

PLAYBOOK

WK 12

VIKINGS VS. PANTHERS | NOV. 29, 2020 | NOON





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MINNESOTA
VIKINGS

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STILL NEED TO SET YOUR FANTASY LINEUP? ASK VIK FOR THE LATEST PLAYER-SPECIFIC STATS.

Use the camera app on your smart phone to scan and get the answers you need.



01



WEEK 11

MIN VS DAL

Wearing #PrimetimePurple uniforms, the Vikings overcame a halftime deficit and took the lead twice in the fourth quarter but were unable to hang on in a 31-28 loss to the Cowboys.



PHOTO 1

Justin Jefferson caught three passes for 86 yards, including a 39-yard touchdown that put Minnesota up 28-24 with 9:37 remaining.

PHOTO 2

Kirk Cousins completed 22 of 30 passes for 314 yards with three scores for a passer rating of 140.1.



02



03

**PHOTO 3**

Adam Thielen one-hands his first of two short touchdowns on the evening. This one – the 35th of his career – moved him past Ahmad Rashad for the sixth-most touchdown receptions in franchise history.

PHOTO 4

Eric Kendricks recorded his sixth career interception and second in three weeks. He totaled two passes defended.

**PHOTO 5**

Dalvin Cook rushed 27 times for 115 yards and a 1-yard touchdown. He added 45 yards through the air. The 160 yards from scrimmage gave him 750 through the past four games, a Vikings franchise record for a four-game stretch.

VIKINGS

V S P A N T H E R S



This will be the 15th meeting between the Vikings and Panthers franchises and first at U.S. Bank Stadium.

Minnesota is seeking its second home victory of 2020 after dropping a 31-28 decision to Dallas to fall to 4-6 on the season. The loss snapped a three-game win streak for the Vikings.

Carolina (4-7) enters the Week 12 contest on the heels of an impressive 20-0 blanking of Detroit that snapped a five-game losing streak.

Both teams have little remaining room for errors if they hope to make a run at the NFC Playoffs.

FIRST GLANCE

Vikings Defense vs. Panthers Offense:

Regardless if facing Teddy Bridgewater, P.J. Walker or Will Grier, the Vikings will try to affect the quarterback more frequently than they were able to against Andy Dalton, who completed 22 of 32 passes for 203 yards and three scores (passer rating of

104.0). Eric Kendricks recorded the game's only interception. The Vikings have allowed success rates of 36.2 percent on third downs (42 of 116) but 66.7 percent on fourth downs (14 of 21). The Panthers have converted 40.5 percent of third downs (53 of 131) and 56.3 percent of fourth downs (nine of 16).

Vikings Offense vs. Panthers Defense:

The Vikings leaned heavily on Dalvin Cook against Dallas. The running back handled 27 of Minnesota's 29 total carries, finishing the game with 115 yards on the ground and a score. He enters Week 12 trailing Tennessee's Derrick Henry by 10 rushing yards for the NFL lead (1,079 to 1,069). Cook's 13 rushing touchdowns lead the league. Adam Thielen added two more receiving scores in Week 11, bringing his season total to a career-best 11 receiving touchdowns. It was his fourth game this season with two scores and second in a row. He leads the NFL entering Week 12.

SERIES RESULTS

- Vikings W-L vs. Panthers franchise: 8-6
- Vikings Home: 6-3; Vikings Away: 2-3

PREGAME ALL-ACCESS

Vikings fans can connect with home games in a new way thanks to Vikings *Pregame All-Access* presented by U.S. Bank, a livestreaming of pregame events and player warm-ups on vikings.com, the team's mobile app and official social media platforms. The livestream is designed to virtually bring fans into U.S. Bank Stadium. It begins an hour before kickoff.



PREGAME
ALL-ACCESS

usbank

HOMETOWN HEROES

The U.S. Bank Hometown Heroes program honors individuals who have gone to extraordinary measures to make positive differences in the community. If you would like to nominate someone, visit vikings.com/fans/promos/hometown-hero.



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HY-VEE FUEL SAVER PROMOTION

THEY score, YOU save! Shop your local Hy-Vee store following game day to receive great fuel savings. Simply spend the same amount that the Vikings scored, and earn a 1¢ credit on your Hy-Vee Fuel Saver + Perks® card. If the Vikings score 14 points, spend \$14 or more the next day and earn 14¢ credit on your Hy-Vee Fuel Saver + Perks® card. SKOL! Promotion valid at all Minnesota Hy-Vee locations; some limitations apply. See store for details.



CENTURYLINK LEGENDS CONNECTION

Don't miss your chance to virtually meet fan-favorite football heroes all season. CenturyLink has teamed up with your Minnesota Vikings for the Legends Connection Meet & Greet Sweepstakes – an opportunity for a 30-minute virtual Meet & Greet with a Vikings Legend. Enter online at vikings.com/fans/centurylink-promo for a chance to win.



KWIK TRIP OPENING DRIVE

Sunday's Kwik Trip opening drive contestant is Steve Vermilya from Dover, MN. Steve will win a \$25 gift card for every yard earned on the Vikings opening drive plus a \$500 bonus for a field goal or \$1,000 for an opening drive touchdown. To enter, see your neighborhood Kwik Trip today!



FRONTLINE FEATURES PRESENTED BY MILLER LITE

Frontline Features will recognize extraordinary Vikings fans throughout the season who have overcome challenges to make a difference for others during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nominate a deserving frontline worker at Vikings.com/frontline.



SKOL SCRIBBLES CONTEST DRIVEN BY POLARIS

Enter the Skol Scribbles contest by submitting your idea for weekly photo transformations. You could win one of 16 weekly prize packs from Polaris. Follow the @vikings on Instagram or Snapchat Stories to learn more.



Spalon will be giving away a \$100 gift card during Sunday's game! Show us your game-day look by tweeting a photo @SpalonMontage or tagging @spalonmontage on your IG story for a chance to win!

60 GREATEST VIKINGS FANS PRESENTED BY U.S. BANK

In celebration of 60 seasons of Vikings football, the Vikings are naming 60 of their most passionate supporters to the 60 Greatest Fans Team. If you know someone with unyielding dedication to the Vikings, nominate that fan today at Vikings.com/60Fans.



➔ Check out pages 41-42 to learn about the latest fans to make the team.

ABSOLUT® VIKINGS HOMEGATER

Are you the Absolut® Vikings Homegater? Whatever you do on game day, celebrate your Absolut® best this football season by submitting your photo as the Absolut® Homegater of the week. Fans will have a chance to win a Vikings and Absolut® weekly prize pack, and one super fan will be dubbed the Absolut® Homegater of the Season, winning a co-branded mini-fridge. To enter, go to vikings.com/homegater and submit your fan photo today.

ABSOLUT.®



WIN A VIKINGS HOMEGATING PRIZE PACK FROM PEPSI

Simply scan your commemorative 60th Anniversary cup (available at Hy-Vee gas stations) with the Vikings app OR select 'Augmented Reality' within the Vikings app to unlock Vikings photo filters. Share yours using #VikingsGameFace for your chance to win! For full contest rules, visit Vikings.com/VikingsGameFace

BUFFALO WILD WINGS SACKS FOR APPS

Buffalo Wild Wings brings you "Sacks for Apps" during all Vikings home and away games this season! When the Vikings record 3.0 or more sacks in a game, all fans score a free appetizer with a minimum purchase of \$5. Offer is valid for three days after each eligible game. Visit vikings.com/bww for more details.



MYSTIC LAKE PASS OR PLAY

"Pass or Play" is a free game, presented by Mystic Lake, available in the Vikings App that allows users to set weekly rosters. The top three users each week will be eligible for prizes.

Mystic LAKE®

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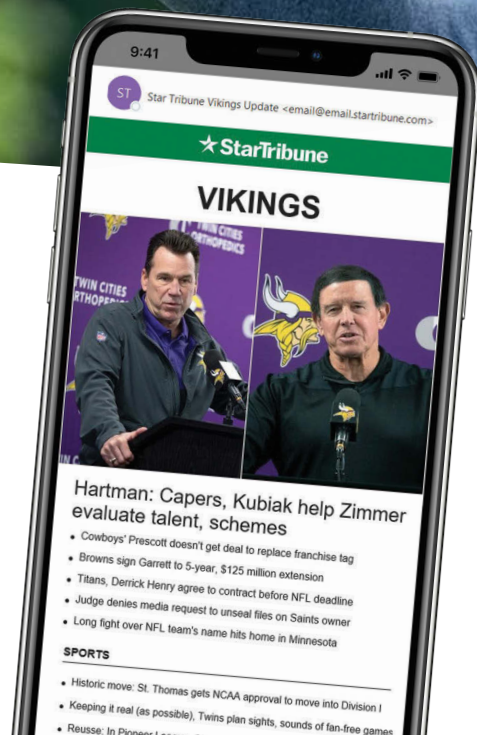




