

BASEBALL

Mayo's Regal commits to University of Nebraska

BY GUY N. LIMBECK
Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER — Now that he's got his college commitment out of the way, Ian Regal can just relax and play baseball during his senior season at Mayo High School.

Regal, who is starting his senior year at Mayo this fall, announced his intention last week to attend Division I University of Nebraska and play baseball for the Cornhuskers.

"It was always my goal to make my decision by the start of my senior year just to be able to focus on my school and then my workouts and just hit the gym hard," Regal said. "And obviously now being committed, I can play a little more relaxed and not have to worry about impressing scouts anymore."

Regal said he had a few other offers from mid-major Division I schools, but he felt Nebraska afforded him the best opportunity. During a campus visit he thought the atmosphere and team camaraderie was "top notch and second to none."

Regal becomes the latest in a line of players from the area to attend Nebraska to play baseball. Mayo grad Tyler Rank played for the Cornhuskers in 2008-09. Red Wing's Pat Kelly (2012-2014) and Ryan Boldt (2014-16) both played three seasons at Nebraska.

The left-handed hitting and throwing Regal is a pitcher/first baseman/outfielder. As a junior at Mayo, he batted .378 with 10 doubles, 14 runs scored and 18 RBIs. On the mound, he had a 3-1 record with 1.25 ERA. He was named Big Nine All-Conference and to the Post Bulletin All-Area First Team.

Regal might have a chance to be a two-way player at

Nebraska.

"They mainly want me as a pitcher but they'll give me the opportunity to hit once I get there," he said. "I'll try my hand at hitting and the outfield, most likely."

As a junior, Regal's fastball was timed at 92 miles per hour during a game. He said he was consistently throwing in the upper 80s for most of the season. Regal also throws a slider, curveball and changeup.

He played traveling baseball with the Blizzard out of the Twin Cities for most of this summer and when he was home, he also played American Legion ball with the Rochester Redhawks. It was during one tournament in July with the Blizzard that Regal made a trip from Iowa to Nebraska to visit the Cornhuskers' campus in Lincoln.

"It's really great to be going to such a highly respected and nationally known school," Regal said.

Nebraska is coached by Will Bolt. He was the Big Ten Conference Coach of the Year in 2021 when he guided the team to a Big Ten Conference title. The Cornhuskers were 23-30 in 2022 and 10-14 in league play.

Nebraska coaches had scouted Regal during a high school game against Owatonna this spring and also saw him play at the Area Codes Baseball Tryouts in Illinois this summer.

The 6-foot-2, 175-pound Regal works out at Rochester Batting Cages and also trains with former minor-league pitcher Mitch Brown, a Century graduate.

Regal hopes to sharpen his control during his senior season. He struck out a whopping 71 hitters in just 39 innings as a junior, but he also walked 32.



Joe Ahlquist / Post Bulletin file photo

Ian Regal, who will be a senior at Mayo High School this fall, has announced his commitment to play Division I college baseball at the University of Nebraska.

SWIMMING & DIVING



Guy N. Limbeck / Post Bulletin

Mayo seniors, front row left to right, Chloe Weingarten, Natalie Boorjian and Avery Walz, and back row left to right, Sarah Samman and Abby Wigle, are the captains for this year's girls swimming and diving team. And all five attended Bamber Valley Elementary School.

FIVE OF A KIND

Mayo captains have developed strong bond over past decade

BY GUY N. LIMBECK
Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER

The Mayo girls swimming and diving team will have five captains during the upcoming season.

The quintet has a lot in common, including a bond that began forming more than a decade ago. All five come from the same elementary school.

The five seniors are Natalie Boorjian, Sarah Samman, Chloe Weingarten, Avery Walz and Abby Wigle. They all grew up together and attended Bamber Valley Elementary School. "From Mayo High School, there could be like eight different elementary schools feeding in so it's cool that all five of us are from the same place," said Boorjian, who was All-State in a pair of events last season.

Wigle is in her third varsity season. A year ago she placed 12th in diving at the Class AA state meet. "It's been a really consistent friendship," Wigle said. "I know I could always rely on them if I needed anything. They're always there for me, which is a really nice feeling to have."

It might be rare enough that five members of a team come from the same elementary school, but the fact that all five are captains is quite unique.

"It's absolutely amazing," said Walz, whose mother teaches at Bamber Valley. "You get to know these people

so well and it makes the experience so much more fun. You have so many fun memories with them and they carry on for years and years."

