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NEVER IN DOUBT

WHEN ALL LOOKED LOST, JOEL STAVE'S CONFIDENCE KEPT HIM ON TRACK AND HELPED THE BADGERS FIND THEIR WAY BACK TO INDIANAPOLIS

NCAA VOLLEYBALL

ENCOURAGED TO DREAM BIG, THE BADGERS ARE TURNING THEIR GOALS INTO REALITY



COVER STORY

NEVER IN DOUBT

Saddled with early-season struggles, outsiders wondered if all was lost for Joel Stave. Inside, however, the quarterback's confidence never wavered. The rest is history.



VOLLEYBALL

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Big dreams have led to big things this season for Dominique Thompson and the Badgers, who are set to make an NCAA tournament run.

LUCAS AT LARGE

NEW YEAR, NEW MAN

After showing flashes of his capabilities last season, sophomore Bronson Koenig is back a year bigger and a year better for Badgers.



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Experienced Koenig a season bigger, better

Per usual, there was music blaring from the Kohl Center weight room after a recent Wisconsin basketball practice. While the sound of Christmas music was atypical of such heavy metal-induced environments, it was purely in character with the character responsible for playing it, Frank Kaminsky.

“Frank put that on, of course; he likes his Christmas music,” said Bronson Koenig, who certainly didn’t want to come off as a Grinch. Seniority takes precedence, even if it means getting your swell on to the Little Drummer Boy or Jingle Bell Rock. “He’s a senior, he can play what he wants,” Koenig sighed.

Koenig is a sophomore and he’s starting to look the part. “He’s a year older, a year wiser, a year smarter, a year more mature, a year more confident, a year more comfortable,” rattled off UW associate head coach Greg Gard. “He seems so much more at ease than what he was a year ago.”

After completing his weight lifting session to the Christmas medley, the 6-foot-4, 187-pound Koenig took a seat outside the UW locker room and downed a protein drink. “I’m trying not to lose weight during the season,” he said. “I’m about three pounds

under after playing three games in three days.”

The Badgers won all three — against UAB, Georgetown and Oklahoma — to win the 2014 Battle 4 Atlantis and Koenig distinguished himself with some heavy lifting off the bench. Koenig had 11 assists and only one turnover in 65 minutes overall. He also scored 14 points in the Georgetown victory.

“He stepped right in when Trae (Traevon Jackson) got in foul trouble,” Gard said. “It showed his maturity, moxie and poise on the floor. It also showed his ability to score and facilitate and run the show. We knew what he could do, it was just a matter of getting out there and doing it in live action.”

What he was able to do over 27 minutes against Georgetown was not unlike his first half against Kentucky in the Final Four when he provided an offensive spark by scoring 11 points in 16 minutes. In both instances, he had no trouble handling the ball pressure or strength of the opposing guards.

And he’s a little bigger and stronger this season. “Definitely stronger,” said Koenig, a sophomore from La Crosse Aquinas. “I’m fluctuating between 190 and 194 (his recent weight loss notwithstanding) and I’m moving better on defense along with being able to absorb contact, stuff like that.”

In addition to be better suited physically to deal with the rigors of Big Ten competition, Koenig has a better grasp of what is being asked of him. “He’s in a position to be more aggressive offensively,” Gard said. “He knows

“HE’S IN A POSITION TO BE MORE AGGRESSIVE OFFENSIVELY,” GARD SAID. “HE KNOWS THAT HE DOESN’T HAVE TO DEFER. HE KNOWS WHAT A GOOD SHOT IS AND WHAT WE WANT.”





that he doesn't have to defer. He knows what a good shot is and what we want."

That's the beauty of experience — one season under Bo Ryan's wing. "I just know how to play in coach Ryan's system now," said Koenig, who had modest freshman numbers — averaging 3.5 points and 15.5 minutes with 41 assists to 18 turnovers — and expects "fewer offensive and defensive lapses."

It all should lead to more playing time with the graduation loss of guard Ben Brust. Koenig was averaging 21 minutes through the first seven games as one of the top subs; he's the first guard off the bench and Duje Dukan is the first "big." Together,

they were a dynamic one-two punch in the Bahamas.

"That was probably one of the biggest transitions from high school," Koenig said of adjusting to not being in the starting lineup. "And here I am my sophomore year and I'm still coming off the bench, which is fine with me with how good we are (in the backcourt) and the guys that we have."

It's not as easy as it looks to stay ready and to deliver when called upon to enter a game because it's subject to matchups and foul trouble. "But it's really not hard for me stay focused when I'm on the bench," Koenig said, "because I'm always ready to get in there and produce."

Before the start of his freshman year, Koenig had to deal with an offseason setback when he hurt his back. This season, he had mono, which also set him back. On top of that, he got off to a slow start offensively; he made only 2 of his first 11 field goal attempts over the first three games.

"He's just too good of a shooter mechanically and he puts too much time in it," Gard said. "He can get shots off pretty much on anybody with his ability to make plays with the ball."

Koenig was disappointed, but he echoed Gard's observation, "I know I'm a good shooter." Others will find that out this season if they don't know it already. ■





Badgers keep finding ways to get better

It was a great atmosphere last Saturday at Camp Randall. You saw how much the Axe and tradition and the seniors and winning the West Division title meant to the players and our fans.

I thought both teams played really hard. It was a classic Big Ten game, very physical football. And I thought everybody appreciated how the game was played. It was a feel-good day.

It sure was nice to be able to celebrate with the kids and the coaches during the trophy presentation following the game. I thought it was all pretty cool.

After the Northwestern loss, I guarantee you that I wasn't thinking about championships or playing in Indianapolis again for a Big Ten title. But there were some adjustments made.

First, Joel Stave comes around and you figure out how you're going to manage the quarterback situation. It settles the offense down when you can say, "This is how we're going to do it."

That takes stress off the quarterbacks and gives you consistency within the offense. Tanner McEvoy is going to come in and run some Wildcat, which creates problems for a defense.

Defensively, I don't see the issues now that we had with matchups. Whether we're doing it better or adjusting our personnel better, we haven't had the same issues that we had at

Northwestern.

