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**WELCOME
HOME**

A NATIVE SON OF MADISON
AND ALUMNUS OF UW,
PAUL CHRYST RETURNS TO
LEAD WISCONSIN FOOTBALL



DAVID STLUKA

COVER STORY

YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN

Paul Chryst's coaching career has involved stops at programs around the country, but Madison has always been a constant. Once again, Chryst has found his way home.



ICON SPORTSMAN

HEISMAN

STILL STRIVING

Melvin Gordon's future will be framed by the same thing that made him college football's best running back — hard work, and lots of it.

LUCAS AT LARGE

THE 'FIT' IS FINE

After sharing a sideline at Pitt, former Badgers QB Brooks Bollinger knows better than most that Paul Chryst meshes perfectly with UW.



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Chryst got first call for job

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Bollinger: Chryst an ‘unbelievable fit’

Brooks Bollinger was going into his senior year when he first crossed paths with Paul Chryst who had just been hired as an assistant by Wisconsin head coach Barry Alvarez. Chryst was put in charge of the tight ends. “And I immediately liked him,” Bollinger said. “It was just the way he carried himself.”

With two Rose Bowl wins under his belt, Bollinger was already one of the most accomplished quarterbacks in school history. He would finish his UW career with a 30-12 record as a starter; including a 3-0 postseason mark, leaving him as one of only two Big Ten QB’s to start in three bowl victories.

“The thing that you liked about Paul as a coach is who he is,” said Bollinger, who accounted for 64 touchdowns as a dual-threat runner and passer. “He respects the game. He understands the way it should be done. He’s kind of that old school ball coach. And it’s authentic — it’s who he is.”

Bollinger always regretted not getting to spend more time around Chryst at Wisconsin. But he always found him to be accessible even though Chryst coached another position group. “In his own unassuming way,” he said, “he always understood how to engage in conversation and be supportive.”

After leaving school, Bollinger embarked on an eight-year pro career that included six seasons in the NFL and two in the United Football League. Whenever he returned to Madison, he had an open invitation from Chryst to sit in the quarterbacks’ room. “I got to know him better and better,” he said.

At the end of his playing ca-

BOLLINGER ON CHRYST:
HE’LL SAY THE MAGIC IS THAT THERE IS NO MAGIC. HE UNDERSTANDS THE FUNDAMENTALS ARE CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS. HE WILL TRUST THE PLAYERS AND GIVE THEM THE ROAD MAP.



reer, Bollinger took over as the head coach at Hill-Murray High School in Maplewood, Minn. and led the Pioneers to a 9-3 record and their first state playoff berth in 24 years. The following season, Chryst brought Bollinger to Pitt as the quarterbacks coach on his first staff.

“That was a big jump for me and my family,” said Bollinger, a coach’s kid from Grand Forks, North Dakota. “I don’t know if there’s anybody else that we would have made it (the move) with just because you knew you could trust how you were going to be treated and what you were going to be a part of.”

“I had a ton of input as a young coach. Paul listened and valued my opinion. I kind of grew up as a football junkie which he obviously is, too, and we had great conversations. It could be hard coaching a position (quarterbacks) for a guy who had coached it so long and so well. But it wasn’t with Paul.”

Bollinger spent two years at Pittsburgh before making a career decision to leave coaching based on the challenge of sustaining the lifestyle of a 24/7 profession and his own family needs to be around the kids. As a result, Bollinger and his wife Natalie moved back to Minnesota to raise their four children.

“Throughout that whole process, coming to that decision, he



was probably the most supportive person I had in just talking me through it," Bollinger said. "His first response was his concern about me and making sure I was making the right decision for my family. It lifted a huge weight off my shoulders."

You can imagine Bollinger's excitement then when Chryst was named Wisconsin's head coach. "It's an unbelievable fit," he said. "The great thing about Paul is not only will he understand the great history and tradition and uniqueness of the program, but he doesn't want to make it about him.

"I know him and I know how

well his coaching philosophy fits that place. He understands that it's not just about winning football games and building the program. It's about winning football games, building the program and using that as a vehicle to have a huge impact on the young men.

"He works his butt off to make sure everything he does is sound and then he creates an environment where the guys are going to work and understand their role. Then he puts those players in a position where they can best use their skill-set and he lets them take ownership."

Chryst doesn't take short cuts,

Bollinger stressed. He doesn't rely on sleight of hand or smoke and mirrors. "He'll say the magic is that there is no magic," Bollinger said. "He understands the fundamentals are critical to the success. He will trust the players and give them the road map."

Bollinger believes that Chryst's hiring has already given the program a shot in the arm. "From the high school coaches to the guys at the bar to the parishioners at St. Maria Goretti," he said, "people have a ton of respect for Paul because they know who he is and what he stands for." ■





Football program in good hands with Chryst

Within minutes of Gary Andersen informing me that he had taken the Oregon State job, I was on the phone with Paul Chryst, who was on the top my short list.

People who know me know how I operate. I always have a short list and I had some very good head coaching candidates on this one.

I definitely had some people that I wanted to talk to and I visited with each of my top three candidates. But Paul was No. 1 on the list and he stood out above the rest.

I feel great that I can turn over the program to someone who cares for the program. He was a player here, he was a coach here. He has an understanding of what we're all about.

Paul is going to take pride in this program. He's not just passing through. This is somebody who's going to take great pride in being the head coach at Wisconsin.

It was hard for me not to hire Paul when I hired Bret Bielema. But I made a decision back then. And I would have hired Paul when Bret left for Arkansas had I not just helped place him at Pitt.

Loyalty is important to me. Some people don't understand loyalty. But Paul will be very loyal to the university. He loves this school and community. He has deep roots here. He wants to be

here.

Paul is a good football man, and no one can deny that. He's a football guy who understands how we've built this program and how this program will succeed and what you have to do to succeed.

Being a head coach for three years can help you look at the big picture. Until you become one, you don't know how to how to answer and deal with all the things that come across your desk.

He has been through that now. He has been through hiring assistant coaches and dealing with player issues. He has taken teams to bowl games. There won't be any surprises for him.

He's very confident, probably more confident than he was when he left three years ago. When you're an assistant, you may think you're confident, but there are things you're not quite sure about.

Paul has definite thoughts on how he's going to run his program. As a head coach, he has done it already. And he's leaving a Pitt program in much better shape than it was when he inherited it.

