



## MSU OPENS SPRING FOOTBALL PRACTICE TODAY



Pat Christman

Minnesota State quarterback Ryan Fick spent his redshirt season signaling plays from the sideline and running the scout team at practice.

## MSU: All QBs are learning new offense

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the only returning player from that group, having played in seven games and made four starts last season.

Bryant completed 78 of 133 passes for 806 yards and five touchdowns with three interceptions. He also rushed for 94 yards and four scores.

However, Bryant is not the only quarterback at practice who has started games for the Mavericks. Ben King returns to the squad after taking off last season to concentrate on baseball. As a freshman and sophomore starter, he completed 317 of 589 passes for 3,922 yards with 24 touchdowns and 21 interceptions, helping the team post a 6-5 record in 2004.

"Last year, we didn't have a quarterback who had ever played in a Division II football game," Jamrog said. "Now, Josh Bryant has had hundreds of snaps under his belt, and Ben King has had thousands of snaps under his belt.

"And we also have a young, hungry quarterback who has paid his dues on the scout team and done a great job. It will be interesting to see who the best decision-maker is because they all have the tools."

Fick came to Minnesota State as a highly regarded recruit, having led his Bettendorf (Iowa) team to the Class 4A state championship, throwing for a record 301 yards in the final game. He passed for 25 touchdowns with just seven interceptions.

Fick also has good genetics. His father Rob was the team MVP and starting quarterback at Iowa in 1974, and his sister Lynsey was a state champion in tennis and later

played at Purdue.

"If I didn't think I could (be the starter), I wouldn't be here," Fick said. "If given the opportunity, any of the quarterbacks can do it. It's up to the coaches (to choose the starter)."

All of the quarterbacks are learning a new offense under new coordinator Dan Ragsdale, schemes that should be more wide open than last season. Ragsdale said he's not looking for the best passer, he's looking for the best quarterback, a player that will make the right choices once live action begins. That's why every snap in practice will be graded.

"It's like (last) fall all over again," said Fick, who gained some experience last season by signaling plays from the sideline and traveling with the team on road games. "You always have to prove yourself, and you're always trying to improve. I have a lot more confidence now, but I have to be patient.

"I'm trying to take advantage of everything. You might not get that many opportunities, but I'll just keep my mouth shut and listen. You never learn from talking."

Jamrog said he's certain one of the quarterbacks will emerge over the next 29 days, and he wants to have a definite depth chart when the team opens the season Aug. 24 at home against Truman State.

"There will be a lot of learning from the quarterbacks because this is a pretty sophisticated offense," Jamrog said. "The guys have done a good job of getting in the playbook, but it's one thing to study it and another to take it out on the football field."

## Quarterback quandary

For second straight spring, QB position is area of concern

*"It will be interesting to see who the best decision-maker is because they all have the tools."*

By Chad Courrier  
 Free Press Staff Writer

**MANKATO** — There were times last season when Ryan Fick might have been the best quarterback at Minnesota State's practices, but he was redshirting.

As the season progressed, coach Jeff Jamrog said there were times when he would have liked to throw Fick into a game, looking for consistent play at that position.

"We had a scrimmage in the middle of the season, and he made some excellent

plays," Jamrog said. "Guys on the sideline were like, 'wow.' At times, I wondered how he would do (in a game)."

"But it was in the best interest of the program and Ryan to take the redshirt."

The Mavericks begin spring practice today and there are 13 more practices scheduled before the annual spring game April 29 at 2 p.m. at Blakeslee Stadium. For the second straight season, quarterback is a position of concern for the Mavericks.

"Quarterback always draws a lot of attention," Jamrog said. "Most of the

time, as your quarterback goes, so goes the rest of the team. I'm excited about all of the candidates."

Inconsistent quarterback play plagued the Mavericks' offense last season, and there were three players who took snaps: Jamie VanDenElzen, Joshua Bryant and D.J. Porter. Bryant, who played two seasons at Mesabi Community College, is

JEFF JAMROG,  
 Minnesota State head football coach

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### Minnesota State's quarterback candidates



**Joshua Bryant**  
**Personal:** Senior, 6-3, 206 pounds  
**Positives:** Played in seven games last season, starting four. Most athletic of the group, passing for five touchdowns and rushing for four.  
**Negatives:** Didn't take control of the position when given a chance last season. Struggled with consistency.



**Ryan Fick**  
**Personal:** Redshirt freshman, 6-0, 195 pounds  
**Positives:** Intangibles, confidence and composure. Father was starting quarterback at Iowa. Played on a state championship team at Bettendorf, Iowa.  
**Negatives:** Has never played a college game.



**Ben King**  
**Personal:** Senior, 6-1, 185 pounds  
**Positives:** Experience. Started 20 games as freshman and sophomore, leading Mavericks to winning season in 2004.  
**Negatives:** Did not play football last season to concentrate on pitching for baseball. Still splitting time between sports this spring.



**Cohlman Rutschow**  
**Personal:** Sophomore, 6-2, 200 pounds  
**Positives:** Appeared in one game last season. Seems to be picking up new offense quickly.  
**Negatives:** Still lacks experience. Appears to be running fourth in four-player competition.