

2009 Husky Football Outlook

A new coach and a new conference spelled success for the St. Cloud State University football team in 2008 and now the Huskies are looking toward a successful 2009 season.

Scott Underwood (Augustana College, 1988) was introduced as the new head coach in March of 2008 and guided the Huskies to a 7-4 overall record, a 7-3 Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC) record, and a 5-1 NSIC North Division record. The seven wins marked the most for the Huskies since winning eight in 2005.

With 25 seniors and a strong defense, the Huskies expected to have some success going into their first season in the NSIC. In contrast to last year, this year's Huskies have nine seniors and only seven starters returning, including five on offense. "The big thing is that going into last season we knew we were going to have with 25 seniors," said Underwood. "You really change that for this year as far. As for the defensive side of the ball there will be at least nine new faces out there. Offensively, our skill spots have all-conference types of players. Our hope is that our offense will start out strong and try to carry our defense, and let them catch up in terms of playing experience."

The Huskies will be challenged early as they will face three playoff teams in the first three weeks of the schedule. "We open with the Mineral Water Bowl Champion (Augustana), play a Division IAA playoff team (Maine) and then face a DII playoff team (Wayne State)," Underwood said. "There is no easy start for us to try to get our feet on the ground."

Offensively, the Huskies look to expand. "Having Ian (Shoemaker) and Doug (Patterson) as our two offensive coordinators, I think we are trying to expand a little bit more offensively to what fits the talent of our players," said Underwood. "We were



Brandon Geiss

pretty vanilla at trying to institute an offense last year. Now we are trying to refine the things we think we can do based on our players talents and attributes."

Defensively, Underwood feels that as the season progresses, the Huskies will gradually be a decent time on that side of the ball. "We have some players that had to sit behind Ryan Kees (invited to Detroit Lions camp) and NSIC Defensive Player of the Year Cale Pulczynski, who in another situation would have had a lot of playing time." Underwood said. "We lack some game playing experience but we do feel we have talent on the defensive side of the ball. We have some players that have had roles on special teams in the past."

Quarterback: The Huskies return senior Mitch Watkins (Jerseyville, Ill) at quarterback. Watkins was the starter in all 11 games last season and completed 145 passes for 1,828 yards and 13



Mitch Watkins

touchdowns. He also rushed for six touchdowns. "We expect him to be more aggressive than he was a year ago. Last year I think he had an average year and now we expect him to lead us," said Underwood. Behind Watkins is senior Derek Stripling (Wabasso) who played in four games, completed one pass for 50 yards and rushed for 53 yards. "Derek has some experience and is starting to play with more confidence." The third quarterback is Brad Meade (Chippewa Falls, Wisc.) a freshman last season who, according to the coaching staff made progress during the spring.

Running Back: The running backs are led by the return of First Team All-Conference player Brandon Geiss (Shorewood, Ill.) Geiss is the first true freshman to start for the Huskies since 2001 season when kicker Shawn Braunagel started. Geiss rushed for 798 yards and ten touchdowns in 2008. He also went over the 100-yard mark

three times. “Brandon is obviously very talented and I think with more experience and confidence we can expect more things from him,” added Underwood. A healthy Jake Machacek (Eagan) returns to the line up for the Huskies. Machacek carried the ball 57 times for 291 yards and two touchdowns in 2008. “We have a healthy Jake Machacek. I think in the spring he really showed us what we recruited him for three years ago. He’s physical and an effort kid. He is very tough. We are excited for him.” The Huskies added transfer Stefan Geissler (Cadott, Wisc.) who is coming off an injury and will give the Huskies a more physical presence as he is a bigger back. With a combination of the above mentioned players, the Huskies feel comfortable in any three of the players and could go to a two-back set at times.

Wide Receiver: The Huskies enter 2009 with limited experience at the receiver spot with one exception. Junior Fred Williams (Milwaukee, Wisc.), an All-NSIC First Team pick will carry a majority of the load at the receiver position. “We lack experience as we graduated five players from that spot,” said Underwood. Williams led the Huskies in receiving in 2008, making 49 catches for 659 yards and six touchdowns. Look for sophomore Collin Miller (Northfield) and converted quarterbacks Rob Evans (Franklin, Wisc.) and Tye Dill (St. Cloud) to fill in the position.



