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VIKINGS NOTES

Vikings hands-on at NFL combine

By ANDREW KRAMMER
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INDIANAPOLIS - Kentucky quarterback **Will Levis** told a gripping tale Friday about his meeting this week with Vikings brass inside a Lucas Oil Stadium suite.

Levis, considered one of the top passers in this year's draft along with Alabama's **Bryce Young**, Ohio State's **C.J. Stroud** and Florida's **Anthony Richardson**, said the Vikings had him hold a football during their interview.

"They just kind of had you have a football in your hands," Levis said, "which is nice because I like having something to kind of play around with. I don't know if it's because they wanted to see how big my hands were or something."

The Vikings are meeting with the draft's quarterbacks — the same as they did last year — while also again trying to negotiate new contract terms with **Kirk Cousins**, who is only signed through 2023.

Coach **Kevin O'Connell** said he values face-to-face interactions and evaluations of draft prospects, as some coaches, such as the Packers' **Matt LaFleur**, stay away from Indy. Regarding QBs, O'Connell prefers an annual study of veterans and rookies alike because he said he never knows when he'll cross paths with a player.

"Just out of habit, I do that every single year," O'Connell said earlier this week. "The guys in the draft, free agency, just looking at the landscape of the league, and then all of the quarterbacks on our roster and how we feel about our position. There's a reason I feel so strongly about Kirk."

Gophers reach 4.4 speed

Gophers defensive backs **Jordan Howden** and **Terell Smith** posted impressive times in the 40-yard dash on Friday. Howden, who was questioned by draft analysts about his speed, ranked fifth among safeties with a 4.49-second time. Smith tied for eighth among all cornerbacks needing only 4.41 seconds.

Neither fared as well in the jumps, which gauge explosiveness. Howden ranked 12th in both the vertical (33.5 inches) and broad (9 feet, 11 inches) jumps out of 19 safeties. Smith ranked 25th with his vertical jump (34 inches) and 27th in the broad jump (10 feet) out of 29 corners.

Brotherly advice

Auburn kicker **Anders Carlson**, the younger brother of former Vikings kicker **Daniel Carlson**, said he has received some brotherly advice about the NFL journey. The older Carlson was named a first-team All-Pro selection for the Raiders last season, four years after he was a fifth-round pick released after only two games for Minnesota.

"He just told me to enjoy this process," Anders Carlson said. "He talked about some of the things he lacked going to the Vikings. He had a lot of talent, but trusted himself not as much as he does now. Now with the Raiders, he's had a lot of success and I'm sure that's not going to stop. He's got a great group around him, which is really crucial in the NFL."

MINNESOTA SCENE

U softball team defeats No. 20 Oregon on HRs

STAFF and NEWS SERVICES

Addison Leschber hit two solo homers and **Breezy Bennett** a two-run shot as the Gophers softball team beat No. 20 Oregon 4-1 on Friday in its opening game of the Judi Garman Classic in Fullerton, Calif. Both players are freshmen.

Senior **Autumn Pease** pitched a two-hitter for Minnesota (9-6). She allowed only a home run by **Alyssa Daniell** of the Ducks (13-4) in the second inning.

U baseball stays winless

Hawaii edged the Gophers baseball team 3-2 on the first day of the Cambria College Classic at U.S. Bank Stadium.

Riley Swenson hit a solo homer to center field for Minnesota (0-9) in the fifth inning and **Sam Hunt** had an RBI double in the ninth.

Matt Wong had a two-run homer for the Rainbow Warriors (5-3), who turned a triple play in the third.

The Gophers play No. 4 Mississippi (8-2), the defending NCAA champion, at 7 p.m. Saturday in their second tournament game.

U football to open two spring practices

The Gophers football team will hold two spring practices that will be free and open to the public. The practices on March 28 and April 4 will begin at 5:15 p.m. and be held at a site to be determined.

The Gophers previously announced they will hold their spring game at 11 a.m. April 22 at Huntington Bank Stadium. It, too, will be free.

RANDY JOHNSON

Whitecaps fall in shootout

Liz Schepers and **Sydney Baldwin** both scored in the last minute of regulation time for the Minnesota Whitecaps to tie the score, but the visitors lost to the Boston Pride 5-4 in a shootout (2-0) in the Premier Hockey Federation.

The loss was the fifth in a row for the Whitecaps (10-9-2). **Jenna Brenneman** made 44 saves for Minnesota. **Corinne Schroeder** had 28 stops for Boston (17-3-1).

Etc.

• The No. 1-ranked Gophers men's hockey team, which received a quarterfinal bye this weekend in the Big Ten playoffs for winning the regular-season title, will play an intrasquad scrimmage at 6 p.m. Saturday at Graham Arena in Rochester. Seating is limited, but it is free and open to the public.

• The host Gophers tennis team lost 4-0 to Wisconsin. **Anet Koskel** lost 6-2, 6-2 to **Ava Markham** at No. 1 singles and also lost at No. 2 doubles with partner **Aiva Schmitz** 6-3. Coupled with a forfeit loss by Minnesota (5-6, 0-2 Big Ten) in one of the other two doubles matches, the Badgers won the doubles point despite a loss at No. 1 doubles. Wisconsin also won at No. 5 and 6 singles on forfeits.

PREPS RESULTS

BOYS HOCKEY ORONO 4, DELANO 1

Strong finishes returns Orono to state

Avery Anderson scored twice for the Spartans in the final six minutes.

By HEATHER RULE • Special to the Star Tribune

Orono's lead was cut in half in the third period, down to one goal. Delano, its season on the line, was pressuring to tie. With 6 minutes, 40 seconds left in regulation, Delano's bench — including coach Gerrit van Bergen — fired itself up and got its sea-of-orange fans going, too.

Less than 90 seconds later, Orono scored a power-play goal to regain the two-goal lead. That was all the insurance the top-seeded Spartans needed in a 4-1 victory over third seed Delano in the Class 1A, Section 2 boys hockey title game Friday at the St. Louis Park Recreation Center.

"It was a backbreaker there," Orono coach Sean Fish said. "It's one of those, if you don't get it, now all of a sudden that last two minutes is even tougher on you."

Junior Brody Finnegan gave Orono (23-5) a 1-0 lead late in the first period on a blue-line shot off the faceoff with his fifth goal of the season, and fourth in his past five games.

"It was unreal," Finnegan said. "I didn't even know it went in.

"One of my buddies, Avery [Anderson], was pointing at the student section. I just ran over there."

Anderson was the one who later jammed home a rebound at the goalmouth with about five minutes left in regulation for that 3-1 lead. He added an empty-netter in the final minute.

The victory sends Orono back to state for the first time since 2018, when it won the Class 1A state championship.

Delano (15-13-0) fell just short of a section title for the second consecutive season. Van Bergen said his team came out in the third period with a lot of fire.

"Nonetheless, I felt like that [power-play goal] took a little bit of the wind out of our sails," he said.

RESULTS

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