

Vikings Safety Smith Ready To Rough Up Competition

MANKATO, Minn. (AP) — The Minnesota Vikings haven't had a standout or even steady performer at either safety spot since Darren Sharper left four years ago.

Harrison Smith should be able to help. He's been playing this position almost his entire life.

"The first time I played safety was like in elementary school," said Smith, the rookie from Notre Dame who grew up in Knoxville, Tenn. "I remember my coach saying I was going to play the spot where the Tennessee Volunteers' leading tackler played the last year, and I thought he was talking about linebacker. But it was safety, and he was talking about Deon Grant."

Grant recently punctuated a 12-season NFL career with a Super Bowl title with the New York Giants, so he's been a good example for Smith to study. Steve Atwater and Sean Taylor were two other former NFL stars at safety who Smith cited as models for his game.

"My favorite part is kind of being able to be on the back end and the front end, just because safeties have the ability to drop down in the box or play deep. So you can kind of get the best of both worlds," Smith said.

Asked to choose between an interception or a big hit, he said: "They both serve their purposes. I think interceptions help the team the most. But big hits, they get everybody pumped up."

Smith has contributed his share of those at training camp this month, even trading shoves, stares and angry words with star wide receiver Percy Harvin during one particularly snippy practice. This 6-foot-2, 214-pound rookie, taken with the 29th overall pick in the draft after the Vikings traded into the end of the first round, clearly has an edge to the way he plays.

"I love that. You want your safeties to be quarterbacks and smart but you want some nastiness to them too, and he has

that," said defensive coordinator Alan Williams.

The Vikings have also wanted Smith to stay hungry and not simply walk in to a starting spot. He didn't begin working with the first team defense until this week, while Mistral Raymond and Jamarca Sanford manned the position. But they're both late-round draft picks (Sanford went in the seventh in 2009 and Raymond in the sixth in 2011), and they both struggled to stop the run in last Friday's preseason game at San Francisco in which the 49ers rushed for 260 yards.

So Smith has moved past Sanford on the depth chart.

"He played well. The game wasn't too big for him. He looked like he belonged out there," Williams said. "Again, we want to see that same thing. Can he get lined up? Can he communicate to the defense? Can he operate within the defense and can he do that on a consistent basis? When a play comes at him can he make the play?"

There's no indication that he can't. The only player in Notre Dame history to total more than 200 tackles, 15 tackles for loss and 15 pass breakups in a career (he tallied 309, 18 1/2 and 28 in those categories), Smith was just the second safety drafted in the first round by the Vikings in their 52-year history. Joey Browner in 1983 was the other. After the excellence of Paul Krause in the 1970s and Browner in the 1980s, the Vikings have had a dearth of quality safeties.

Sharper was picked for two Pro Bowls, in 2005 and 2007. The only others with that honor between Browner and Sharper were Todd Scott (1992), Robert Griffith (2000) and Corey Chavous (2003). Husain Abdullah, Tyrell Johnson and Madiou Williams are among those who've struggled to consistently give the Vikings (29th in the AP Pro32) a sure-tackling, smart-running, ball-hawking player at the position in recent years.

So maybe Smith can become the next

Browner or Krause. His success would go a long way toward shoring up a defense that sprung a lot of leaks last year.

"I hope he's really, really awesome," said a smiling defensive end Jared Allen, "because that gives me more time to hit the quarterback."

The Vikings were most enamored with Smith's versatility at the position. He played some outside linebacker at Notre Dame, so his run-stopping skills should be there.

"He is better at everything than I really thought. He's a tall guy, and usually tall guys are a little bit leggy and may not be quick-footed, but right now he's excelling at the pass coverage," Williams said. "We put him on tight end and he's been extremely effective."

Playing the position well usually comes easier when a guy like Smith has been enjoying it for so many years.

"Not think too much," he said. "Just run and play football."

Tanagers Top Watchdogs In Golf Dual

VERMILLION — Carter Andre's winning round of 41 helped the Vermillion Tanagers open their season with a 15-stroke victory over Beresford in a boys' golf dual Tuesday at The Bluffs Golf Course in Vermillion.

Vermillion carded a 192, with Beresford at 207.

Beresford's duo of Nick Antonson (43) and Kory Diefendorf (46) were second and third, respectively. Rounding out the top five were Vermillion's Paul Schwasinger (50) and Jake Odems (50).

In the junior varsity dual, Vermillion won by 32 strokes, 230-262.

Sam Craig of the Tanagers was the top finisher at 51.