Growing up learning Bamber Valley's core values — Take care of yourself, take care of others, take care of our place — made it an easier transition to the Mayo swim team for the quintet.

"It really raised us to respect the things around you, including yourself, others and the place that you are in," Walz said. "And that carries so well into our team culture and what our team is about. It just really helps you understand the team, and care for everybody around you."

If there is a common theme among the Mayo team from the captains, it is that the Spartans do their very best to make sure everyone is welcome and included in all activities.

"I feel like taking care of others is important to me," Weingarten said. "It's important to make sure everyone feels comfortable on the team and in real life."

Weingarten and Boorjian are both in their fourth season on the varsity. Samman, also in her fourth varsity season, had two older sisters who swam for Mayo and they were both captains as well.

"We've always been very open on this team," Samman said. "We've always been very kind to each other and we always lift each other up."

Bonding outside of practice and meets is always popular

among swimming and diving teams and this year's Spartans captains have taken that to heart. They have organized pasta feeds, yoga sessions and a number of captains' practices, which include more than just time just spent in the pool.

And while the five captains have had a long-standing relationship with each other, they make sure they reach out to all team members now that they are in a true leadership role.

"We share a common background so that helps us with each other, but also we're very inclusive as a team," Weingarten said. "We are a very inviting and welcoming community and I feel that our shared background helps us be strong together."

Boorjian has taken on a leadership role for several years for the Spartans so being a captain this season was a smooth transition for her.

"I love this team and this environment so I just want to continue on what previous captains from other years have done," she said. "But there's no extra pressure."

The Spartans were 8-2 in dual meets a year ago, placed third at the Big Nine Conference meet, fourth in Section IAA and 12th at the Class AA state meet.

"We had a lot of great energy last year," Boorjian said. "We're just looking to continue that this year. We have a bunch of new faces so it should be a great season."

California dreamin': Mayo's Hanson to head west for college career

BY PAT RUFF
Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER — Hannah Hanson has spent the last five years being among the best female athletes that Rochester Mayo has ever had.

Hanson, now a senior, has played varsity volleyball and basketball since the eighth grade, and been a varsity track-and-field athlete since the seventh grade.

Colleges had been recruiting her in all three sports.

Over the weekend, Hanson made a college decision. No, she won't be doing a trifecta of athletics at the next level. But she will be doing two.

Hanson said yes to NCAA Division II Biola University, an evangelical Christian

"I think she's going to be ready to spread those wings of hers."

MAYO VOLLEYBALL COACH DEB FREDERICK

institution in La Mirada, Calif., 20 miles from Los Angeles.

Also a star student (4.0 GPA), Hanson will pursue volleyball and track and field there.

"I am sure happy that Hannah found the right place for herself," Mayo track and field coach Jared Smiley said. "And it's a place she gets to do two things she loves (volleyball and track and field). She didn't have to choose just one sport."

Hanson had been recruited at the Division I level in track and field (the University of Minnesota and North Dakota State University, among others) and basketball (University of Denver). But the thought of devoting as much time as is required in a Division I sport

didn't appeal to her. What she also wanted to avoid was having to whittle her athletic life down to just one sport, another likely requirement had she gone Division I.

So, Biola University in sunny California, here she comes. "I had two visits there this summer, and it just felt (right) that I go there," said Hanson, who is one of a set of triplets, along with brothers Isaiah and Levi. "Initially, I never thought about going to California."

"But we have a pastor at our church who went (to Biola) and I also have a friend who goes there, and I'd heard great things about it. It is a great Christian school and that is something that I was really looking for. You

have to take bible classes and do chapel. Faith is a huge part of my life. I've always wanted to further my faith in college and play a high level of sports there."

Hanson believes both of those desires will be nicely met at Biola. Though she knows less about its track-and-field program, Biola's volleyball team landed second in its Pacific West Conference last year and has landed a pair of Division I transfers for this upcoming season.

She's being recruited as a setter by Biola, one of three positions she's played (outside hitter and right-side hitter the others) on excellent Mayo teams. Hanson finished with 286 kills, 336 assists, 207 digs and 42 blocks last season when Mayo finished 11-0 in the Big Nine Conference, 20-10 overall.

In track and field, Hanson has been a star hurdler and jumper. She competed against a loaded

and record-setting field in the hurdles this past state meet and finished fourth in the 100s and fifth in the 300s, setting personal and school records in both.

