

SPORTS

Mike Zimmer’s takeover of Vikings starts

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — After working for two decades in the NFL to fulfill his desire to become a head coach, Mike Zimmer has finally reached the real deal. Minnesota Vikings training camp started Friday, and the season opener is a little more than six weeks away.

Despite the popularity of Zimmer’s predecessor, Leslie Frazier, the Vikings have exuded the familiar optimism of a team with a fresh start throughout spring practices. The praise for the new atmosphere, style and expectations is a predictable theme around the league whenever a change in the man in charge is made.

The same type of attitude was conveyed when Frazier took over three years ago, and Zimmer’s presence is merely the latest phase in this constantly churning, pressure-packed cycle of the NFL.

That doesn’t mean the outcome can’t be different this time, though.

Zimmer has inherited a roster containing 10 former first-round picks, seven of whom were drafted in 2012 or later, and the Vikings went 10-6 just two seasons ago.

“It’s no longer about trying to be a top-10 defense. It’s no longer about trying to make the playoffs,” de-

fensive end Brian Robison said. “Coach Zimmer will tell you straight up: ‘We’re not trying to make the playoffs.’ Your goal has to be, ‘We will make the playoffs. We will be the best defense in the league. We will go to the Super Bowl.’ Those are the type of things I’m talking about it. It’s just that the way we think is totally different.”

Here are some things to know about the Vikings, who reported to Minnesota State University in Mankato on Thursday for the 49th straight summer:

QUARTERBACK COMPETITION: The quest for a long-term franchise quarterback has reached almost a decade for the Vikings, and rookie Teddy Bridgewater is the newest nominee. His arrival from Louisville has elicited higher hopes than Christian Ponder’s in 2011, and make no mistake: The job will be Bridgewater’s sooner than later.

First he’ll have to beat out Matt Cassel, who was re-signed to sustain the bridge between first-rounders. After Ponder’s flop last year, Cassel proved again he’s a capable starter. He’d be the



Mike Zimmer

safe pick, but if Bridgewater blows the coaches away in practice and preseason then all bets are off. Zimmer has said he’s not afraid to play rookies.

SETTING THE BARR: The natural attention on the quarterback might make it easy to forget that Anthony Barr, the outside linebacker from UCLA, was selected 23 slots ahead of Bridgewater in the first round. He’ll likely join 31-year-old Chad Greenway, the only proven player at this position group, and Jasper Brinkley, who was re-signed for the middle spot after one season away, in the starting lineup. Barr has a lot of learning to do, as a converted fullback who played only two years on defense in college, but his athleticism will be an immediate asset.

“I’ve never had a linebacker, even thinking back into my Dallas days, who has the size and the speed and all of the things that this guy has,” Zimmer said.

PATTERSON ON THE RISE: One of the few highlights from last season for the Vikings was the late emergence of Cordarrelle Patterson as a game-changing wide receiver and kick-off returner. Patterson was at his best when Cassel was on the field, and his role will only increase under new offensive coordinator

Norv Turner.

“Each year I’m going to try to pull something different out,” Patterson said. “I don’t know what it is, but I feel like I can get better and improve on my game.”

SECONDARY SHUFFLE: Pass defense was the biggest problem in 2013 for the Vikings, and their most significant move of the offseason was to sign Captain Munnerlyn away from Carolina to serve as the slot coverage man Antoine Winfield used to play so well. Training camp competition ought to be the most intense among the defensive backs, with Jamarca Sanford, Andrew Sendejo and Kurt Coleman the top candidates to start at safety next to Harrison Smith. Derek Cox, Josh Robinson and Shaun Prater are in the mix behind Munnerlyn and Xavier Rhodes at cornerback.

FRONT FOUR FOCUS: Robison has taken over as the leader of the defensive line, with Everson Griffen and his hefty new contract slated for the other end spot with four-time All-Pro Jared Allen now in Chicago. Tackle Linval Joseph was added in another big-money deal, putting Sharrif Floyd under pressure after a quiet rookie season to grow into the tackle spot opened by the departure of Kevin Williams, who left for Seattle.