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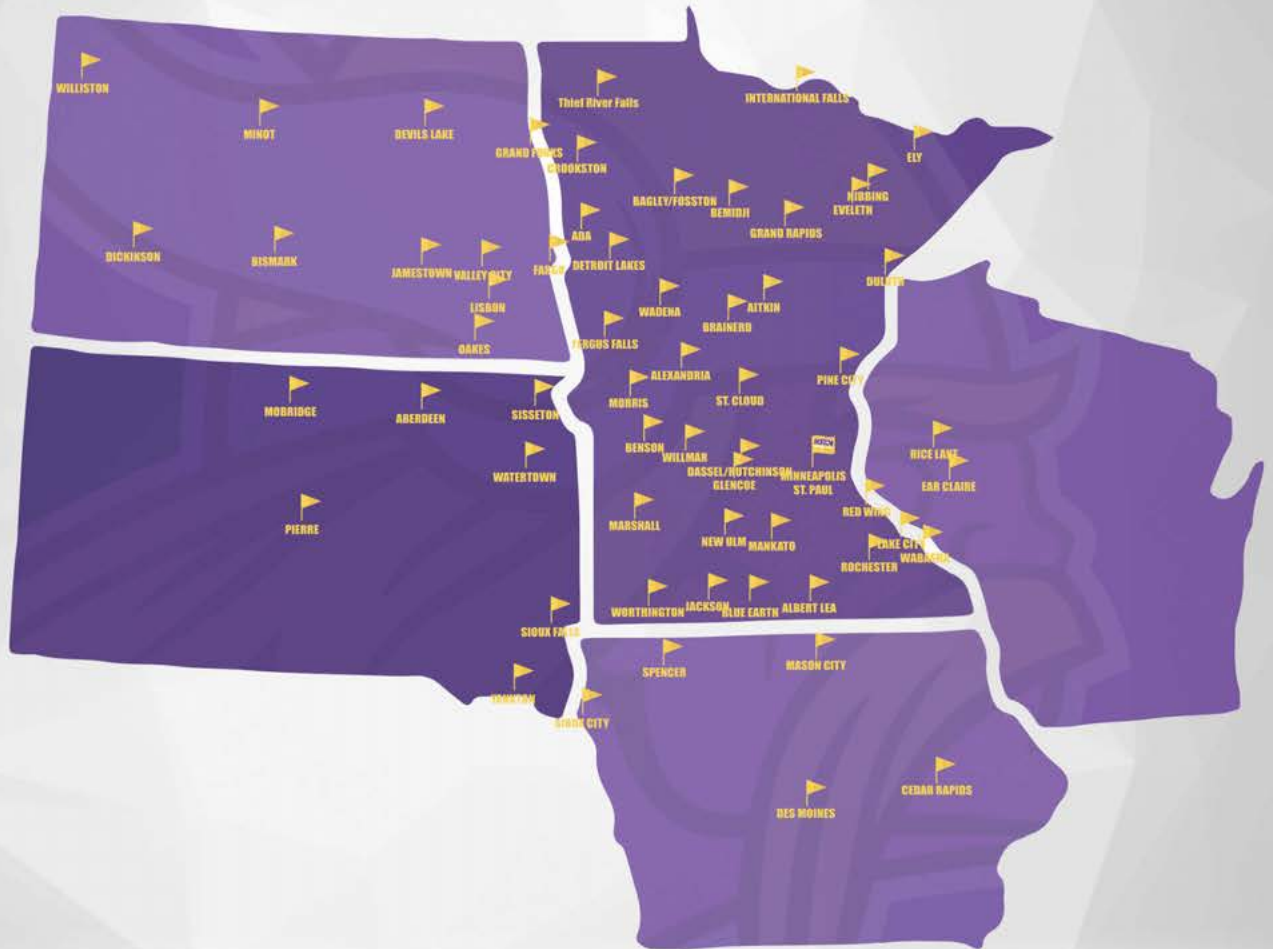


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2020 SEASON LEADERS

Passing (Yds)	Kirk Cousins	2,461
Rushing (Yds)	Dalvin Cook	1,069
Receiving (Yds)	Justin Jefferson	848
Tackles	Eric Kendricks	94
Sacks	E. Wilson, D.J. Wonnum	3.0
Interceptions	H. Smith, E. Wilson	3
KOR (Yards)	K.J. Osborn	22.2
PR (Avg.)	Chad Beebe	2.3

2020 SCHEDULE

1	9/13	Green Bay Packers	L 43-34
2	9/20	at Indianapolis Colts	L 28-11
3	9/27	Tennessee Titans	L 31-30
4	10/4	at Houston Texans	W 31-23
5	10/11	at Seattle Seahawks	L 27-26
6	10/18	Atlanta Falcons	L 40-23
7	10/25	Bye Week	
8	11/1	at Green Bay Packers	W 28-22
9	11/8	Detroit Lions	W 34-20
10	11/16	at Chicago Bears	W 19-13
11	11/22	Dallas Cowboys	L 31-28
12	11/29	Carolina Panthers	
13	12/6	Jacksonville Jaguars	
14	12/13	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers	
15	12/20	Chicago Bears	
16	12/25	at New Orleans Saints	
17	1/3	at Detroit Lions	

TOP 2 AGAINST PANTHERS

RUSHING YARDS

120	Robert Smith on 23 attempts in Minnesota (Oct. 12, 1997)
113	Chester Taylor on 24 attempts in Minnesota (Sept. 17, 2006)

PASSING YARDS

357	Daunte Culpepper on 22-of-29 passing in Minnesota (Nov. 19, 2000)
280	Case Keenum on 27-of-44 passing at Carolina (Dec. 10, 2017)

RECEIVING YARDS

138	Cris Carter on eight catches in Minnesota (Nov. 19, 2000)
106	Randy Moss on five catches in Minnesota (Nov. 19, 2000)

Few players are as fun to watch before the snap as Smith. The safety has thrived for several seasons in Head Coach Mike Zimmer's system because of his versatility. This allows him to disguise the Vikings intentions before the snap in a game of cat-and-mouse with opposing quarterbacks. He will creep down toward the line of scrimmage only to drop into coverage, or he might come screaming through the line of scrimmage on a blitz. He's also able to meet running backs in the backfield for tackles for loss. The Vikings were able to deploy Smith multiple ways to adversely affect the Bears at Chicago in Week 10 when Minnesota allowed a season-low 149 net yards. Among Vikings defensive backs, Smith ranks third all-time with 829 tackles (team stats) and first with 13 sacks. He ranks seventh overall with 26 career interceptions and holds the team record with four interceptions returned for touchdowns.

BACK-TO-BACK PICKS

Smith's interceptions of Detroit's Chase Daniel in Week 9 and Chicago's Nick Foles in Week 10 marked the seventh time in his nine-season career that he's recorded picks in back-to-back weeks. He did so each season from 2012-14 and has done so one time in each season since 2017.

Smith holds the Vikings record for the most interception returns of 50 or more yards with four such plays. Those include a 56-yard touchdown after picking off Jay Cutler in December 2012 and an 81-yard score after nabbing a toss by Austin Davis in the 2014 season opener.

4

OF 50+

THE BEST USE THE BEST



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2020 SEASON LEADERS

Passing (Yds)	Teddy Bridgewater	2,552
Rushing (Yds)	Mike Davis	449
Receiving (Yds)	Robby Anderson	818
Tackles	Shaq Thompson	84
Sacks	Brian Burns	6.0
Interceptions	Donte Jackson	3
KOR (Yds)	Pharoh Cooper	430
PR (Avg.)	Pharoh Cooper	5.8

2020 SCHEDULE

1	9/13	Las Vegas Raiders	L 34-30
2	9/20	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers	L 31-17
3	9/27	at Los Angeles Chargers	W 21-16
4	10/4	Arizona Cardinals	W 31-21
5	10/11	at Atlanta Falcons	W 23-16
6	10/18	Chicago Bears	L 23-16
7	10/25	at New Orleans Saints	L 27-24
8	10/29	Atlanta Falcons	L 25-17
9	11/8	at Kansas City Chiefs	L 33-31
10	11/15	Tampa Bay Buccaneers	L 46-23
11	11/22	Detroit Lions	W 20-0
12	11/29	at Minnesota Vikings	
13		Bye Week	
14	12/13	Denver Broncos	
15	12/20	at Green Bay Packers	
16	12/27	at Washington Football Team	
17	1/3	New Orleans Saints	

TOP 2 AGAINST VIKINGS

RUSHING YARDS

154	Lamar Smith on 30 attempts in Minnesota (Sept. 22, 2002)
109	Jonathan Stewart on 25 attempts in Minnesota (Dec. 20, 2009)

PASSING YARDS

341	Jake Delhomme on 21-of-30 passing at Carolina (Oct. 30, 2005)
299	Matt Moore on 21-of-33 passing at Carolina (Dec. 20, 2009)

RECEIVING YARDS

201	Steve Smith on 11 catches at Carolina (Oct. 30, 2005)
157	Steve Smith on nine catches at Carolina (Dec. 20, 2009)

It is unknown at press time if Bridgewater will play against the team that drafted him because an MCL sprain he suffered in Week 10 against Tampa Bay caused him to miss last week's 20-0 win over Detroit. Bridgewater, as Vikings fans know, has overcome far worse. He suffered a knee dislocation during a non-contact injury at Minnesota's final practice of his third NFL preseason. The afternoon of Aug. 30, 2016, is one that set about a chain reaction within the Vikings organization and toppled dominoes across the league. Bridgewater didn't appear in a game again until Dec. 17, 2017, when he attempted two passes and took three snaps in the victory formation the day the Vikings clinched the NFC North. In 2018, Bridgewater headed to New Orleans and played one snap against Minnesota at U.S. Bank Stadium. He went 5-0 as a starter while filling in for Drew Brees last season before becoming Carolina's starter this offseason.

ON THE MONEY

Bridgewater is on track to have his highest completion percentage for any season. In 10 starts, his completion percentage of 72.1 ranks second among qualifying passers (238 completions on 330 attempts). The former first-round pick's previous best rate was 67.9 (133 of 196 passes) in 2019.


Bridgewater has tied his career best for rushing scores in a season with three so far in 2020. He scored a touchdown on the ground in each of his previous two outings (at Kansas City and before leaving the game against Tampa Bay). He also had a trifecta with Minnesota in 2015.