Hanson likes the thought of competing in a place — California — where the weather is cooperative year-round for track and field.

"We are going to have a nice, long outdoor season," she said. "I'm going to get a lot of time out there."

Mayo volleyball coach Deb Frederick believes that Hanson can be special in all kinds of ways at Biola. She also senses that she's ready for the adventures that await there, ones that will come nearly 2,000 miles away from her Rochester home.

"When she came back from one of her Biola visits, she was really excited about it," Frederick said. "I think she's going to be ready to spread those wings of hers."



Hanson

GIRLS TENNIS

Mayo believes a state title is on the horizon

BY PAT RUFF
Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER — Jeff Demary knows what a state championship tennis team looks like.

He's had the experience of coaching two of them, the Mayo boys in 2007 and 2011.

"Those two teams, they had so many (USTA) tournament players on them," Demary said.

That in mind, Demary spent the summer months daydreaming about the prospects and possibilities of the team he's coaching right now, the Mayo girls.

It just so happens that this outfit is loaded with girls who concentrate on the sport year-round and know all about USTA Northern Section tournament trips to Sioux Falls and Rapid City, S.D.; the Twin

Cities; as well as plenty more tiny jaunts to the Rochester Athletic Club for USTA events.

For many of them, tennis isn't a seasonal sport — it is always their season.

"This may be as deep a team as we've ever had," said Demary, who's either been an assistant or head coach at Mayo since 1990. "We are absolutely loaded with young talent. We go six deep in singles. It's going to be very competitive. We've got a lot of young girls who have worked extremely hard at their tennis and it's going to be a battle to see who plays varsity."

And yes, they pass the USTA tournaments litmus test. The one that seems to separate the elite teams from the rest.

That, as much as anything, has Demary thinking big. It has him thinking that this bunch really could win a state

title. And if not this season, then next.

It would be a first for the Mayo girls, who have been to the state tournament 24 of the last 25 years but have never won it all.

"Even though we are young (just one senior on the roster and its top two players are sophomore Claire Loftus and eighth-grade sister Aoife Loftus), we have a lot of girls who have played in competitive matches," Demary said. "We have six (of our top seven players) back from last year. We are well positioned. We want to challenge for a state title."

SKIPPERS ARE NO. 1

Minnetonka might read that last statement and smirk.

The Skippers are not only the defending Class AA state champions, but they return all

but one of their top 10 players from a year ago. Seven of their best players are seniors.

So how in the heck is Mayo — with a bunch of its top talent sophomores and below even in the conversation with Minnetonka?

Well, because Demary sees what he sees and he knows what he knows. Also on Mayo's side is it was ranked as high as second in the state last year.

"I do think that Minnetonka is the clear favorite," he said. "But I also think that we have a team that worked the hardest in the offseason. We have players who have put in the most time. We have tournament players and that is a real asset. They are really good and they want to win. But a lot of things have to go into (having a shot at a state title). We have a lot of things that we have to focus on first before

we get to that point (in late October)."

Mayo has two seniors on its team, Ella Dozois and Jordan Ruskell. Dozois has been playing tennis for Mayo since the seventh grade. She knows what teams look like. She also knows what they act like.

"Our team chemistry is so good," Dozois said. "We all get along super well. We all hang around each other outside of tennis and all have positive energy. All of us want to be great and help each other improve. It's a good mix of young and old."

Dozois is like Demary. She is stoked for this season. There is something special in the air.

"We are all super excited," she said. "We've been looking forward to this season ever since last season ended. We have a really good feeling this year."

Mayo, Lourdes tennis teams have lofty goals

BY PAT RUFF
Post Bulletin

Rochester Mayo (Class AA) and Rochester Lourdes (Class A) are expected to be among the best tennis teams in the state in their respective classes. Here's a look at all of Rochester's girls' tennis teams, and what to expect from them in 2022.

CENTURY PANTHERS

Head coach: Kris Allen. **Assistant:** Melissa Coleman.

Last season: 12-5 overall. Lost 4-3 to Lakeville South in the Section 1AA semifinals. The doubles combination of Paige Sargent/Julia Baber finished second in the state individual tournament.

Top returners: Jr. Sarah Yilma (all-Big Nine in doubles); Jr. Sarah Nevenheim (all-Big Nine in doubles); Jr. Reetu Gurung; Jr. Kaitlin Osburn; So. Naomi Nevenheim.