That's what good coaches do. You see what your issues are and you try to correct them. You try to make sure your team improves and that's exactly what we've done. We got better.

What's impressive is to come into the season with such a young team with so many question marks and then to play the way we did down the stretch against three good teams, and to beat them all.

All three are rivals, especially Iowa and Minnesota, and those are always intense rivalry games. And we were able to come away with wins in all three, including Nebraska, a budding rivalry.

All three are physical teams and you're going to get beat up. But Gary managed the players in practice and prepared them without wearing them out. It's a tough balancing act.

Now, you get a chance to play a Top 5 team like Ohio State and win the Big Ten championship outright. This is exactly what you play for — to have opportunities like this on a big stage.

Melvin Gordon has been spectacular all season. And I would say he's still alive to win the Heisman. He needs a big game and maybe for Oregon's Marcus Mariota to stub his toe a bit.

Mariota has played well all year, he has been consistent. But if Melvin has another big game and Mariota slips, you can

never tell what might happen.

It has been an interesting week in our league with job openings now at Nebraska and Michigan. Those brands are important for our conference, along with Penn State. Our league needs those schools to be good. For the Big Ten to be strong, they have to be strong. And I want our league to be strong, as well as us.

My time is winding down on the playoff selection committee for this season, and it has been interesting, very interesting.

I've said all along that our people come in well-prepared. We have good discussions and there isn't anything that is taken lightly. It has been a very thorough process, I promise you that. And I've enjoyed it.

But it wears on you, and your regular job. I'm not going to be able to go to our championship game and that kills me; it absolutely kills me. I thought maybe I could make it work.

But I have to be in Dallas on Friday and we'll be watching games Saturday. They felt I needed to stay in case something happened and I couldn't get back or have input. I understand that.

I knew this might come up if we made it to the championship. We did and that's the most awesome thing. I'm really happy for our coaches, players and fans. You know where my heart will be. ■



Stave, Badgers have saved best for last

While out and about several weeks ago, I bumped into a fan who informed me she “was done with football this year.” She was ready for basketball. It was the beginning of October.

This weekend, the young lady and her group of friends will be in Indianapolis cheering on the Badgers in the Big Ten Championship Game against Ohio State.

Ah, the beauty of being a fan.

No doubt there are many who felt much the same, and now are packing for Indy. I have said it before and I will say it again: Early in the season, I was not smart enough to know the Badgers would be in this position. A new starting front seven. Some inexperience in the receiving corps. Uncertainty at quarterback.

A trip to the league title game? Not bad, eh?

This is a young team. Nearly half the roster is made up of true freshmen or redshirt freshmen. Credit the veterans for helping this team win the Big Ten West.

Start with a senior class that has put up a 38-15 record in the last four seasons. Two more will tie this group for the most wins by a class in school history.

Beyond the seniors, other vets such as left tackle Tyler Marz and receivers Alex Erickson and Jordan Fredrick have been big for the offense.

On defense, senior linebacker Marcus Trotter is putting togeth-

er a special season, as is Derek Landisch. Juniors Michael Caputo and Darius Hillary also have established themselves as being among the best at their respective positions. And I think Vince Biegel is on his way to being a star.

But for one of the best stories, we turn our attention back to the offense. Melvin Gordon’s numbers speak volumes. He is having a season most can only dream of enjoying. Opponents might be feeling pretty good if they can “hold” him to 150 yards. Minnesota coach Jerry Kill made a good point when he suggested Gordon is from another planet.

That said, if there can be a comeback player of the year award, my vote would go to Joel Stave. Usually such an award would go to someone who was injured the previous season, then returned to play well. Stave’s situation is a bit different, and well-documented.

From late August through September, the junior from Greenfield fought back from his much-talked about struggles throwing the ball. It would have been easy, and perhaps even understandable had Stave decided to move on.

He did not take that route. Good for him. Good for the Badgers.

One of coach Gary Andersen’s favorite terms is “care factor.”

Stave has a ton of it. His team has a ton of it. While we know the Badgers are a run-based team, Stave’s passing has picked up in recent weeks. In the last four games, he has connected on 48 of 72 throws (66 percent) for 619 yards and four touchdowns.

Yet Stave’s biggest play to date might be his 12-yard run on a critical third-and-8 situation late in the game at Iowa. It helped seal the 26-24 victory against the Hawkeyes.

Then last week, with the Badgers trailing Minnesota by 14 and facing another third-and-8, Stave hooked up with Erickson for a 70-yard pass play that led to Wisconsin’s first touchdown. Who knows what happens if the Badgers are forced to punt. Let’s face it, the Gophers had the momentum.

The kid has guts, and the kid has been clutch down the stretch.

Try to put yourself in Stave’s shoes. He faced the TV cameras last August and tried to answer questions about why throwing a football had suddenly become so difficult. Try to ignore all the “doctors” and “quarterback gurus” who think they have you all figured out.

Somehow, Joel Stave was able to do that successfully, and he is a big part of why this team is playing in early December.

Good for him. Real good for the Badgers. ■



PAST IS

PASSED

It all seemed to be going wrong on the outside, but the calm and confident demeanor inside Joel Stave never allowed the quarterback — who has played a key role in leading Wisconsin back to the Big Ten title game — to stop believing that all would be right for himself and the Badgers.

BY MIKE LUCAS ■ UWBADGERS.COM



WISCONSIN QUARTERBACK JOEL Stave was insistent, but politely so. He never lost his confidence, even when he struggled to throw the ball consistently where he wanted; he never lost his way even when others feared that he might have; and he never lost his faith in this story having a happy ending.

Stave also never lost his love for music and playing the piano.

Blocking out all the outside noise, all the psycho-analysis, he has always found comfort on the keyboard. From the time that he stepped on campus as a mid-term high school enrollee and played the piano, upon the prodding of teammates, at a reception hosted by the chancellor, it has been a release.

Maybe even an escape.

Barb Stave got her son started playing the piano at an early age. He later taught himself to play the guitar and harmonica, skills that have been on display whenever he has performed at The Buckingham, a yearly all-sports assembly that recognizes academics and student-athlete entertainers.