It was in shambles and he had to clean it up. He had to get some of the kids out of there and get some good kids in there. And he was just beginning to put his stamp on the program.

When I interviewed Paul, the

discussions were more about people than scheme. I know what Paul will do offensively. I know that he has a great offensive mind. He can handle his offensive staff.

We talked a little bit about who he would think about as a defensive coordinator and I want to help him anyway I can to put together a good defensive staff.

We also talked about recruiting. He understands that you'd better lock down Wisconsin. The walk-on program is vital and I think we were letting that slip.

I've gotten the sense that maybe our relations with the high school coaches in the state have slipped a little bit, too, and that has to be rekindled.

There are so many intangibles Paul brings to this job — starting with the logistics of getting around the city and state. He knows the people. And they know him. You can't buy those things.

Paul is planning on attending all of our bowl practices. Along with staying on top of recruiting, he'll be able to meet with every one of our players that are coming back and evaluate them.

When the bowl game is over, he'll be ready to go. Paul has the same vision for this program that I do. He wants to compete for championships and I would expect nothing less.

I'm thrilled to welcome him back home. ■



Finding a fit? Tough to do better than Chryst

For the last two years, I have told anyone who asked that Gary Andersen, while not from the Midwest, comes across as someone who is from this part of the world. A decent, down-to-earth family man who also happens to be a good football coach.

I still believe that. However, as we discovered last week, Andersen decided it was time to move on. The reasons, be they real or nothing more than speculation, have been out there for everyone to debate. Stunning as the move is to so many — most importantly the players — I firmly believe that if you are not happy somewhere, it is best for all concerned to get out.

So Andersen got out. Personally, I have no ill will. I enjoyed working with him. As far as this observer is concerned, we had a good professional relationship. I wish nothing but the best for Gary, his wife Stacey and the entire Andersen family.

With that, it is important to note that while such a move creates some short term uncertainty, this shapes up to be a win-win situation. Yes, a good coach has left, but another good coach is coming to town. One who is the right fit for the University of Wisconsin.

Actually, Paul Chryst is the perfect fit.

The University of Wisconsin is unique. Everyone loves a win-

ner, but there are guidelines here that will not change. Those who run this institution as well as this athletic department, expect student-athletes to be qualified athletically, academically and socially.

While never perfect, the track record around here is pretty good in that regard. Paul Chryst understands the formula. More importantly, he accepts the formula.

Beyond his obvious talents as a football coach, Chryst's knowledge of what makes the University of Wisconsin tick should be a huge asset. He knows the drill. He believes in it.

One of Barry Alvarez's favorite lines is "It's hard to win." Nobody has to explain that to Paul Chryst. He is fully aware of the

challenges, and the Paul Chryst I know embraces them. He was a player during an extremely difficult period in this program's history, some of the worst of the worst.

On the other hand, Chryst was the offensive coordinator for some of the best of the best, including the 2011 season when the Badgers averaged 44 points per game in route to a Big Ten title.

I have always marveled at how Chryst handles both the good and the bad. Similar to lifelong family friend Bo Ryan, Chryst simply enjoys the process. Preparation. Breaking down video. Practice. Just do everything you can during the week, and let Saturday's game take care of itself.

He has been a head coach for three years. He inherited a Pitt program that was in disarray, and he gave it direction. I would imagine it is difficult for him to leave, but most reasonable people can understand his decision.

While still managing to win, Chryst's alma mater needs some stability from its head coach. It needs someone who wants to be here, who wants to stay here, and someone who understands the Wisconsin Way.

The Badgers believe they have found that coach. A decent, down-to-earth family man who is back where he belongs.

Welcome home, Coach Chryst. ■



WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION TO THE HIRING OF PAUL CHRYST?



J.J. WATT
DL • Houston Texans

“ I couldn’t be more excited about having Coach Chryst return to the Badger Football program. He is a Wisconsin guy with Wisconsin roots and he has a Wisconsin mentality. He understands what it will mean to be a Badger and on top of being a great football coach, he is a great man. I’m excited about our future. On, Wisconsin!”



MONTEE BALL
RB • Denver Broncos

“ Coach Chryst builds so much chemistry with the team, not only on game days but during practice and in the locker room. He is a players’ coach. If you need to talk to him about anything, he is willing to listen and help. Most importantly, though, he is a great coach who is willing to put in the work to do whatever it takes to win football games. He is a great fit for the program. I am very excited!”