Outlook: Century

has a new head coach, Allen. She was a longtime assistant to Josh Heiden, who stepped down at the end of last season. The Panthers have a strong junior class, but no seniors. Star senior Paige Sargent has elected to play on the Century boys team this spring. Leading the juniors are Sarah Yilma, Sarah Nevenheim and Reetu Gurung. There are also some young players who will provide a boost in freshman Tea McEachern and seventh-grader Zoe Zhang. "While we may be lacking in experience, we have a solid base of consistent hitters and girls who are excited to be out on the court," Allen said.

JM ROCKETS

Co-head coaches: Elizabeth Fink, Jane Pelouin-Fink.

Last season: 5-5 Big Nine, 6-6 overall.

Top returners: Sr. Ginny Haul (No. 1 singles); Sr. Sarah Mullenback (No. 1 doubles); Stacie Mullenback (No. 1

doubles); So. Aubrey Ackman (No. 2 or 3 singles); Jr. Halley Villar (No. 2 or 3 singles, No. 2 doubles); Sr. Anna Sun (No. 3 singles, No. 2 doubles).

Outlook: John Marshall has a nice blend of upper- and underclassmen playing this season. The Rockets showed that they had some skill in doubles last year and hope to show that off again this season. JM also has a get-along bunch. "We will continue to focus on a team-first mentality, while achieving both team and individual performance goals," JM co-head coach Elizabeth Fink said. "At the end of the day, our players' goals are to evaluate if they've left everything on the court, focused on controllable aspects and determine areas for improvement."

MAYO SPARTANS

Head coach: Jeff Demary. **Assistant:** Avanih Misra.

Last season: 21-3 overall and finished

fourth at state. Lost 5-2 to Mounds View in the third-place match. Singles player Claire Loftus lost in the state individual tournament.

Top returners: So. Claire Loftus (Section 1AA champion, lost in state quarterfinals); 8th-grader Aoife Loftus (No. 2 singles); Sr. Jordan Ruskell (No. 1 doubles); So. Keely Ryder (singles or No. 1 doubles); Fr. Ana Christina Medina (singles, Lourdes transfer).

Outlook: The Spartans are young but also incredibly talented and driven. Sisters Claire Loftus (sophomore) and Aoife Loftus (eighth-grader) give Mayo two of the top 15 players in the state. Claire is likely a top-five player. Mayo extends far beyond those two, however, which is what makes it so good. The Spartans have six players who will contend for one of the four singles spots and their doubles are also loaded. Mayo graduated just one player from last

year's team, which was ranked as high as No. 2 in the state. "This may be the deepest team Mayo has ever had with 15 players vying for varsity spots," Mayo coach Jeff Demary said. "The challenge will be who ends up earning the last varsity doubles position."

LOURDES EAGLES

Head coach: Ben Maes. **Assistant:** Joe Boyer.

Last season: 17-5 overall and finished fifth at state. Beat Pine City 5-2 in fifth-place match. Ryann Witter was third in singles at the state individual tournament. Doubles team of Taylor Elliott/Elyse Palen was second at state; doubles team of Caroline Daly/Erin Witter was sixth.

Top returners: Sr. Ryann Witter (No. 1 singles, third place state individual singles); Jr. Caroline Daly (No. 2 singles); Jr. Erin Witter (No. 3 singles); Jr. Elyse Palen (No. 1 doubles, 2nd place state individual doubles); Jr. Taylor Elliott (No. 1 doubles, 2nd place state individual doubles).

Outlook: The Eagles are among the favorites to capture the Class A state team championship this season. They lost 5-2 a year ago to eventual champion Blake in the first round of the state team tournament. Lourdes is loaded with seasoned players, including No. 1 singles player Ryann Witter. The senior will be among the top five players in state Class A this season. Lourdes' concentration is on doubles. It will focus on them with Ben Maes as its head coach. Maes replaces David Pettengill, who stepped down at the completion of last season. Maes has been the head Century boys team coach. "If we can get better at doubles we greatly improve our chances at state," Maes said. "We should win our section and are one of the favorites to win state as a team."

COMMENTARY

Vikings right to keep starters sidelined in preseason

BY DANE MIZUTANI
St. Paul Pioneer Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Anyone hoping to catch a glimpse of their favorite player during last Saturday night's NFL exhibition game at U.S. Bank Stadium got a rude awakening 90 minutes before kickoff.

That's when the Vikings announced they were resting basically every starter on the team.