“I don’t get a ton of time to sit down and play the piano,” Joel Stave was saying after practice this week. “But a couple of times a month, I’ll head over to Humanities and walk around in the basement until I find a room that is unlocked — which I’ve always been able to do — with a piano in it.

“I’ll sit down and play for an hour or so when I get some free time. It’s a good way to relax and I really enjoy doing it. The last time I played was the first or second week of November. I was listening to Pandora and watching some film and I heard a song I liked and thought, ‘I should go learn that one.’”

One of the earliest selections that he mastered was “Drops of Jupiter (Tell Me),” which earned Train a Grammy in 2002. Over the years, he has been able to diversify his playlist and when he went home to Greenfield for Thanksgiving, he got to play the piano and reflect on all that he’s thankful for.

Stave’s family has always been very important to him, but never more so than during the final weeks of training camp and the first month of the season, when he was searching for his throwing

rhythm while fighting through his much-publicized mental block.

Despite all the passes that he had thrown since he was only “this high” — no taller and no older than a fourth grader — he had to get back to that place where he could make the simplest, most fundamental throws; the throws that just feel right. “You know,” he said, “when it doesn’t feel right.”

Whether he was throwing to older brother Bryan, a recent UW grad, during the Sixth Quarter — long after the field had been cleared after the Western Illinois game and the band’s Fifth Quarter — or he was throwing to one of his former receivers at Whitnall High School during the Badgers’ bye week, he was confident that he would get it right again.

“I was up and down, but I’m happy I’m out of it,” said Stave, who was reluctant to revisit all of that gray area or what he has labeled the “bizarre feeling” that he had during that uncomfortable period in his football life when he watched from the sidelines during the first four games of the season.

“I stayed confident,” Stave emphasized without raising his voice, which he rarely does. “I knew I would come out of it. I knew I would be fine. I guess I just waited it out. I relied on my family and friends back home, my friends on the team, the people that I had been through a lot with.”

It was tough on those people, too. “It’s one of those things where you get the guys close to him to kind of help him out and keep pushing him along,” said UW safety Michael Caputo. “But it’s really something that you have to get through on your own while leaning on the support of your teammates.”

Offensive tackle Rob Havenstein, a fifth-year senior, has shared the huddle with Stave and that shaped his approach. “I think everyone



needs their space in certain ways,” said Havenstein, who spoke for the O-line when he added, “We all told him, ‘If he ever needed to come to talk, we’re here for you.’”

Havenstein also cited an important distinction in this case that may have foreshadowed Stave’s return; all that was needed was a little time and patience. “It’s not like he was gone physically away from us or anything like that,” he said. “Whatever Joel needed at that time, we were going to give him.”

Not that it was easy on any of them. “It was obviously tough knowing Joel,” said Havenstein. “He’s such a good guy and it was kind of hard to see him struggle through some things. But just the way he has turned it around, I think he’s playing some of his best football right now.

“And that’s an absolute testament to him as a person, let alone a college football player. He’s a great quarterback. He commands the offense in the huddle — it’s his huddle. If he messes up, he’s the first one to say something about it. And he’s out there every day working on it, getting

better.

“I think his confidence is absolutely skyrocketing,” Havenstein asserted, strongly now. “I feel like he’s comfortable now back in the pocket with us. A big thing for him is the way he leads the team with his own kind of charisma. He’s not real vocal out there in front of everyone.

“But it’s just the way he goes about his business; you can get behind a guy like that. Everyone in the front five and pretty much everyone on offense knows how he works and what his work ethic is. It was only a matter of time before he bounced back and got to be his normal Joel self again.”

Stave has been a catalyst in Wisconsin’s seven-game winning streak that has carried the Badgers to a West Division title and into the Big Ten Championship Game against Ohio State. “There are a lot of pieces to the puzzle,” Havenstein said. “But Joel is a very important piece to that puzzle.”

• • • •

On the bus ride home from Evanston, Stave studied the game film from a 20-14 loss to Northwestern in UW’s Big Ten opener. It marked Stave’s return to active duty — he took over for Tanner McEvoy late in the second quarter and played the second half — but it was undeniably a team low point.

The Badgers managed to score only twice on five trips inside the red zone. Through his first two seasons, Stave had completed 61 percent of his passes, but he converted on just 8 of 19 throws for 114 yards and one touchdown against the Wildcats. More distressing was the fact that he was intercepted three times.

“That’s not always an easy thing to do,” he said of reviewing the film on the bus. “I did that for awhile and played some Solitaire on my iPad and stuff like that just to keep my mind busy.”

But what was going through his mind on how he had played?

“Obviously, it was fun to get back out there and to get to play again,” he said. “And you could



ICON SPORTSWIRE

see a lot of room for improvement for us offensively. There were a lot of plays that we left out there. There were some opportunities to convert on third down and maybe hit some shots over the top.

“Looking back on that game,” he summarized, “we saw a lot of areas where we really could get better. Every time you struggle, every time you lose a game, there’s so much that you can learn from the game. But it just takes that much more out of you, so you don’t want to beat yourself up about it.”

What has been the difference since then?

“We continued to get better every day,” said Stave, who has completed 67 percent of his passes for 619 yards and five TDs the last four games. “We continued to build as an offense and as a team. This team has continued to grow every day and we’ve continued to feel more comfortable with ourselves.

“I know offensively we’ve continued to get better with the passing game. The running game has always been there for us but it has also continued to grow and get better throughout the season. I’ve tried to stay steady. I’ve always been confident in what I can do and what this team can do.”

How would he define confidence?

“I think confidence is...” he said before pausing. “It’s kind of a tough word to describe.”

Do people tend to overuse the word, especially in the sports context?

“Maybe a little bit,” he said. “It’s that feel-



ing of feeling comfortable, I think. When you’re confident, you’re calm and you’re comfortable. When you’re not confident, you’re aren’t calm, I guess. You’re a little more wound up, a little more anxious.

“There are always nerves — that’s the feeling in your stomach before games. Confidence is being able to take that feeling and being able to control it and feel calm and comfortable in that situation. I’ve always been confident in my abilities and what I’ve been able to do in my time here.”

