



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D
South Dakota State quarterback Austin Sumner drops back to pass during the Oct. 13 home game against Western Illinois in Brookings.

STATE-U FOOTBALL | STARTING QUARTERBACKS

Avoiding The Sophomore Slump

SDSU's Sumner, USD's Vander Maten Utilize Different Styles To Lead Jackrabbits, Coyotes

BY JEREMY HOECK
jeremy.hoeck@yankton.net

Experience. System. Style. Production.

The list of differences between the two starting quarterbacks for Saturday's long-awaited football game between South Dakota State and the University of South Dakota far exceeds their similarities.

On the one hand, Austin Sumner with the Jackrabbits and Josh Vander Maten with the Coyotes are both sophomores, but other than that they are vastly different leaders on programs with significantly opposite successes this season.

Put simply: Sumner is more of a pocket passer for SDSU (7-3, 5-2), while Vander Maten is more of a running threat for USD (1-9, 0-7).

"I just trying to do whatever it takes," Sumner, a former Brandon Valley standout, said. "If it means throwing 30 times or 15 times, whatever we have to do to get a 'W,' I'm fine with."

The 6-foot-5 Sumner has overcome a thumb injury and subsequent struggles to again post solid offensive numbers for the Jackrabbits. He has completed 159-of-283 passes for 1,829 yards and 13 touchdowns with 13 interceptions.

He is, however, not the dual threat quarterback that Vander Maten is. The 6-foot-2 Coyote is 130-of-232 passing for 1,443 yards and seven touchdowns with seven interceptions through the air. He has also rushed 127 times for 485 yards and six scores.

Vander Maten's performance last Saturday against Northern Iowa, with 340 total yards and two touchdowns was his best outing in six weeks.

"I'm definitely getting more comfortable," he said. "That's what we wanted. I'd like to have more wins in there, but I'm just trying to get better and help our offense get rolling."

"We need something good to happen going into the off-season, that's our big goal right now."

Vander Maten: Former Walk-On

One of the biggest differences between the two quarterbacks is experience. Sumner is nearing the end of his first full season as a starter but has made 18 starts since assuming the role early in 2011.

Vander Maten, on the other hand, assumed the starting duties this season. The former walk-on from Boyden, Iowa, played in seven games last year as a redshirt freshman and had just 221 yards passing — though he did have a touchdown throw at Wisconsin.

With a new coaching staff coming into 2012, the 21-year-old Vander Maten was unquestionably the starter and responded with a 2-touchdown performance in the opener at Montana.

He was steady until back-to-back sub-par efforts against North Dakota State and Indiana State — two of the nation's top defenses. In those two games combined, Vander Maten passed for just 94 yards with three interceptions, two returned for touchdowns.

"At the beginning, he started building up and getting better week to week," offensive coordinator Wes Beschornor said. "We ran into two really good defenses, and they took him away. I didn't get him out of that, and that was my fault."

Vander Maten's struggles have figured prominently in USD's offensive woes this season. Out of 121 FCS teams, the Coyotes rank No. 111 in passing yardage with 286.6 total yards per game.

"He's very capable in both aspects of the game. He's more comfortable running right now, and any time you dont throw the ball well, that's what you have to rely on, your feet," Beschornor said. "He's done that. He gets away from pressure."

"We'll continue to ask him to stand in there and make the throws, but when it's not there get out of the pocket and get it done."

Doing so has showcased Vander Maten's ability to pressure opposing defenses with his feet. He has led the Coyotes in rushing four times this season, highlighted by last Saturday's 135-yard performance.

"I feel like I'm more of a 'wiggler,' trying to make people miss so I don't take that big hit," Vander Maten said. "But if I have to get hit, I'll deal with it."

With two more years to develop and become more consistent, Vander Maten will naturally progress, according to one of his offensive linemen.

"He's had his ups and downs, but every quarterback has that," senior center Tim Ross said. "The progression in his passing and how he makes his reads, you can see the game is slowing down for him."

"It's nice to see that growth."

Sumner: Native Son

A record-setting freshman season in 2011 led to high expectations for Sumner — who set new Missouri Valley Football Conference freshman records for passing yards (2,382) and led the country in three other areas — this fall.

The dislocated thumb on his throwing hand he suffered before the opener



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D
University of South Dakota sophomore quarterback Josh Vander Maten, center, runs up the middle for a big gain during last Saturday's home game with Northern Iowa at the DakotaDome in Vermillion. Vander Maten combined for 340 yards and two touchdowns in one of his best performances of the season.

at Kansas, however, tempered some of those goals.

"We felt we had a really solid team coming in; we were very confident, but that injury didn't help," Sumner, 20, said. "It didn't really help me be confident knowing where the ball was going. I just never knew what was going to happen with the ball."

A change in his grip of the ball was awkward at first, he says, but having a rushing attack led by Zenner naturally took some pressure off him to have a big game through the air.

"The one thing I took from it is that you have to keep believing in yourself," Sumner said. "Everybody rides the wave with you. We all have the same goal."

With their quarterback playing injured, the Jackrabbits relied on the emergence of sophomore running back Zach Zenner. He started the season with rushing yard efforts of 183, 278, 197, 237, 182 and 171 to lead the nation in that category. Zenner now ranks second nationally with 1,539 yards for an average of 153.9 per game.

Sumner, meanwhile, turned a corner with a 351-yard, 5-touchdown performance against Youngstown State on Oct. 27. The week later, he completed 11-of-16 passes (two fourth down conversions) on a game-winning 94-yard drive at Southern Illinois.

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JILANNE DOOM/P&D
South Dakota quarterback Josh Vander Maten is hit by North Dakota State's Kyle Emanuel, 53, as he attempts a pass during their Missouri Valley Football Conference game Oct. 20 at Howard Wood Field in Sioux Falls. The Bison routed the Coyotes 54-0 and USD has dropped three straight games since to fall to 1-9 overall.

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