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# Sports

## Will victory over South Dakota turn MSU football program around?

**MANKATO** — Minnesota State's 44-39 victory over South Dakota on Saturday at Blakeslee Stadium was thrilling, emotional, flukish and satisfying. But was it the victory, long-awaited as it is, that will turn this football program around?



**CHAD COURRIER**  
The Free Press

That remains to be seen.

To recap, the Mavericks dominated the third quarter and led 31-14, but the high-scoring, explosive Coyotes, ranked in the top 10 by some Division II polls, rallied with four touchdowns to lead 39-38 with 1:34 to play.

Please see COURRIER, Page D6

## COURRIER: Milestone victory or forgotten game?

Continued from Page D1

Minnesota State took over on the 23-yard line with 1:29 remaining and marched to the South Dakota 16 with Ben King completing 7 of 7 passes. There were just nine seconds on the clock, and it was looking like so many other games for the Mavericks, who over the last decade have played well enough to win but managed to lose.

On second down, the Mavericks lined up for a field goal, but ran a fake, completely catching South Dakota off guard. However, the pass to a wide-open Dan Harke was short, and it was even easier to believe the Mavericks would fail again.

The incompletion still set up a third-down field goal

attempt and another chance to win. This time, the kick hit the upright, bouncing cruelly straight back, but a whistle saved the Mavericks, who by committing an illegal motion penalty actually killed the play before it started.

Now five yards back, the Mavericks had a chance for a 38-yard field goal. Surely, the third time would be a charm. But the Coyotes rushed hard up the middle, blocking the kick, much as Minnesota Duluth had done two weeks earlier at the stadium to seal an overtime victory.

This time, however, the ball deflected back to Jeff Fielder, who alertly picked it up and ran 23 yards for the Mavericks' first North Central Conference victory

of the season. Had the blocked kick bounced ahead of the line of scrimmage, the game would have been over and coach Jeff Jamrog would have been trying to find words to explain how difficult it was to lose this game.

Instead, he was able to smile and celebrate a victory. Too bad only 2,000 fans were there to witness, about half of the number that had attended each of the first three home games.

So with two games remaining in this season, will this be a milestone victory, or will it quickly be forgotten, much like that 20-13 victory over Nebraska-Omaha in the 2004 season finale? Or those three straight victories, including road wins at North Dakota and South Dakota, late in

the 2002 season? Or the 26-25 victory over North Dakota State in 2001?

Those were all games that were expected to get this program on the right track, signs of optimism that would inspire the team, the university and the community. From here forward, things would be different.

Of course, that remains to be seen. But perhaps we'll look back, five or 10 years from now, as the Mavericks celebrate an NCC championship and recall the day that Minnesota State won a game by getting a field goal blocked.

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