Stave is more confident moving around the pocket thanks to a tutoring session that he had during spring break with former NFL quarter-

back Jeff Garcia. Stave flew to California to visit family that lives in Palm Springs. While there, he got together with Garcia, an 11-year vet with eight teams.

The workouts were all about footwork. When he returned to Madison, Stave recounted, “A lot

of what he (Garcia) said was that you just have to hang tough in the pocket. You’ve got to be able to deliver an accurate ball with the pressure in your face.

“You can’t necessarily be running in and out (of the pocket) all the time. You

have to be ready to hang in there and make an evasive move if you need to. It was a good chance to talk with someone who has been a very successful quarterback at the highest level.”

The sessions have paid dividends. “Some of my footwork has really improved,” Stave said.

“HE LEADS THE TEAM WITH HIS OWN KIND OF CHARISMA. HE’S NOT REAL VOCAL OUT THERE IN FRONT OF EVERYONE,” HAVENSTEIN SAID. “BUT IT’S JUST THE WAY HE GOES ABOUT HIS BUSINESS; YOU CAN GET BEHIND A GUY LIKE THAT.”

“When I’m in the pocket I try not to have ‘happy feet’ or whatever you want to call it — when you’re moving too quick. I think we’ve done a good job with pass protection and that’s where it all starts.”

The Badgers have a completion percentage of 41 on third down. Conceded Stave, “We’ve done a good job of hanging in the pocket and hitting some shots downfield and converting some big third downs here and there, and all of that starts with your feet.”

Last season, Stave was at his best in a hostile environment at Ohio State. He completed 20 of 34 passes for a then-career-high 295 yards and two touchdowns. But the Badgers were guilty of too many mistakes that cost them a chance to upset the Buckeyes, who hung on for a 31-24 win.

“They have a different defensive coordinator now and you don’t want to put as much stock into last year’s film,” Stave said. “I’ll go back and watch their personnel and I’ll watch what we did. But I’m going through a lot of their film

from this year, especially games like Michigan State and Penn State.

“These were games against pro-style offenses like ours and I’ll see what I can find as far as how they like to play defense. They forced us to throw the ball last year and I think we did a good job of responding. Abby had a tremendous game against a very good corner in Bradley Roby.”

Jared Abbrederis had 10 catches for 207 yards.

Ohio State’s new defensive coordinator, by the way, is no stranger to Stave or any of the other Wisconsin upperclassmen. Chris Ash, who helped coordinate some of Bret Bielema’s defenses with the Badgers and at Arkansas, is now on the job for Urban Meyer in Columbus.

“There are a lot of new faces here and a whole different offense; it’s not the same as the Coach (Paul) Chryst offense that he (Ash) practiced against every week,” Stave said. “He’ll have a feel for some of our guys as players. But it’s two years later, it’s different faces, it’s a whole different scheme.”

But how much is really different for Stave?



Last week, UW tailback Melvin Gordon had some interesting thoughts. And they're worth repeating in building Stave's profile.

"He has been competing for his job every year," Gordon said. "Any other quarterback around the nation if they had started two years, it's pretty much their job until they're gone. But he has been fighting every year for his position, he has been competing every year.

"He comes back and plays hard; he plays hard in big games. He's a leader on this team that we need. We need Stav; he makes plays when they're needed to be made. We need our receivers and Stav to make it happen."

When what Gordon had to say was relayed to Stave, he didn't change expression and commented, "That's how football is, that's how sports are, they're competitive. You never wanted anything handed to you — you always have got to be competing for it."

Then, again, he has played in 29 games with a sparkling 20-6 record as a starter.

"I think maybe that it is a little bit unique in my situation," he said, "in that I have at this point started 20 some games. And year after year in training camp and spring ball, it's always a competition. But that's how good teams are made — through good competition."

The same applies to good quarterbacks who won't shy away from a competitive battle. Maybe Stave is more thankful than he really knows for these moments when he's being challenged and tested, especially in light of his younger sister, Rachel,

who can no longer push her limits in the same fashion.

Rachel Stave — a three-time high school state champion — was a freshman diver on the UW women's swimming team when she sustained a neck injury (a chip fracture of a vertebra) during a dry land training session last September. She's still in school but not competing.

"We have a good little balance between us," said Stave. "I help her when she needs help. She helps me when I need help. She has done a tremendous job given the hand that she got dealt when she first got here.


"It's tough enough to being a freshman in college but a week and one-half into your freshman year, you break your neck and you have to be walking around in a neck brace and you can't do your

sport and you can't even carry your own backpack, that's tough."

Not that he needed to be reminded during his own travails, but he agreed that such perspective is always valuable "just knowing it could be so much worse" than you think it is at the time.

And make no mistake about it, after some dark days, it has been feeling right for awhile.

"It's exactly where we wanted to be going into the year," Stave said of a team goal to play for a Big Ten championship in Indianapolis. "To be in the position that we had hoped to be in 12 games later is really a testament to the way this team works and the way this team prepares every week."

