

SPORTS



STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN BONESKE

Vikings running back Adrian Peterson (28) breaks the ankle tackle of Browns defensive back Buster Skrine (22) in Sunday's game at the Metrodome. Peterson rushed for 88 yards and a touchdown in Minnesota's 31-27 loss to Cleveland.

Vikings hope Peterson can break loose in London

WATFORD, England (AP) — For once, the Minnesota Vikings aren't counting on Adrian Peterson to do it all.

Peterson, last season's NFL MVP following his 2,097-yard rushing season, has been held in check through three games this season — all losses.

Now, facing a must-win game against the winless Pittsburgh Steelers in London, coach Leslie Frazier expects his offense to steady itself so Peterson can break loose.

"He doesn't have to score every time he touches the ball," Frazier said Wednesday at the Vikings base outside London. "He's a great, great player. We all know that. But he doesn't have to feel like he has to carry the whole team."

Peterson admits he needs to show more patience, as defenses have packed the box to keep him bottled up.

"People get the misconception that I'm trying to do too much. Every touch I want to get into the end zone," Peterson said. "That's just me playing football."

The return of fullback Jerome Felton from a three-game suspension will also lift some of the responsibility from Peterson.

"Now I can say there is some type of confidence I feel just knowing what type of guy he is, knowing his approach and his mentality," said Peterson, who has rushed for 281 yards on 69 carries this season. "He's a guy I can count on. It feels good to have him back."

Peterson has averaged under 3 yards per carry since opening with a 78-yard touchdown run on the first snap of the Vikings season.

"We play well off each other," Felton said. "It's exciting to be back."

Felton's return could also unburden an ailing offensive line, which allowed six sacks in Sunday's 31-27 loss to the Cleveland Browns. Quarterback Christian Ponder was nursing sore ribs after taking a beating in the defeat but expects to play Sunday at Wembley Stadium.

"We've just got to keep going, to keep grinding, to keep pounding," Peterson said. "I have faith that our running game is going to open up and explode."

Despite the sense of urgency that has accompanied Minnesota on its overseas trip, the team was in high spirits on its first day of practice in the U.K. — an unseasonably warm day.

The Vikings are the designated home team for Sunday's game. The players have managed to enjoy some of the local flavors, although Frazier insists the team is solely focused on kick-starting its season.

Peterson was all smiles while fielding questions about a future acting career that included talk about his ability to play James Bond. Defensive end Jared Allen escaped the hotel to enjoy a plate of bangers and mash — a British dish of sausages and mashed potatoes.

"It was one of the best I ever had," Allen said.

Ponder expects to play despite sore ribs

WATFORD, England (AP) — Minnesota Vikings quarterback Christian Ponder expects to start against the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday in London despite a rib injury.

Ponder, injured early in last Sunday's 31-27 loss to the Cleveland Browns, emerged from the Vikings first practice in the U.K. on Wednesday confident that he will play at Wembley Stadium.

"It's a little sore and it's going to be something I will have to work through but I threw more than I thought I would be able to," Ponder said. "We'll wait to see how this week plays out, but my expectation and my hope is that I will be playing."

Vikings coach Leslie Frazier said Wednesday's practice would "be a big signal in what direction we'll have to go..."

Backup quarterback Matt Cassell also took snaps on Wednesday, and he is ready to step in if Ponder is unavailable to play. Ponder has been under



STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN BONESKE

Vikings quarterback Christian Ponder celebrates scoring his first of two rushing touchdowns in Sunday's home game against Cleveland.

pressure since the loss to Vikings to 0-3. The third-year quarterback has

thrown five interceptions and two touchdowns for a 65.9 passing rating, and has also lost two fumbles.

"My confidence hasn't wavered," said Ponder, who led the Vikings to the playoffs last season. "I have a great support staff around me with Adrian Peterson and the staff around me."

Peterson said he was always ready to give Ponder a pep talk, as he did when fans at Mall of America Field began jeering the quarterback during the Cleveland loss.

"He's bouncing back," the Vikings running back said. "I told him, 'You know the business. You know how it goes. Just stay focused and continue to work. You know what to do.'"

Fullback Jerome Felton is returning from a three-game suspension to provide an extra blocker in the Vikings backfield.

The Steelers are also 0-3 going into the first of two NFL International Series games to be played in London this season.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Gophers give no guarantees to injured players

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — When Philip Nelson's right hamstring strain forced him out of the game, Minnesota turned to redshirt freshman Mitch Leidner at quarterback.

Leidner started for the Gophers last week, too, rushed for 151 yards and four touchdowns and tops the depth chart going into the Big Ten opener today against Iowa. Nelson, the sophomore who took over at midseason last year, has no guarantees of getting the job back.

This is the way coach Jerry Kill and his staff have preferred to operate over many years together. The same situation is in effect at running back, where junior Donnell Kirkwood, coming off a 926-yard season, sprained his right ankle in the first game. Junior David Cobb and sophomore Rodrick Williams have taken over and thrived over the last three weeks.

Filling in for Kill after his seizure during the Sept. 14 win over Western Illinois, defensive coordinator Tracy Claeys spoke

the day after about the requirement for injured players to re-establish themselves as starters.

"Our kids understand the injury policy," Claeys said then. "I think that's why Donnell is working his butt off because the other two are playing well, and he knows that to get his spot back he has to perform better than them."

Claeys added: "Those kids know in our player policy manual that if you get injured and somebody replaces you, and they're playing better than you when you get healthy, then you got to beat them back out."

