

Fun-D-amentals

By: Eli Penquite

The 2019 University of Wisconsin's football team is having a very successful season due, in part, to the play of the defense. Their defense is supported by the leadership, experience, and love for the game of their senior linebackers Zack Baun and Chris Orr.

The team has a top-ten defense and is ranked sixth in the country with an average of 277.0 yards per game, and ranked ninth in the nation with an average of 14.6 points per game.

The success of the Wisconsin defense has a lot to do with the playing ability of their senior linebackers, who have been outperforming other teams' offenses. The statistics show how strong these linebackers have been playing. Three of the Badgers' linebackers lead the Badgers for tackles. The three linebackers, Zack Baun, Chris Orr and Jack Sanborn, have 27.5 sacks, combined.

As seniors, Chris Orr and Zack Baun are leaders, both statistically and in experience, for the defense. Chris Orr is from DeSoto, Texas and has earned three letters, for excellence in school activities. As a senior, he is showing why he is a starter with 71 tackles, 2 forced fumbles, and 1 recovered fumble this year.

I asked him what he thought helped him get here. "I will say my family. And I will say my drive and my love for the game of football," Chris said. "That helped me reach this point in my career. My family have always been there supporting me. Not everybody always thought that I could play football at this level. So, their support along with my drive and love for the game."

The strong play by Chris Orr may be from the experience he has as a fifth-year senior. "For me, the in-game experience is being comfortable in pretty much every game situation and also being a part of teams with some great leaders and some really good people."

Zack Baun is from Brown Deer, Wisconsin. He earned his second letter in 2018 after a foot injury in 2017. He has 62 tackles, 1 interception, and 2 forced fumbles this year, as a senior.

I also asked Zack about what he thought got him here. Zack said, "A lot of people have helped me to get to where I am at today. My youth football and my mom and family. A lot of coaches along the way. I'm thankful for a lot of people in my life. It wasn't just me that got me to where I am today, but it's the accumulation of a lot of people. A lot of things went into this."

As a team captain, Zack has shown his leadership in the way he plays. He said "I like to build relationships, which also, in turn, builds trust. If a guy trusts you on the team, and trusts you to do the right thing, and make the right play, it goes a really long way." Baun is a good leader who doesn't just talk the talk but believes in walking the walk and leading by example.

With a top defense in the nation, I wondered what challenges their defense has experienced throughout the season. I asked Chris Orr and he said, "I will say the challenges of the defense is not getting too comfortable. Sometimes it's hard to not get comfortable when you see someone make routine plays all the time." In my conversation with Orr, he discussed an example of being comfortable thinking that your teammate would make a play and then unfortunately they miss a tackle. Orr said they try to stay alert and not take plays for granted.

As far as what makes the Wisconsin defense so good, Zack explained, "I think we have some really, really good guys on this team. It's not like it's just coming from the linebackers, the defensive line, and the safeties or cornerbacks. I think our coaches have done a good job at putting us in a position to make plays and show our athleticism."

They are also a very close group that just wants to have fun. They hang out together after practice and spend time with each other off the field. Zack and Chris are even roommates at Wisconsin. One of their goals is to just win the game and have fun doing it, and I think that is a very big reason for the team's success. The hope is that this will lead to them accomplishing their other goals, including winning the West Division of the Big Ten, going to the Big Ten Championship game, and maybe winning the game.

They both have a lot of fun at home games when the crowd is behind them. Orr said, "At home games, just the fact that at home, you feel like it's the entire world versus other teams. Camp Randall [Stadium] gets loud. You can see it messes with other offenses like the quarterback and O-line can't really hear. And it always feels good when you make a big play, to hear the crowd erupt." Both said they also love away games because then it is them against the world.

Chris Orr and Zack Baun are trying to finish out their last season on the Wisconsin defense with a bang and are ending the regular season in Indianapolis at the Big Ten Championship game against Ohio State.