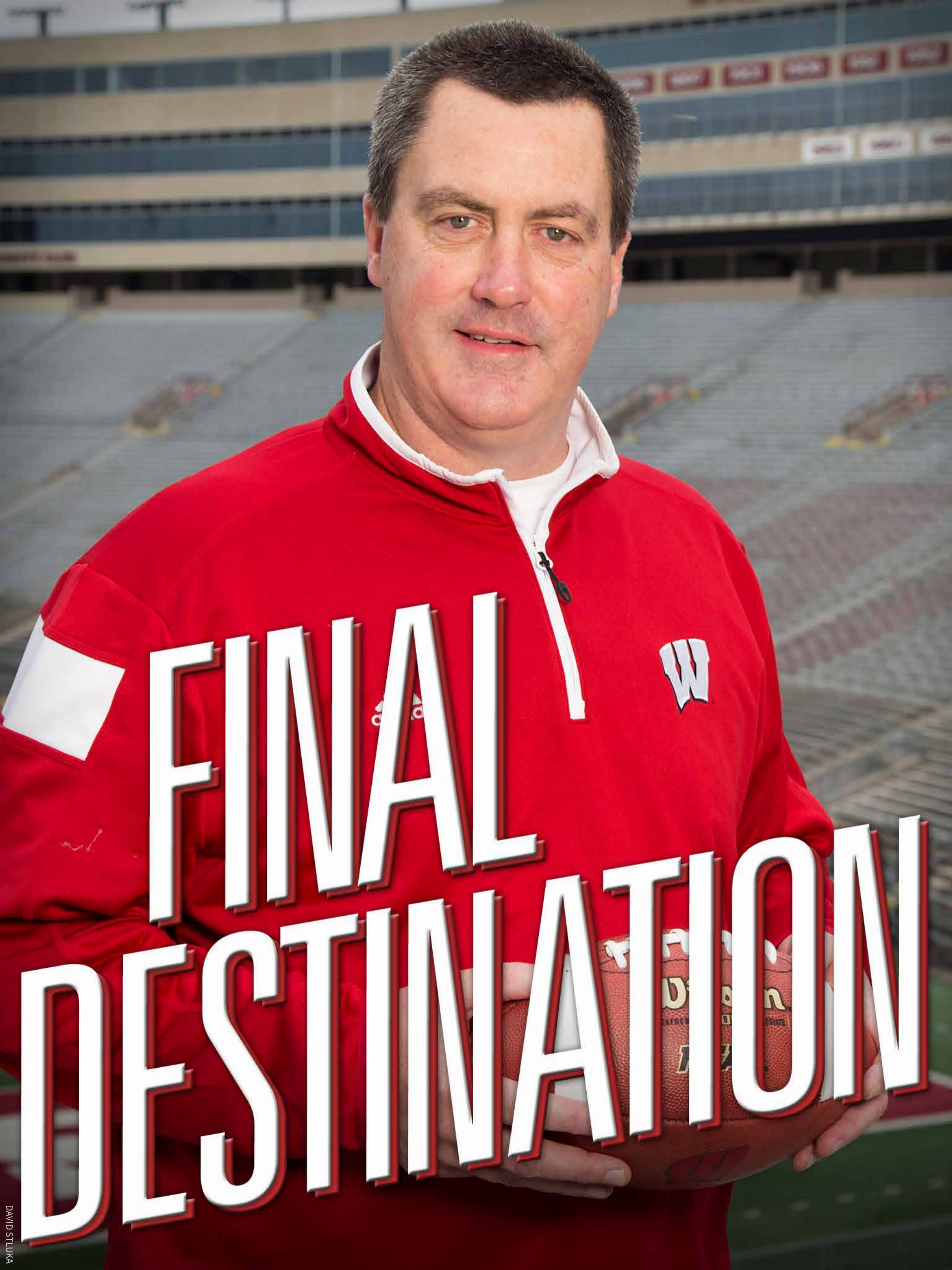
RUSSELL WILSON
QB • Seattle Seahawks

“ Coach Paul Chryst, he and I had a lot of amazing times together, a lot of laughs and a lot of amazing wins. I’m really excited for him to be the new head coach at the University of Wisconsin. He’ll do an unbelievable job and I believe he’ll win a national title or two.”



JOE THOMAS
OL • Cleveland Browns

“ You could really write anything complimentary about Paul Chryst and put my name on it because I think it’s a great hire and I love him. Coach Chryst is an outstanding fit for Wisconsin. He has a deep knowledge of the history of Wisconsin Football. He was the architect of some of the best offensives in UW history. He is a tremendous leader and an outstanding offensive mind. The University of Wisconsin could not have found a better coach than Paul Chryst.”



FINAL DESTINATION

WHEREVER HIS CAREER HAS TAKEN HIM, **PAUL CHRYST** HAS ALWAYS FOUND HIS WAY BACK TO HIS NATIVE MADISON, A CYCLE THAT HAS REPEATED ITSELF ONCE AGAIN WITH HIS HIRING AS THE HEAD COACH OF HIS ALMA MATER.

BY MIKE LUCAS ■ UWBADGERS.COM

AS THE PRIVATE JET BEGAN ITS descent, Paul Chryst peered out the window like he had routinely done on so many previous trips home. But it was different Tuesday because he experienced something that was unique from the all those other times that he had flown into the Dane County Regional Airport.

“Once we broke through the clouds,” said the 49-year-old Chryst, who has spent the last three seasons as the head coach of the Pittsburgh Panthers, “it was a little surreal when you see the capitol and the lakes, and it’s funny because I’ve never felt that flying into Madison before.”

The last time he had been back was two years ago when daughter JoJo graduated from Edgewood High School. She had stayed behind and

lived with her grandmother, Patti Chryst, so she could complete her senior year with friends instead of relocating immediately with the rest of the family to Pittsburgh.

Such are the ties that bond.

Soon after Paul and his wife, Robin, got to their campus hotel Tuesday, their kids — Katy, JoJo and Danny — were out and about. “All three of them got picked up by friends,” Paul Chryst said, grinning. “And we were just talking about how you can go into other cities and you don’t know anybody.”

That doesn’t apply here.

“This is obviously a special place not only for me but our whole family and that makes it that much more special, there’s more depth to it,” he said. “And now it’s neat knowing you’re starting



another chapter in the same city; it's exciting and — like I said earlier — a little surreal.”

On Wednesday, Chryst was introduced as Wisconsin's head football coach, replacing Gary Andersen, who left after two seasons for Oregon State. Chryst admitted to having a rush of emotion and energy when UW athletic director Barry Alvarez first contacted him about the job opening.

“You're surprised,” he said, “and, then, you're awfully excited about the possibility and you're trying not to let your mind go too fast because, at the time, you know there are still a lot of things that have to happen. You're appreciative that he called and you feel really fortunate for it to work out.”

After investing so much in rebuilding the Pitt program, he insisted it wasn't easy to leave. In fact, it was what Chryst expected it to be: it was hard. “It was extremely hard,” he noted. “But if it wasn't hard, you shouldn't be doing this (for a living). And it was hard not just for me but for the whole family.

“I certainly feel proud of what we were doing.

I told the players all the time, ‘I love the progress we've made, but we're not where we want to be.’ I do feel good, not for me but for so many people — coaches, administrators and, most importantly, the players — that it is better now than when we came in.

“We've got a ton of respect and appreciation for that group of players. That's the one thing I do know about myself: I get my energy from the players and the people I'm around. What I appreciated is that a lot of them understood (taking the UW job) and they'll always have a special place in my heart.”

But, then, so does the University of Wisconsin and Madison.

“To me,” Chryst said, “what's special is the people; the people that are here and have had an impact on you or are meaningful to you. There are a lot of those people certainly in Madison and within striking distance (Platteville is 75 miles away). We have a lot of good memories of this place.

“I thought about it this way,” he went on. “I was able to live it growing up here and being

around the program (as a youngster) and then leave ...”

He went to high school in Platteville.

“And then I was able to come back and go to school and play here — Robin went to school here as well — and then leave ...”

The start of his coaching odyssey.

“And then I was able to come back and be part of the program as a coach and then leave ...”

For another coaching gig.

“And then I was able to come back again as a coach ...”

Before leaving again for Pittsburgh.

