

SPORTS

Jennings feels more at home in year two in Minnesota

MANKATO (AP) — You can hear it in the way Greg Jennings talks about the Minnesota Vikings offense under new coordinator Norv Turner.

You can see it in his smile when he playfully opens his media sessions with a joke or a dig.

You can feel it in the light and airy way the veteran receiver carries himself both on the field and off during training camp.

Jennings just seems a lot more comfortable in his second season in Minnesota than he did in his first.

“When you’ve gone through something and have experience at it, you gain more knowledge and have more understanding and you develop a comfort level,” Jennings said. “That’s what’s taken place.”

Last year, Jennings arrived in Minnesota after spending the first seven seasons of his career with the Green Bay Packers. When he decided to leave for a big contract with the NFC North rivals, the split wasn’t smooth.

The two sides traded a few biting, but mostly harmless, barbs and the questions that came from the media put him on the defensive early.

After establishing himself as one of the team spokesmen during his time in Green Bay because of his candor and his accessibility, Jennings withdrew from the public eye as he got himself settled in Minnesota.

View galleryJennings

feels more at home in year 2 in Minnesota

Minnesota Vikings wide receiver Greg Jennings (15) talks with head coach Mike Zimmer, left, during N...

He also had to endure a revolving door of quarterbacks and a run-heavy system from Vikings offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave that contributed to his relative lack of production.

Jennings had 68 catches and four touchdowns in 2013, but his 11.8 yards per catch was the lowest full-season average of his career and his 804 yards receiving were his lowest output in a full season since his rookie year.

Musgrave was fired along with head coach Leslie Frazier after the season ended, and new coach Mike Zimmer brought in Turner, widely considered one of the most innovative minds in the game, to revamp the offense.

“We were heavy, heavy, heavy run game,” Jennings said. “Now we’re going to take a lot more stress off of Adrian. He’s still going to get a heavy dosage of run. But I think with what Norv brings to the table, he’s going to bring a more balanced offense.”

The prospect of being more heavily involved in the game plan from week



Greg Jennings

to week seemed to have emboldened Jennings, who will turn 31 in September.

“I think that he has done especially well since we have started camp the last four days,” Turner said. “He has really zeroed in and focused in. He is important in what we do, playing in the slot in the third down and then he is the guy that can move around and create some matchup things with him, so I like what I have seen.”

Jennings also is no longer asked about the Packers, about quarterback Aaron Rodgers and about his decision to leave the organization and his reasons for it. That’s all in the past now, and this is home.

He’s serving as a mentor to second-year pro Cordarrelle Patterson, helping rookie quarterback Teddy Bridgewater get up to speed and also reigniting the chemistry he had with veteran quarterback Matt Cassel.

“Greg always looks comfortable,” receiver Jerome Simpson said. “That guy’s a smooth guy, man. I look up to him myself being a veteran because he’s just always cool and calm. He runs great routes.”

It appears he even has a new nickname. Receivers coach George Stewart has taken to calling Jennings the team “encyclopedia.”

“Just like you look at an encyclopedia,” Simpson said, “you look at him to get techniques and look up things about this game.”

Starr, Favre and Rodgers.

Favre also said he would like former general manager Ron Wolf, who gave up a first-round pick to acquire Favre from the Atlanta Falcons in February 1992, and former coach Mike Holmgren, who helped harness his immense talent, to also be part of the celebration of his return.

“Without Ron (Wolf), I would not be on this phone right now and we would not be having this discussion,” Favre said.

Favre disputed that he was concerned about a negative fan reaction upon his return to Lambeau Field, having been booed mercilessly during his returns with the Vikings.

bottom of the fifth when Vollom singled to drive in two runs to tie the game, Clay Bergstrom singled to drive in what turned out to be the game-winning run and Cole Miggins singled to drive in two more runs.

Vollom, who ended up with three hits and 5 RBI, drove in another run with a single in the bottom of the sixth.

Ben Humbert pitched all seven innings to record the win for the Falls, allowing

four runs on six hits with three walks while striking out 11.

Connor Nelson picked up the pitching loss for La Crescent. In 4 2/3 innings, Nelson allowed seven runs, three earned, on eight hits with four walks while striking out five. John Gerholt relieved Nelson and allowed an earned run on two hits while striking out three in 1 1/3 innings.

