

SPORTS

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN BONESKE

Gophers quarterback Mitch Leidner (7) throws a pass while receiving blocking protection from left tackle Josh Campion (65) in last Saturday’s home game against Northwestern.

Gophers keep following their winning formula

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Most of what Minnesota does well is not the glamorous part of football. Sure, there are the occasional touchdown returns, long runs by David Cobb and crisp play-action completions by quarterback Mitch Leidner, but the Gophers have a decidedly old-style formula in an age of no-huddle, spread-out, high-scoring offenses. Minnesota plays sound defense and tries to grind the game out by keeping the ball on the ground as much as possible. And halfway through coach Jerry Kill’s fourth season, signs abound that it can be a recipe for Big Ten success, perhaps good enough to keep the Gophers (5-1, 2-0) in the West Division race all the way to the end of the season. They host Purdue this weekend and then go to Illinois, so they’re in good position to remain in first place until at least mid-November. Granted, the book can’t be close to being written until after the daunting final run of Iowa, Ohio State, Nebraska and Wisconsin, three of the five highest-scoring teams in the conference. The Gophers, though, have become a consistent, aggressive and reliable group under defensive coordinator Tracy Claeks. They’re allowing an average of 18.7 points per game, fourth in the Big Ten and tied for the 15th among the 125 FBS teams. “You’re seeing more explosive offenses,” defensive tackle Cameron Botticelli said, “and the most important thing is to not use that as a crutch because at the end of the day if you say, ‘Well, they run a hurry-up,’ or ‘They have these great receivers,’ you’re making an excuse to not perform and we won’t do that here.” The Gophers are right in line with one of the major goals Claeks has for them: Limit opponents to 17 points or fewer each game. Never mind that fewer than 6 percent of teams in the country average lower than that. “I still believe in the whole idea it’s better to over-demand than under-demand,” Claeks said. “You get better results.” The Gophers are tied for first in the conference with nine interceptions, a hallmark of the deep, speedy secondary that has become one of the team’s true strengths. “This is not something that just happened out of nowhere,” cornerback Brian Boddy-Calhoun said. Though they’re last in the Big Ten with just 11 sacks, the defensive line has withstood a season-ending right knee injury for tackle Scott Ekpe and received plenty of help from a handful of true freshmen. Linebacker Damien Wilson was even named the conference’s co-defensive player of the week, a sign of progress for that young position group. Finding faster defensive backs was one of the staff’s recruiting targets since taking over, and the Gophers have been able to find some standouts who weren’t sought after by other Big Ten or major-conference schools. Generally, programs in the northern states are having an increasingly tougher time attracting the elite-level athletes as population shifts continue southward. Given the raw weather Big Ten teams often play in down the stretch, a ball-control offense and a stingy defense can still be a viable combination in this conference. This, remember, is a team that beat San Jose State last month despite completing only one pass and playing without Leidner because of knee and toe injuries. The sophomore has shown significant strides since returning, including last week’s 24-17 win over Northwestern, taking advantage of the focus on Cobb and turned several play-action fakes into first-down throws. “I think he’s feeling good, feeling better,” Kill said. “I always say, if you feel good, you play good.”

GIRLS SWIMMING AND DIVING

Broncos fly past Nighthawks

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Nine first-place and seven runner-up finishes in the 11 swimming events helped lift the International Falls girls swimming and diving to a 66-28 road dual meet victory Tuesday against Northeast Range/Ely. The Broncos, who won all three relays and had six individual winners, went 1-2 in five events with swimmers being shuffled around in races they normally don’t compete in. Falls’ Emma Misner and Emily Saari took the



Emma Misner



Claire Herzig

top-two places in the 50-yard freestyle in respective times of 28.59 and 30.95 seconds. In the 100 freestyle, the Broncos’ Claire Herzig and Tayler Hebner went 1-2 in 1:02.61 and 1:05.47,

respectively. Herzig added a runner-up finish in the 200 individual medley (2:47.25). Falls’ Abby Kostiuik, the school record holder in the 100 butterfly and 100 backstroke, won the 500 freestyle (6:24.94) with Misner finishing runner-up in 6:34.56. Kostiuik, Hebner, Misner and Herzig won the 200 freestyle relay (1:55.72), while Josie Bates, Carolann Stone, Hannah Kruse and Anna Earley placed runner-up in 2:00.28. Hebner, Stone, Kostiuik and Abby Auran finished first in the 400 freestyle re-

lay (4:25.71), while Hannah Kruse, Reina Goulet, Saari and Earley placed second in 4:43.6. Saari, Herzig, Kostiuik and Misner won the 200 medley relay (2:11.15). Auran won the 200 freestyle (2:27.38) and also placed second in the 100 backstroke (1:18.45). Stone won the 100 butterfly (1:15.81), while Earley placed first in the 100 breaststroke (1:21.38). The Broncos’ next meet is set for Oct. 23 at Mesabi East, prior to their final home meet of the season Oct. 28 against Virginia.

