



Sports



John Cross

In his first season as a starter, sophomore safety Blake Freese leads the Minnesota State football team with 24 tackles.

Freese ready to learn from his mistake

Sophomore safety growing as a starter

By Chad Courrier
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MANKATO — Blake Freese knew what was coming. An all-out blitz left him in man-to-man coverage against an All-American tight end.

Freese, a sophomore safety at Minnesota State, read the pattern and saw the ball. He tried to cut underneath the tight end and go for the interception, but the pass was thrown perfectly, just inches above his hands, leading the Northwest Missouri State receiver into the end zone with a clinching touchdown as Freese was left behind, frustrated and disappointed.

"It was a mistake by me," Freese said. "I should have stayed on top of the route. I'm young, I'm learning. Hopefully, it won't happen again."

"That was such a big play, it gets to me every time I think about it. I know I'll be cognizant of that next time."

The next time could be tonight as the Mavericks (1-1) host Wisconsin-Oshkosh

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(1-0) in the final nonconference game of the season. Kickoff is scheduled for 6:30 p.m.

Freese came to Minnesota State after a successful career at Eden Prairie, and it was at that first campus visit that coach Jeff Jamrog knew he had a special player.

"He's a work in progress, he just needs snaps," Jamrog said. "He's a confident player. He needs to keep working on technique and assignments."

Freese played some as a

true freshman, participating on all of the special teams and getting some time at safety behind Kevin Adams, an all-conference player, making 13 tackles.

"I really busted my (butt) in the offseason because I knew with Kevin gone, I'd have to step up," Freese said. "That 2-9 season really got to everybody, and I wanted to make sure that I wasn't going to hurt the team."

So far, Freese has collected a team-high 12 tackles in each of the first two games, which is either a sign that he's a sure

tackler or that too many runners are breaking through the front seven.

"We do work our safeties into the run defense," Jamrog said. "(Freese) could play linebacker, and we gave that some thought. But he's like having an extra linebacker out there."

Freese gained 20 pounds this season, using an offseason weightlifting program to complement his speed and agility workouts. He's spending extra time watching film, learning how to better read the routes and tendencies of

the receivers.

He wants to do whatever it takes to avoid the mistake he made at Northwest Missouri State because he believes that the Mavericks are a championship-caliber team.

"I feel we have the talent to get a (championship) ring," Freese said. "That loss was like a kick in the (butt) because it shows we're not there yet. We know we have the ability to compete with any team, and we have to keep working hard. Hopefully, we'll get to play Northwest again (in the playoffs)."