

Press&Dakotan  
DAILY DOSE**Daily opinions from the P&D Sports Staff on local and national high school, college and professional sports.****BY JEREMY HOECK**  
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VERMILLION — You could make that Tyler Starr is one of the most polite, yet most dominating player out on the football field.

With the long, blonde hair, tattoos streaking across his chest and arms, the 6-foot-5 linebacker (more of a hybrid defensive end) is on first glance intimidating. Yet, as we saw during USD's football media day on Thursday, Starr is a layered dude. Myself, sports editor James Cimburek, along with our summer intern, watched as Starr used part of Wednesday morning's practice to spend a few minutes playing with his young child. He later returned to the field and re-assumed the role as the defensive stopper.

## Coyotes' Starr Shows His Depth On Media Day

That's the Tyler Starr that opposing teams fear. The one they scheme against. The one who recorded 14 sacks and 19 tackles for loss a year ago.

And yes, he is not short on bold statements. When I asked him about the Nov. 17 game at South Dakota State, he said, "I'm a firm believer that we have to establish dominance in our home."

As many of the players do, Starr admits to playing with a chip on his shoulder. He said he was recruited by some of the FCS schools in the area, and naturally, that fuels his fire for entering the Missouri Valley Football Conference this fall.

In our brief interview at the USD student center, Starr said the team's goal for 2012 is to "come out here and change the game; to do something no team has ever done." Does that mean a national championship? Yes, that's exactly what he meant.

"We have a goal, so if we just keep at it every day, success will become a habit."

As has his destruction of opposing run games.

## Yankton City Classic Aug. 25-26

Entries are now being taken for the Yankton City Classic, which will be held Aug. 25-26 at both Hillcrest Golf and Country Club and Fox Run Golf Course. The event is a 36-hole event, with 18 holes played on each course. Half the field will play at each course each day.

The event is open to all players 18 years and older who have either a Yankton mailing address as their residence or are members of either course. All players must also have a valid USGA handicap for entry. No entries will be accepted without a valid USGA handicap.

The event will be flighted by handicap. All flight champions will be decided by the graders, with the exception of the last men's flight and the ladies' flight which are determined by net score. The overall city champion can come from any flight.

Entries are due Sunday, Aug. 19, with entry fees due upon registration. Entries are available at Fox Run Golf Course, Hillcrest Country Club, or at [http://www.cityofyankton.org/recreation/golf/events/2012\\_city\\_classic.pdf](http://www.cityofyankton.org/recreation/golf/events/2012_city_classic.pdf)

Questions can be directed to the Fox Run golf shop at 668-5205.

## Huskers Snag Top Spot in Pre-season Big Ten Poll

CHICAGO, Ill. — The Nebraska volleyball team was selected as the favorite to win the Big Ten Conference title

in the coaches' preseason volleyball poll released Thursday afternoon by the conference office. The defending Big Ten Champion Huskers were voted to finish first, while Penn State was voted to finish second and Purdue third. Minnesota, Illinois and Ohio State rounded out the rest of the top six.

The conference office also announced its Preseason All-Big Ten Team on Thursday, with three Huskers being honored, including unanimous selections seniors Lauren Cook and Hannah Werth. Cook and Werth were joined by senior Gina Mancuso, as the Huskers were one of four schools with more than two honorees.

Cook will lead the Husker offense in 2012 after she was a first-team All-Big Ten and AVCA honorable mention All-America selection in 2011. She took over at setter as a junior after sharing the position with two-time All-American Sydney Anderson in NU's 3-62 rotation in 2010. Cook helped the Huskers hit .600 or better in 10 matches in 2011, including two matches over .400. She also led NU with 18 double-doubles on the year.

Werth will guide the Husker defense as a senior after earning AVCA honorable mention All-America and first-team All-Big Ten honors as a junior. She recorded 10 double-doubles in 2011, while averaging 2.80 kills per set and 3.11 digs per set on the season. Werth notched at least 10 kills in 18 matches, while recording at least 10 digs in 19 matches in 2011. She also posted a streak of eight matches where she recorded at least 10 digs.