“It’s one of those places that can keep pulling you back and every time you’re excited to come back,” Chryst summarized. “And we’ve left some really good people and places to come back and that’s because of the people here as well. What is it about this place? It’s the people, right? That’s what it is.”

He paused and snickered, “I love the lakes, but I’m not coming back for the lakes.”

• • • •

Paul Chryst is back because he sees himself as others see him — as a good fit for Wisconsin.

“The bar has been set at a high level and that’s awesome and it didn’t just happen (overnight),” he said. “Like any place, you want it to be better because you were there. And you want to positively impact the players and the people, something which you get to do day-in and day-out.

“What matters most to me? People talk to me about what’s my dream job? My dream job is to be able to do it with a group of people and what matters is who you get to do it with. Do you have a chance (to be successful)? We’ve got that chance. Great things have been done here and that’s the opportunity and the challenge to build on that.”

Given the departures over the last three years of Bret Bielema, who left for Arkansas, and his successor, Andersen, Alvarez pointed out Wisconsin was obviously not a destination job for

▼ **SLIDESHOW:** Swipe to change • Tap to pause/play

CHRYST ON THE APPEAL OF MADISON:

“It’s one of those places that can keep pulling you back and every time you’re excited to come back. What is it about this place? It’s the people, right? That’s what it is.”



either. But he quickly added that the opposite has been true for himself and UW men’s basketball coach Bo Ryan.

What about Chryst? How does he view this job? “It has everything that we, as a family, and me, personally, are looking for,” he said. “But I think you earn that right — like those guys (Alvarez and Ryan) have — you have to earn that right to make it your destination. That’s the quest.”

Presiding over his own program in Pittsburgh for the last three years not only reshaped Chryst on the field, from coordinator to head coach, but it cast him in the role of an overseer, one who’s accountable for the actions of everyone in the program, all of which has enhanced his profile.

Sometimes you have to leave to come back.

“You’re always trying to grow,” he said. “We ask that of our players — to be the best that you can be and continue to grow. And I hope to continue to grow as a head coach and I feel like that (Pittsburgh experience) helped quite a bit. I’m proud of what a lot of us have done there.”

That extends to how he has grown as a person and decision-maker. “That part is energizing,” Chryst said. “In the end, every decision that we make comes down to one thing: Does it help our student-athletes grow? Certainly football is a big component and that’s the common bond.”

Chryst cited the growth of students in the classroom with the ultimate goal of getting a meaningful degree and the growth of players on the field and their relationship and responsibilities to something even bigger as maturing adults. “That’s being a part of the university and state,” he said.

Focusing on what matters is a driving principle in the Chryst playbook.

“It’s not a complicated formula and it leads you to the right answers most of the time,” said Chryst, adding that he doesn’t think that his personality has changed much the last three years. “I learned there are some decisions you need to make and you weigh them and you do what’s best.

“It’s not hard to do what’s best for the program

and what's best for the team. It's just not always comfortable. But that's OK."

In almost the same breath, he acknowledged that it's not only OK, but it's critical for a coach to remain true to himself, something that he picked up during his first tour of duty under Alvarez.

"That was the first thing I learned when I came here," he said, "the first words from Barry."

That was 12 years ago.

Chryst had just taken a risk when he turned down a full-time coaching job with the New Orleans Saints. Professionally and financially, it was a good deal, especially since he was out of work. But something didn't feel right and he had to fall back on his instincts.

For three years, he had coached tight ends for his mentor Mike Riley in San Diego. But after the Chargers released Riley, everybody was on their own. Riley wound up with the Saints as a member of Jim Haslett's staff. That opened the door for Chryst, who accepted a position as a defen-

sive assistant.

Shortly thereafter he had a change of heart and informed Haslett that he didn't want the job. His heartstrings were pulling him in another direction — back home to Madison and Wisconsin, where his dad had played and coached and where he had lettered as a reserve quarterback, linebacker and tight end.

Despite a significant reduction in pay, Chryst agreed to take over as Alvarez's administrative assistant and on-campus recruiter in 2002. Although he didn't have any full-time openings on his staff, Alvarez promised Chryst that if something turned up, he would be the first one considered.

By the time Chryst arrived for his first day in the office, he already had a new title and job description: tight ends coach, an opening that was created when Tim Davis left to join Pete Carroll's staff at Southern Cal. Chryst also became UW's chief recruiter in the state.

"What kind of style of coach do you want?"





▲ TAP TO WATCH - Paul Chryst Introductory Press Conference

Chryst asked Alvarez.

“What I want and what you have to be,” Alvarez replied, “is that you have to be yourself.”

It would not be the last time that Alvarez would share some words of wisdom. When Riley was named the Oregon State head coach in 2003, he recruited Chryst to be his offensive coordinator; it was an offer that he couldn’t refuse even though he had been on Alvarez’s staff for only a year.

Upon reflection this week, Alvarez confided, “I should have given him more responsibilities and kept him here. That was a mistake that I made — I let him leave. But I was able to bring him back (two years later in 2005) as my co-offensive coordinator (with Brian White) and he did a great job.”

In 2006, Chryst assumed total control of the Badgers offense for the next six years under Alvarez and Bielema. It was during this produc-

tive, resume-building span that Alvarez recognized, “It was just a matter of time before Paul was going to get a head coaching job.”

That came following the 2011 season when he was hired at Pittsburgh on Alvarez’s strong and influential recommendation. That Alvarez is once again a trusted boss, a sounding board

as an athletic director, is something that Chryst didn’t take for granted when he agreed to be his head coach.

“There are so many things that make this for me — and for our family — such a great job and that’s certainly one of them,”

Chryst said. “Just being able to talk to him about different things, whether it’s specific to football on the field or handling situations off the field.”

Calling Alvarez a great resource, Chryst added, “Almost minimizes what it can be.”

Asked about any national perception, real or imagined, that Alvarez’s shadow can be suffo-

“I SHOULD HAVE GIVEN HIM MORE RESPONSIBILITIES AND KEPT HIM HERE,” ALVAREZ SAID OF CHRYST. “THAT WAS A MISTAKE THAT I MADE — I LET HIM LEAVE. BUT I WAS ABLE TO BRING HIM BACK.”

cating to anyone who doesn't subscribe to his thinking, Chryst responded, "That's the farthest thing from the truth from what I've experienced. It was anything but that really.

