

SPORTS

Pondering life as a Vikings 3rd-stringer

BY DAVE CAMPBELL
AP Pro Football Writer

Most of the time after the Minnesota Vikings practice these days, Christian Ponder walks off the field largely unnoticed, not unlike the rest of the third-stringers on the roster in training camp.

Matt Cassel and Teddy Bridgewater are often swarmed by reporters eager for nuggets from the two competitors for the starting quarterback spot. Bridgewater, in particular, gets the star treatment from screaming fans clamoring for his autograph or at least a smile as he crosses the street toward the locker room.

Status and outlook can shift quickly in the NFL, and Ponder's situation is just one example from around the league. The contrast from then to now is nonetheless stark for the 26-year-old Ponder. When the Vikings released their first depth chart of the season this week, the descent from first-round draft pick and most important member of the organization to third-stringer with an unclear future became official.

"I'm a competitive guy. I want to be the guy taking the first-team reps and getting more plays than I am, but I understand that's the direction they're headed," Ponder said recently. "As bothersome as it is to not take as many reps, I'm trying to be a professional about it and just learn."

The Vikings hosted Oakland on Friday in their exhibition opener.

"I don't know what's going to happen playing-wise this year. I think it's clear right now I'm getting the least amount of reps because I'm the third guy, but you always have to be prepared because you never know," Ponder said. "Football's a crazy game, and I'm going to be prepared and I'm going to work hard. I can learn so much. After this year, who knows where I'm going to be? And I think what

I'm going to learn this year is going to help me and help my career."

Selected with the 12th pick in the 2011 draft out of Florida State, Ponder replaced Donovan McNabb six games into that season and played well enough in 2012 despite some glaringly rough performances for the Vikings to reach the playoffs.

But last year was a regression, with seven touchdowns and nine interceptions in eight games as the starter. When the Vikings resigned Cassel and drafted Bridgewater, Ponder entered lame-duck mode for the final season of his rookie contract.

"I guess there are preconceived notions, but as far as when you start working with them you're just coaching that guy," quarterbacks coach Scott Turner said. "You don't really think about it after that. Yes, you're human and you see the things, you know what I mean? But I was just affected by what I saw on film, not necessarily what people have said. And then I try to make my own judgments, with the rest of the coaching staff, based on how he responds in the offense we're running."

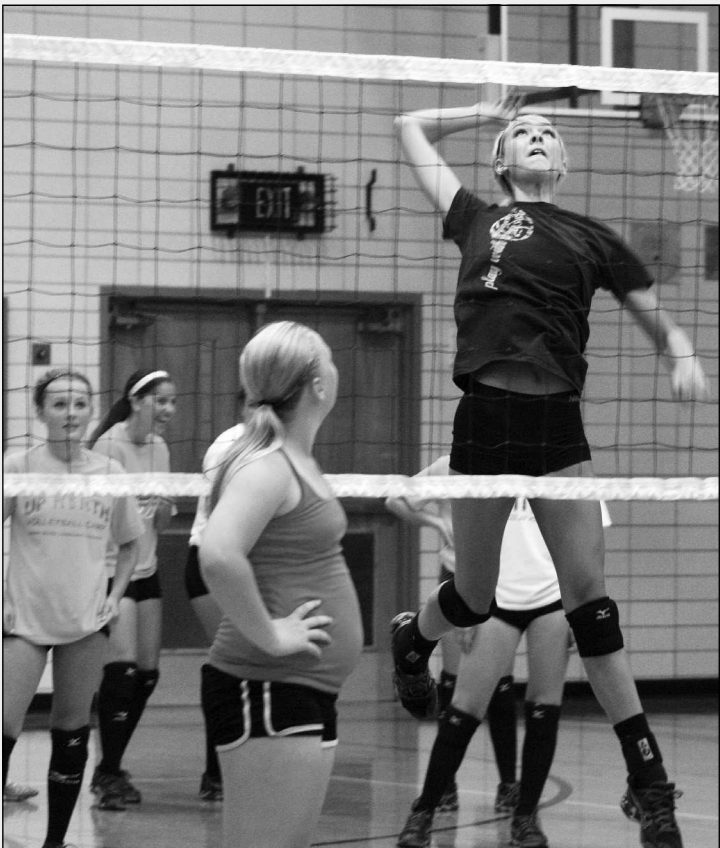
Turner and that rest of the coaching staff have been complimentary of Ponder's attitude, despite the near-certainty he will be playing elsewhere next year or sooner.

"He always knows what to do," Turner said. "He's always engaged."

Perspective helps. Ponder and his wife, Samantha, recently added a baby daughter, Bowden Sainte-Claire, to their family. She's named after former Florida State coach Bobby Bowden, of course.

There's another benefit, too, to being the afterthought.

"It's not as stressful when you're not the starter," Ponder said. "Again, you can sit back and watch other guys and see what they do and learn from them."



Senior volleyball player McKenna Rasmussen spikes a ball over the net Thursday during captain's practice at Falls High School.

STAFF PHOTOS BY EMILY GEDDE



Brittany Foss sets up a play during captain's practice at Falls High School Thursday.



Eighth grader Pacey Rousseau bumps the ball back to her partner during a warm-up drill during volleyball captain's practice Thursday.

Practice makes perfect

Captain's practice for the Bronco volleyball team was in full swing Thursday at Falls High School.

Classes don't begin until Sept. 2, but teams will have put in plenty of work before then. Official varsity practices start Monday, which doesn't leave much time before the first game.

Volleyball kicks off its fall sports season 7 p.m. Aug. 21 against Mountain Iron-Buhl at Mountain Iron-Buhl High School. The first home game is set for Aug. 28 against Littlefork-Big Falls.

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6:00 pm Elk's Spaghetti Dinner

Thursday, August 21st

2:00 pm Concessions Open

2:00 pm Flea Market

2:00 pm Craft Show

3:00 pm Teen Idol Contest

4:00 pm Beer Gardens Open

4:00 pm Flood Volunteer Appreciation

6:00 pm Boat Parade

6:30 pm Flood Volunteer Appreciation Program

7:30 pm Casting Call

10:00 pm Jam Session by Local Artists

Friday, August 22nd

10:00 am Arts & Crafts Festival Flea Market

11:00 am Concessions Open

11:00 am Rad Zoo

11:00 am Fun Zone Opens

12:00 pm Fun Zone Blow-Up

12:00 pm Tractor Rides

12:00 pm Beer Gardens open

1:00 pm Kids Games, Old Fashion Races & Fun Zone

1:30 pm Rad Zoo

4:00 pm Weigh-Ins

6:00 pm Lawn Mower Drag Racing

6:00 pm Steak Dinner

8:00 pm Don Tersigni-Comedian

9:30 pm Johnny Bird Show

Saturday, August 23rd

8:00 am Kids Fishing Tournament

8:00 am Classic Car/Motorcycle Show Registration

9:00 am 5 K Race

9:00 am Fastpitch Tournament

10:00 am Arts & Crafts Festival Flea Market

10:00 am Classic Car/Motorcycle Show

10:00 am Disc Golf

11:00 am Concessions Open

11:00 am Family Fun Zone opens

12:00 pm Beer Gardens open

12:00 pm Tractor Rides

12:00 pm Go Cart Races

12:00 pm Jam Session by Local Artists

12:30 pm Kids Games, Old Fashion Races & Fun Zone

3:30 pm Car/Motorcycle Show Awards - drive thru

4:00 pm Weigh-ins

7:00 pm Hypnotist

9:00 pm Brat Pack Radio

10:00 pm Raffle Drawing

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