The inactive lists were a thing of beauty as the Vikings and the 49ers each submitted 27 names apiece. Hilariously, both teams still made everyone dress for warmups because that makes sense, right?



O'Connell

On offense the Vikings sat quarterback Kirk Cousins; running back Dalvin Cook; fullback C.J. Ham; receivers Justin Jefferson, Adam Thielen, and K.J. Osborn; tight ends Irv Smith Jr. and Johnny Mundt; and offensive linemen Christian Darrisaw, Ezra Cleveland, Garrett Bradbury, Jesse Davis, and Brian O'Neill, among others.

On defense the Vikings sat defensive linemen Harrison Phillips and Dalvin Tomlinson; outside linebackers Danielle Hunter and Za'Darius Smith; inside linebackers Eric Kendricks and Jordan Hicks; cornerbacks Patrick Peterson, Cam Dantzler, and Chandon Sullivan; and safeties Harrison Smith and Cam Bynum, among others.

Odds are, most of those players will remain on the sidelines when

the Vikings close their all-but-meaningless preseason schedule at Denver at 8 p.m. Saturday.

It's pretty clear at this point that Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell isn't going to play anyone of note before the Sept. 11 season opener against the rival Green Bay Packers. Nor should he.

While many fans might take exception to this school of thought — especially those who curiously traded a perfect summer night in the Twin Cities to watch the Vikings' JV squad limp to a 17-1 loss — this is absolutely the right call by O'Connell.

He is smart. The preseason is dumb.

There's nothing to gain from playing someone who matters a lot in a game that doesn't matter at all. Especially in the NFL, where players can get seriously injured

anytime they lace up the cleats.

This is something coaches across the league are slowly starting to realize. It has become commonplace for teams to rest their starters for the duration of the three-game preseason these days. Just because the legendary Bud Grant was probably a pretty big fan of playing his starters in the preseason doesn't mean O'Connell has to follow that script.

What is anyone going to learn from watching Cousins play a couple of series? The best-case scenario is he looks sharp while marching the offense down the field for a touchdown. The worst-case scenario is he blows out his knee and the 2022 season is over before it even starts.

The same thing goes for pretty much every other player the Vikings have penciled in as a

starter for Week 1.

Everyone knows Cook is dynamic with the ball in his hands. Everyone knows Jefferson is a cheat code personified. Everyone knows Hunter and Smith have the potential to wreak havoc on opposing quarterbacks as long as they stay healthy.

None of these things needs to be validated during a meaningless game in August. Not when the games start to count in September.

Now, there's certainly some value to the preseason.

It helps sort out position battles in real time. Look at how quarterbacks Sean Mannion and Kellen Mond have been splitting reps 50-50 in an effort to win the backup role.

It gives rookies their first taste of the NFL outside of TCO Performance Center in

Eagan. It's safe to say rookie safety Lewis Cine is benefiting from getting some stuff on film.

It provides fringe roster players a chance to prove themselves. After a couple of impressive performances, defensive lineman T.Y. McGill suddenly looks like a lock to make the team.

Still, there was a particular play on Saturday night that served as a not-so-subtle reminder why no starter should ever sniff the field in preseason. On a rather innocuous play in coverage, rookie cornerback Andrew Booth Jr. suffered an ankle injury away from the action. He needed to be helped to the sideline and did not return.

That could have happened to anyone. Which is exactly why O'Connell made sure his starters weren't out there in the first place.

SPORTS BRIEF

COACH: TOM BRADY TO RETURN THIS WEEK; AARON STINNIE OUT FOR SEASON

Tampa Bay Buccaneers coach Todd Bowles said Sunday that quarterback Tom Brady will be returning to the team this week.

Bowles did not disclose a specific return day for Brady, who left the Buccaneers on Aug. 11 due to personal reasons. Bowles said he wasn't sure if Brady would play in Tampa Bay's preseason finale against the host Indianapolis

Colts on Saturday.

Once he returns, Brady will find himself behind an offensive line that absorbed another significant hit on Saturday.

Guard Aaron Stinnie will miss the 2022 season after he sustained a torn ACL and MCL in his left knee, Bowles said Sunday.

Stinnie was injured after being rolled up on by Tennessee safety Adrian Colbert in the second half of Tampa Bay's 13-3 preseason loss to the Titans. Stinnie was

carted off the field.