"People would say the same thing when you come in here and you're going to be his offensive coordinator like I was. Now, he knew every bit of what we were doing (on offense). But that's what I enjoyed so much about working for him.

"He trusted you to do your job and yet you knew that he was always there for you and you could ask him things. I mean, you'd listen to his opinions. Wouldn't we all want that?"

That topic was also addressed by Alvarez, a Hall of Fame college football coach.

"People who have never been around here, never been on campus, don't know me, per se, have been speculating on why coaches have left," Alvarez said. "You can ask Gary Andersen and he will tell you that I'm not a micro-manager. I allowed him to run his program.

"Now, if I see something that I don't think is right, it's my job to tell them. I'm not going to

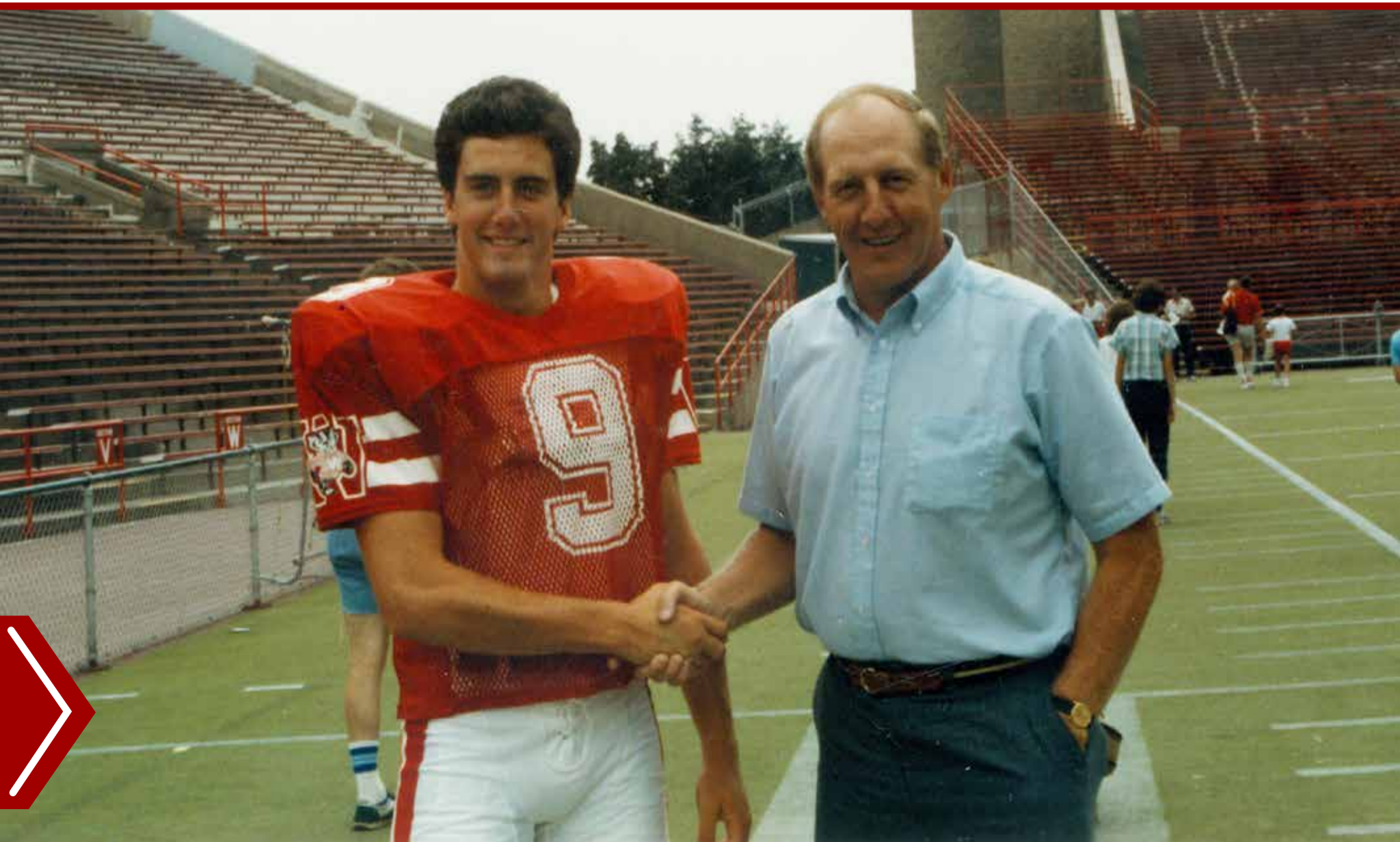
beat on the table and say, 'You have to do this' or 'You have to do that.' I don't give them parameters other than being sound. If I see something that is not sound, I have to speak up."

George Chryst was the same way as a player and coach. He was about sound fundamentals.

A guard/linebacker for the Badgers in the late '50s, he was the head coach at Madison Edgewood High School, a UW assistant under Milt Bruhn and John Jardine, an administrative assistant under Dave McClain, and the head coach and athletic director at UW-Platteville, where he hired Bo Ryan.

"He was a coach's coach," Alvarez once said of George Chryst, who died in 1992. He was 55. Paul Chryst has often said of his dad, "He truly had a passion for the game and, with that, he was a great student of the game. And I've always felt fortunate to have picked up some of those traits."

Tuesday, Paul Chryst elaborated some more on his father. "I remember him saying all the time, 'This is your job and you're pretty fortu-



nate to be able to do it,” he said. “More than anything, he would say, ‘Respect the game and those who play it.’ I still have a ways to go to get to his level. But you try to emulate and be like him.”

How would his dad react knowing that his son had just been named the head coach of the Badgers? “I think he’d be pretty proud,” he said. “I was just talking with Bo (Ryan) and he was saying, ‘What do you think would happen if George came down the hallway and he sees you as the head coach of football and me coaching basketball?’ It was fun to think of it that way.”

Patti Chryst would probably have a good laugh, too. “She’s certainly proud but like any mom she was going to be proud no matter what you’re doing,” Paul Chryst said. “She was able to go out and see what we were able to do in Pittsburgh. She got a good feel for our players. That she is proud makes you feel good and I know she’s really excited, too.”

Excited about the Chryst homecoming. It has all happened so swiftly, so unexpectedly with Riley replacing Bo Pelini at Nebraska and Andersen replacing Riley at Oregon State. Now Chryst will be matching strategy with Riley in the Big Ten. “It’s a pretty amazing the sequence of events,” he said.