3


IN '20

VIKINGS ROSTER


2	Britton Colquitt	P
4	Sean Mannion	QB
5	Dan Bailey	K
8	Kirk Cousins	QB
11	Tajae Sharpe	WR
12	Chad Beebe	WR
17	K.J. Osborn	WR
18	Justin Jefferson	WR
19	Adam Thielen	WR
20	Jeff Gladney	CB
22	Harrison Smith	S
23	Mike Boone	RB
25	Alexander Mattison	RB
26	Chris Jones	CB
27	Cameron Dantzler	CB
29	Kris Boyd	CB
30	C.J. Ham	FB
31	Ameer Abdullah	RB
33	Dalvin Cook	RB
37	Curtis Riley	S
38	Harrison Hand	CB
39	Dylan Mabin	CB
40	Todd Davis	LB
41	Anthony Harris	S
44	Josh Metellus	S
45	Troy Dye	LB
47	Hardy Nickerson	LB
50	Eric Wilson	LB
51	Hercules Mata'afa	DE
54	Eric Kendricks	LB
56	Garrett Bradbury	C
57	Ryan Connelly	LB
58	Austin Cutting	LS
61	Brett Jones	C
67	Jordan Brailford	DE
69	Rashod Hill	T
71	Riley Reiff	T
72	Ezra Cleveland	G
74	Olisaemeka Udoh	T
75	Brian O'Neill	T
78	Dakota Dozier	G
81	Bisi Johnson	WR
82	Kyle Rudolph	TE
83	Tyler Conklin	TE
84	Irv Smith Jr.	TE
85	Dan Chisena	WR
90	Jalyn Holmes	DE
92	James Lynch	DT
93	Shamar Stephen	DT
94	Jaleel Johnson	DT
95	Ifeadi Odenigbo	DE
96	Armon Watts	DT
98	D.J. Wonnum	DE




33
RUNNING BACK
Dalvin Cook




8
QUARTERBACK
Kirk Cousins




30
FULLBACK
C.J. Ham




19
WIDE RECEIVER
Adam Thielen




82
TIGHT END
Kyle Rudolph




75
RIGHT TACKLE
Brian O'Neill




72
RIGHT GUARD
Ezra Cleveland




56
CENTER
Garrett Bradbury



78
LEFT GUARD
Dakota Dozier




71
LEFT TACKLE
Riley Reiff




18
WIDE RECEIVER
Justin Jefferson


VIKINGS OFFENSE




26
CORNERBACK
Donte Jackson




53
DEFENSIVE END
Brian Burns




92
DEFENSIVE TACKLE
Zach Kerr




95
DEFENSIVE TACKLE
Derrick Brown




97
DEFENSIVE END
Yetur Cross-Matos




24
CORNERBACK
Rasul Douglas




21
SAM LINEBACKER
Jeremy Chinn




52
MIKE LINEBACKER
Tahir Whitehead



33
FREE SAFETY
Tre Boston




54
WILL LINEBACKER
Shaq Thompson




31
STRONG SAFETY
Justin Burris


VIKINGS SPECIAL TEAMS




5
KICKER
Dan Bailey



2
PUNTER
Britton Colquitt



58
LONG SNAPPER
Austin Cutting



17
PUNT/KICK RETURNER
K.J. Osborn

MINNESOTA VIKINGS DEPTH CHART & ROSTER



OFFENSE

WR	Jefferson	B. Johnson	Chisena
LT	Reiff	Hill	
LG	Dozier		
C	Bradbury	Jones	
RG	Cleveland		
RT	O'Neill	Udoh	
TE	Rudolph	I. Smith Jr.	Conklin
WR	Thielen	Beebe	Sharpe
QB	Cousins	Mannion	
RB	Cook	Mattison	Abdullah
FB	Ham		

DEFENSE

LDE	Holmes	Wonnum	
NT	Stephen	Watts	
DT	J. Johnson	Lynch	
RDE	Odenigbo	Mata'afa	Brailford
WLB	Wilson	Nickerson	
MLB	Kendricks	Nickerson	
SLB	Dye	Davis	Connelly
LCB	Dantzler	Jones	Hand
RCB	Gladney	Boyd	Mabin
SS	H. Smith	Riley	
FS	Harris	Metellus	

PANTHERS ROSTER

3	Joseph Charlton	P
4	Joey Slye	K
5	Teddy Bridgewater	QB
6	P.J. Walker	QB
7	Will Grier	QB
10	Curtis Samuel	WR
11	Robby Anderson	WR
12	DJ Moore	WR
14	Pharoh Cooper	WR
16	Brandon Zylstra	WR
21	Jeremy Chinn	S
22	Christian McCaffrey	RB
23	Stantley Thomas-Oliver	CB
24	Rasul Douglas	CB
25	Troy Pride Jr.	CB
26	Donte Jackson	CB
27	Kenny Robinson	S
28	Mike Davis	RB
29	Corn Elder	CB
31	Juston Burris	S
33	Tre Boston	S
35	Rodney Smith	RB
36	Trenton Cannon	RB
38	Myles Hartsfield	DB
40	Alex Armah	FB
42	Sam Franklin	LB
44	JJ Jansen	LS
45	Chris Orr	LB
50	Julian Stanford	LB
52	Tahir Whitehead	LB
53	Brian Burns	DE
54	Shaq Thompson	LB
56	Jermaine Carter Jr.	LB
61	Matt Paradis	C
64	Chris Reed	G
65	Dennis Daley	G
67	John Miller	G
69	Tyler Larsen	C
72	Taylor Moton	T
73	Trent Scott	T
74	Greg Little	T
75	Michael Schofield	G
76	Russell Okung	T
80	Ian Thomas	TE
82	Chris Manhertz	TE
86	Colin Thompson	TE
92	Zach Kerr	DT
93	Bravvion Roy	DT
94	Efe Obada	DE
95	Derrick Brown	DT
96	Austin Larkin	DE
97	Yetur Gross-Matos	DE
98	Marquis Haynes	DE



50
LINEBACKER
Eric Wilson



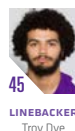
41
SAFETY
Anthony Harris



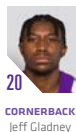
54
LINEBACKER
Eric Kendricks



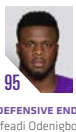
22
SAFETY
Harrison Smith



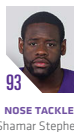
45
LINEBACKER
Troy Dye



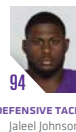
20
CORNERBACK
Jeff Gladney



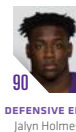
95
DEFENSIVE END
Ifeadi Odenigbo



93
NOSE TACKLE
Shamar Stephen



94
DEFENSIVE TACKLE
Jaleel Johnson



90
DEFENSIVE END
Jalyn Holmes

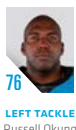


27
CORNERBACK
Cameron Dantzler

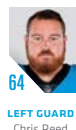
VIKINGS DEFENSE



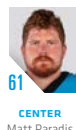
12
WIDE RECEIVER
DJ Moore



76
LEFT TACKLE
Russell Okung



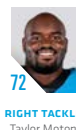
64
LEFT GUARD
Chris Reed



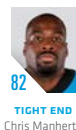
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TIGHT END
Chris Manhertz



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WIDE RECEIVER
Robby Anderson

PANTHERS OFFENSE



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FULLBACK
Alex Armah



5
QUARTERBACK
Teddy Bridgewater



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RUNNING BACK
Christian McCaffrey

PANTHERS SPECIAL TEAMS



4
KICKER
Joey Slye



3
PUNTER
Joseph Charlton



44
LONG SNAPPER
J.J. Jansen



14
PUNT/KICK RETURNER
Pharoh Cooper

CAROLINA PANTHERS DEPTH CHART & ROSTER



OFFENSE

WR	Moore	Samuel	Cooper
LT	Okung	Little	
LG	Reed	Daley	Schofield
C	Paradis	Larsen	
RG	Miller	Daley	Schofield
RT	Moton	Scott	
TE	Manhertz	Thomas	C. Thompson
WR	Anderson	Zylstra	
QB	Bridgewater	Grier/Walker	
FB	Armah		
RB	McCaffrey	Davis	Cannon

DEFENSE

DE	Burns	Haynes	Larkin
DT	Kerr		
DT	Brown	Roy	
DE	Gross-Matos	Obada	
WLB	S. Thompson	Stanford	
SLB	Whitehead	Carter Jr.	
SLB	Chinn	Carter Jr.	
CB	Jackson	Elder	
CB	Douglas	Pride Jr.	T.-Oliver III
SS	Burris	Franklin	Robinson
FS	Boston	Chinn	Hartsfield



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DOZIER

BY ERIC SMITH

As the NFL season rolls along, players around the league are likely more cognizant of taking care of their bodies, especially now that every team has played double-digit games. Dakota Dozier is included in that group.

Dozier has been a mainstay along Minnesota's offensive line so far this season, starting all 10 games at left guard between left tackle Riley Reiff and center Garrett Bradbury.

Dozier hasn't missed a play either, clocking in for all 627 offensive snaps so far this season. That's a career-high for the 29-year-old, who had 11 career starts before this season. Four of them came with the Vikings in 2019 when he logged what was then a career-high 362 snaps.

But even as he's put his body through the wringer in the trenches, Dozier is also having the most fun he's ever had on the field.

"It's been great, and I've truly loved it," Dozier said. "I've definitely had to stay on top of taking care of my body more. Honestly, I enjoy that part of it as well. Just super excited and hoping we can keep it going for several more games.

"I definitely try to make sure I'm getting a massage or seeing the chiropractor or acupuncture, just different things that [I've found out have helped other guys]" Dozier added. "Our bodies are our business, so the more we take care of them, the better we can get out there and play. I try to do everything I can to get the most out of what I've been given."

Dozier's steady play on the line has helped the Vikings offense click over the past month.

Entering Week 12, Minnesota ranks sixth in the NFL with 150.7 rushing yards per game. And in the past four games, the Vikings have averaged an impressive 168 rushing yards per contest.

Dozier, who re-signed with the Vikings this offseason, is originally from South Carolina but said he thinks he's found a home in Minnesota, and he has built a strong rapport with his teammates.

"We've really gotten it to a point where we're all on the same page with everything," Dozier said of the Vikings offensive line. "Just understanding where each other is going to be on each play, it gives you confidence to hit your guy, hit your assignment and do it to the best of your abilities.

"When you can play loose and free like that, it gives you that much more of an advantage," Dozier added. "We go out there and say, 'We're going to do our thing, try to stop us.' It's been really fun to see this offense start rolling."

We caught up with Dakota this week for a Water Break, presented by Crown Royal.





Q. You've been a part of helping Dalvin Cook be No. 2 in the NFL in rushing yards (1,069) thus far. What's it like blocking for him?

A. "It's a ton of fun. Dalvin is obviously a special running back, but he's a special dude, too. You're out there and he's saying, 'I go as far as you go.' It builds you up, and if you can get that guy just a crease, he can do something special. It jizzes you up on game day and throughout the week. He's a great guy, and I'm glad to be his teammate."

Q. You played under Vikings offensive line coach Rick Dennison with the Jets in 2018. Given his background — he has an engineering degree and wrote his Master's thesis in college on fluid mechanics — how much has his teaching personality come out in virtual settings?