Varsity Division
TEAM SCORES: Vermillion 192, Beresford 207
INDIVIDUAL: Carter Andre V 41, Nick Antonson B 43, Kory Diefendorf B 46, Paul Schwasinger V 50, Jake Odems V 50, Andrew Heine V 51, Jay Mungler V 53, Cody Harlyk B 54, Lee Staasi B 64, Hunter Beesen B 64

Junior Varsity Division
TEAM SCORES: Vermillion 230, Beresford 262
INDIVIDUAL: Sam Craig V 51, Tristen Meadows V 55, Tim Ellison V 59, Sam Nelson B 61, Hunter Beesen B 64, Gavin Gilbertson V 65, Zaine Langner B 67, Karl Mann B 70

NHLPA Makes First Proposal To Owners

TORONTO (AP) — The National Hockey League Players' Association has made its first proposal in the latest round of collective bargaining talks with the NHL.

The union said its proposal to the league includes a smaller percentage of revenues for players and an expanded revenue sharing program to help struggling teams.

Donald Fehr, the executive director of the NHL Players' Association, said the proposal could "stabilize the industry."

Fehr said players are set to surrender as much as \$465 million in revenue under the proposal if the league continues to grow at an average rate. He says that number could balloon to \$800 million if the league grows at the same rate it has over the last two seasons.

"We do believe that the proposal the players made today, once implemented, can produce a stable industry ... that can give us a chance to move beyond the recurring labor strife that has plagued the NHL the last two decades," Fehr said.

Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby, Washington's Alex Ovechkin, Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos and Ottawa's Jason Spezza were among 23 players that participated in the meeting Tuesday in Toronto.

"I like it a lot," Crosby said of the proposal. "I think, as Don said, it's addressing the issues that the league has. (We're) making sure as players that we do our part to help those (struggling) teams out, but also holding the teams accountable."

"At the end of the day, it's going to take both (sides) to do that."

An NHL proposal last month called for a significant decrease for

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TAKING THE NEXT STEP



The University of South Dakota has been hard at work this past week, trying to build off Sanford Health's \$20 million gift toward a new athletic arena at USD. An artist's rendition of the interior of that proposed facility is pictured above.

Sayler, USD Work To Make University's Biggest Athletic Project Since The DakotaDome A Reality

BY JEREMY HOECK

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VERMILLION — If step one was a large donation, step two for the University of South Dakota is seeking additional pledges.

In the week since Sanford Health announced a \$20 million gift toward a new athletic arena at USD, athletic director David Sayler has been on the road gauging interest from potential donors.

Has it been a fruitful trip?

"It's been extremely positive. I've been really happy with the responses I've gotten," Sayler said Tuesday from a fundraising trip in California. "Linking up with Sanford in this way speaks volumes to how far this department has come, from those first visions to now being able to make it happen. "The whole project has been extremely well-received."

Part of Sanford's donation will help support student scholarships and university faculty, but the focus has been on what it will do toward helping USD construct a new 6,000-seat basketball and volleyball arena.

The facility will be connected on the south end of the DakotaDome — a building that has served as the home for every Coyote sport since its 1979 opening.

With the Division I transition now fully in the background, USD can look to the future, said Kevin Brown, who serves on the board of the directors for the Howling Pack — USD's booster club.

"When I heard Sanford was able to give that amount of money, I thought, 'Could we

dare be able to say we could have these kinds of facilities in Vermillion?', said Brown, who has also volunteered with USD track meets and basketball games for a number of years.

"I just think it'll be a wonderful thing to maybe make this happen in just a few years."

One of the sports that will be most immediately impacted by a new home is basketball. The dome provides its own intrinsic advantages (noise, depth perception, etc.), but leaves a lot to be desired, Brown said.

"I've seen (coach) Dave Boots recruiting to the DakotaDome, which is a difficult place, at best, to play basketball," he said. "We've had such wonderful athletes and all that success, which is really saying something."

"But having a state of the art arena will be a great next step for USD."

Will the gift from Sanford kick-start other donations?

"Don't we hope so," Brown said. "It's also helping with the remodeling of the Dome, with track and soccer, so I can only think that this gift will be that step for those other donors on the sideline."

The second phase in USD's 2015 Master Plan for Athletic Facilities — with a price tag close to \$70 million — is for renovations to the dome, which would add football seating to 16,000. The third phase calls for a new outdoor track and field complex that would also house a new soccer field. Last week, Sayler said he has additional donations totaling \$9 million, with a portion of

that pledged to the track facility.

With approximately \$30 million left to raise for the arena, the goal is for other donors to step forward, he said.

"That's certainly the plan, to talk with our donors to step up and match that money," Sayler said.

Of course, that is easier said than done when you're talking about people's individual circumstances. On his trip to California, Sayler said he has met with the same people and groups multiple times to talk about USD's athletic visions.

"You can't force them into something, just you just have to see where you both are, and how you can work together," he said. "There's some urgency on my end to achieve what you want to achieve, but you're on their timetable."

"It's all in their hands."

On a USD campus that has seen a new student center, business school and medical school buildings pop up in the last few years, athletics has long needed changes as well, Brown said.