The essence of coaching for Chryst can be best understood when translated in his own words — the words that he has used in the past to describe what he has taken from watching Ryan and how he accentuates the strengths of his players and pays such close attention to all of the details.


“I just love how Bo teaches the game,” Chryst has fre-

quently explained. “He still makes it a player’s game. The magic? There isn’t any magic. It’s just teaching and how you teach and it’s getting players to believe in what you’re doing. Bo is one of the best at it.”

So is Paul Chryst. “I’m looking forward to getting around our players,” he said anxiously. “I don’t want to get in the way, they’re still finishing out this season and they get one more game together in the bowl. But I’m excited to start building those relationships.”

And, yes, he does know that the Badgers open up with Alabama next season.

“Every great challenge,” he reasoned, “is a great opportunity.”

None better than the one Chryst has today in making this a destination job. 



A photograph of a young Black man with long dreadlocks, wearing a white headband and a black sleeveless jersey with "BADGER FOOTBALL" in red. He is looking off to the side with a focused expression. The background is a blurred stadium setting.

NO REST FOR THE BEST

*FROM DRILLS IN THE PARK WITH DAD TO A SPOT ON THE STAGE
IN NEW YORK — AND THE MANY YARDS IN BETWEEN — HARD
WORK HAS PAVED MELVIN GORDON'S PATH TO GREATNESS*

BY JERRY BARCA • FOR VARSITY



▲ TAP TO WATCH: Gordon in Gotham

BEHIND THE INFECTIOUS SMILE THAT toured New York City, behind that charming move on ESPN in the Best Buy Theater when he knocked the Heisman Trophy, jokingly trying to cause the bronze statue to fumble, Melvin Gordon left the Big Apple knowing there was more work to do.

By all accounts of those close to him, work, and more accurately hard work, has been the constant in Gordon's football life since he was 9 years old.

Before he was even a tween, Gordon visited one of his aunties with his dad. Gordon stopped and stared at the glass encasement holding football trophies and pictures of his cousin playing the game.

"Melvin decided then: 'I can do something with this,'" said his mother, Carmen Gordon. "That was the turning point, as crazy as it might sound."

Pretty soon thereafter the drills with his dad, also named Melvin, started. His father would place empty bottles on the baseball diamond near the family's Kenosha home. On the field,

Melvin worked on planting a foot at one bottle and quickly changing direction to cut back across the field. His father had him close each repetition with a straight sprint and a hurdle.

"I remember the day he taught me that," Gordon said.

At this point, Melvin wasn't a star in bantam football. He didn't even play on offense, but the next day he dropped back to return a kickoff in practice.

"I just stuck my foot in the ground, went back across field and I just made everyone look bad. Right then, I was like, 'Wow!' Doing those drills helped me be better. I saw the result. Then after that, I felt like doing drills and doing extra things that would help me."

A little more than a decade later, the drills and the extra work resulted in one of the best rushing seasons in college football history. The Wisconsin junior has rushed for 2,336 yards, which ranks as the fourth-best single-season mark. He reached the 2,000-yard milestone in the fewest carries ever. For his efforts, he has been decorated with honors including the Doak Walker

Award, given to the best running back in the country, and he earned a spot on the Associated Press and Walter Camp All-America teams.

Gordon, along with Amari Cooper of Alabama and Marcus Mariota of Oregon, were named Heisman Trophy finalists. As part of the award festivities, Gordon spent two days in New York City. He met past Heisman winners. He appeared on national TV and radio multiple times. He toured Manhattan, stopping by the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree to take a selfie with Santa Claus, and to pose for photos with his family.

Back on the tour bus, he had a cell phone conversation with Herschel Walker. The college legend had already texted one of the Heisman administrators with a message for Gordon: “Tell Melvin he doesn’t have to be like me. He’s better than me,” the 1982 Heisman winner wrote.

Gordon finished second to Marcus Mariota for college football’s most prestigious award. Like everyone else who follows the sport, Gordon knew the Oregon quarterback would win it. “He deserved it, though. It is well deserved,” Gordon

said.

But Gordon did want the Heisman. Boy, did he want it. A picture of the trophy adorned a wall in his room as a motivational reminder. Since the drills at the baseball field, his father had been telling him, “Bring that trophy back. Get that trophy. We need that trophy.”

And yet, being a runner-up for college football’s most prestigious award was not the projection for the Melvin Gordon who started his high school career at Grayslake Central in Grayslake, Illinois. Feeling snubbed on the field, Gordon entered Kenosha Bradford midway through his freshman year.

“I’m going to give them a reason to play me this time,” Gordon said of his mindset at his new high school.

That summer, he worked out in the morning, napped or watched TV on his couch, and worked out again later in the day. He did some rendition of this every day, not yet knowing the body needed days off for recovery time from the workouts. By the time he stepped on a football

▼ **SLIDESHOW: GORDON IN GOTHAM** • Swipe to change • Tap to pause/play • Photos by David Stluka



▲ TAP TO WATCH - Melvin Gordon: Beyond the Big Play

field again, Gordon said he added 30 pounds to a frame that had grown about four inches.

On the jayvee field, quarterback Gino DeBartolo knew the running back was headed to greatness.

“It would be third and 13 and we’d be running a toss to Melvin and we’d pick up a first down almost every time,” said DeBartolo, who attended the Heisman presentation as Gordon’s guest. “When you’re running the ball on third and long, you know that something must be special with that person.”

That offseason the work continued. Gordon, DeBartolo, Joe Keels, who plays defensive end at Nebraska, and Trae Waynes, now an All-Big Ten cornerback at Michigan State, would meet in the high school gym at 6 a.m. to work on passing routes and footwork. After school they participated in voluntary team workouts. Then Gordon and DeBartolo, who attends the U.S.

Military Academy and played football there for three years, lifted weights, often times with Gordon’s father.

“He always made sure we were on the right track,” DeBartolo said of the older Gordon. “He always made sure we were focused, and Melvin was focused.”

There were games when Kenosha was ahead 49-0 at halftime and Gordon’s dad would make sure his son and his son’s teammates remained focused.

“He would come over and just start yelling that the score was zero-zero, just to show that you can never be complacent with where you’re at, there’s always room to grow,” DeBartolo said.