A. "I definitely feel like that background for him has helped us. It's almost all been virtual, so he knows how to teach those different things. It's helped us a lot, and he's gotten guys on the same page with a lot of things. The way he uses the game plan has been a big part of what we're doing."

Q. Earlier this season, Vikings Head Coach Mike Zimmer called you a 'conscientious' person? Did you hear that, and what was your reaction to it?

A. "I heard it [laughs]. And I agree I'm the kind of person who's going to go out there and do my job or assignment to the best of my ability. That's something

I've always taken to be part of my identity. When I heard that, I said, 'Cool. I'll definitely take that compliment.'"

Q. You were a four-year starter at Furman University from 2010-2013. Do you still have a lot of pride for the Paladins?

A. "I definitely do, especially since I'm the only person in the league from Furman right now. I take a lot of pride in that because it's not a big school... just 2,600 students or something like that. Furman will always be a special place for me. I met my wife [Haley] there, got my degree and a chance to play college football, then got drafted. A lot of great things happened for me at Furman."

Q. You mentioned your wife, and you have a young son, Dak, who is 2 years old. Are you appreciating the extra family time this season because of the COVID-19 protocols?

A. "When March hit and we quarantined, I spent a ton of time with them. I was home with them more than ever. And even during the season, we honestly do more things at home to be safe. Dak got to stay up late and watch the first half of the Monday night [win over the Bears], so my wife sent me a video of him, and he was loving it. He's growing up really fast, so I'm trying to love every moment I can. And with my wife, date night is something we really enjoy. It's harder to do right now, so we've been creative with making pizza at home or playing a board game or something like that. We're just all enjoying spending time with each other."



The 'Water Break' presented by Crown Royal will post on Vikings.com on Wednesdays before home games.

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PREVIEW

DALVIN COOK

BY LINDSEY YOUNG



Does anyone have more fun playing football than Dalvin Cook?

"Like a kid at recess," Vikings running back Alexander Mattison said.

"He never steps on the field without a big smile on his face," added tackle Brian O'Neill.

"I see him out there – giggling, smiling," said Cook's mother, Varondria Burnett. "He's in his element."

That signature smile, his head tipped back in laughter, the way Cook's eyes light up on game day ... that's just the way he's always been.

It's simple. He's just having fun.

"I just go out there and try to be me," Cook said. "I try not to be too serious, because that ain't enjoying what you do. And I love my job."

"I try to pride myself on that, being a big energy-giver," he continued. "Bringing it for my guys and hopefully helping us win. That's just my personality and who I am. I'm not stepping out of the box trying to be anybody else."

He's even more intentional about bringing vitality to the Vikings during a season dramatically altered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On game days, Minnesota plays against a solid purple backdrop of eerily empty seats at U.S. Bank Stadium, save for several hundred cutouts. But that's no excuse, says the fourth-year running back, for poor performance.

Cook recently co-starred in a promo with Dodgers first baseman Cody Bellinger, who asked about vacant stadiums.

"We've got a saying," Cook told him. "B.Y.O.J. – Bring Your Own Juice."

"We had to come up with something to get each other going, making the 'new normal,' normal," he later elaborated. "I think that was a good saying. 'Bring your own juice.' And I think if you do that, we'll have a lot at the stadium."

CREATING A SPARK

The Vikings have learned to harness that energy over the past several weeks.

After starting out 1-5, Minnesota emerged from its Week 7 bye for a three-game stretch against division opponents and claimed each contest, beginning with an upset at Lambeau Field. Cook, who has racked up 750 scrimmage yards over the past four outings, a new franchise record, put up career numbers at Green Bay and against Detroit with 163 and 206 rushing yards, respectively.

Cook's longest run of the season occurred against the Lions, when he shook off multiple defenders, broke free and raced 70 yards for a touchdown.

O'Neill is usually too busy making his blocks to see Cook's progress in real time and previously relied on the crowd's reaction to know the play's outcome.

"With no fans in the stadium, it's a little different. Sometimes you've got to look up to see what's happening," O'Neill said. "On that 70-yarder, I didn't think I blocked my man really well, so I was worried about that. And then I look, and Dalvin's running down the field away from everybody, and it's, 'Oh, wow.' It doesn't take much."

All Cook needs is the smallest seam to slip through. And when he scores, he thanks the teammates who helped him reach the end zone by handing off the ball for an unsung hero to spike.

Following the touchdown against the Lions, Cook gave the pigskin to fullback C.J. Ham.

"It's just showing the guys how much you appreciate the way they grind," Cook said. "I score the touchdown, and I get the accolades for it. With them doing the dirty work, it goes unnoticed. But it doesn't go unnoticed with me, so I try to let the guys know that."

The gesture means a lot to Ham, who's been given the honor a handful of times.

"When somebody of his caliber, of his talent, is that willing to give credit to the people around him, it makes

“KNOWING THAT I COULD BE ME

every day was important. That’s why it was so important for me to sign the contract [extension].”

- DALVIN
COOK

me want to play even harder for him,” Ham said. “I think a lot of guys could probably second that.”

And as exhilarating as a long touchdown run is, Cook takes just as much pride in blocking on pass plays, or turning a play that should lose yards into a 13-yard gain like he did later against Detroit.

“That’s always my mindset, you know? Just try to make a play,” Cook said. “You do all that hard work, and [it feels] just like a 70-yarder.”

Cook is a natural talent, to be sure. But there’s also a commitment to his craft that can’t be missed.

“Just the way he runs the ball is inspiring to me as a teammate,” Vikings linebacker Eric Kendricks said. “When I’m about to go out on defense and play my position, I see Dalvin and how he’s putting in work, how he’s taking hits, how he’s finishing runs. I want to be able to match my teammate and his effort, his desire and his fire.

“He’s obviously a special player and has all these tangible [skills] – he’s fast and things like that – but his heart and want-to is what is really contagious for the team,” Kendricks added.

In a recent media interview, defensive tackle Jaleel Johnson fielded reporters’ questions while wearing a Dalvin “The Chef” Cook sweatshirt.

Asked about repping his teammate’s merch, Johnson smiled.

“I’m actually one of Dalvin’s biggest fans. He’s a phenomenal player. We all know that, and we see it every Sunday. The type of

energy that he brings to the offense, even our whole team, it’s crazy,” Johnson said. “Dalvin is a rare breed. He’s going to give you everything he has every Sunday. That’s something that I enjoy seeing. When the defense goes on the field, I just think to myself, ‘What would Dalvin do?’ ”

FINDING HIS HAPPY PLACE

The football field, Burnett explained, is where her son feels most at home. It’s his happy place where he relishes the feel of the not-quite-smooth leather in his hands.

After all, he’s spent two decades of his life suiting up for the gridiron.

Cook started playing football at age 5, and the sport’s been making him smile ever since.

“Seeing guys before me making plays, being successful, I just wanted to do what they [did],” Cook said. “My older brother (DeAndre Burnett) was my influence in football. He was out there making plays, and I wanted to be just like him.”

He’s wasn’t the biggest or the strongest. In fact, Varondria Burnett remembers him being one of the smallest boys on the field. But when he got the ball? Even at a young age, something special happened.

“It would just surprise everybody. They did not know how fast he was going to be,” Burnett recalled. “He would take off, and they would be like, ‘Whoa.’ ”



Cook has always been good at football, and Burnett has always been confident in what he’d do on the field. But the transformation Burnett has most enjoyed watching is the way he’s found his voice.

This season, Cook often is spotted at the center of the Vikings pregame huddle delivering a fiery speech.

Ham said the pep talks “have been huge” in helping Minnesota gain ground after a rocky start. While over the years he’s seen some players step into that role who didn’t really feel comfortable or who did so out of assumed obligation, Ham appreciates the authenticity Cook brings.

“He’s natural,” Ham said. “It’s just his true passion that’s coming out because he loves football so much, but he always wants us to love it just as much as he does.”

What many people may not realize is that the Vikings star running back, who tears out of the tunnel at U.S. Bank Stadium and rallies his teammates before a game, hasn’t always been so bold.

“Dalvin is a really reserved person,” Burnett said. “The Dalvin that you all see, we see that Dalvin, but we also see the Dalvin that’s sort of an introvert. ... [When he was younger], he could barely put words together. He didn’t like to talk.

“I’m just proud of seeing the type of man that he’s becoming. How he gets in front of

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It's just his true passion that's coming out because he loves football so much, but he always wants us to love it just as much as he does."

- C.J. HAM ON DALVIN COOK

people and he's able to articulate and speak. The raising of him is just coming full circle," she added. "Seeing him in the community; how people respond to him; when they see him, how he brings people joy; how he brings his teammates joy just by being around him. That's what makes me so proud."

Cook's coaches, teammates and fans alike have seen more and more of his personality each season, and he credits the way Minnesota has embraced him from the very beginning. For that reason, he considers the Twin Cities a second home and invests heavily in the community through his involvement with the Vikings Table charity food truck.

"Knowing that I could be me every day was important. That's why it was so important for me to sign the contract [extension]," Cook said. "I knew from day one when I walked in with the guys, they embraced who Dalvin Cook was. There wasn't any, 'He doesn't talk, he doesn't do this.' It was, 'Just give him time. He'll open up.'"

"That's what it comes down to. Just letting a person get comfortable," he continued. "I think the guys and the people around here did a good job of easing me into it and just letting my role expand while I was here."

FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

Despite all of the obstacles that 2020 has presented, from racial injustices and social unrest to the COVID-19 pandemic and playing games in uninhabited stadiums, Cook has kept smiling.

He points to the way his career began when, after starting out hot, he suffered a torn ACL in Week 4 of the 2017 season. Cook has weathered various minor injuries since but also battled back.

"I always appreciated the grind and embraced my teammates and all that, but just going through my whole injury bug at the beginning of my career made me appreciate the game so much more," he said.

"[I'm happy] every time I wake up and come to work."

Cook is careful not to take life too seriously.

Following back-to-back wins over the Packers and Lions, he conducted his virtual media session wearing Bose sunglasses and a grin.

"I've been wearing the shades," Cook laughed. "That's been the look I've been working. ... It's just the vibe around here. We've been getting better and just having fun."

He gave a separate pair of postgame sunglasses to Jefferson when the rookie racked up 135 receiving yards at Soldier Field.