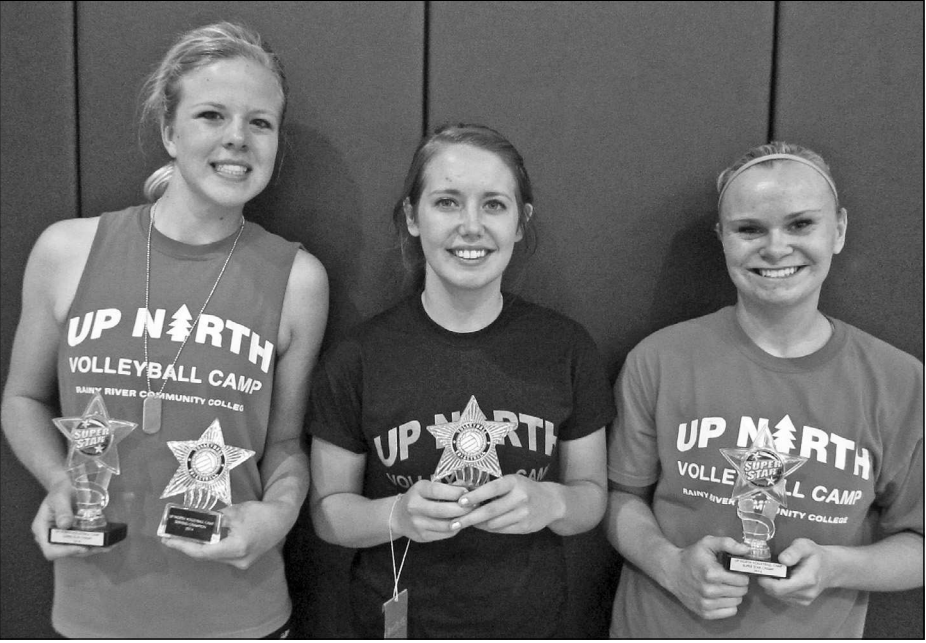
KOENIG TO UMPIRE SENIOR LEAGUE REGION TOURNEY



STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN BONESKE

Josh Koenig, shown umpiring the July 17 Legion baseball doubleheader at Scheela Field, umpired at this week’s Wisconsin State Little League tournament in Wausau and has also been selected by the Central Region Little League office in Indianapolis to umpire the Senior League Region tournament from Aug. 1-6 in Peru/Ogelsby, Ill.

UP NORTH VOLLEYBALL AWARDS



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Award winners at this month’s Up North Volleyball Camp for grades 8-12 at Rainy River Community College included, from left, Jena Sullivan, Sarah Isaacs, Teagan Anderson.

FALLS LITTLE LEAGUE 10U 3RD



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The International Falls 10U baseball team finished third at this month’s Minnesota District 4 Little League Tournament after beating Virginia, 10-3, and then losing to Itasca, 6-1, and Hibbing, 8-4. Team members shown include, from left, front row, Cooper LaVigne, Tucker Hell, Owen Sether, Julius Maish, Bryant Koenig, Will Gilbert. Middle row, Jett Tomczak, Mitchell Nemec, Joe Talmage, Alex Larson, Knute Boerger, Ben Glowack. Back row, assistant coach Josh Koenig, manager Phil Talmage, assistant coach Marc Glowack.

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Happy Golden Birthday On the 26th Samantha

Love Grandpa and Grandma Smerika

The family of Bruce Anderson would like to thank everyone that attended his memorial service and those who were with us in thought. Special thanks to Lee Grim for officiating Bruce’s service; Bill Newton, Dan, Grady and Aspen Anderson, and Graham Gallop for their music; and family and friends that shared remembrances of Bruce. It was a wonderful celebration of his life!

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