At Wisconsin, Gordon’s work ethic remained. By now, you’ve probably heard the story about the Snapchat to teammate Kenzel Doe with video of Gordon sweating through ladder agility drills in the wee hours of the morning.

“It would be third and 13 and we’d be running a toss to Melvin and we’d pick up a first down almost every time,” said DeBartolo, “When you’re running the ball on third and long, you know that something must be special with that person.”

What has changed, though, is the presence of Gordon's father. After being the dad who was at every practice and game, he was no longer there.

When the Wisconsin running back broke the record for rushing yards in a game, tallying 408 in three quarters versus Nebraska, his father cried. Just as he had taught his son to hurdle defenders in that cutback drill back in Kenosha, he watched No. 25 do just that, leaping over a Cornhuskers player en route to a record-setting day. "400 yards in a game? Impossible," he said with a father's proud amazement.

The 46-year-old Gordon watched the game from FCI Elkton, a low-security prison in Lisbon, Ohio.

"It hurts me bad inside that I'm not there to share this moment with them. It's ridiculous that I did this to my family," Gordon said through tears in a phone call from the facility.

While not a secret, the news of Gordon's imprisonment was reported last week by Teddy Greenstein in the Chicago Tribune: "In March 2012, Gordon was sentenced to 10 years for his role in a northern Illinois cocaine-dealing ring. Scheduled to be released in August 2020, Gordon is concurrently serving a three-year sentence for drug dealing in Kenosha County," Greenstein wrote.

The Badgers running back found out about the prison sentence at practice during his freshman year. "I broke down. I was crying and stuff. I wasn't focused," he paused. "That's how that day went."

The absence of his father has been the biggest challenge for the Gordon. They communicate mostly through email, dad still giving son tips and feedback on his game, and Gordon visited his father during Wisconsin's bye week in October.

"It's been tough," Gordon said. "I was used to seeing him every day, being there, supporting me, laughing, and telling me what I needed to do. It's just difficult that he's not here."

At the same time, Gordon doesn't want anyone to feel sorry for him, and he doesn't want people to judge his father. He doesn't want this to be some dramatic part of the narrative either. He knew the situation would become more public with the scrutiny of the upcoming NFL draft.

"I didn't want to complain about it to other people because I know I still got him. Some people don't even have a father," he said. "It was something I wanted to keep to myself. I knew it would come out eventually. I just didn't want anyone to judge my dad and think he was a bad father because of some decisions he made, because he isn't."

No matter the circumstance, Gordon keeps working. He knows that is what there is to do. His father tells him to, and so does his mother.

On Sunday, when he flew back to Madison from New York City, he watched film on Auburn. He wants to beat an SEC team. So far he is 0-2 against opponents from that conference. He wants to experience a college bowl win.

After that? More work. For the last two years, no running back has been selected in the first round of the NFL draft. He wants to end that trend.

"To prepare for the draft is going to be harder than what I've experienced already. And I've put in a lot of hard work," he said. "When I get my chance to be placed on a team, I feel I'll have to put even more hard work in than I will preparing for the draft."

"That's just how it goes." 





DAVID STILKA

Ryan and Chryst share special friendship

Chryst now owes Ryan a... lampshade?

When Paul Chryst returned to Madison as the 30th football coach in Wisconsin history, there was at least one of his colleagues who needed no introduction. For UW men's basketball coach Bo Ryan, reuniting with Chryst only writes the latest chapter of a long and special friendship.

Ryan's relationship with the Chryst family began in the late '70s when Ryan was an assistant coach at Wisconsin and Paul's late father, George, was an assistant with the football program.

The Ryans and the Chrysts would only grow closer. In 1984, George — who was then the athletic director at UW-Platteville — hired Ryan to be the Pioneers' head basketball coach.

George Chryst passed away in 1992, but he was top of mind for both Ryan and Paul Chryst when they got the chance to speak this week after Chryst was hired as the football coach.

"What do you think your dad would be thinking right now knowing that you and I are now the head football and men's basketball coaches at Wisconsin?" Ryan asked Chryst.

Ryan, who himself was hired at UW in a homecoming fashion in 2001, is thrilled for his good friend to get the same calling.

"I'm absolutely thrilled for Paul and his family, including his

-SCROLL FOR MORE-

SCHEDULE (10-1, 0-0)

Home games in **bold**. All times CT.

RECENTLY

Dec. 6	at Marquette	W, 49-38
Dec. 10	at Milwaukee	W, 93-54
Dec. 13	Nicholls State	W, 86-43

COMING UP

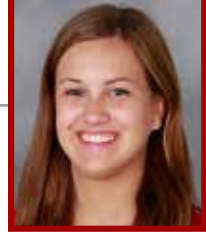
Dec. 22	at California	8 p.m.
Dec. 28	Buffalo	TBD
Dec. 31	Penn State	Noon

2015

Jan. 4	at N'western	7:30 p.m.
Jan. 7	Purdue	6 p.m.
Jan. 11	at Rutgers	TBD

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Badgers split road games in close contests

Turnovers continue to cause issues for Badgers

Coming off their first road win of the season at Florida (51-48), the Badgers dropped their next road contest to in-state rival Green Bay (53-43) on Saturday.

Wisconsin was unable to overcome its 25 turnovers, which ultimately translated into 23 points for Green Bay. The Phoenix halted what was a two-game winning streak for the Badgers, who were out scored 31-21 in the second half by Green Bay.

“Some of our turnovers were just the result of poor decision making,” Wisconsin head coach Bobbie Kelsey said. “It doesn’t help when you’re not taking care of the ball. I’ll give (Green Bay) credit though, they’re a tough team and they are going to make you make some mistakes.”

Wisconsin has struggled from 3-point range its last two games, shooting just 17.1 percent. The Badgers shot 21.4 percent (3-of-14) from deep at Florida on Dec. 10 before hitting a season-low 14.3 percent (3-of-21) at Green Bay on Saturday.

They also held the Phoenix to their lowest 3-point field goal percentage of the season at .053 (1-19). UW ranks third in the Big Ten, allowing opponents to shoot just 25.2 percent (37-of-147) from 3-point range.

-SCROLL FOR MORE-

SCHEDULE (3-6, 0-0)

Home games in **bold**. All times CT.