Mancuso produced a stellar junior campaign and closed the season with an AVCA first-team All-America honor. Elevating her play in her third year with the Huskers, she led the team in kills and points in 2011 and was also a unanimous first-team All-Big Ten selection. She averaged 3.60 kills per set, 2.66 digs per set and was continually ranked in the top 10 in the Big Ten Conference for total kills during the season. She totaled 406 kills in 2011 and notched at least 10 kills in 27 matches.

Fans will have their first opportunity to see the Huskers in at the Red/White Scrimmage on Saturday, Aug. 18 at 7 p.m. Tickets are still available online at Huskers.com or by calling 1-800-8-BIGRED. Fans are also encouraged to secure their tickets through Ticketmaster for the Nebraska-Notre Dame match at the CenturyLink Center in Omaha on Aug. 26 at 1:30 p.m.

## DSU Baseball To Hold Youth Fall League, Prospect Day

MADISON — The Dakota State University baseball coaching staff will be holding a Youth Fall League on Sundays beginning Sunday, Sept. 9. The league is open for kids ages 8-12 and will have two different age divisions. The teams will be coached by current DSU baseball players.

DSU will also be holding a prospect scout day for high school juniors and seniors on Saturday, Sept. 22. The

morning will consist of campus tours & admission information. The afternoon will consist of several baseball tests and finish with a scrimmage.

For more information on these events, contact Assistant Coach Eric Horthness at 605-760-0621 or [eric.horthness@dsu.edu](mailto:eric.horthness@dsu.edu)

## SDSU Soccer Ranked 61st In Preseason Poll

BROOKINGS — The South Dakota State women's soccer team opened the 2012 season at No. 61 on the TopDrawerSoccer.com Tournament 64.

The Tournament 64 rankings are a running attempt to project the postseason college soccer tournament qualifiers, including every automatic conference berth. Thus, some college soccer teams will not be included that are included in other rankings lists.

SDSU faces two other teams included in this week's rankings this season in Georgia (No. 25) and Wisconsin (No. 33).

The Jacks are the lone Summit League team included in the Preseason (Aug. 6-12) rankings.

In addition to the rankings, SDSU is featured in The Summit League preview on TopDrawerSoccer.com and is one of the predicted league champions in the conference predictions.

SDSU opens the regular season this weekend at

Green Bay and Wisconsin.

## Youth Groups Selling Riverboat Days Parking Passes

Two Yankton youth groups are selling parking passes for near Riverboat Park for this weekend's Riverboat Days festivities.

— Yankton Baseball Association passes are available at JJBenji and First Chiropractic. The parking area is located in the old Gurney's parking lot.

For more information, contact Jeff Benjamin at 661-6351 or Marcia Walter at 660-6564.

— Yankton club high school soccer passes are available at Slumberland and the Scrapbook Store. The parking area is located near the Scrapbook Store, 315 E 3rd Street.

For more information, contact Deb Lillie at 661-1296.

## Coaches: Send In Fall Sports Info

The 2012 Press & Dakotan Fall Sports Preview will be released in the Friday, Aug. 24 edition.

Coaches of fall sports are asked to send in their team information as soon as possible. Forms may be sent by fax to 605-665-1721. Information may also be e-mailed to [sports@yankton.net](mailto:sports@yankton.net).

Forms were sent to the schools earlier this month. Coaches who have not received their fall sports information forms may call 1-800-743-2968, ext. 106, or e-mail [sports@yankton.net](mailto:sports@yankton.net).