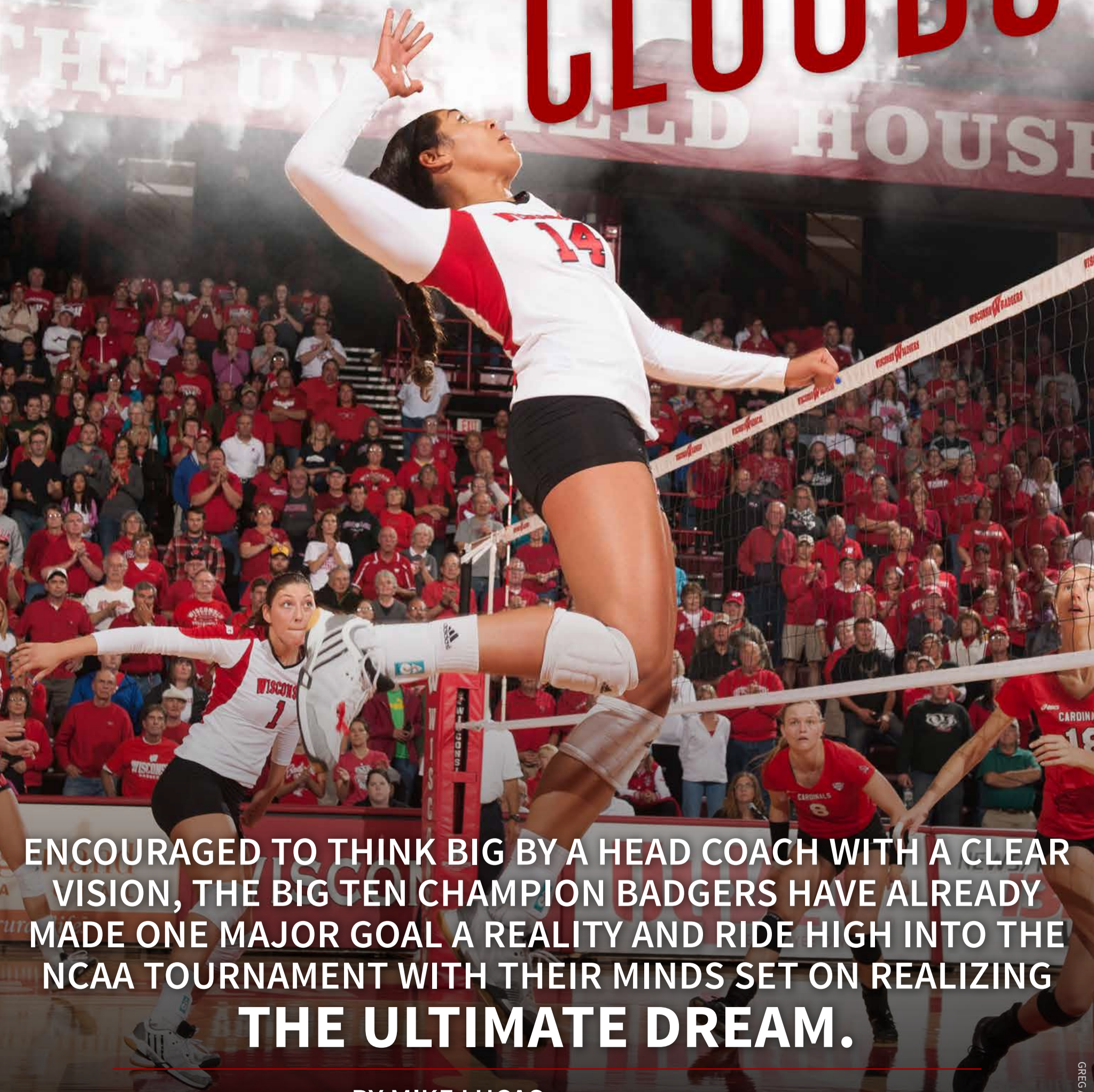
And the way this critical piece to the puzzle — Stave — has meshed with the others. 

JOEL STAVE:

It's exactly where we wanted to be going into the year. To be in the position that we had hoped to be in 12 games later is really a testament to the way this team works and the way this team prepares every week.



HEADS IN THE CLOUDS



ENCOURAGED TO THINK BIG BY A HEAD COACH WITH A CLEAR VISION, THE BIG TEN CHAMPION BADGERS HAVE ALREADY MADE ONE MAJOR GOAL A REALITY AND RIDE HIGH INTO THE NCAA TOURNAMENT WITH THEIR MINDS SET ON REALIZING **THE ULTIMATE DREAM.**

BY MIKE LUCAS ■ UWBADGERS.COM



GREG ANDERSON

DOMINIQUE THOMPSON NEVER GAVE it much thought, not then, not ever.

“I didn’t,” she admitted. “I didn’t think about being a champion.”

This was prior to Kelly Sheffield taking over the Wisconsin’s volleyball program; prior to Sheffield encouraging and challenging his athletes to dream big — Big Ten championships and beyond.

“Ever since Kelly has been here,” said Thompson, a fifth-year senior, “he has made it a point to dream about that, to think about that, to think about that every day, if that’s what drives you.”

Sheffield left nothing to chance; no detail was too small in spawning dreamers and doers to create a winning culture. “He opened all of our eyes to thinking like a champion,” Thompson said.

What’s wrong with that? What’s wrong with dreaming?

“The first thing you’ve got to do is dream,”

Sheffield pointed out. “Remember back when we were all kids and we’d lay in bed and dream?

“You’d start thinking what it feels like to have the confetti coming down and what you would do in those championship moments. How would you feel when the game is on the line?

“That’s what we all were doing when we were younger, we were dreaming and we’re rehearsing for those moments.”

Instead of assuming this was merely coach-speak, a tactic by a new coach to win over the returning players, Thompson was ready to hear what he was saying, ready to think like a champion.

“Honestly, I was thinking, ‘That would be cool,’” she said of winning a Big Ten title. “Once we started winning and getting confident, it started to feel possible. That was really cool.”

So how cool was it last Friday night when the Badgers won the outright Big Ten crown? Flashing a mega-watt smile, Thompson said, “It’s everything. It’s amazing, it’s a dream come true.”

The dreaming started with the goal-setting. “We believed it at the beginning of the season,” she said. “We wanted to be Big Ten champs and national champs and we’re not afraid to talk about it.”

And now that the Badgers are opening up the NCAA tournament as the No. 4 overall seed, they’ll get a chance to back up that talk with action starting Thursday night against Western Michigan. Two wins at the UW Field House will send Wisconsin to next week’s Louisville Regional.

“We’re not satisfied at all,” said Thompson, a relatively undersized 5-foot-11 middle blocker who has compensated with quickness. “We want six more games and we want to end with a W. We’re hungry.”

Still. The Badgers are still hungry after a spirited run to the 2013 NCAA championship game.

“Last year was an amazing experience,” Thompson said. “It made us even hungrier for this year. Day-in and day-out we were working because we know how bad it feels to lose.”

Wisconsin lost to Penn State in the Seattle fi-

nal. “And we don’t want that to happen again,” Thompson said of the incentive to get back to the Final Four. “We want to be No. 1.”

No one should be surprised that the Badgers are in this position again.