"We can't afford to get anyone hurt down there," Bowles said of an offensive line that already has lost Pro Bowl center Ryan Jensen to a knee injury. Jensen is out indefinitely, while tackle Tristan Wirfs is considered day-to-day with an oblique strain.

Stinnie, 28, was a candidate for the starting left guard position after Ali Marpet abruptly retired in the offseason.

Second-round draft pick

Luke Goedeke is among the contenders for the starting role.

Bowles was asked about his level of comfort with playing a rookie or a player with a little NFL experience at that position.

"It's not about experience, it's about experience playing," Bowles said. "Luke and Nick (Leverett) do a great job right now. They're getting a lot of reps, so they've earned that right to compete for that spot. Maybe if one more goes down ...

"We don't mind playing rookies — we've been playing rookies since we've been here. It's just a matter of them getting in-game experience. We're comfortable with the guys we have right now, but if we can find an option that's out there that fits us, we'll look at it."

Stinnie appeared in six games (one start) last season. He started three postseason games for the Bucs in 2020, including Super Bowl LV.

Field Level Media

Rochester's North Carolina connections lead teams to titles

ROCHESTER
Rochester's Mac Horvath helped the Bourne Braves win the championship series in the Cape Cod League.

The Cape Cod is a wood-bat summer league for college baseball players, like the Northwoods League.

Horvath, who plays his college ball at the University of North Carolina, joined Bourne late in the year and played in 18 games during the regular season. Despite the limited number of games, he was among the league leaders with six home runs.

He finished batting .250 (18-for-72) with a double,

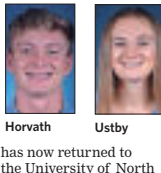


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15 RBIs, 13 runs scored and eight stolen bases. He had a .514 slugging percentage and an .813 OPS.

Bourne swept the Brewster Whitecaps in the best-of-3 championship series, winning 3-0 and 8-1. In the two games, Horvath was 3-for-8 with a double and an RBI.

Horvath, an infielder,



Horvath Ustby

has now returned to the University of North Carolina, where he is gearing up for his third season of baseball. If he has another strong season for the Tar Heels, he could be a high selection in the 2023 amateur baseball draft.

Rochester's **Alyssa Ustby**, who also plays a varsity sport at North Carolina, was also a

recent winner of a high-level event.

The 6-foot-2 Ustby is a starting guard/forward for the Tar Heels women's basketball team. She was one of six players selected to the women's U.S. 23-and-under 3-on-3 basketball team.

The U.S. squad played for a week in the Dominican Republic in the U23 Nations League. Ustby helped the U.S. team post a perfect 18-0 record and it won the FIBA Americas championship.

With the victory, the U.S. squad now qualifies for the 3-on-3 Nations League Final, which will

be held Sept. 14-16 in Constanta, Romania.

Sean **LaPlante**, a 2018 Byron graduate, will be a student assistant baseball coach for Winona State University again next spring. He was a student assistant this spring and he has been retained by the new coach for the same position in 2023.

LaPlante played football at Winona State as a kicker and punter before becoming a baseball coach. He is the son of **Brian LaPlante**, the men's basketball coach at Rochester Community and Technical College.

"It's a good get for him,

he's put a lot of time in," Brian LaPlante said.

Sean LaPlante has also been the varsity assistant baseball coach for Lewiston-Altona and coached the Lewiston American Legion team for the past two years. The 22-year-old hopes to become a full-time coach in the near future, possibly at the college level.

"He has a good passion (for it) and does a good job," Brian LaPlante said.

Guy N. Limbeck is a sports writer for the Post Bulletin. His Local Notebook appears each Tuesday. He can be reached at glimbeck@postbulletin.com.



Matt Krohn / USA Today Sports

Minnesota Vikings defensive tackle T.Y. McGill reacts after making a stop against the San Francisco 49ers on Saturday during the second quarter at U.S. Bank Stadium.

Meet T.Y. McGill, the NFL journeyman who's making the Vikings pay attention

BY DANE MIZUTANI
St. Paul Pioneer Press

MINNEAPOLIS — For the rest of time, defensive tackle T.Y. McGill will go down as the first player ever signed by Minnesota Vikings general manager Kwesi Adofo-Mensah.

Not long after taking over the Vikings front office, Adofo-Mensah decided it was important to ink McGill to a contract. It barely moved the needle at the time.

Not surprising given McNFL's track record as an NFL journeyman.

