



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D
South Dakota State's Tyrel Kool returns the opening kickoff during the Jackrabbits' 31-10 victory over Western Illinois in Brookings. The senior from Yankton scored on the play, returning the kickoff 100 yards. During his career, Kool has been used at running back, wide receiver, return specialist and cornerback.

STATE-U FOOTBALL | TYREL KOOL

Jacks Utilize Kool's Versatility

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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When Tyrel Kool left Yankton for South Dakota State University, he was recruited to the football team to play running back. He spent just one year in the Jackrabbit backfield, but the senior has made an impact on and off the field.

The 5-9, 190-pound speedster will play the final regular season game of his career on Saturday, entering the game ranked in the top-10 all-time for SDSU in career receptions. "We thought he'd be a running back his whole career," said SDSU head football coach John Stiegelmeier. "Out of need we moved him around. We wanted to get our best 11 on the field, and he was one

of our best three or four." Kool first got onto the field for SDSU as a freshman, playing mostly in the return game and in the defensive secondary. He broke an 84-yard return against the University of Minnesota, earning himself Missouri Valley Football Conference Special Teams Player of the Week honors. The next year he was at wide receiver and led the Jackrabbits with 64 receptions and 808 yards. He twice earned MVFC Offensive Player of the Week honors and was named honorable mention all-MVFC for the season. "Playing wide receiver and cornerback was a way to get me on the field earlier," Kool said. "They asked me if I was OK with it, and I took the opportunity." Kool finally got his chance in the backfield last season and rushed for a team-high 534 yards. "I had to get a little bit heavier so I could take a beating," Kool said of returning to running back. "In terms of learning the system, it's just a little bit different mindset." But late in the season, freshman Zach Zenner emerged as a solid option in the run game. Kool was left with a choice, play behind a standout

sophomore or return to wide receiver. "You ask Tyrel to do something and he says, 'All right. I can do it,'" said SDSU wide receiver coach Josh Davis. "He never complained." One of the things that has allowed Kool to bounce from position to position during his career is his intellect. "The best thing about Tyrel is that he's a football player," Davis said. "When coaches tell him what to do he understands things right away. He has a great football mind." That intellect — as well as his desire — are evident when Kool speaks, according to Stiegelmeier. "Whenever Tyrel talks to the team, it is always well thought out," he said. "On the football field he competes. He plays his tail off for himself and for the team." That determination was shown in the Jackrabbits' loss to FBS Kansas in the season opener. In the game, he caught eight passes for 76 yards and a score. "We give out a ball at the end of the game. The balls are deflated, and we give it to a player who left it all out on the field," Stiegelmeier said. "I asked coach Davis who he thought should get it, and he said that he'd

only had one other receiver play as hard as Tyrel did in that game. "I asked him who, and he said, 'Tyrel, two years ago.'" Kool has continued to move around, getting some time in the return game. Earlier this season he took the opening kickoff against Western Illinois for a 100-yard touchdown, tying a school record. "Whoever is on the field, we ask them to do what they can to help the team," Stiegelmeier said. "Tyrel does what we ask, and does it at full speed." While moving from position to position was a challenge for Kool, he feels it made him a better football player. "It really helped me understand defenses better and understand our offensive scheme," he said. "It's made me a more versatile player." Kool will also take away an appreciation for hard work. "It's about being able to bring your lunch pail to work and be the best at what you do, no matter what it is you do," he said.

You can follow James D. Cimburek on Twitter at twitter.com/aceman904



AREA SPOTLIGHT: ROBBIE JELSMa



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D
Robbie Jelsma, a sophomore linebacker from Springfield, has played in six games this season, recording 11 tackles. Three times this season he has recorded three tackles, in consecutive weeks against Western Illinois, Northern Iowa and Youngstown State. He also recorded three tackles, including a sack, during the 2011 season against FBS Illinois.

AREA SPOTLIGHT: AUSTIN KOCH



JEREMY HOECK/P&D
Austin Koch (83), a junior wide receiver from Tyndall, has played in eight games this season, including a start at Missouri State. Koch has recorded two tackles on special teams this season. He recorded a career-best four tackles in USD's victory over then No. 1 Eastern Washington in the 2011 season.

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"He's gotten healthier from his injury and he's gotten comfortable in understanding that not everything is always going to block," SDSU head coach John Stiegelmeier said. "Last year we did a good job blocking for him." "I think he just understands where we're at as an offense. He's very comfortable in his role." That's where experience helps someone like Sumner. He's been in big games, including last Saturday's showdown at North Dakota State, but nothing close to the fervor surrounding the matchup with USD. "Every week is a big game in this conference, so we're used to playing good teams," Sumner said. "These have the asterisk on them just because of who they area. We'll have a lot of fun, we've worked hard all year, and we're looking forward to taking care of business."

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