Kill downplayed this philosophy when asked about it at his news conference Tuesday, to the point of contradicting what Claeys said earlier.

"It's not been a policy. When a kid's healthy, we'll put him back in the lineup. If a player's a great player and another guy comes in and does a nice job with it, not as good as the other player, you play the one who's coming back off injury," Kill said. "If you

got guys who rise to the occasion, it gives you a little bit different perspective. You know, you put the best players on the field to win. I think it's pretty simple."

Kill added: "I think everybody in the country does it. I don't know anybody that doesn't. You play the best players."

Perhaps he was just being a typically coy college football coach. Or maybe he was trying to encourage Kirkwood and Nelson with the prospect of a significant role waiting for them once they're fully healthy. But regardless of acknowledgment from the coach, the playing-time patterns have been clear in his three years here.

Cobb is ninth in the Big Ten with 332 yards rushing, including five touchdowns and an average of 6.3 yards per carry. He had a career-high 125 yards in the victory Saturday over San Jose State. Williams has 277 yards rushing to go with three touchdowns and a per-attempt average of 6.2 yards. Reducing their workload simply to accommodate Kirkwood

once he's healthy probably wouldn't be wise, unless the defenses in the conference start to slow them down.

Kill has long stressed the need to have two capable, mobile quarterbacks in his run-oriented system that features a heavy dose of read-option plays. Nelson will certainly play again once he's ready, and if Leidner struggles in Big Ten play he would likely become the starter again quickly. Given the added exposure running quarterbacks have to injury, they'll probably both be needed the rest of the way regardless of their actual performance.

Kill said Nelson seemed "to be getting along pretty good" this week.

Leidner is, too. "I really didn't know what to expect. We were just going to go out there and play hard, and luckily it worked out," he said of his first career start. "In terms of preparation it's the same as it's always been. Just good hard practices and continuing to get better."

HOCKEY

► continued from B2

Hughes stopped 2013 Falls High School graduate Lucas DeBenedet on the

fourth Fort Frances shootout attempt to seal the victory for the Ice Dogs.

Hughes made 41 stops in regulation and overtime, along with three of four in the shootout to pick up the

win.

Ferguson faced 37 shots in a relief appearance in goal.

The Ice Dogs improved their season record to 3-1, while the Lakers picked up

a point in the shootout setback as their record went to 1-1-0-1 overall.

Both teams face each other again at 7:30 tonight at Ice for Kids Arena in Fort Frances.



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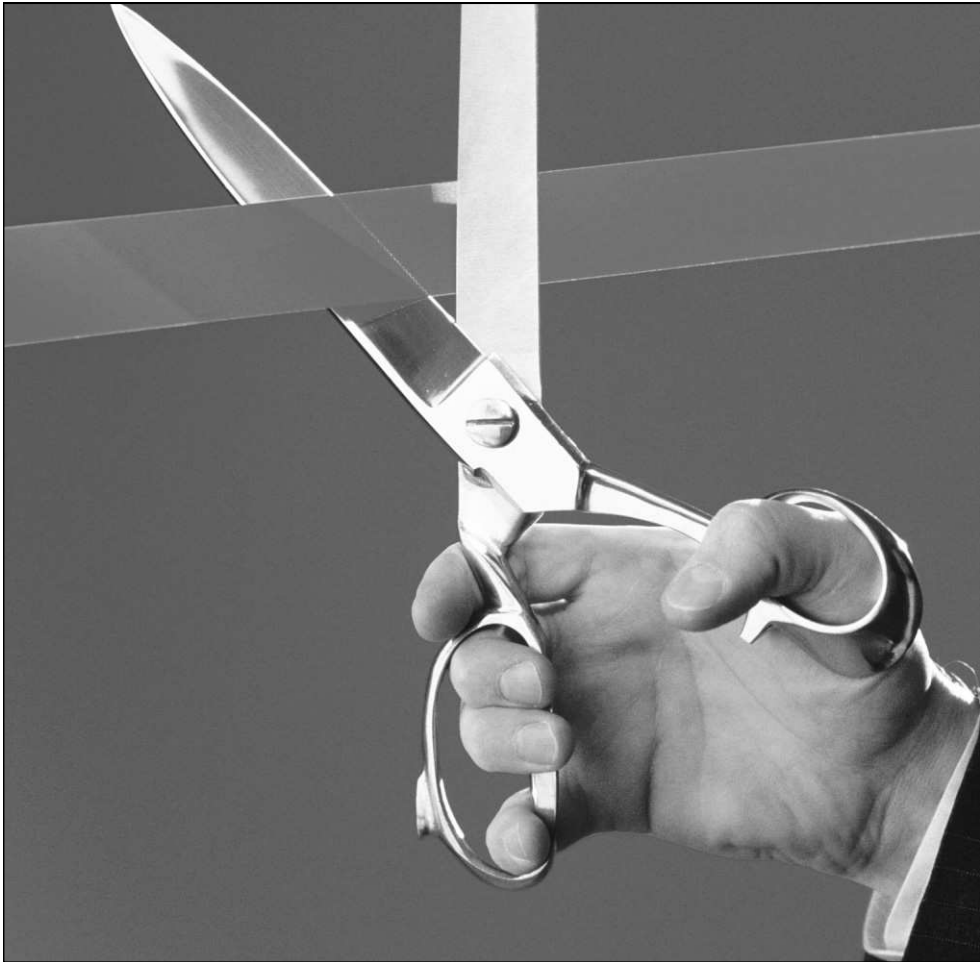
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