Nearly six months later McGill is making Adofo-Mensah look like a genius. He's up to 3 1/2 sacks in the exhibition season after turning some heads against the Las Vegas Raiders last week, then following it up with another impressive performance against the San Francisco 49ers on Saturday night at U.S. Bank Stadium.

That type of production has impressed coach Kevin O'Connell. He spoke highly of McGill after the Vikings suffered a 17-7 loss to the 49ers.

"He's a guy that flashed to me," O'Connell said. "He wrecked multiple plays tonight. It's the plays that don't register on the stat sheet, too, when we see him exploding through

the line and forcing the back to bounce. It's really cool to see a guy like that understand the outcome he may have and ultimately capitalize on it with performances like tonight."

This is nothing new for McGill. As an NFL journeyman, he has always looked at the preseason as a chance to prove himself.

"This is what I do, man," said McGill, who went undrafted in 2015 and has gone on to play for nine different teams. "Whatever opportunity I get, I take advantage of it, then let the chips fall where they may."

What's kept McGill going through the various times he has been cut in his career?

He pointed to some words of encouragement from veterans like longtime Seattle Seahawks defensive linemen Michael Bennett and Brandon Mebane.

"I got the OK from those guys like, 'Hey man, you deserve to be here,'" McGill said. "Just things like that keep me going."

Though he hasn't been much of an impact player to this point in his career, McGill is starting to look like someone that could be a valuable depth piece for the Vikings. Not that he's getting too far ahead of himself.

"I don't even know right now in terms of where I'm at on the depth chart," McGill said. "Just trying to grind. That's all I do. I really don't even need the feedback (from the coaching staff), because at this point I know what I need to correct, and I know what I need to get better at. Just keep chugging along."

His rapid rise throughout preseason has raised an important question: What exactly does the "T.Y." stand for in his first name?

"It really doesn't stand for anything," McGill said with a laugh. "I'm a junior, my first name is Torrone, and my dad's first name is Torrone. Except everybody growing up used to call him Tyrone for some reason before I was born. Then they started calling him Ty. Then when I was born they were like, 'We're going to call him T.Y. for short.'"

The name has stuck. He has even started to implement it into his persona on the field.

In an ode to longtime Indianapolis Colts receiver T.Y. Hilton, a former teammate, McGill gestured a "T" and a "Y" after his sack against the 49ers.

"I always told him, 'Look, if I score a touchdown, I'm going to hit it,'" McGill said. "I never got to score a touchdown, and I still

hit anyway. Hopefully he ain't mad at me."

While this type of production from McGill might come as a surprise to some casual fans, it's not surprising to anyone that has to go against him in practice.

"I ask those offensive linemen, 'Who's sticking out as far as somebody's that's tough to block?' Who feels heavy in those combinations?" O'Connell said. "They are going back and talking amongst themselves, like, 'T.Y. is a problem.'"

That work against the offense in practice hasn't gone unnoticed from members of the defense.

"He works extremely hard at everything he's doing," linebacker Brian Asamoah II said. "He gets it in practice, and it's not a surprise when he does it in the game as well."

With a game against the Denver Broncos looming next weekend, McGill doesn't consider himself a lock to make the 53-man roster. He has been cut too many times to feel safe.

"I know I'm playing next week," McGill said. "I've always been a guy that's been on the bubble that's probably not going to make the team. Just keep stacking days. That's all I can do. The things going on upstairs, I can't control any of that stuff."

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SPORTS BRIEF

SUNDAY'S WHITE SOX GUARDIANS GAME POSTPONED BECAUSE OF 'UNPLAYABLE FIELD CONDITIONS'

CLEVELAND — Sunday's Chicago White Sox-Cleveland Guardians game at Progressive Field has been postponed because of "unplayable field conditions," the Guardians announced.

It rained for portions of the morning in the area. A

rescheduled date was not immediately announced.

The third-place Sox are 2½ games behind the first-place Guardians in the American League Central.

The teams split the shortened weekend series. The Guardians won 5-2 Friday behind 14 strikeouts from starter Triston McKenzie. The Sox won Saturday's game 2-0 behind 8

stellar innings from Johnny Cueto.

The Sox travel to Kansas City, Mo., for one game against the Royals Monday at Kauffman Stadium and then go to Baltimore for a three-game series against the Orioles beginning Tuesday.

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WEDNESDAYS: Family Time

Lindy Lange wraps up all the events in and around Rochester that are aimed at kids and their parents.

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