“The whole season we’ve kind of known that we have a special bond,” said Thompson. “We graduated one senior (Annemarie Hickey) and she’s still part of the program (as a student assistant).”

“Really nobody left from last year. We have a great chemistry; we’re best friends on and off the court. There’s a lot of love going on with this team.”

There’s much to love about how Wisconsin has handled expectations this season.

“I just think it has been a gradual climb,” Thompson said. “I don’t know if there was necessarily a turning point. It has been the same people the whole time. And we’re trying to make it to the top.”

Sheffield agreed and added, “I don’t know if there has been this earthquake-type of thing.”

Instead, he confirmed, “We’ve had high goals



from the beginning and we're learning as we go along. I think we've been building and trying to fix things that have come our way."

It really all goes back to laying down a strong foundation.

"We talked to them about the dreaming," he said, "and we talked to them about making sacrifices and putting the work in. You lay out a plan, 'This is what our culture is going to be.'

"And anything is possible, however big you can dream; and however much you're willing to work and put into going after those dreams. We just tackled the day-to-day stuff.

"I thought one of the things that we really needed to do was to learn how we were going to handle adversity. Champions are made based

on how they handle those adverse moments."

Trust and familiarity have been more than buzz words; they've been part of the formula, along with consistency. Explained Sheffield, "We try to be consistent with our approach on a daily basis."

To this end, Thompson credited Sheffield with the "ability to figure out how to get the best out of each player and how to grow each player. And he does it differently with everyone."

Having already invested three years in the UW program before Sheffield arrived, including a redshirt season in 2012 when she was injured, Thompson has some solid perspective.

"It has been amazing to be a part of this change," she conceded, "being able to see how it has been and being on both ends of the spectrum. It makes me appreciate it that much more."

There's something to be said about the spoils of success. And the Badgers have a bevy of major award winners in the Big Ten. To say the least, they have had a darn good year.

Sheffield was the Coach of the Year, Lauren Carlini was the Player of the Year and Setter of the Year, and Taylor Morey was the Defensive Player of the Year. That's quite a haul.

Carlini, Morey and Courtney Thomas were also named first-team All-Big Ten while Haileigh Nelson and Thompson received honorable mention. Kelli Bates was named to the All-Freshman team.

"She's amazing and she will

DOMINIQUE THOMPSON:
"I thought one of the things that we really needed to do was to learn how we were going to handle adversity. Champions are made based on how they handle those adverse moments."



FIFTEEN STRONG

▲ TAP TO WATCH - Wisconsin Volleyball: Fifteen Strong

always be amazing,” Thompson said of Carlini, a sophomore. “She’s a great teammate and she’s definitely a big deal and pulled us all along with her.”

But she completed that thought with what is the essence of this group. “Lauren would even say it herself,” Thompson suggested, “that we’re all equally important.”

It’s another reason why the Badgers have become so formidable.

“I honestly think that we’re a team that needs everybody,” Thompson said. “If one person is having an off-night, another person is going to step up.

“I don’t think there’s any single key person, every person is a key aspect to this team and it wouldn’t be the same without them. Even the players who don’t play, our practice team, are amazing.”

Proudly wearing a Big Ten championship baseball cap, Thompson re-emphasized that everybody has pulled their weight. “It’s every single person,” she said. “We’re 15 strong.”

• • • •

Some two hours before last Saturday’s kick-off between Minnesota and Wisconsin’s football teams at Camp Randall Stadium, Dominique Thompson joined her father in the press box. She took a seat in the visitor’s radio booth where Darrell Thompson was working as a color analyst on the Gophers radio network.

The Thompson clan gathered last week in Madison for Thanksgiving. Reeling off the guest list at her apartment, Dominique Thompson said, “Mom and dad, brothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles. It’s amazing to be able to play in front of the people that you love.”

That’s what she did Friday night in Wisconsin’s win over Purdue at the UW Field House. And nobody was prouder than dad, who’s still the all-time leading rusher at Minnesota; and mom, Stephanie Smith Thompson, who played volleyball at Iowa. Dominique wears Stephanie’s old No. 14.

“It was emotional,” said Darrell, a first-round pick of the Green Bay Packers in 1990. “It was very special to be able to watch my daughter win a Big Ten championship; something that I

didn't think was realistic a few years ago. It was a fabulous night."

Neither Darrell, nor Stephanie pressured Dominique into competing athletically.

"There was a little bit, but I think it was pretty friendly pressure," he said. "It was more like, 'We want you do something, but if you don't want to do anything, that's OK.' But she ran pretty fast and she could jump high, so I thought she'd be a basketball player."

So did everyone else in the family, including Dominique. She came to the sport late and struggled to such an extent that she questioned whether she wanted to continue to play after her freshman year of high school. But she stuck with it and began refining her game at Robbinsdale Armstrong High School.

How has she grown since then? "The growth, I think, is just in the maturity," said Darrell, who lives in Plymouth, Minnesota, "realizing the importance of taking care of your body; water and nutrition and all those different things.

"She has always been dedicated and focused on volleyball, but especially the last two years, I think that she has realized, 'I've got to rest, I've got to take care of my body — that way I can play longer and feel better when I do play.'"

Dominique has taken all of the fatherly advice to heart. "I didn't necessarily follow it when I was younger — the taking care of my body aspect," she said. "I didn't realize how important it was until I started getting some aches and pains and figured out how I could fix that a little bit."

It's no coincidence that Darrell is the president of Bolder Options, a nonprofit organization devoted to healthy youth development, well-

ness and mentoring in the Twin Cities area.

"I was a volunteer when I was playing ball," he said, "and when I got done playing, it grew from a part-time to a full-time position. I love it — it's an opportunity to make a difference in the life of a young person. Our goals are to introduce kids to healthy lifestyles."

Dominique Thompson would like to someday work for Bolder Options. But she's pretty tied up right now working toward

another trip to the Final Four. And there's nothing bolder than dreaming about winning it all, the only option these players have had in mind since falling short in Seattle.

Sheffield wouldn't have it any other way. Does he feel like his team will have a target on its back going into the tournament?