## SCOREBOARD

## FOOTBALL

## NFL PRESEASON

**Thursday, Aug. 16**  
Cleveland at Green Bay, 7 p.m.  
Cincinnati at Atlanta, 7 p.m.

**Friday, Aug. 17**  
Tennessee at Tampa Bay, 6:30 p.m.  
Buffalo at Minnesota, 7 p.m.

**Saturday, Aug. 18**  
Jacksonville at New Orleans, 7 p.m.  
Detroit at Baltimore, 7 p.m.

**Sunday, Aug. 19**  
Miami at Carolina, 7 p.m.  
Oakland at Arizona, 8 p.m.

**Sunday, Aug. 20**  
Indianapolis at Pittsburgh, 7 p.m.

**Monday, Aug. 20**  
Philadelphia at New England, 7 p.m.

## BASEBALL

## LITTLE LEAGUE WORLD SERIES

**At South Williamsport, Pa.**  
**Double Elimination**

**UNITED STATES:** GREAT LAKES, New Castle, Ind.; MID-ATLANTIC, Parsippany, N.J.;

**MIDWEST:** Kearney, Neb.; **NEW ENGLAND:** Fairfield, Conn.; **NORTHWEST:** Gresham, Ore.;

**SOUTHEAST:** Goodlettsville, Tenn.; **SOUTH:** WEST, San Antonio, Texas; **PACIFIC:** Petaluma, Calif.

**INTERNATIONAL:** ASIA-PACIFIC, Taoyuan, Taiwan; CANADA, Vancouver, British Columbia; CARIBBEAN, Willemstad, Curacao;

**EUROPE:** Ramstein, Germany; **JAPAN:** Tokyo; **LATIN AMERICA:** Aguadulce, Panama; MEA, Lugazi, Uganda; MEXICO, Nuevo Laredo.

**Thursday, Aug. 16**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Friday, Aug. 17**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Saturday, Aug. 18**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Sunday, Aug. 19**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Monday, Aug. 20**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Tuesday, Aug. 21**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Wednesday, Aug. 22**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Thursday, Aug. 23**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Friday, Aug. 24**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Saturday, Aug. 25**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Sunday, Aug. 26**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Monday, Aug. 27**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Tuesday, Aug. 28**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Wednesday, Aug. 29**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Thursday, Aug. 30**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Friday, Aug. 31**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Saturday, Sept. 1**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Sunday, Sept. 2**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Monday, Sept. 3**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Tuesday, Sept. 4**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Wednesday, Sept. 5**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Thursday, Sept. 6**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Friday, Sept. 7**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Saturday, Sept. 8**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Sunday, Sept. 9**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Monday, Sept. 10**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Tuesday, Sept. 11**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Wednesday, Sept. 12**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Thursday, Sept. 13**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Friday, Sept. 14**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Saturday, Sept. 15**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Sunday, Sept. 16**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Monday, Sept. 17**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Tuesday, Sept. 18**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Wednesday, Sept. 19**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Thursday, Sept. 20**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Friday, Sept. 21**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Saturday, Sept. 22**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Sunday, Sept. 23**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Monday, Sept. 24**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Tuesday, Sept. 25**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Wednesday, Sept. 26**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Thursday, Sept. 27**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

**Friday, Sept. 28**  
Tokyo 7, Aguadulce 0  
Petaluma, Calif. 6, Fairfield, Conn. 4

## AREA CALENDAR

**Friday, August 17**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Vermillion (6 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Custer at Vermillion  
**TENNIS, BOYS'** R.C. Stevens/Watertown at YHS (11 a.m.)

**Saturday, August 18**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**TENNIS, GIRLS'** R.C. Stevens/Watertown/Vermillion at YHS (9 a.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

**Sunday, August 19**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Idaho (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

**Monday, August 20**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Idaho (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

**Tuesday, August 21**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Idaho (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

**Wednesday, August 22**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Idaho (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

**Thursday, August 23**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Idaho (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

**Friday, August 24**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Idaho (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

**Saturday, August 25**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Idaho (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

**Sunday, August 26**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Idaho (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

**Monday, August 27**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Idaho (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

**Tuesday, August 28**  
**GOLF, DAKOTAS TOUR** Paradise Valley Inv. at Casper, Wyo.  
**SOCCER, WOMEN'S** USD at Idaho (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.); Freeman Academy at Mitchell (11 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, BOYS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS'** Brandon Valley at Yankton (3 p.m.)  
**SOCCER, GIRLS' JV** Brandon Valley at Yankton (11 p.m.)

## 297-Pound Boy Too Big For PeeWee Football

MESQUITE, Texas (AP) — A suburban Dallas boy has been barred from playing pee-wee football because the league says he is just too big at nearly 300 pounds.

Mesquite Pee Wee Football Association President Ronnie Henderson said the rules are clear and 12-year-old Elijah Earnheart is not eligible. The 6-foot-1-inch boy exceeds the 135-pound limit for seventh-graders, and he got the bad news last Sunday when the league held its official weigh-in.