Who will get the honor next?

"Whoever's in the hot seat," Cook said. "Any week, there could be a guy that gets hot and goes off."

As the Vikings look to work their way back into postseason contention, Cook will continue doing his thing on the field while also leading his teammates and keeping things loose.

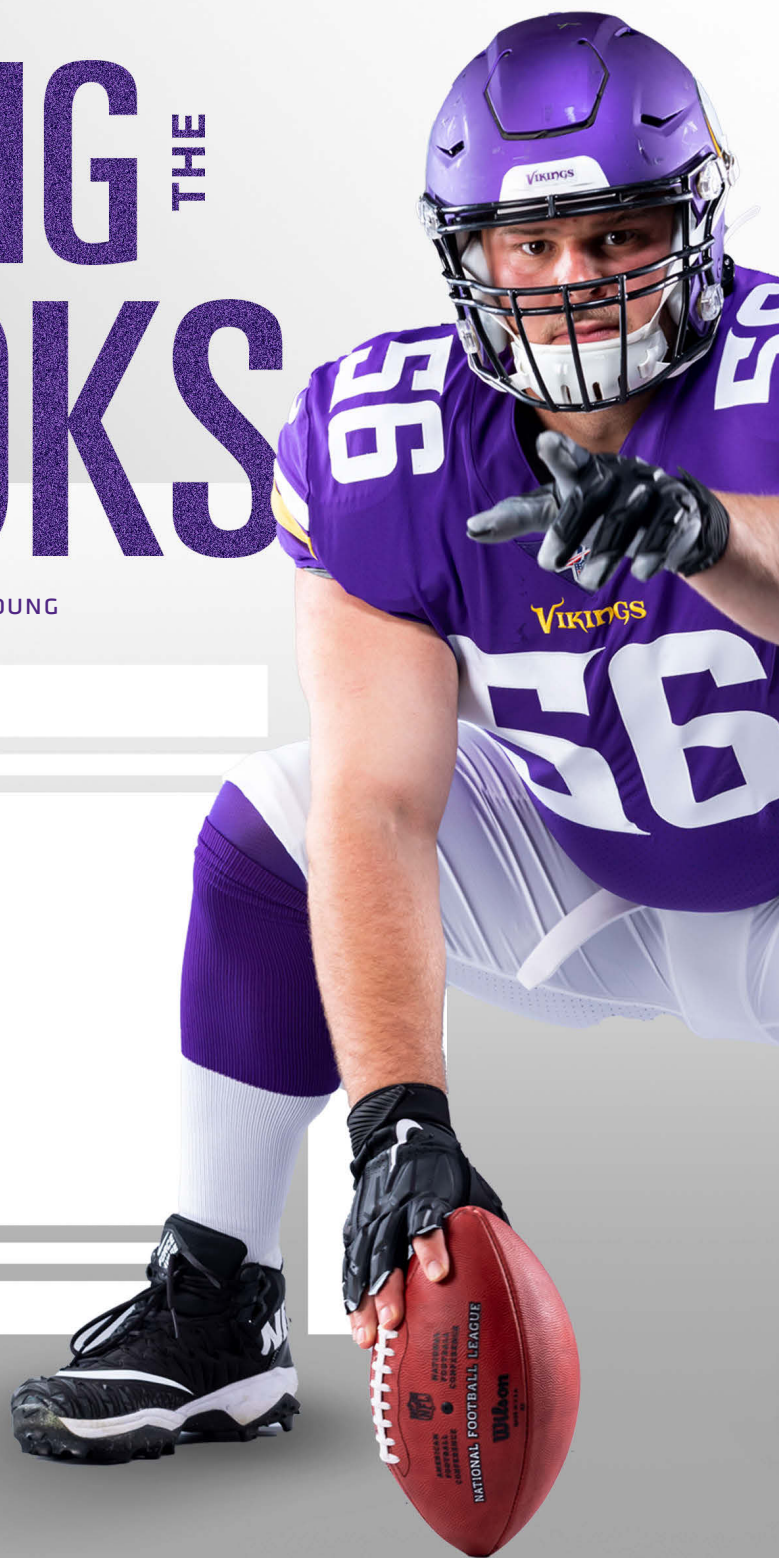
"He loves the game. He loves when it gets tough because that's when the cream rises to the top - and he's always tough," O'Neill said. "He's so fun to play with because you see he has so much joy every time he's on the field, whether he's barking, running around, catching the ball, whatever it is, he brings a lot of the joy to the game."

"We all do this because we love to do it," he added, "and Dalvin's a really, really clear reminder of that every day."



HITTING THE BOOKS

BY LINDSEY YOUNG





Everything has looked entirely different for the NFL – and for the world – throughout 2020. For the offseason and later Minnesota's Week 7 bye, gone (for this year) were the days of cross-country travels and warm-weather escapes. Players and coaches instead stayed close to home in order to take precautions against COVID-19.

New-look downtime has created opportunities for increased family time, creative at-home workouts and even some good old-fashioned reading.

Second-year center Garrett Bradbury told reporters prior to the season that he ramped up his reading time during spring months shut down by the pandemic. Books of choice included Phil Knight's autobiography, *Shoe Dog*, as well as *The Inner Game of Tennis*, both recommendations by Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins.

Bradbury finds himself drawn most-often toward compelling narrative, fiction or nonfiction but isn't opposed to picking up the occasional self-help book.

"If it's a biography, I just love hearing about other people's lives – or fiction, obviously, just a good story. I read *Unbroken*, the book about Louie Zamperini, just a really powerful story about perseverance, courage, what he had to go through.

"And along the same lines for *Shoe Dog* – just hearing about how Nike really shouldn't be what it is. Phil Knight had to go through so much in order to build it into what it is," Bradbury added. "It's fascinating because all we see is the multibillion-dollar company that it is, but they were struggling for quite a while. It's cool to hear other people's stories."

The 25-year-old hasn't always been a reader. It wasn't until his senior year at N.C. State that Bradbury decided it would be "really good for me" to create more of a habit.

"I think whenever you're sitting down to read, hopefully you're trying to better yourself. That's kind of the mindset that I take," Bradbury said. "That's why mixing in a good self-help book is good every once in a while. It's also just time to get away and be in a quiet place and enjoy a book."

It's not uncommon for Bradbury to chat about books with Cousins or other teammates after reading them.

And although there are no formal meetings (I'd recommend calling it the QuarterBook Club, personally), the Vikings QB room as a whole enjoys exchanging book reviews.

"They'll tell me, 'Hey, I went and got such-and-such a book,' and then I'll say, 'Oh, what do you think so far? What are your thoughts?' Usually we're on the same page about what we like or don't like about it, or what we agree with or don't agree with, or what we want to look into further," Cousins said.

EARLY READERS

Unlike Bradbury, Cousins' affinity for a good book started at a young age, instilled by his mom.

He recalled loving an easy-reader-style biography on Jerry Rice as an elementary school student and later reading about Duke's head basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski and former Yankees pitcher Mariano Rivera.

But before it all came another series that he and backup QB Sean Mannion agree on: *The Berenstain Bears*.

"Both my parents are teachers, so we always had a lot of books around the house," Mannion said, "but when I was really little, I remember *The Berenstain Bears* being a big series. Maybe when I was first or second grade, kindergarten."

Memories of Papa, Mama, Brother and Sister Bear – and their life adventures colorfully illustrated on soft-covered storybooks – came flooding back for this fellow reader. So, the question had to be asked: What were some other childhood favorites?



Eddie Yarbrough, who has been on the Vikings active roster and practice squad, said he's "always been a reader" but offers a disclaimer:

"I'm not going to B.S. you and say I used to be head of the 'Read-a-thon.' Nah, that wasn't me," Yarbrough laughed. "But I still loved reading, though. And if we're talking about throwbacks, [man], *Junie B. Jones*. I think I read almost every single *Junie B. Jones* book. If I see one now, if I'm, like, at a doctor's office or something, definitely picking it up."

He notes Andrew Clements' *Frindle* as another childhood go-to. And the third one, well, he'll blame it on growing up as the youngest of three.

"I never really got into the popular series like *Harry Potter* or *Twilight*," Yarbrough said. "But I would read these ones because my older sisters had them in bunches: *Judy Moody*. Oh, would I take down some *Judy Moody*."

Yarbrough may not have been pulled into the Wizarding World as a youngster, but others in the locker room followed closely the quests of Harry, Ron and Hermione.

"When I was just approaching the age where I was old enough to read a longer chapter book start to finish, *Harry Potter* was kind of the craze," Mannion recalled. "That was kind of cool. It was perfect timing for me."

Vikings running back Ameer Abdullah also identified as a "huge *Harry Potter* fan" – and before that, he admitted, *Captain Underpants*.

"But as I've gotten older and where I am right now in my later 20s, I've been reading a lot more autobiographies, biographies, self-help books," he explained. "Just things that are more nonfiction that are more applicable to everyday life."

LEARNING EACH OTHER'S STORIES

Beyond on-field performances, any shared interest – in this case, books – helps to bring people together within a locker room.

Mannion noted the different ways teams across the NFL arrange players' lockers.

"Sometimes they put your lockers by position, and here with the Vikings they do it randomly, which I think is really cool," he said. "Last year when I signed as a free agent, I didn't really know anybody. I was next to Eric [Kendricks], and he's an awesome guy."

"It's kind of an icebreaker, you know? When you're sitting next to somebody, even if you don't know them, you're going to talk to them, you're going to get to know them," Mannion continued.

In fact, he credits Kendricks for "one of the best book suggestions" he's ever received.

"Eric recommended *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell last year, and ... it just blew me away," Mannion said. "I've just been hooked on Malcolm Gladwell ever since."

READERS TO WRITERS

So far, Cousins is the only player in the Vikings locker room that has authored a book. His *Game Changer: Faith, Football & Finding Your Way* was published in

June 2013 after his rookie season with Washington. The quarterback hasn't ruled out the idea of writing another book someday.

"The hard part is deciding when you want to write it," Cousins said. "I think when I retire from football, you still feel like you have more you want to do in life, and you haven't finished the story."

Will any Vikings teammates have books written about – or by – them one day?

If anyone should, Bradbury opined, it's Abdullah.

