

MSU MISSES INJURED LINEBACKER HUNTER



Pat Christman

Minnesota State linebacker Tony Hunter (front) missed all of spring football practice, and his 2007 season is in jeopardy because of a knee injury, so he's trying to encourage and help teammates, such as defensive end Telemo Bobmanuel.

Sidelined

Severe knee injury may cost two-year starter entire 2007 season

By Chad Courrier
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — Saturday's 15th and final football practice of the spring was pretty much the same for Tony Hunter. The Minnesota State sophomore slapped some backs, shouted encouragement and offered advice to a few of the younger players.

The white bandage on his knee snuck out from the bottom of his black shorts, and his limp was noticeable. It was a tough, physical spring practice period for the Mavericks, but it was just as tough for Hunter, whose surgically repaired knee kept him on the Blakeslee Stadium sidelines.

"It hurts not to be out there," Hunter said. Hurt is something that Hunter had had to live with for the last six months. Through five games last season, the sophomore middle linebacker was one of the Mavericks' leading tacklers, with 16 solos and 15 assists, 5.5 tackles for loss and a sack.

But against North Dakota, he suffered a serious knee injury that not only cost him the final five games last season, but it might take away 2007, as well.

"If he plays (next season), that will be a bonus," coach Jeff Jamrog said. "It's tough to count on him, coming back from that injury."

Hunter tore two ligaments and the patella tendon. The damage required two surgeries because each required different rehab. In October, he had his patella tendon and medial collateral ligament repaired because to rehab those injuries, his knee had to be immobilized. In February, he had surgery to repair the anterior cruciate ligament, and the rehab from that surgery required that he bend the joint.

Now, he spends 2½ hours each day in the training room, working on strengthening and stabilizing his knee.

"The doctors and trainer say that I might be ready (by fall)," Hunter said. "But 100 percent? I don't want to be another Culpepper."

Hunter said he has watched the case of former Minnesota Vikings quarterback Daunte Culpepper, who suffered a similar injury in 2005. Culpepper, who was traded to Miami, tried to come back early last season, ended up needing additional surgery and may have put

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HUNTER: Rehabs the knee, aids his teammates

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his career in jeopardy.

"I've got two years left to play, and I don't want to go out there and injure it again and not play at all," Hunter said. "If I sit out a year and come back, I know that will

hurt. I want to do what's best for the team, not just me."

In Hunter's place, sophomore John Jones has had a good spring and would probably fill the middle. Freshman Brandon Pete would also be a possibility, but he's missed the spring with a back injury.

"It's difficult when you have a two-year starter not playing," Jamrog said. "It kills competition."

So Hunter waits and rehabs and tries to remain positive. He said he'll return to his home in Kansas City for a week once the semester

ends, then he'll spend the rest of the summer in Mankato, either getting ready to play next season or helping his teammates prepare.

"I understand the whole defense, so I do what I can to help," Hunter said.