Henderson said he asked Elijah whether he was in sixth or seventh grade, then told him "no need going" any further.

Cindy Earnheart, the boy's mother, said she was incensed and Elijah was humiliated.

"They would not even let him weigh in on the scales like every single boy out there," she said. "He might be the size of a grown man but he's 12 years old and he has feelings, too."

Elijah, who describes himself as a "gentle giant" and dreams of someday playing pro football, said the turn of events was unfair.

"I'm not sad, I'm mad that I don't get to play," Elijah said. "I've been practicing for three weeks."

Henderson said three other boys were turned away that day because of safety concerns for other players.

"We've got little boys that play against him that are 85, 95 and 100 pounds," Henderson said. "We have to look out for all the kids, not just him."

Cindy Earnheart said her son was feeling self-conscious about his size until he discovered pee-wee football. His barber happened to coach a team, the Mesquite Vikings, and suggested the boy join. Coach Marc Wright said a passage in the rulebook seemed to indicate that youths who weigh more than 135 pounds could play, but only on the offensive or defensive line.

At his physical last month, Elijah's doctor said he weighed 297 pounds and stood 6-feet-1 1/2 inches tall. His mother said they special-ordered his helmet, shoulder pads, pants and jersey because of his size, which she said is hered-

itary in her family.

Elijah took the practice field, looming over boys more than half his size, and was thrilled.

When he's playing football Elijah said, "I feel energetic. I feel happy."

He practiced with the Vikings for three weeks and even took part in a scrimmage. Then came the weigh-in.

Henderson said the exception in the rulebook was meant for sixth-graders who can weigh as much as 160 pounds. He suggested Elijah play for his middle school team, but the boy doesn't have much football experience and was hoping to feel his way in pee-wee first.

Cindy Earnheart said barring her son was discrimination.

"No one is telling boys who are too thin or too small that they can't play football," she said. "Why tell my kid he's too big?"

She added: "Isn't a bigger better in football? Football is a contact sport. If you don't want your son tackled, get him off the field."

## Ponder: Vikings Can 'Win Now'

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Christian Ponder's success as an NFL quarterback is years away from being determined.

He's not interested in waiting for the Minnesota Vikings to improve, though.

"We want to win now. We're putting that pressure on ourselves that we want to do a lot better than 3-13. We want to make the playoffs. We want to be competitive in the NFC North," Ponder said.

The Vikings (29th in the preseason AP Pro32) are 9-24 since they advanced to the NFC championship game behind Brett Favre 2 1/2 years ago. Even if running back Adrian Peterson is back to normal from the start following his rehabilitation from reconstructive surgery on his left knee, there are too many rookies and recent late-round draft picks in the starting lineup for the Vikings to be seriously considered around the league as contenders.

But one of the beauties of the NFL, of course, is the thin margin between bad teams and good ones. With 16 games and the constant

competitive balance provided by the salary cap, there's almost always one club that turns a double-digit-defeat season into a playoff spot the next year.

"In our minds, we have a good team," Ponder said. "Obviously, we've still got a lot of things to get better at in these next two weeks. Obviously, we know it's tough. We know it's a tough division. You look at last year: We were in so many games. We could have easily been 10-6, and we ended 3-13. So that's a good sign. We were close last year, and we're only going to be better this year."

The question is how much better the Vikings can be with Ponder, whose first 10 NFL starts could be best described as erratic.

His confidence has been apparent on the field and that's one of the most important steps. He's had some practice performances during training camp that were rookie-like, but overall he's been more accurate in the pocket and made better choices about where to throw the ball.

guarding them," joked offensive coordinator Wes Beschoner of his 1-2 punch of Sims and Sanders.

Among the other lineman tasked with creating space for the duo are left tackle Matt Huff (So.), left guard Cody O'Neill (Jr.), right guard Andrew Schofield (So.) and right tackle Marc Murtha (Jr.), according to the depth chart.

"This is probably the best offensive line I've been around," Sanders said. "We've got all big and pretty fast. They're some receivers around us who can do everything; block, catch and run."

It will all start with the quarterback, a position that will be anchored