VIKINGS-BILLS PREVIEW

Schools of thought vary for teams at QB

BY JACK CASSIDY
AP STATS Writer

The Minnesota Vikings made a move toward the future when they handed the quarterback position to first-round pick Teddy Bridgewater. Bridgewater’s opponent Sunday, the Buffalo Bills, didn’t subscribe to the same school of thought. They proved as much when they benched second-year quarterback E.J. Manuel in favor of Kyle Orton after four games. So far, neither replacement has excelled. Bridgewater, who took over for the Vikings (2-4) after Matt Cassel suffered a season-ending foot injury, flashed his potential in his first start, passing for 317 yards and rushing for a touchdown in a 41-28 win over Atlanta on Sept. 28. The success, though, was short-lived. Bridgewater missed a 42-10 defeat at Green Bay four days later with an ankle injury and struggled mightily when he returned last Sunday against Detroit. He completed 23 of 37 passes for 188 yards and three interceptions in a 17-3 loss. “You’re not just going to go out there and be perfect,” said Bridgewater, who will make his first road start. “There’s some throws that you’re not going to be able to control and there will be things that happen throughout the course of a game that you won’t be able to control. “But at the same time, for me, it was an eye-opener. After my performance against Atlanta, I believe the expectation level is high. But I have a high expectation level for myself also.” Bridgewater has yet to throw a touchdown pass and his 70.8 passer rating ranks second-lowest among qualified players. Those early career statistics, however, have done little to dissuade coach Mike Zimmer of his ability. “I believe, with all my heart, that Teddy Bridgewater is going to be the franchise quarterback here for a long, long time,” Zimmer said Monday. “I believe that



STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN BONESKE

Vikings rookie quarterback Teddy Bridgewater (5) drops back to pass in last Sunday’s home game against Detroit. Bridgewater is slated to make his third pro career start this weekend. Minnesota’s next opponent, the Buffalo Bills, benched second-year quarterback E.J. Manuel in favor of veteran Kyle Orton after four games.

the team believes that, too.” For Buffalo (3-3), the quarterback change emphasized its hope to compete this season. But since Orton took over, the Bills are 1-1 — the same winning percentage they had under Manuel. Orton threw for 299 yards and two touchdowns in a 37-22 loss to New England last week. The veteran also turned the ball over twice, both of which led to Patriots scores. “Sometimes we can’t stay out of our own way,” Orton said after the loss, which moved New England into first place in the AFC East. “It’s tough to beat a good team doing that.” Orton, averaging 303.5 yards over his two starts, will face the league’s sixth-best passing defense. The Vikings have allowed 213.8 yards per game, and safety Harrison Smith is tied for the NFL lead with three interceptions. They will look to shut down a Bills offense with issues extending far be-

yond just the quarterback position. Despite a rushing attack headed by C.J. Spiller and Fred Jackson and a receiving threat led by talented rookie Sammy Watkins, the Bills have managed 11 touchdowns — fifth-fewest in the NFL. “It’s not one individual,” coach Doug Marrone said. “It’s easy when it’s one individual. You just put one out and put somebody else in. But it’s up front, it’s hitting the holes, it’s believing and trusting the scheme.” Jackson, who has one of Buffalo’s two rushing touchdowns, singled out not a player but an overall lack of execution as his team’s biggest issue. “Turnovers and penalties,” Jackson said. “When you kill yourselves on drives like that it’s going to be hard to get anything going.” Buffalo has been penalized the third-most times in the NFL and was flagged eight times for 107 yards against New England.

Adding another problem to the mix, reports surfaced Monday that wideout Mike Williams had been granted permission to seek a trade by general manager Doug Whaley after the healthy Williams was benched last Sunday. However, Williams said Wednesday he wants to continue playing for his hometown team and has ordered his agent to stop seeking trade offers. Defensively, Buffalo leads the NFL in allowing 67.5 yards per game on the ground and has yet to surrender a rushing touchdown. Minnesota rushed for 241 yards against the Falcons, with rookie Jerick McKinnon having 135 on 18 carries. McKinnon, though, has 64 yards on 18 attempts in the last two games. The Vikings lead the all-time series 8-4, winning 38-14 in the last matchup Dec. 5, 2010. The teams have not played in Buffalo since 2006.

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Chamber 283-9400

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