"We don't talk like that," he said. "The discussion is, when you're playing an opponent, it's two teams going after the same thing, so go get what you want, go get what you dream." **W**

**"IT'S EVERY SINGLE PERSON."
THOMPSON SAID.
"WE'RE 15 STRONG."**





Rivalry comes at right time for Wisconsin

Marquette presents quick chance to turn page

Losing is never easy. Not in a season where you're struggling or a season when you're undefeated and considered one of the nation's elite teams. Not when you suffer an unexpected bump or even when you fall to another one of college basketball's titans.

The sting of the Badgers' 80-70 loss to No. 2 Duke may linger for a while for Wisconsin fans, but the team itself has no time to dwell. For in just two days, awaits a team that certainly won't feel sorry for its bitter in-state rival.

Wisconsin and Marquette will renew one of the best rivalries in college basketball on Saturday. In a series that shifts between Madison and Milwaukee each year, the Badgers will be the team traveling this season and make the 75-mile trek down I-94 into enemy territory.

The Badgers and Golden Eagles will meet for the 121st time in a series that began in 1917. UW and MU have played every year but one since the 1958-59 season (did not play in 1984-85).

Overall, Wisconsin owns a 65-55 advantage in the series, making Marquette the Badgers' most played non-conference rival. Bo Ryan owns a 7-6 record against Marquette, including wins

SCHEDULE (7-1, 0-0)

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

RECENTLY

Battle 4 Atlantis — Paradise Island, Bahamas

Nov. 26	vs. UAB	W, 72-43
Nov. 27	vs. Georgetown	W, 68-65
Nov. 28	vs. Oklahoma	W, 69-56

Dec. 3	#4 Duke	L, 70-80
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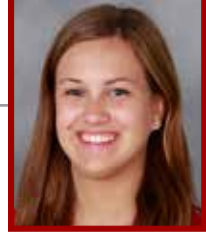
COMING UP

Dec. 6	at Marquette	11:30 a.m.
Dec. 10	at Milwaukee	8 p.m.
Dec. 13	Nicholls State	2 p.m.
Dec. 22	at California	8 p.m.

[> Complete Schedule](#) | [Buy Tickets](#)

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Badgers still looking to put it all together

Second-half struggles hurting Badgers early on

After four consecutive losses, Wisconsin looks to improve offensively as the Badgers face a tough Miami team in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge before returning home to take on Marquette. Double-digit turnovers have doomed the Badgers in all four losses.

Looking back at the Junkanoo Jam, Wisconsin averaged 21 turnovers in the two games and saw its shooting percentages drop significantly from its first two games of the season.

“We were privileged to go down to the Bahamas and to play in the tournament that featured the No. 1 team in the country, and of course we drew them first, so that wasn’t what we were hoping for,” Wisconsin head coach Bobbie Kelsey said. “Then we played an aggressive ECU team who pressed the whole game. So our turnovers were really high, but I was proud of the kids in that they did persevere and just try to keep pressing throughout the whole game.”

Despite the loss, the Badgers held the No. 1 Gamecocks to their lowest score of the season and kept leading scorer Tiffany Mitchell who averages 17 points per game, 10 below her seasonal average.

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SCHEDULE (1-4, 0-0)

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

RECENTLY

Nov. 20 **Vanderbilt** L, 67-58

Nov. 23 at Drake L, 89-77

Junkanoo Jam — Freeport, Bahamas

Nov. 27 #1 S. Carolina L, 67-44

Nov. 28 East Carolina L, 61-43

COMING UP

ACC/Big Ten Challenge:

Dec. 4 at Miami 7 p.m.

Dec. 6 **Marquette** 1 p.m.

Dec. 10 at Florida 6 p.m.

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GREG ANDERSON

UW ready to dance in NCAA tournament

Badgers host first and second round matches

Only 64 teams are still playing volleyball after the NCAA tournament bracket was announced on Sunday. After this week, that number will be down to 32 then 16 and so on until only one team remains. For the Badgers, their goal is to be the last team standing.

“We’re obviously very excited to still be playing,” head coach Kelly Sheffield said. “This is an unbelievable time of year, 64 teams still playing for their season. It’s a gift with how hard our players have worked to get to this point.”

For fourth-seeded Wisconsin, the first step towards the NCAA championship starts this week as UW hosts first and second round matches on Thursday-Friday in the UW Field House. Marquette (24-8) and Illinois State (26-5) play the opening match on Thursday at 5 p.m. while Wisconsin (28-2) takes on Western Michigan (22-13) in the second match at 7:30 p.m. Winners advance to the second-round match on Friday at 7 p.m. The second-round winner advances to the Louisville Regional on Dec. 12-13.

“We’ve got our hands full with three really good teams coming in,” said Sheffield. “Western Michigan from a good Mid-Ameri-

SCHEDULE (28-2, 19-1)

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

RECENTLY

Nov. 15	at Iowa	W, 3-0
Nov. 19	#10 Illinois	W, 3-1
Nov. 21	at #20 Ohio State	W, 3-0
Nov. 26	at Rutgers	W, 3-1
Nov. 28	#19 Purdue	W, 3-0

COMING UP

Dec. 4	NCAA First Round 7:30 p.m. vs. Western Michigan
Dec. 5	NCAA Second Round 7 p.m.
Dec. 12	at NCAA Regionals

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Good feelings as Big Ten season begins

Badgers pick up momentum from 1-0-1 series

There is a long way to go, but the Badgers got in the win column for the first time last weekend. After inching closer on Friday night with a 1-1 overtime tie against Ferris State, the Badgers grabbed a 5-3 victory on Saturday against the Bulldogs to finally earn a reward for their hard work.

Now it is time to move forward. The Badgers open their Big Ten Conference schedule this weekend when Penn State visits for a pair of 8 p.m. games. With two victories, Wisconsin would be at worst, tied for first place in the Big Ten at a very early juncture in the season.

There has been slow and steady progress through the first two months of the season, culminating last weekend with improved special teams, solid goaltending and increased goal scoring.

The Badger power play scored in both games and has in three consecutive games. UW's penalty kill was perfect on the weekend, killing all seven penalties.

Senior Joel Rumpel made 64 saves on 68 shots on the weekend to earn his 50th career victory.

