

# Thompson to continue football career at SMSU

Travis Rosenau

SLEEPY EYE - Attending a good college while staying close to home was important for Sleepy Eye High School senior Evan Thompson.

And doing that while able to play football at a Division II school was just the icing on the cake for the 6-foot-2, 275-pound offensive lineman.

Thompson, a little more than three months removed from playing his final high school football game with Sleepy Eye United, signed his letter of intent on Feb. 7 to play football at the next level with the Southwest Minnesota State University Mustangs.

"After football ended, I just couldn't imagine that being the end of it," Thompson said. "I wanted to play college ball. Momma's boy, didn't want to move too far away from home. So I told myself before I got any offers or anything, 'I really want to stay close to home.' And then SMSU gave me an offer and it was huge. I went and did my official visit, met some of the guys, got to see the field, talked to the coaches, I loved it."

Thompson is not a complete stranger to the SMSU football field as his final high school football game came during SEU's Section 3A title game against Springfield at SMSU on Nov. 3, 2023.

The Tigers won that game to advance to state for the second year in a row, but SEU was still able put together an 8-3 season in their first year as a coop between Sleepy Eye High School and Sleepy Eye St. Mary's High School.

"It was crazy how everybody clicked, it was just one big family right away," Thompson said of playing with SEU. "Going in, the whole town was skeptical, 'How are these boys going to react?' But, I don't know, we just loved the game, got in there and had one thing in mind - just to play football."

Thompson was also a team captain for SEU last fall and finished his final prep season as the All-District Lineman of the Year. He will bring his push-and-pull talents to the Mustangs as an interior lineman.

"They're talking interior line, so guard or center," Thompson said.

Thompson said he talked to around 20 schools, with four official offers. In addition to receiving an offer from SMSU, Thompson said he also got offers from the University of Jamestown, Dakota State and Valley City State.

While his journey to the college field is just beginning, Thompson admitted he's got work to do and will likely redshirt his first season to learn the ropes and put on more weight.

"I will pretty much for sure end up redshirting my freshman year," he said. "Especially for offensive line, they want me to go in there and gain like 40 pounds. So that's a big thing. They'll have me on a big meal plan, workout plan to put on weight my first year."

The Mustangs football team went 2-9 last season in the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference and will be looking to put together a stronger season this fall. Even though Thompson will likely redshirt this coming season, he said he's aiming to do well in school and put in the work to show his coaches he's ready when needed.

"Obviously I want to have good grades," Thompson said. "But relating to football, I like the idea of being the young guy that can come in and get the job done. So I want the coaches to know that I'm ready whenever they need me."

In addition to liking the campus and being close to home, Thompson said he was also drawn to SMSU after hearing how the coaching staff treats players.

"Talking to the players, they said the coaches really want to get to know you on a personal basis, which is big for me," Thompson said. "I didn't want to just be another piece."

Thompson plans to study criminal justice at SMSU.

Until then, Thompson is rounding out the last month of his prep wrestling career with the New Ulm Area wrestling team as the state's No. 3-ranked Class AA heavyweight. NUA begins the team Section 3AA tourney as the No. 1 seed in the south and will host a section matchup on Thursday night.

Thompson finished sixth at the state individual tourney last season and was named the 2023 All-Journal Wrestler of the Year.