RECENTLY

ACC/Big Ten Challenge:

Dec. 4	at Miami	L, 66-54
Dec. 6	Marquette	W, 89-64
Dec. 10	at Florida	W, 51-48
Dec. 13	at Green Bay	L, 53-43

COMING UP

Dec. 20	Oral Roberts	5 p.m.
Dec. 28	Michigan	3 p.m.
<i>2015</i>		
Jan. 1	at Northwestern	1 p.m.
Jan. 4	Minnesota	2 p.m.

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FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:



Badgers' season ends with regional final

Wisconsin falls to Penn State in Elite Eight

Coach Kelly Sheffield said it best after his Badgers lost in an NCAA regional final to Penn State on Saturday in the KFC Yum! Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

“One loss doesn’t define our season or define our careers,” Sheffield said in a postmatch news conference. “If someone is going to take you down, you want them to take you down when you’re leaving it all out there.”

“I thought it was two teams that were just battling like crazy ... it was just warriors leaving it all out there. From that standpoint, you couldn’t be more proud. These guys hold their heads high. Certainly we’re upset that we weren’t able to do something that we set as a goal of ours.”

At the start of the 2014 season, the Badgers had two goals — to win the Big Ten Conference and win an NCAA championship.

Wisconsin claimed the Big Ten title with a 19-1 record but ran into a tough Penn State team in the Elite Eight round of the NCAA tournament. The Badgers battled the Nittany Lions — the fifth overall seed, coming off a second-place finish in the Big Ten — with All-America setter Lauren Carlini hampered by an ankle injury suffered in the first set.

-SCROLL FOR MORE-

SCHEDULE (31-3, 19-1)

Home events in **bold**. All times CT.

RECENTLY

Nov. 28	Purdue	W, 3-0
Dec. 4	NCAA First Round vs. W. Michigan	W, 3-0
Dec. 5	NCAA Second Round vs. Illinois State	W, 3-0
Dec. 12	NCAA Regional Semifinal vs. Ohio State	W, 3-2
Dec. 13	NCAA Regional Final vs. Penn State	L, 1-3

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LARRY RADLOFF

Breaking for semester, and keeping faith

Two off weeks on tap as Badgers look to reset

“I’m glad we have a break because it’s a time to reboot the program,” Wisconsin head coach Mike Eaves remarked at his last news conference before finals week and the semester break. “Reboot the computer here a little bit. They need to finish strong in school, go home and enjoy their family, and we’ll reboot the program when we get back.”

It has been a tough fall for the men’s hockey team. Wins were hard to come by as the squad, with its widely-discussed roster of 13 freshmen getting introduced to college hockey, picked up just one victory in 12 games. Some of the rookies have thrived, some have struggled and some are still looking for game action. Much of the same can be said for the upperclassmen.

Now three months into their college playing careers, the freshmen, along with the rest of the team figuring out new roles, will finish up the semester with finals this week, before getting home and enjoying some time away — but still with hockey on the mind.

“I think guys are excited to get back already and get back to work to turn this thing around,” senior goaltender Joel Rumpel stated. “It might be positive to get away from the rink for a

SCHEDULE (1-10-1)

Home games in **bold**. All times CT.

RECENTLY

Nov. 29	Ferris State	W, 5-3
Dec. 5	Penn State	L, 5-2
Dec. 6	Penn State	L, 4-2
Dec. 12	US U-18 (Exh.)	L, 4-1

COMING UP

Jan. 2	Michigan Tech	7 p.m.
Jan. 3	Michigan Tech	7 p.m.
Jan. 9	Boston Univ.	7 p.m.
Jan. 10	Boston Univ.	7 p.m.
Jan. 16	at Minnesota	8 p.m.
Jan. 17	at Minnesota	5 p.m.

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-SCROLL FOR MORE-



Badgers stun with two conference wins

UW has had huge turnaround on the season

Weeks don't get too much better than the one the Wisconsin wrestling program had last week. Barry Davis and his squad jumped back into the USA Today/NWCA rankings at No. 19.

No big deal or anything, but Wisconsin started the weekend with a 45-0 shutout win over conference foe Indiana. Shutout wins over Division I schools don't come around often — not for 11 years in Wisconsin's case. The last time UW shut out Indiana came 20 years before that, in 1983.

The much-anticipated showdown of the night came in the 165 lbs. weight class. Wisconsin All-American Isaac Jordan's stellar performance was a fan favorite and, by far, the highlight of the dual as the seventh-ranked sophomore entered a top-10 dual with Indiana's No. 3 Taylor Walsh.

"He is a pretty funky wrestler," Jordan said. "He pins a lot of guys so I had to be smart and pay attention. I thought I could ride him, which I did for most of the second period. He got away at the end, which is something I need to work on."

After a scoreless first period, Jordan notched three near fall points and Walsh answered with an escape. Those would be the last points of the match for Indiana and Jordan finished off

-SCROLL FOR MORE-

SCHEDULE (5-1, 3-0)

Home events in **bold**. All times CT.

RECENTLY

Nov. 22	Navy Classic	4th place
	<i>Annapolis, Md.</i>	
Nov. 29	at S. Dakota St.	W, 26-9
Nov. 30	at N. Dakota St.	W, 25-9
Dec. 11	Indiana	W, 45-0
Dec. 13	at Nebraska	W, 23-14

COMING UP

Dec. 29-30	at Midlands	All Day
Jan. 9	Northwestern	7 p.m.
Jan. 11	Purdue	1 p.m.
Jan. 23	Michigan	6 p.m.

[> View complete schedule](#)

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THE BARN OPENS

DECEMBER 18, 1930: After construction began in the winter of 1929, the UW Field House was dedicated and began its stint as the Badgers' home. The men's basketball team beat Pennsylvania, 25-12, in front of a sellout crowd of 8,600 to dedicate the building.

-MORE THIS WEEK-



RAISED TO RAFTERS

DECEMBER 21, 1983:

Theresa Huff's jersey became the only number retired in UW women's basketball history. The 5-foot-11 center played from 1979-83 and finished her career with 30 school records.



DIALED IN FROM DEEP

DECEMBER 23, 2010:

Men's basketball set a school record with 17 3-pointers in an 80-56 win over Coppin State. Jon Leuer hit five treys to lead UW, while Jordan Taylor and Tim Jarmusz each added four.



TERRIFIC TURNOUT

DECEMBER 19, 1998:

Wisconsin hosted the 1998 NCAA Volleyball Championship at the Kohl Center. Long Beach State won the national title by defeating Penn State, 3-2, in front of a record crowd of 13,194.