



# Sports

## Mavericks' season-opening victory showcased the good, bad, ugly



**CHAD  
COURRIER**  
The Free Press

Minnesota State football coach Jeff Jamrog summed it up quite accurately, following last week's 34-16 victory over Truman State.

"Things got a little uglier than we wanted," he said. "But we made some plays that separated us from Truman."

For those of you who didn't venture out on that stormy night, the season-opener last

week at Blakeslee Stadium did offer a little something for the swan and the ugly duckling.

The Mavericks scored offensively, defensively and on special teams, a rare feat that usually leads to victory. Quarterback Ben King didn't show much rust from the year away, completing 23 of 32 passes for 283 yards, the second-highest total of his

career. King, who spent last season working on a curveball, completed 16 of 18 throws during a stretch in the middle two quarters.

Senior receiver Tyrell Smith, one of the few known entities on this team, was electrifying, returning a punt 94 yards for a score and catching five passes, including a touchdown.

Newcomer Bryan Alberty was as good as advertised. The scatback rushed for 26 yards and caught six passes for 95 yards and two scores.

The defense gave up some yards, but also came up with two interceptions, two fumble recoveries and four sacks. Given it

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was an unfamiliar opponent, with a first-year quarterback the Mavericks hadn't seen much on film, it's too early to find fault with the tacklers.

Despite the weather delays, the Mavericks didn't have many lapses, which could have been expected, especially in a season-opener.

Kickers Jason Tompkins and Ben Spencer and punter Jonathan Christensen all had strong games despite a tricky wind.

There were concerns, also.

Minnesota State opened the game with 18 straight pass plays, which is OK when playing Truman State, but that kind of imbalance won't cut it in the North Central Conference. Minnesota State tried to just 11 rushing attempts, 10 of which came in the fourth quarter, and gained

just 28 yards.

The Mavericks were called for 14 penalties, which cost them 170 yards. There were blocking fouls, illegal motion, too many players on the field, pass interference — some physical, some mental. That many infractions will turn victories into losses against better competition.

The Mavericks converted just once on seven third-down plays, another sign that the team relied too heavily on its passing attack by missing on short-yardage or leaving too many third-and-longs.

Truman State, an average team at best, rushed for 275 yards, but it wasn't the smash-mouth, we're-bigger-and-stronger-than-you style that past opponents have used against Minnesota State. According to Jamrog, the problem was more schemes and assignments than power,

but it's still troublesome considering that the Mavericks will face far better rushing teams over the next three months.

One game does not a season make, but one victory goes a long way toward erasing the hangover from last season's 2-9 performance. King looks like he might be worth at least two or three more victories, and the defense seems bigger and faster with certainly more depth.

The victory was important in that it let players who were here last year forget about the past, and for the new players to the program, they can believe what they were told during the recruiting process.

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