

Reason for optimism, concern as camp ends

• The Vikings can feel good about the progress made by Adrian Peterson, but real questions remain at linebacker and at safety.

VIKINGS INSIDER

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MANKATO - That's it. It's over. Vikings training camp is complete.

The doors to the dorms at Gage Hall have been closed. The mountain bikes players and coaches rode around for three weeks have been locked up for good.

Now it's time for the Vikings to turn their attention to their second pre-season test, a Friday game against Buffalo. But before we look ahead, here's a rundown of the five most important things we learned during camp:

1 Not even a scary run-in with Cajun food could slow Adrian Peterson's recovery.

On July 30, Peterson had a serving of jambalaya in the dorm cafeteria, suffered a severe allergic reaction to the seafood and felt his face swelling and his breathing passages closing.

An injection of Epinephrine and a trip to the hospital got him right again. And then, the next day in the blazing heat, Peterson effortlessly attacked a strength and conditioning workout that would have weakened even the healthiest civilian.

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Vikings running back Adrian Peterson waved goodbye to fans Wednesday after the last practice of the season in Mankato.

« ALL OF US SOMETIMES NEED A BUR UNDER OUR SADDLE TO GET US GOING. »

Offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave on his motivation tactics

The second unit of linebackers consists of Larry Dean, Tyrone McKenzie and Marvin Mitchell. That's a significant drop-off from a starting trio that's far from extraordinary to begin with.

5 Fans will ask for anything. Seriously, anything.

After one camp practice, a young fan asked rookie Robert Blanton for his mouthpiece. Said center John Sullivan: "The idea that someone would want that is shocking. Disgusting."

Yeah, exactly.

But that led us to take a quick poll of players on the oddest requests they got during camp.

"I had one guy ask me for my half-drunk Gatorade," Josh Robinson said. "But I was like, 'Dude, really? I'm too thirsty.'"

Percy Harvin was amiable in signing autographs most days, even with some odd wishes mixed in.

"I've had a few people wanting me to sign, well, in places on their body that probably shouldn't be signed," he said.

Jarius Wright regularly fulfilled fan requests for wrist bands, skull caps and towels.

"For some of these people," he said, "the sweatier, the better."

Sullivan? He was a little more reticent in giving away souvenirs that had been on his sweat-soaked body for 2½-hour practices. So don't ever ask him for his gloves.

"Trust me, you don't want these," Sullivan said. "In 12 hours, these things are going to smell like an outhouse."

Still, Sullivan gets it. Growing up, he was an avid Steelers fan.

"I really liked Rod Woodson," he said. "I wanted to play corner — which really worked out physically for me. I was never the real hardcore fan. But I appreciate these fans' dedication to us. Having them out here has really helped break up the grind of these days."

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Yep, that was the strangest episode of what was an eventful three weeks for Peterson. He began camp on the physically unable to perform list but left as an active participant in practice — less than 33 weeks after having surgery to repair torn ligaments in his left knee.

Is Peterson back to full strength and ready to resume a normal workload? Nope. There's still a ways to go.

But it's a wonderful sign that he is back practicing and continually pestering Vikings coaches for more work and more contact. Peterson plans to play in the third preseason game against San Diego, another boost to his superhuman reputation. As General Manager Rick Spielman said, "He's just different."

Early on during camp, coach Leslie Frazier was watching clips from 2011 and came across a handful of impressive Peterson runs.

"Great plays," Frazier said. "So I came up to him and said, 'Can you see yourself in your mind being able to do that again?' Adrian said, 'Coach, I can do that right now if you let me.' In his mind, there's nothing wrong; he's going to be fine."

2 Jared Allen is not in a competition with Matt Kalil. It's more of a partnership.

One of the story lines heading into camp centered on the anticipated matchup between the Vikings' star defensive end and their promising rookie left tackle.



Allen

Depth lacking on defense

Allen graciously discussed the topic on the first day of practice. Then he fielded more questions about it a few days later. And somehow, even as repetitive as that plot line became, still more questions came with Allen handling them with a good-natured chuckle and explaining he did not come to Mankato to win a 1-on-1 war with Kalil.

Instead, the duo has used their daily battles as growth opportunities to prepare for the season.

Allen has gotten the better of the matchup overall. But Kalil hasn't exactly been a turnstile against the NFL's reigning sack king.

"I've had a few good days against him," Kalil said. "Which fuels my confidence. But with Jared, if you feel like you're on top of the world, he'll beat you three plays in a row."

Kalil has also reminded himself to stay receptive to Allen's pointers.

"Jared's beaten offensive tackles a lot better than me," Kalil said. "And he's so multidimensional with everything he does — his footwork, all of his moves, his hands. He's helped me refine my footwork so I don't open up too fast. He's shown me ways to better use my hands. Plus, to see the way he works his butt off out here, there's never a threat of complacency."

3 Offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave won't stand for lethargy.

After a sluggish effort from his offense spoiled the afternoon practice on Aug. 6, Musgrave used that night's meeting to light a fire under his players. Literally.

Musgrave delivered a passionate pep talk that included fiery mannerisms and, yes, a flaming pile of sticks and leaves.

"All of us sometimes need a bur under our saddle to get us going," he explained.

So how large did the flames get?

"I'm sure they got too big for the fire code," the offensive coordinator said. "But luckily we got to put them out quickly."

Aside from that motivational mojo, Musgrave has delivered a straightforward message to his offense. For three weeks, all of his starters have been reciting some version of the same theme — success in 2012 will come from every player doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.

In other words, heroics won't be required. Instead, mistake-free football will be celebrated more often. Second-year quarterback Christian Ponder will be most responsible and most closely watched in responding to that command.

4 The defense might still have serious depth issues, especially at linebacker and safety.

Here's a quick round of applause for Chad Greenway, who turned in a solid camp. Fellow linebacker Erin Henderson also seems to be developing well heading into his second year as a starter. And in the secondary, rookie safety Harrison Smith has done as asked and earned a starting job. (For the next 10 years, perhaps?)



Greenway

Smith's spirited play has been fun to watch. He is rarely out of position and likes to get his licks in whenever possible.

But who will start alongside him? Jamarca Sanford just doesn't make enough plays on the ball downfield to retain his starting job. Yet Mistral Raymond hasn't progressed to the point of being a no-brainer starter either.

And consider the rest of the linebacking corps. Jasper Brinkley is starting at middle linebacker by default, but he has been all sorts of rusty and wasn't effective in limited action last Friday night during the Vikings' preseason-opening loss at San Francisco.