waukesha, Wis., where he made 124 tackles, 92 solos, his senior season. Jones, 6-0 and 210, holds the Oregon, Wis., record with 302 tackles in his career. Klug (6-2, 195) helped Caledonia reach the Class 2A championship game, making 95 tackles last season. Pete, who father Lawrence played in the NFL, made 102 tackles and 10 sacks last season at Millard West High School in Omaha.

Each player was recruited by another staff member, but Gordon was sure to meet them during the campus visit, put them through some drills and look into their eyes to see how important football was in their lives. They passed the "eye" test.

It wouldn't be surprising if all four play next season, though it would be nice to get a redshirt on them as well.

"We're going to be young, but I don't mind," Gordon said. "I love it. I look forward to the challenge."

The Mavericks defense made great strides last season, going from near the bottom of the North Central Conference up to near the top. The defense allowed 57 yards of offense less

than in 2004, with four more sacks and 10 more takeaways.

Yet the team floundered with a 2-9 record.

"We had the No. 2 defense in the conference, but that's not good enough," Gordon said. "It doesn't mean a thing is you don't get the W. I tell the guys if (the opposition) doesn't score, we win. I want to get to the point where it's hard to score a touchdown."

"Last year, we just didn't have the depth."

With each new recruiting class, depth becomes less of a concern. As each new linebacker comes to Minnesota State, Gordon gets more excited.

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