"I would read a book about Ameer in a heartbeat," Bradbury said with no hesitation. "I feel like every conversation I have with him, I find out something new about him – whether he's producing music videos or producing a movie, writing scripts, involved with farms and local produce – it's endless with him."

Abdullah laughed, admitting that he is "involved in a lot" in order to experience everything he can out of life.

"I do actually intend on writing," he said. "I have a couple of ideas in mind. Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* is a book that I would want to kind of [style] my biography after."

"I definitely intend to write a biography one day," Abdullah added. "That's dope that Garrett said he would read it."

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PRO BOWL FAN VOTING OPENS

BY ERIC SMITH

Plenty of Vikings players have stepped up on the field this season to help the Vikings recover from a disappointing start.

And while the playoffs are the goal, those individual players are also in the mix for Pro Bowl honors, too. The annual all-star game will not be held in-person because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the 2021 Pro Bowl will be transformed by going virtual in *Madden NFL 21* with celebrities, NFL Legends, current players and streamers playing as the official Pro Bowl rosters.

Here's a look at the candidacies of 10 Vikings:

DALVIN COOK

The NFL's second-leading rusher with 1,069 yards, Cook has helped the Minnesota's recent surge. He has recorded six games with at least 95 rushing yards and leads all NFL players with 13 rushing touchdowns. He made his first Pro Bowl in 2019 after getting the most fan votes of any non-quarterback.

C.J. HAM

Ham was also a first-time Pro Bowler in 2019, and the Vikings fullback (and Minnesota native) has been at it again in 2020. His blocking has paved the way for Cook's big days and has helped the Vikings rank sixth in the NFL with 150.7 rushing yards per game.

JUSTIN JEFFERSON

The 2020 first-round pick has looked like a superstar 10 games into his NFL career. He leads Minnesota in yards (848) and has four scores on 45 receptions.

Jefferson is on pace to have perhaps the best season for a Vikings rookie wide receiver since Randy Moss, and he has already tied Moss' 1998 record of four games with 100-plus receiving yards.

"The team loves him, he works hard, he practices hard," said Vikings Offensive Coordinator Gary Kubiak. "He's gaining the respect of players with how he goes about doing his job."

ADAM THIELEN

Thielen hasn't slowed down in his age-30 season, as he has recorded 49 catches for 646 yards so far in 2020.

But the fan favorite has made his bones in the end zone, as he leads the Vikings with 11 touchdown catches, a total that ranks first among all NFL players.

Thielen – who is also a Minnesota native – has been a two-time Pro Bowler in his career in 2017 and 2018. His play on the field so far could earn him a third honor for his 2020 season.

GARRETT BRADBURY

Bradbury was the Vikings 2019 first-round pick and held his own as a rookie. But the center has blossomed in his sophomore season, taking charge in the middle of that unit in both the run and the pass game.

Bradbury's development up front is a key reason why the Vikings have soared into the top 10 in yards per game (eighth at 387.1) in 2020.

BRIAN O'NEILL

O'Neill is a third-year player who should likely be considered among the league's top-tier right tackles. The 2018 second-round pick had progressed in each of his three seasons so far and is viewed as a key building block for the future of Minnesota's offensive line.

The versatile and athletic O'Neill can hold his own against the league's best pass rushers and is effective when tasked with getting on the move to create space in the running game.

"I like when our running plays go for a lot of yards," O'Neill said. "If that requires me to pull, let's do it. If that requires me to down block, let's do it. I like when our offense does really well. That's fun."

ERIC KENDRICKS

Kendricks was an All-Pro and a Pro Bowler in 2019, and he's proven this season that he likely deserves a repeat of both accolades.

The do-it-all linebacker currently leads the Vikings in tackles, marking the sixth straight season he has done so. Kendricks, who is among the league's top linebackers in coverage, has two interceptions and five passes defended so far this season.

"He is really instinctive, he anticipates routes, he's seen a lot of football now, so he can anticipate things before they happen," said Vikings Co-Defensive Coordinator Adam Zimmer. "I think he's playing as good as he ever has and probably better than he ever has."

ERIC WILSON

Wilson has worked his way from undrafted free agent to special teams ace to a key piece of the Vikings revamped defense.

The linebacker has taken on a large role in Anthony Barr's absence and has responded with the best football of his career. Wilson is tied for the team lead in both sacks and interceptions with three apiece, and he also has a forced fumble and a pair of fumble recoveries.

"I don't know that anyone's playing at a higher level than Eric Wilson right now," Kendricks said. "That man's a walking turnover."

HARRISON SMITH

"The Hitman" is a Pro Bowl regular, having made five straight appearances in the annual all-star game. Smith is one of 13 players who has made five consecutive Pro Bowls while with the Vikings.

The lynchpin of the Vikings defense, Smith has helped lead that unit in 2020 with three interceptions and six passes defended.

ANTHONY HARRIS

Harris likely should have made his first Pro Bowl in 2019 when he tied for the league lead with six interceptions. And even though the ball hasn't fallen his way yet in 2020, the Vikings safety has still made an impact with his all-around game this season.

One of the most likable guys in the locker room, Harris' leadership has been a noticeable reason for the improved play of Minnesota's young cornerbacks.

On the field, he has provided steadiness on the back end in 2020 with a tackle for loss and four passes defended.

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LASKA & LUNA CONKLIN

BY LINDSEY YOUNG

PURPLE Pups

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When Minnesota winters roll around, there's no one quite as excited as Tyler Conklin's Siberian Huskies, Laska and Luna.

"They love the snow. When the winter comes, they'll want to be outside all day," Conklin said. "Obviously the [summer] heat's kind of hard on them sometimes – you'll hear them panting and trying to get back in the house. Luna will stay outside, she'll just try to find shade, but Laska, he'll try getting inside. Especially being from the Midwest, I love the seasons, and it's perfect."

The Vikings tight end grew up in Michigan and moved to the Twin Cities when Minnesota drafted him in the fifth round of the 2018 NFL Draft. As a rookie, he brought home Laska, the black-and-white Husky with one blue eye and one brown eye.

Conklin describes Laska as the people-lover.

Whether it's Conklin, his girlfriend Scottie or his friends, Laska always is seeking out someone to spend time with and cuddle with.

"He loves to run ... he likes chasing squirrels and birds, but for the most part, he's pretty mild," Conklin said. "I mean, if he's in the house, he's just laying around, wanting to get petted."

Laska was an "only child" for a year before Conklin and Scottie added a second canine to the clan. Luna also has one blue and one brown eye but has a fluffy, nearly all-white coat.



OWNER: TYLER CONKLIN

FAMILY MATTER:
CONKLIN GREW UP WITH HUSKIES AND FELL IN LOVE WITH THE BREED.

OPPOSITE SIBLINGS:
LASKA IS LOW-KEY, WHILE HIS SISTER LUNA IS AN ENERGETIC TROUBLEMAKER.

INFLUENCER STATUS:
CONKLIN'S GIRLFRIEND SCOTTIE RUNS AN INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT OF THEIR PUPS.



"They're family. You come home, you've got two kids - I know they're not real kids, but they're my kids. It's just a sense of home, a sense of family. I'll have dogs for my whole life."

- TYLER CONKLIN



Luna's personality couldn't differ any more from her brother's.

"She's a little more of a typical Husky. High-energy, likes to get into stuff," Conklin explained. "If you let her out, she'll sit outside on the top of the hill in the backyard all day, where Laska's crying to get back in and hang out with the family. ... She's a little more [naughty]. She likes to get into stuff and cause problems."

"Laska doesn't really do anything wrong, honestly. He's definitely the Golden Child," Conklin added with a smile. "Luna's just lucky that she's super cute. And she's built kind of funny for a Husky, so it makes her [even cuter]."

When it came to choosing a dog breed, Conklin didn't have to think twice about it.

Growing up, his family also had a pair of Huskies - Shadow, a black-and-white male; and Pepper, a female who was mainly white.

"Ever since I was young, I've always kind of loved Siberian Huskies, how they look like wolves and the way they act," Conklin said. "I love everything about them."

The only downfall, he admitted, is the long hair left clinging to any place - or anyone - the pups have been around.

"Besides the [shedding], they're great,"

Conklin said. "And they don't bark a lot. When they do, they 'talk.' It's hard to explain how they talk - I'm not going to try to mimic it - but it's definitely cute when you come home from work or whatever you're doing and they just start kind of talking to you."

Conklin laughed that the pups are "spoiled rotten" by Scottie, who takes them to a Minneapolis dog park multiple times a week and started an Instagram account (@laskalunaconklin) for them.

"I have nothing to do with that," he quipped. "That's all my girlfriend. She loves Instagram and taking pictures."

Asked to compare his pets to two of his teammates, he thought for a moment between likening Laska to Conklin's fellow tight end Kyle Rudolph.

"Rudy ... one of the older guys who just handles his business, good with everybody. That's how I would compare Laska," Conklin said. "And then Luna, being a little more of a troublemaker, that's hard because I can't throw anybody under the bus."

After a few seconds, though, he committed to an answer.

"She's a little more outspoken, so I'd say maybe Kris Boyd? Just because Kris is always talking or doing something, and that's how

Luna is," Conklin said. "She's always getting into stuff or barking or messing with people ... Kris is always messing around with people in the locker room."

Despite the extra responsibility of being a pet owner and sometimes being challenged by Luna "always getting into stuff," Conklin can't envision a life without his dogs.

"They're honestly great," he said. "I was really nervous about getting a dog, especially a Husky - my dad was like, 'They love to run, they're stubborn' - and it's honestly been one of the best decisions I've made."

"They're family," he added. "You come home, you've got two kids - I know they're not real kids, but they're my kids. It's just a sense of home, a sense of family. I'll have dogs for my whole life."





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COMPARING EXPANSION DRAFTS

BY CRAIG PETERS

The Vikings entry to the NFL for the 1961 season included an expansion draft that helped build the franchise's first roster. Minnesota was able to select three unprotected veterans from 12 different teams on Jan. 26, 1961.



Dallas, which had been granted an expansion franchise at the same time as Minneapolis/St. Paul but began play the previous year, was exempt from exposing any of its players.

