

MASSIVE MAVERICKS



John Gross

At 6-foot-3 and 300 pounds, Jake Droessler (62) says he's as big as he wants to get. Not so for fellow freshmen Any Schoonover (68, 6-foot-4, 285) and Josh Clausen (74, 6-foot-3, 275), who want to supersize themselves more to meet the increasingly hefty demands of college line play.

Livin' large

Ever-bigger linemen are representative of football's rush to girthness

By **Brian Ojanpa**
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MANKATO — When Spence Nowinsky played football at Minnesota State University in the early 1990s, players weighing 275 pounds were regarded as leviathan loads.

Now, a lineman of that girth might be regarded as borderline anorexic.

That's hyperbole, of course, yet not without a basic truth:

"It's scary how big kids are get-

ting," says Nowinsky, the Mavericks offensive line coach.

The supersizing of football players continues unabated. Part of it is simple evolution. People in general keep getting bigger. But another part centers up on the job requirements of the sport, particularly as they pertain to linemen.

These days, keeping up with the Joneses across the line of scrimmage typically means achieving a weight that begins with the numeral three.

This season, Minnesota State has

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four or five players flirting with 300 pounds. And that's middling by North Central Conference standards.

The University of North Dakota's 300-Pound Club includes two linemen weighing in at 322 and 330.

Among St. Cloud State's six 300-pound-plus players is a building disguised as a football player — 6-foot-7, 350-pound Adam Koss. And here's the kicker: He's a freshman.

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LINEMAN: 'How big are these kids going to be in four years?'

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"How big are these kids going to be in four years?" wonders Nowinsky, who says MSU's freshmen this year include several in the 6-foot-4, 290-pound range.

Maverick freshman Jake Droessler from Storm Lake, Iowa, is 6-foot-3, 300 pounds, and recalls the first time he saw the scale register that weight.

"I said, 'Oh, no.' I thought that was a little too big by 10 or 15 pounds."

And now?

"I don't think so," says Droessler, who thinks he's maintaining his quickness at that weight. Even so, he doesn't want to tempt fate by trying to get bigger.

Not so for fellow freshmen Andy Schoonover and Josh Clausen.

Schoonover, from Boyceville, Wis., is 6-foot-4, 285 pounds, and wants to get up to 310, a weight he thinks he can handle without sacrificing foot quickness.

Clausen, from Storm Lake, Iowa, is 6-foot-3 and 275 pounds, a weight he hopes to leave in the dust as soon as possible.

"I want to get as big as I can — 310, 320," Clausen says. "But if I got up to 310 and couldn't move, I'd cut weight so I could still have the quick feet."

Quickness is the key here, because large size becomes quickly devalued if speed is its

casualty.

However, Nowinsky says he doesn't see that happening among the crops of ever-larger players.

"Big kids now are moving so much better," Nowinsky says. "The big, slow high school kid can't play college football."

Never mind the pros, where there's a term for mere 300-pound linemen — unemployed.

In the early 1980s, there were only two dozen 300-pound players in the NFL. Now there are more than 350.

In 1973, the Buffalo Bills offensive line averaged 255 pounds per man. This season's line averages 327.

All of which conjures dizzying thoughts in Nowinsky.

"If we're getting 6-foot-4,

290-pound guys at a Division II school, what are the Division I schools getting?" he says.

Here's what just one — Texas A&M — has on its plate this season: 18 players over 300 pounds, the heaviest weighing 355.

In the surreal-weight world of football lineman, poundage has become relative. One Texas A&M freshman, 6-foot-5 Kellen Heard who weighed 381 pounds last spring, has trimmed off 53 pounds.

Now he says he feels rejuvenated at a "sleek" 328 pounds.

Meantime, MSU's Schoonover, Droessler and Clausen confess to a common wish: They'd all like to be taller. That way, they could efficiently carry even more size.