Fred Williams

Tight End: A quartet of players return to the tight end position in 2009. Seniors Houston Niesche (Colorado Springs, Colo.) and Cody Anderson Norblom (Minneapolis), junior Nick Angellotti (Wauconda, Ill) and sophomore Seth Noreen (Avon) all return. Anderson Norblom is a First Team All-Conference pick who caught six passes for 59 yards and a touchdown a year ago. Niesche also caught six passes. “We really expect Cody and Nick to be the first two guys on the field

depending on Houston’s health. We might play a lot of two tight end sets and those guys can play a lot of different spots. Watching Cody in the spring, he might be more valuable flexed out as a wide out. We have a plethora of talent at tight end when healthy,” said Underwood.



Houston Niesche

Offensive Line: The Huskies lost four starters on the line from last year. It all starts with the return of First Team All-Conference tackle Scott Ferguson (Bowmanville, Ont.) who was a starter last year. The next players with experience are sophomores Matt Theis (Eden Valley) and Matt Harrington (Plymouth) at guard. Others with experience include sophomores Scott Horath (Eagan) at center and Ben Larson (Eagan) at tackle. Junior Jason Terres (Cold Spring) has moved from the defensive line to the O-line and junior Tyler Illikainen (Wayzata) also returns. Sophomore Andrew Beckmann (Waseca) is a player the coaching staff feels will be a great one by the time he is done here.

Defensive Line: Junior tackle Chuck Merritt (Aurora, Ill) is the top returning player on the defensive line. Merritt played in all 11 games last season. He tallied 28 tackles, including three quarterback sacks and six tackles for loss. Junior Josh Popanda (Twin Lakes, Wisc.) played more towards the end of the season and according to Underwood has come a long way and the coaching staff is expecting a big year out of him. Popanda played in 11 games and garnered 19 tackles, including seven TFL and a quarterback sack. Other players with some experience on the line include sophomore Adam Shaffer (Dubuque, IA) and junior Joe Winandy (Mazomanie, Wisc.) at defensive end. Redshirt Ross Kees



Chuck Merritt

(Eagan) returns and junior Jim Siegle (Long Prairie) has been converted from a linebacker to defensive end. A couple of young players who will gain some experience include sophomore Matt Schwartz (Lino Lakes) and junior Titus Cole (Glendale, Wisc.) at defensive tackle.

Inside Linebacker: Senior co-captain Paul Denne (St. Cloud) gets things started at linebacker. He is the top returning player in terms of tackles as he played 11 games last season and notched 51 tackles. He also had five TFL, 2.5 quarterback sacks and an interception. Senior Gyangelo Bradden (Minneapolis) and sophomore Thomas Gruis (Clear Lake, Iowa) also have playing experience, as does junior D'Angelos Svenkeson (St. Paul).



Paul Denne

Outside Linebacker: Junior Justin McPherson (Menasha) and sophomore Chris Key (Libertyville, Ill) will get things started on the outside. Both had nine tackles last season.

Secondary: Senior co-captain Brian Kampa (Sartell) brings the experience to the secondary.



Brian Kampa

He played in 11 games last season and tallied 33 tackles. He had in interception and a fumble recovery. Junior Tyler Niedfeldt (Plymouth, Wisc.) and sophomore Tony Kubes (New Prague) provide some experience in the secondary. Niedfeldt had 20 tackles in nine games and an interception last season. Kubes had 16 tackles, having played in seven games.

Corner: According to Coach Underwood the Huskies are pretty young at the corner. Sophomores Marvin Mathews (Roseville), Matt Hansmans (Forest Lake) and Joe Everson (Lakeville)

will be at the corners. Hansmann played some in the secondary last year and was on returns while Everson played some special teams a year ago. The coaching staff hopes that newcomer Wade Williams (Waupun, Wisc.) will get some snaps.

Special Teams: "We reload a little bit here," said Underwood. Four-year kicker and punter Brian Cristan has graduated. Junior Justin Delgado (Burlington, Wisc.) and sophomore Tyler Aldrich (Woodbury) will handle the kicking chores for the Huskies. Delgado was two for two on extra point attempts last year. Sophomore Matt Compton (Owatonna) is a transfer from the University of South Dakota who punted for the Huskies during the spring.

Returns: Fred Williams and Brandon Geiss are back on kick returns. Williams had 17 kick returns for 442 yards and one touchdown last season. Geiss ran back five returns for 110 yards. Tony Kubes and Matt Hansmann both did well last season on punt returns until getting hurt. Kubes had 20 returns for 199 yards and Hansmann ten returns for 139 yards.

According to Underwood the NSIC looks to be very strong and competitive in 2009. "Whoever can stay healthy and get off to a good start, can obviously do well." Underwood looks for Minnesota State, Minnesota Duluth, Augustana, Winona and Wayne State to be towards the top. However he cautions that anybody can beat anybody on any given day. "There is not any easy game," said Underwood.