"To see some of the facility enhancements under president (Jim) Abbott are tremendous," Brown said. "Jim and (wife) Colette have really been that catalyst. Not just on the athletic side, the university has made such strides in the last few years. I'm proud of what they've accomplished."

"Athletic wise, it's exciting to know the best is just around the corner."

You can follow Jeremy Hoeck on Twitter at twitter.com/jhoeck

Comic Con Tackles Fantasy Football

BY BARRY WILNER

AP Pro Football Writer

Fantasy football has an estimated 30 million players nationwide, a TV sitcom built around it and, now, its own convention produced by the same people who run Comic Con.

The first Fantasy Football Fest will be held at the Convention Center in Atlantic City this weekend, a two-day event expected to attract 25,000 fans who will participate in fantasy drafts while they meet — and maybe pick up a few tips from — real NFL veterans, including Hall of Famers Joe Montana and Bruce Smith.

"Our whole world is focused on awesome fan experiences," says Greg Topalian, senior vice president of ReedPOP, whose company organizes not only major comic book conventions, but a penny arcade expo, "Star Wars" celebrations, and an Ultimate Fighting expo — all of which draw huge crowds. "We felt like this is a similar type of community, really passionate."

"There's been no physical way to do a draft and enjoy fantasy with friends and the rest of the football community."

Now, there will be, and Topalian sees the attraction of the festival on Saturday and Sunday as more about every aspect of football. But with fantasy at the core.

"We looked at what do fans value beyond fantasy?" he says. "They buy sports memorabilia, so we will have an exposition floor and Steiner Sports will be supplying memorabilia."

"Football is also a lifestyle thing, so we will have tailgating, beer-tasting, all part of being a fantasy player and a fan."

Those fantasy players will be able to get help from experts in the make believe, if you will, and can ask former players their opinions on who to draft and when. A separate area of the building has been set aside exclusively for leagues to conduct drafts.

The National Fantasy Football Championship, which began in 2004 as the industry's first multi-city, high-stakes event and awarded more than \$1.4 million in prizes last year, will hold its draft there this weekend.

SiriusXM satellite radio will broadcast 19 hours of live programming on its fantasy sports channel, including an experts' draft. As an added enticement, Stratmish, a fantasy football tournament format that launched this month, will offer a chance for a fantasy player to win \$2 million in a season-long event.

"We want to be the name brand for fantasy sports as we roll out our programs for 20,000 to 30,000 people who will attend," Stratmish President Michael Shaldone says.

Having the people behind Comic Con running things not only appealed to Stratmish and Steiner Sports, but to several other companies that will have a presence at the Convention Cen-

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Broncos Veterans Manning, Bailey Learning From Each Other

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — Champ Bailey's thumbs got quite the workout in the off-season as he bombarded Peyton Manning with texts pleading with him to come to Denver.

Manning returned just two of them. The first one basically said, "Thanks, I'll get back to you."

The second one, now, that's the one that got Bailey excited.

"Let's go!" it read.

And so, the two 11-time Pro Bowlers who had played in nine of the all-star games together were teammates at long last.

The pair of NFL greats in their mid-30s figured they'd make each other even better by playing together, and they say that's exactly what's happened over the last six months.

Bailey bugged Manning during his free agency whirlwind tour, he said, "because he's an amazing player and his leadership alone is bar none the best in the league. You need a guy like that on your team, and where I want

to go, what I want to do toward the end of my career is win a championship and I feel like he gives us the best chance."

Bailey said he had long put Manning at the top of his QB list because of the "way he breaks down a defense and pretty much tells you what you're in and half the guys on defense don't even know what we're doing. It's sad but true. You try to trick him as much as possible, but for some reason, somebody always tips him and he knows, he just knows."

Bailey never had a quarterback quite like Manning to practice against, and Manning had never had a cornerback the caliber of Bailey to face on an everyday basis, either.

They're eager to see how all this time together, while frustrating at times, will pay dividends for the Broncos (No. 10 in the AP Pro32) this season.

"Well, it makes the games easier, let's just say that," Bailey said. "You're going to face the best in practice every day with Peyton. When

you get in a game, you're probably not going to see a guy of his caliber, so it gets us ready."

Manning feels the same way, suggesting it's Denver's defense, especially the star-studded secondary, that's playing as big a role as he is in getting the Broncos' revamped offense ready for the season.

It's Bailey who's leading the way.

"He's the best corner I've played against in my career," Manning said. "And he's been unbelievably consistent. We played the Broncos a number of times, he always shows up, he's always ready to go, he always presents an intense matchup problem."

The admiration is mutual.

"He's the toughest quarterback I've faced, so it definitely goes both ways," Bailey said. "I haven't picked him since college and I probably shouldn't have picked him in college. He

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BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/MCT

Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning (18) calls a play against the Chicago Bears in the first quarter of an NFL preseason game at Soldier Field on Thursday, August 9, in Chicago, Ill.