

Football Preview:

Strong hopes for the season

Commentary by Stephen Batcher

Well, ladies and gentleman it has all begun. The smell of hot dogs and brats on the grill, the sound of plastic shoulder pads connecting with the frailty of unprotected abs, and the smell of beer on the fans' breaths in the student section. OK, maybe not the last part--especially on this campus, right? Even so, the football season is here, and the Golden Bears have taken over the Griff.

Last year the Bears struggled, offensively and defensively. Besides stopping the run, there wasn't much to cheer about. It was a different season than previous years when the Bears played good solid offense, solid run defense, and only had trouble with stopping the pass at times. The Bears finished 2006 with a 5-6 record and a 4-4 mark in the conference. The Bears were actually, however, 5-4 against conference foes; their win against University of Mary last season was considered non-conference because the game was on the schedule before Mary joined the conference. Mary was also this year's homecoming foe, and first home opponent for the Bears.

The Bears are returning some quality starters on offense this year. Quarterback Kole Goodchild was named preseason player of the year in the conference; he is returning for his second year behind center. He was sort

of a surprise as preseason player of the year, given his time in the back field last season was not as productive as other returning offensive starters around the conference. This year he should have a better line that should give him more time to throw though.

There are also strong hopes that Eric Clinton and his buddies can establish some sort of running game. Junior College (JUCO) offensive line transfers Blake Ogletree and David Boettcher should help senior Dan Buchman anchor the line. A better running game will help Kole as it will relieve the pressure of having to control the offense through the air. Catching balls for Kole will be Tyrone Ruffin and Antwon Williams again this season who have been solid performers the last couple years.

The Bears also look to be better on defense, having brought in many JUCO players from Iowa Community College and North Dakota School of Science. We will have to see how the defensive secondary does, though, since they have been the weak point for the Golden Bears in years past. Junior transfer Dario Moore is one new face that will line up on defense this year and try to help out in the secondary. Moore was an All-American Junior College wide receiver before transferring to the Gophers for a season and then to the

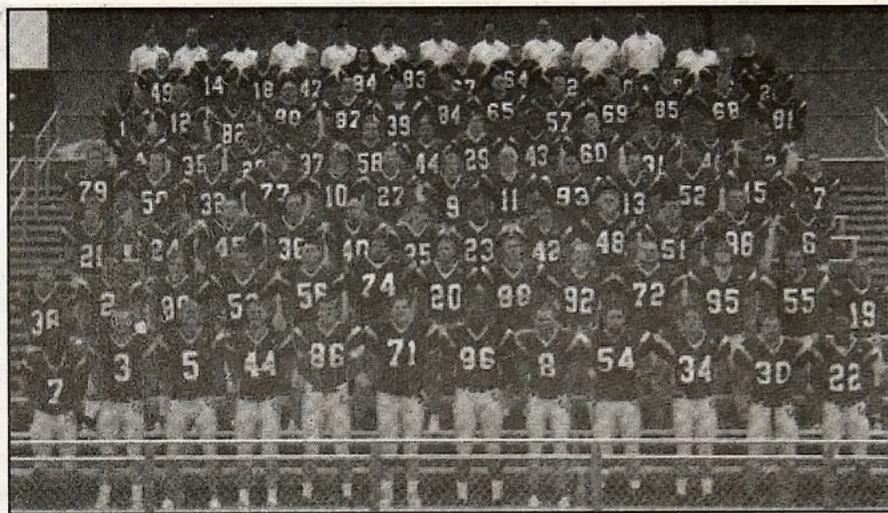


Photo courtesy of www.csp.edu/athletics

Bears this fall. (The Gophers fired head coach Glen Mason this past off-season, which may or may not have led to Moore's transfer.)

The Bears are returning a couple stars on defense, including Duy Huynh, Chuck Meisbauer, and Jordan Frain. They did, however, lose some key starters including Eric Power, the team leader in sacks and tackles for loss, and Antonio Brown, the Bears' interceptions leader. The line backing core looks solid again, however, and they will be relied on to help stop the run and control the passing game. The defense will look to improve upon last year and take the next step to make Concordia a contender for the NSIC crown.

Anyone who went to the games last year probably noticed how much the Bears struggled in the special teams' aspect of the game, especially punting. To make things worse, with Brody Johnson graduating last spring, the Bears will be left to find a new field goal kicker, punter, and/or kickoff spe-

cialist. The Bears do have returning kicker Stephan Bjerke, and he will be joined by Nick Spadafore and TG Schoenberg to help take over the kicking duties.

The Bears looked good on defense in their first game against Augustana this season as they sacked the QB seven times. The defense held the Augies to -12 yards rushing but did give up over 300 yards passing. The inability to stop the passing game will bite the Bears later if they don't fix it. The offense was very balanced and did just enough to win the game. This performance will hopefully not continue the rest of the year. The Bears will need to improve to compete for the NSIC crown.

I predict that the Bears will play well at home, but, as in most seasons, the road will be the test for them. If they can play well on the road, they will have a chance to compete with the top teams in the conference. A bowl game is not out of reach this year.

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Sword