OSAKIS 6, FALLS 2

The Post 66 Broncos

Smith learning from the best in Vikings secondary

MANKATO (AP) — Harrison Smith might get a tip from head coach Mike Zimmer, or defensive coordinator George Edwards will have something to say.

Defensive backs coach Jerry Gray is always available to help.

That’s three current or former defensive coordinators offering their knowledge, and the Minnesota Vikings safety is smart enough to pay attention.

“There’s always going to be some hiccups, but those guys do a great job of teaching,” Smith said. “You listen to guys with that much knowledge.”

Smith is trying to learn a new defense, potentially with a new partner at safety. He’s become a stabilizing force at a position that had seen a lot of turnover before he arrived as a late first-round draft choice in 2012.

“He’s a true pro,” Edwards said. “He does all of the things off and on the field that you are looking for out of a safety. It has been a blessing to have him out there and him take charge of what is happening communication-wise. He has been the one position that has been pretty solid as far as him being there every day.”

For two seasons, Smith has played in the cover-2 defense, which has the safety playing a lot of zone coverage, deep down the field. He said that the biggest difference in the new, more aggressive scheme is closing the space between the defender and receiver and attacking the ball, whether it’s coming up to stop the run or trying to defend the middle of the field.

“Coach Zimmer wants us to compete for the ball,” Smith said. “Most of the elements of this defense are the same. I need to get stronger at all aspects of my position.”



FILE PHOTO

Vikings safety Harrison Smith (22), shown leaping up to intercept a pass in front of then Packers receiver Greg Jennings (85) in the Dec. 2, 2012, game at Lambeau Field, is beginning his third season with Minnesota.

Zimmer, who has some history coaching defensive backs, said he worked a lot with Smith early in the off-season on technique, given that he’s played so little man coverage.

“He goes as hard as he can,” Zimmer said. “He wants to be very good.”

In just two seasons, Smith has solidified himself as the top safety on the team. In his first season, he started all 16 games and earned All-Rookie honors after making 104 tackles and three interceptions, two of which he returned for touchdowns.

Last season, he played in only eight games because of a toe injury, making 58 tackles and two interceptions.

“That guy can really play some football,” cornerback Captain Munnerlyn said. “I’m happy to be his team-

mate. You can mess up back there, and you know he’s going to cover your rear.”

Smith still doesn’t know who will be the other starting safety. Jamarca Sanford played there for much of last season, but Robert Blanton had been working with the starters at training camp until he injured his hamstring on Monday, which could keep him out for a month. This week, Mistral Raymond and rookie Dante Exum have worked some with the No. 1 defense.

“Right now, we’re just building chemistry with the whole defense,” Smith said. “In the secondary, things aren’t always going to go perfectly so you have to be ready to work with whoever is in there. It’s not up to me to decide who’s in there, but whoever it is, we’ll work together.”

FAVRE

► continued from B1

Packers quarterback and Pro Football Hall of Famer Bart Starr.

“I just think that would be an electric moment,” said Favre, who also said he’d love to pose for what would surely be an iconic photo:

LEGION

► continued from B1

La Crescent, 8-4, in a consolation bracket game.

The lead see-sawed back and forth as the Falls tied the game at 2-2 in the bottom of the first when Jackson Vollom hit a two-run single, before La Crescent went back in front with two more runs in the fourth inning.

The Post 66 Broncos overcame the 4-2 deficit in the

Wyatt Ulrich pitched the first five innings for the Post 66 Broncos and recorded the loss, allowing all six runs. Dahlin came in to pitch the sixth inning without giving up a run.

Drew Fearing recorded the complete-game pitching victory for Osakis.

The Falls, which resumed Legion baseball this summer for the first time in several years, ended the season with an overall record of 24-7.

St. James 1, Int'l Falls 0  
Int'l Falls 0-0-0 0-0-0 0-0  
St. James 0-1-0 0-0-0 X-1  
WP-Walker Froehling;  
LP-Caleb Dahlin

Int'l Falls 8, La Crescent 4  
La Crescent 2-0-0 2-0-0 0-4  
Int'l Falls 0-1-0 0-5-1 X-8  
WP-Ben Humbert;  
LP-Connor Nelson

Osakis 6, Int'l Falls 2  
Int'l Falls 1-0-0 0-0-1 0-2  
Osakis 2-2-0 0-2-0 X-6  
WP-Drew Fearing;  
LP-Wyatt Ulrich



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