The Badgers scored a season-high five goals, with Corbin Mc-

SCHEDULE (1-8-1)

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

RECENTLY

Nov. 21	at Colo. State	L, 5-2
Nov. 29	at Denver	L, 3-2
Nov. 28	Ferris State	T, 1-1 (OT)
Nov. 29	Ferris State	W, 5-3

COMING UP

Dec. 5	Penn State	8 p.m.
Dec. 6	Penn State	8 p.m.
Dec. 12	US U-18 (Exh.)	7 p.m.
Jan. 2	Michigan Tech	7 p.m.
Jan. 3	Michigan Tech	7 p.m.
Jan. 9	Boston Univ.	7 p.m.

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No. 3 Wisconsin heads home to host UND

Badgers host North Dakota in first half finale

After playing four of their past five series on the road, the No. 3-ranked Badgers return home to close out the first half of their season, facing North Dakota this weekend before their semester break.

Wisconsin enters its final series of the 2014 calendar year with a pair of impressive streaks. The Badgers have shut out their opponents in each of the past five games, tying the school record for consecutive shutouts.

“It is a group effort,” Wisconsin head coach Mark Johnson said. “You have to collectively play strong and when you do have breakdowns, as you mentioned, your goaltender has to be in a position and competitive. So you certainly last three or four games, I think Ann-Renee (Desbiens) has been able to focus in when we have had breakdowns or had to kill off penalties and she has had to make saves.”

Desbiens has been stellar in net for the Badgers, as she sports a 0.67 goals against average in her past six games and a save percentage of .956. On the season, her winning percentage of .833 is tied for the fifth-best mark nationally, while her six shutouts are tied for the third-most in the nation.

-SCROLL FOR MORE-

SCHEDULE (15-2-1, 11-2-1)

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

RECENTLY

Nov. 21	at St. Cloud State	W, 4-0
Nov. 22	at St. Cloud State	W, 3-0
Nov. 29	at New Hampshire	W, 5-0
Nov. 30	at New Hampshire	W, 5-0

COMING UP

Dec. 5	North Dakota	3 p.m.
Dec. 7	North Dakota	2 p.m.
Jan. 10	#2 Minnesota	4 p.m.
Jan. 11	#2 Minnesota	2 p.m.
Jan. 16	Bemidji State	7 p.m.
Jan. 17	Bemidji State	3 p.m.

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ACTION POINT PHOTO

Badgers bounce back with two big wins

Everything falling into place midseason

A tough loss against a good Rider team two weeks ago seemed to light a fire for the young Wisconsin wrestling team. The squad recovered from the blow with two huge midseason wins against North Dakota State and South Dakota State on the road.

“This weekend was a really good weekend for our program because we really challenged the guys after the Rider and Navy Classic tournaments,” Wisconsin assistant coach Trevor Brandvold said. “We wanted them to come out and wrestle hard and wrestle like they do in practice and for some reason we just didn’t do that the weekend before. We knew this weekend would be a challenge, being Thanksgiving weekend, and just a long bus ride out to South Dakota and North Dakota.”

“So it was a long trip for our guys and just tough timing wise, but we’re really proud of the way they came out and competed and wrestled hard. That’s all we ask, and as you can see the results are going to come.”

The Badgers have faced many obstacles this season and had to make several adjustments in who will start in each weight class. Despite the recent modifications, the Badgers were ag-

-SCROLL FOR MORE-

SCHEDULE (3-1, 1-0)

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

RECENTLY

Nov. 14	Maryland	W, 28-12
Nov. 20	at Rider	L, 20-19
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

COMING UP

Dec. 11	Indiana	7 p.m.
Dec. 13	at Nebraska	6 p.m.
Dec. 13	at UNI Open	All Day
Dec. 29-30	at Midlands	All Day

[> View complete schedule](#)

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DAVID STLUKA

Badgers head south for Texas Invitational

UW heads to Austin for three-day showcase

“**B**adger Tough” is an expression used in the Wisconsin program.

It’s certainly fitting when used to describe this season’s swimming and diving program. Just two weeks after an impressive showing at the Ohio State Invitational, the Badgers are right back on the road this weekend to compete in the standout Texas Invitational.

While in Ohio, the Badgers showed no signs of letting up, despite what has already been a challenging schedule for the team so far this season.

A total of 25 NCAA “B” cuts were earned over the weekend by 13 different Badger swimmers.

Leading the group of qualifiers was senior and 2013 NCAA 200-yard backstroke champion, Drew teDuits, who recorded four ‘B’ cuts alone swimming for the men’s team. Not far behind were Jenny Holtzen and Ivy Martin, who each tallied three cuts for the women’s team.

Martin, a senior captain, had a stellar invitational in Columbus, headlined by her time of 21.97 seconds in the 50-yard free-style, which broke the meet record and stands as the third-fast-

SCHEDULE

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

RECENTLY

Nov. 8 at Stanford M: 90-148
W: 91-145

Nov. 8 **N’western** M: 186.5-110.5
W: 166.5-125.5

Nov. 21-23 Ohio State Invitational
M: 2nd (823.5)
W: 3rd (698)

COMING UP

Dec. 4-6 Texas Inv. All Day
Jan. 10 at USC 8 p.m.
Jan. 16 **Indiana** 5 p.m.

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HEISMAN HORSE

DECEMBER 9, 1954: Alan “The Horse” Ameche was presented the Heisman Trophy as the nation’s finest college football player, becoming the first player in Wisconsin history to win the award.

-MORE THIS WEEK-



REGIONAL CHAMPS

DECEMBER 9, 2000:

The volleyball team advanced to its first NCAA national semifinals with a thrilling five-set victory over UCLA in the regional final, held in the UW Field House.



PILING UP POINTS

DECEMBER 10, 1994:

Michael Finley scored a school record-tying 42 points in a 92-76 loss at Eastern Michigan. He registered 33 points in the second half, setting the school mark for points in a half that still stands.



CENTURY CLUB

DECEMBER 5, 1982:

The women’s basketball team scored the most points in a single game in school history with a 123-79 win over Bradley. Eight players scored in double figures for the Badgers.