

Joseph The Man In The Middle Of Vikings' Improving Defense

BY BRIAN HALL
Associated Press

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. (AP) — Restructuring the porous Minnesota Vikings defense started with one big move for coach Mike Zimmer in 2014: signing 329-pound nose tackle Linval Joseph.

Looking for an anchor in the middle of the defensive line, Joseph was the first free agent signed by Minnesota under Zimmer's watch. The Vikings lured the big tackle from the New York Giants on the opening day of free agency last year with a five-year, \$31.25 million contract.

Zimmer's defense has taken hold in Year 2 and it's no coincidence Joseph has been the man in the middle while Minnesota is allowing the second-fewest points and ninth-fewest yards per game this season.

"He's doing so many good things and he's such a great kid, and really kind of embodies what we're trying to get this football team to be like," Zimmer said. "He does an awful lot of dirty work and doesn't necessarily get the recognition. I know he's getting more now. He doesn't really care about getting recognition, I don't believe."

Joseph's recognition arrived two weeks ago in the form of an NFC defensive player of the week award.

An award usually reserved for players with big sack or interception totals, Joseph earned the honor following Minnesota's 21-18 overtime win against St. Louis when he had 10 tackles, three tackles for loss and half a sack.

"It doesn't surprise me because he's a very good athlete; his strength, his power," Zimmer said. "I guess he's just so much more comfortable that it shows up a little bit more."

Defensive end Brian Robison said it would be a "travesty" if Joseph doesn't earn his first Pro Bowl invitation.

Robison knows all about Pro Bowl-worthy defensive tackles.

His career began when Pat Williams was part of the "Williams Wall" for the Vikings. With Williams in the middle, Minnesota led the league in run defense three straight seasons and posted a second-place finish the following year.

"I think they're similar in how dominant they are at the nose tackle position," Robison said. "I mean, I love Pat to death, but Linval, the things he does athletically for his size is ridiculous. Just his overall strength; he's probably one of the strongest human beings I've been around."

Joseph had seven tackles in last week's win and is tied for fourth on the Vikings with 42 tackles heading into Sunday's game against Green Bay. Joseph has seven tackles for loss, four quarterback hits, a forced fumble and a pass deflection.

After allowing the San Francisco 49ers to run for 230 yards in the season-opener, Minnesota has held six of its past eight opponents under 100 yards rushing.

"Right now everybody is playing together and that is all you can ask for," the reserved Joseph said. "Right now we are one heartbeat and the last couple of games have come right down to the wire, but we got heart and we don't give up. That's what we are trying to teach and coach here and that's what we're doing."

It all started with plugging Joseph into the middle.

NOTES: LT Matt Kalil is questionable for Sunday's game with a toe injury.

Kalil returned to practice on Friday on a limited basis after sitting out the previous two days. S Robert Blanton is questionable with a back injury after being limited on Friday. Rookie LB Eric Kendricks is listed as probable after missing last week's game with a rib injury. Kendricks was a full participant in practice all week.

Kentucky Rolls Past Wright State 78-63

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) — Tyler Ulis scored a career-high 21 points, and No. 2 Kentucky beat Wright State 78-63 on Friday night.

The Wildcats (4-0) followed their impressive victory Tuesday night over No. 5 Duke by shooting 53 percent from the field, with the 5-foot-9 Ulis setting the tone by getting to the basket and the foul line. He was 5 for 9 from the field and 10 for 12 from the line with five assists, after he had 18 points and six assists against the Blue Devils.

Kentucky held the Raiders (1-3) to 36 percent shooting and outrebounded them 37-27. Alex Poythress had 10 points and 10 rebounds, and Marcus Lee grabbed seven rebounds.

Grant Benzinger, the son of former major leaguer Todd Benzinger, had 19 points for Wright State.

NO. 5 DUKE 79, VCU 71: NEW YORK (AP) — Grayson Allen bounced back from an off game against Kentucky by scoring a career-high 30 points, and Duke beat VCU in the opening round of the 2K Classic at Madison Square Garden.

Allen, who averaged 27 points in the Blue Devils' first two games of the season, was held to six points on 2-for-11 shooting by No. 2 Kentucky on Tuesday night in the Champions Classic. Facing the Rams, he looked a lot more like the player who had an exceptional Final Four in leading Duke to its fifth national championship last season.

He was 9 for 15 from the field, including matching his career high with four 3-pointers. He was the key to Duke's 17-3 run that turned VCU's last lead of the game, 54-53, into a comfortable 70-58 lead.

The Blue Devils (3-1) will face Georgetown, which beat Wisconsin, in the championship game Sunday. Melvin Johnson led the Rams (2-1) with 20 points.



P&D FILE PHOTO

South Dakota State's Jesse Bobbit, 7, pressures South Dakota quarterback Ryan Saeger during their matchup on Nov. 14 at the DakotaDome in Vermillion.