Original Vikings Head Coach Norm Van Brocklin, who had just been the league's MVP the previous season as the quarterback of the champion Eagles, famously and callously referred to the group of players as "36 stiffes."

Twenty of the three dozen players made the initial roster, including Van Brocklin's former Philadelphia teammates Gerry Huth, Gene Johnson and Bill Lapham.

Eventual Hall of Fame halfback Hugh McElhenny, who had starred for San Francisco, highlighted the group. Nicknamed "The King," McElhenny rushed 120 times for 570 yards and three scores (and caught 37 passes for 283 yards and three scores) on the way to joining receiver Jerry Reichow as the first two Vikings to make a Pro Bowl.

Minnesota filled its entire starting offensive line through the expansion draft.

Grady Alderman (pictured) was the most prolific of the bunch. He went on to play 193 games, making 176 starts at left tackle, over his 14 seasons in Minnesota and was named one of the 50 Greatest Vikings. The six-time Pro Bowler later joined radio broadcasts, and his work as a CPA led to a role in the planning and construction of the Metrodome.

Huth played three seasons at left guard, and Lapham manned the middle that first season. Mike Rabold, a former St. Louis Cardinal, played two seasons at right guard, and Frank

Youso, a native of International Falls, played two seasons for his home-state team after beginning his career with the Giants as a second-round pick in 1958.

Three decades later, Carolina and Jacksonville participated in an expansion draft to build their first rosters. Vikings Senior Defensive Assistant Dom Capers was the first head coach of the Panthers.

The 28 existing teams were required to make six players available for the Panthers and Jaguars. Each new team had to select between 30 and 42 players. Jacksonville began by picking QB Steve Beuerlein from the Arizona Cardinals, and Carolina followed by tabbing CB Rod Smith – a former Roseville High School standout – from the New England Patriots.

Carolina's 35 players selected from the expansion pool included WR Eric Guliford, as well as LBs Dave Garnett and William Sims. Only Guliford played for Carolina. He caught 29 passes for 444 yards and one touchdown. Guliford also returned 43 punts for 475 yards and a score during Carolina's inaugural season.

Jacksonville's 31 selections did not include a player left unprotected by Minnesota.

The Panthers and Jaguars rounded out their rosters through the 1995 NFL Draft and became the first new teams to benefit from free agency. In that process, Carolina signed Don Beebe, the father of current Vikings receiver Chad Beebe, linebacker Sam Mills and kicker John Kasay.

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FEATURED FAN

NINI

FOR AS LONG AS SHE CAN REMEMBER, NINI SOKOL HAS LOVED THE MINNESOTA VIKINGS.

Of Vietnamese heritage but born in Hong Kong, she and her family moved to St. Paul when Nini was 1. It didn't take long for her father, Neng, to grow attached to American football and become a loyal Vikings fan.

"It's interesting because soccer is huge in Vietnam, but he fell in love with football," Nini said. "Girls don't usually like sports [in Vietnamese culture, but] I grew up kind of as a tomboy. For the longest time, I remember my dad saying, 'Girls aren't supposed to like sports.'"

But eventually, Neng realized that his son and three daughters would be life-long fans.

Some of Nini's fondest memories are of watching *Monday Night Football* with her dad. Because he worked early hours at a manufacturing plant, Neng turned in by 8 p.m. most nights – except for Mondays during the NFL season, when the whole family would stay up to watch the game.

"It's just something that we loved to do together," said Nini, who became a Season Ticket Holder in 2016.

In her early years, she loved watching Cris Carter and Randy Moss, her all-time favorite Viking. She has vivid memories of the 1998 campaign, particularly the Thanksgiving game against the Cowboys. Moss feasted that day with three touchdowns of 50-plus yards.

"The [2009 season] with Brett Favre was really memorable, as well," Nini added. "Every Minnesota fan hates the Packers, so it's like, 'Well it's Brett Favre, but now he's on our team – now we cheer for him, right?'"

When Neng passed away 10 years ago, Nini and her family continued his beloved tradition of gathering together to watch the Vikings. Her mom has never truly understood the fandom – "They lose and you all get so mad!" – but nevertheless cooks traditional Vietnamese food for her children and their families for Vikings road games (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Nini and her husband Mike are passing along the family tradition to their two sons, ages 4 and 5, both of whom are following mom's footsteps and love the Vikings. The couple jokes that her youngest was "nearly" born at U.S. Bank Stadium's inaugural game.

Nini attended the 2016 home opener against the Packers while almost 8 months pregnant and had to be told by



Nini and her husband Mike are raising their sons, ages 4 and 5, to follow in her footsteps.

Mike on several occasions to not get so worked up.

"He's like, 'Can we just not have the baby here at the game?' But fortunately it didn't happen, and we won," she laughed.

But fast-forward six weeks later to Halloween, and Nina got so frustrated about the Vikings *Monday Night Football* loss at Chicago that her family joked, "You're going to go into labor." She went home following the game, and within 30 minutes her water broke, and they were on their way to the hospital.

"Mike jokes about that quite a bit, like, 'If we have a third kid, you're not allowed to be pregnant during the football season.' He is very fearful that we'll be at a Vikings game and they'll have to cart me off," Nini said.





OBADIAH GAMBLE

"Skolbadiah," 11, loves everything about the Vikings. Win or lose, he's all-in. Fans may recognize Obadiah from the "Hey Teddy" music video he made inviting Teddy Bridgewater to his 7th birthday party. The former Viking who now plays for the Panthers did, in fact, make a surprise appearance.

CURRENT CITY:
ST. PAUL, MN
FAVORITE
ALL-TIME VIKING:
TEDDY BRIDGEWATER



JACOB HUBER

Jacob was diagnosed at age 3 with cerebral palsy, which affects his motor skills and makes it difficult to do fun things like riding a bike or running. But at 9 years old, he dreams of being in the NFL and is driven by a competitive spirit. He never leaves home without his football.

CURRENT CITY:
APPLE VALLEY, MN
FAVORITE
ALL-TIME VIKING:
RANDY MOSS



CHRIS NARUM

A loyal Vikings fan, Chris convinced his wife JenaLee to name the couple's sons Lochlan (which means "Viking Warrior") and Thielen. Chris works as a school counselor and uses his love for sports and the Vikings to connect students. JenaLee jokes, "I've never seen him so happy as when we witnessed the Minneapolis Miracle - even at our wedding!"

CURRENT CITY:
BISMARCK, ND
FAVORITE
ALL-TIME VIKING:
ADAM THIELEN



BOB REPIN

"VikingBob" has lived in Chicago for 50 years but became a Vikings fan at age 18 after attending his first NFL game (Vikings-Bears at Soldier Field). He has been a Season Ticket Member for 29 years and attended 234 consecutive Vikings games, including postseason contests, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

CURRENT CITY:
DES PLAINES, IL
FAVORITE
ALL-TIME VIKING:
TOMMY KRAMER



MADDI OLSON

One-third of the "SKOL Sisters" along with her sisters Hunter and Logan, Maddi loves everything about the Vikings, from tailgating in the snow to watching Brett Favre play in Purple and witnessing the Minneapolis Miracle. Game days with their dad has become their "greatest tradition."

CURRENT CITY:
FARIBAULT, MN
FAVORITE
ALL-TIME VIKING:
RANDY MOSS



HUNTER AHLNESS

One-third of the "SKOL Sisters" along with her sisters Maddi and Logan, Hunter says that the Vikings aren't just her favorite team, but they've truly helped create her favorite memories. From traveling to London with her family to see a Vikings win, to 6 a.m. wake-up calls for tailgates, she feels lucky to call herself a life-long fan.

CURRENT CITY:
MANKATO, MN
FAVORITE
ALL-TIME VIKING:
DANIELLE HUNTER



LOGAN AHLNESS

One-third of the "SKOL Sisters" along with her sisters Maddi and Hunter, Logan said they were raised on the Vikings and have Purple blood running through their veins thanks to the biggest fan they know, their dad. Some of Logan's favorite memories include game days at the "obscenely loud" U.S. Bank Stadium.

CURRENT CITY:
SAVAGE, MN
FAVORITE
ALL-TIME VIKING:
DAUNTE CULPEPPER



JOHN WARD

John and his two sons "love everything about the Purple and Gold" and stick with the team through thick and thin. Although John lives in Tennessee and his sons in Idaho, the three travel to Minnesota for three or four games every season. They love connecting with other fans at U.S. Bank Stadium and everything about Vikings football.

CURRENT CITY:
SODDY DAISY, TN
FAVORITE
ALL-TIME VIKING:
ADRIAN PETERSON

Pierre
NOUJAIM

Ron
JOHNSON

Hobie
ARTIGUE

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VIKINGS AWARD SCHOLARSHIPS

JOIN PROJECT SUCCESS FOR VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP

BY CRAIG PETERS

MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENTS WHO ARE PARTICIPATING IN PROJECT SUCCESS AND SOME ALUMNI GATHERED VIRTUALLY LAST WEEK TO “VISIT” THE SMITHSONIAN’S NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE (NMAAHC).

A partnership between Project Success and the Minnesota Vikings sent Legends, current players, Owner/President Mark Wilf and staff to Washington, D.C., to visit the museum in 2019. It has hosted more than seven million people since opening in 2016.

The second-annual trip was initially

Justice Committee, which formed in 2018 and has expanded its efforts each year, including in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

The evening featured a discussion with Page, as well as NMAAHC Curator of Sports, Dr. Damion Thomas, who shared images from the museum, including a display that features Page sitting as a Minnesota Supreme Court Justice. Thomas' presentation also included pictures of an 1850s slave cabin from South Carolina and Doug Williams' jersey from when he played at Grambling before becoming the first Black quarterback to win a Super Bowl.

Page earned his law degree during his on-field career that landed him in the Pro Football Hall of Fame and Vikings Ring of Honor. Upon enshrinement in his hometown of Canton, Ohio, he and his late wife, Diane, launched the Page Education Foundation.

Page lamented that his parents were unable to

pursue their educational dreams, described what Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 meant to him and fielded questions.

Page said a takeaway from his football career that he applied after retiring from the sport was the importance of being able to focus.

“You have to be able to think critically. You have to be able to make decisions,” Page said. “You have to be able to do what is right – not what is easy, not what is convenient, but what is right.”