State VB

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Platte-Geddes 3,

Harding County 1

SIoux FALLS — Platte-Geddes survived a slow start to beat Harding County 18-25, 25-22, 25-23, 25-21 in the consolation semifinals of the South Dakota State Class B Volleyball tournament on Friday at the Denny Sanford Premier Center.

The victory sends the Black Panthers into the fifth place match against Sanborn Central-Woonsocket, today (Saturday) at 11 a.m. Harding County will face Philip for seventh.

Jada Nelson had 19 kills and 15 digs, and Alexis Peterson had 17 kills and 18 digs to lead Platte-Geddes. Jenna Erickson finished with 43 assists and 22 digs. Hallie Hallock had seven kills and 14 digs, and Sarah Erickson had 20 digs in the victory.

For Harding County, Natalie Phillips had 15 kills and Shawnee Mollman had 14 kills to lead the way. Brianna Williams had 36 assists and 18 digs. Kyla Schleuning had 11 kills. Kasey Teigen posted 25 digs, Felicity Phillips had 17 digs, Camryn Anderson had 16 digs and Madeline Teigen had 12 digs in the effort.

Coyotes

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was obviously key this week for USD.

"We had a great game with South Dakota State, but we're anxious to shake that off a little bit and go out to Illinois and see if we can't find a winning season," Glenn said.

That's the remaining goal for the Coyotes, who are all but out of the playoff conversation.

If they were to win in Normal, the Coyotes would secure the program's first winning record since 2011 — the season before Glenn came aboard.

"We're going to salvage what we can," Glenn said. "We have a chance for a winning season, and we're going to fight like heck for it."

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Hurt QB

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son. Now he's been sidelined with a foot injury in favor of untested Brock Osweiler, who has thrown 54 passes in his NFL career.

"To hear coach (Gary) Ku-biak say, 'Hey Brock, you're going to start this week at Chicago' in front of the whole team, yeah," Osweiler said, "it's a little abnormal."

AP sports writers Schuyler Dixon in Dallas and Arnie Stapleton in Denver contributed to this report.

Jacks

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is even more interesting for the resilient Leathernecks. Starting quarterback Trenton Norvell missed the game last weekend because of a Friday appendicitis surgery.

Redshirt freshman Sean McGuire made his debut and the reviews were mostly positive after he went 29 for 44 passing for 332 yards with one touchdown. He threw one interception.

"Our guys didn't [give up]," Leatherneck coach

Bob Nielson said. "They kept battling and they found a way to win a really tough football game on the road and now we have a chance to play a really big game. Not just for our program but who knows, if we get a win and end up at six wins who knows what might happen."

As for Norvell, he's completed 168 of 304 passes for 2,110 yards this season. The junior has thrown 13 touchdowns and eight interceptions.

But Western Illinois isn't the only team riding last week's momentum. The Jackrabbits traveled to Vermillion to beat the rival Coyotes and

keep their road record at a perfect 4-0. To do that, SDSU scored 20 points in the fourth quarter to win 30-23.

Freshman Taryn Christian started at quarterback and struggled. Christian went 9-for-19 passing for 153 yards and one interception.

After that slow start, the Jackrabbits rallied behind junior Zach Lujan in the fourth quarter. He ended the day going 6-for-8 passing for 128 yards.

Lujan would connect with wideout Jake Wieneke (who grabbed six more receptions for 180 yards) on multiple plays to carve out some big yardage and set up running

back Kyle Paris for a touchdown.

With both teams riding the high from challenging wins, this weekend will prove to be an historic test for Stiegelmeier and the Jacks.

"They're a really good football team," Stiegelmeier said of the Leathernecks.

"They'll be ready to play and we've got a lot to play for. I'm excited to see the look in our guy's eyes because we're in virgin territory. We've never been here before. I don't want our guys to get caught up in it, I want them to grasp it and run with it."

SPORTS DIGEST

Junior Wrestling Late Registration Monday

The Yankton Junior Bucks wrestling program will host an open house and late registration on Monday, Nov. 23, from 6:30-8 p.m. at the program's new training center at 2007 Broadway. The area is located between Dollar Tree and Auto Zone.

The event is an opportunity to meet the coach as well as other participants and their families. Those interested in youth wrestling and their families are invited to attend.

Coaches: Send In Winter Sports Information

The 2015 Press & Dakotan Winter Sports Preview will be released in the Friday, December 11 edition.

Coaches of winter sports are asked to send in their team information forms as soon as possible. Forms may be sent by fax to 605-665-1721. Information may also be e-mailed to sports@yankton.net.

Forms were sent to the schools earlier this summer. Coaches who have not received their winter sports information forms may call 1-800-743-2968, ext. 106, or e-mail sports@yankton.net.

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