“If you’re going to make a contribution, and I think we all have the ability to make a contribution to this world we live in, you have to be a person of good character: telling the truth, being honest, saying what we mean and meaning what we say, respecting ourselves and respecting others, making decisions with others in mind,” Page continued. “All of those things are critically important, I think, if we are going to survive as a community of people.”

Current players participated in smaller breakout sessions in which the youth asked wide-ranging questions and explained items at their respective locations that inspire them, represent them as a leader or represent their cultural history/identity.

Wilf announced the awarding of a dozen \$1,000 scholarships to Project Success participants.

“The Vikings and the Wilf family will be pleased to be able to support these scholarships and proud to continue to collaborate with Project Success,” Wilf said. “Thanks for keeping up the great work. Keep dreaming and making change and getting all of our society to be a better place.”



Vikings running back Ameer Abdullah was among the group that visited the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2019.

scheduled for April, but it was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As that challenge continues, Project Success and the Vikings pivoted to last week's videoconference that featured guest appearances by Wilf, Vikings Legend Alan Page, and current players Ameer Abdullah, Anthony Barr, Anthony Harris, Eric Kendricks and Alexander Mattison.

Abdullah, Barr, Harris, Kendricks and Mattison are members of the Vikings Social

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Vikings Table presented by Xcel Energy adjusted its plan in March to best respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and has delivered more than 12,000 free meals in partnership with nonprofits that serve youth and families in need.

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Chili RECIPE

INGREDIENTS

- 2** bell peppers
- 1 lb.** ground beef
- 16 oz.** can of corn
- 16 oz.** can of black beans
- (2) 32 oz.** cans of crushed tomatoes

Spice Mixture:

- 2 tsp ea.** of cumin, pepper, salt, paprika, garlic salt, onion powder
- 2 tbsp** chili powder

DIRECTIONS

- 1** Dice bell peppers, cook over med-high heat until softened and aromatic.
- 2** Add ground beef, season with salt and pepper, cook until brown.
- 3** Add corn, black beans, and crushed tomatoes, season with salt and pepper.
- 4** In a separate small bowl, mix spices together.
- 5** Add spice mixture to cooked ground beef mix.
- 6** Simmer at medium heat for 20-30 minutes or until cooked through.
- 7** Season with salt and pepper if needed.
- 8** Serve with shredded cheese of your choice and fresh cilantro.



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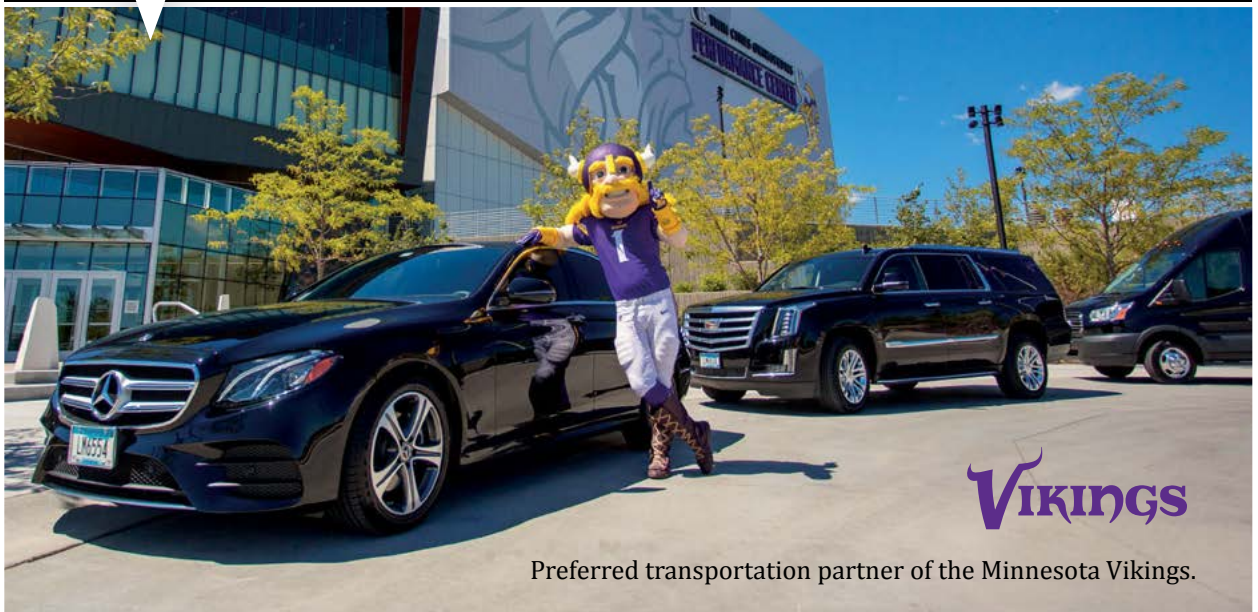
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FAVORITE ON-FIELD EXPERIENCE:

Witnessing the Minneapolis Miracle with all of my teammates in my rookie season. There was so much energy in the stadium that day, and the crowd was electric! I'll never forget the final 25 seconds. Once the Vikings won, my teammates and I all sprinted to each other, hugging, dancing and celebrating that unreal victory.

FAVORITE OFF-FIELD EXPERIENCE:

Visiting American troops in Honduras, Curaçao and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, with MVC Shanyn. We spent time with so many inspiring men and women who told us all about their duties and shared their incredible experiences. I am so appreciative of all the troops we met who sacrifice, dedicate and serve for our country every single day! It was an experience of a lifetime, and it will always hold a special place in my heart.



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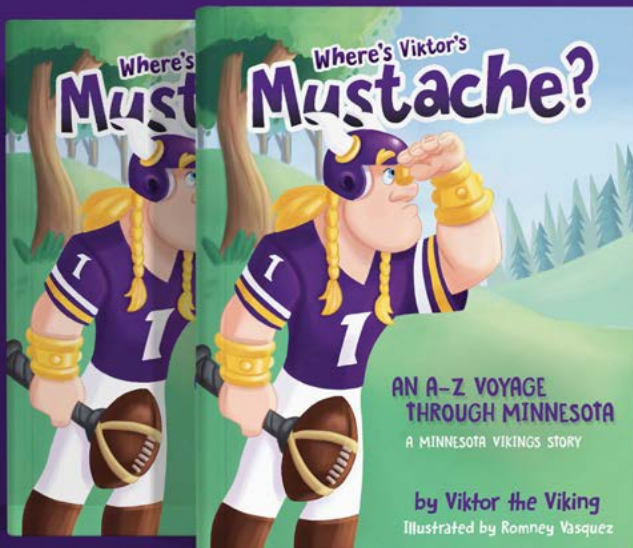
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TV TUNE-IN INFO: WEDNESDAYS AT 8 P.M.
ON WFTC | 10:35 P.M. ON KMSP FOX 9

The Vikings starting quarterback teams up each week with Twin Cities sports anchor Mark Rosen to deliver unique content via a weekly series that features current Vikings players, prominent Minnesotans and guests with connections to Cousins. Other segments focus on game highlights and reactions. Use #AskKirk to submit a question.

VIKINGS REWIND

PRESENTED BY PENTAIR

TUNE-IN INFO: 6:30-7 P.M. MONDAYS

Vikings Rewind takes listeners through a fast-paced recap of the previous day's game. The program features in-game commentary by "Voice of the Vikings" Paul Allen, analyst Pete Berich and sideline reporters Ben Leber and Greg Coleman.

X'S & O'S WITH MIKE ZIMMER

PRESENTED BY U.S. BANK

TUNE-IN INFO: 6-7 P.M. WEDNESDAYS

Paul Allen interviews Vikings Head Coach Mike Zimmer at the midpoint of each week for an in-depth recap of the team's previous game and a look ahead to the upcoming opponent. Allen also connects with an assistant coach for a deeper look at a particular position. The series features both video and audio components and is available across multiple platforms.

SKOL STORIES

PRESENTED BY CENTURYLINK

TUNE-IN INFO: 6:30 P.M. THURSDAYS

Embark on a voyage through Vikings history with Mark Rosen, who covered the team for decades, and Pete Berich, the former linebacker and assistant coach. *Skol Stories* offers rich storytelling that reconnects fans with their favorite memories and links younger listeners to the legacy of the franchise.

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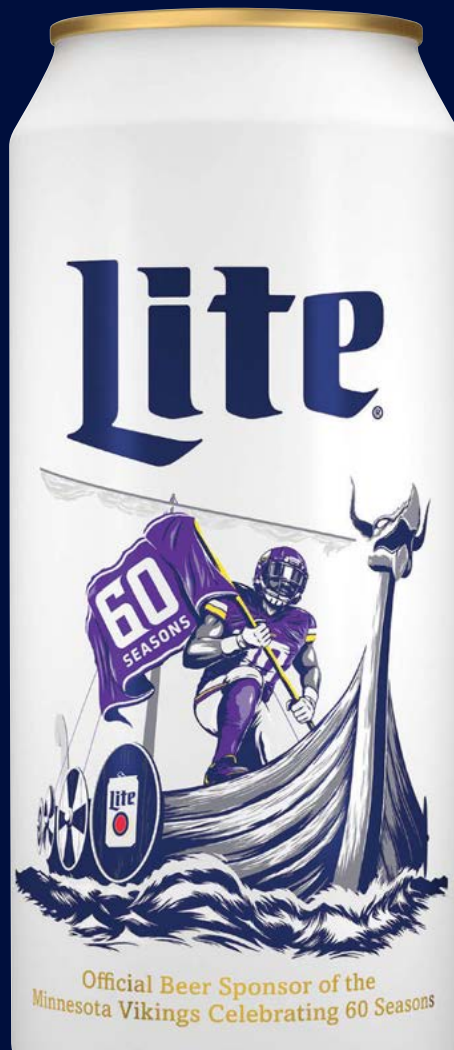


PRESENTED BY PEPSI

TUNE-IN INFO: 6:30 P.M. FRIDAYS

Wind-down your week with *Vikings Vantage* by recapping the week at Twin Cities Orthopedics Performance Center. Vikings.com's Gabe Henderson and Chris Corso co-host the program that includes interviews with current players and media members who cover the team.

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