

WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL

SPORTS

★ SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2011 • D7

UW FOOTBALL

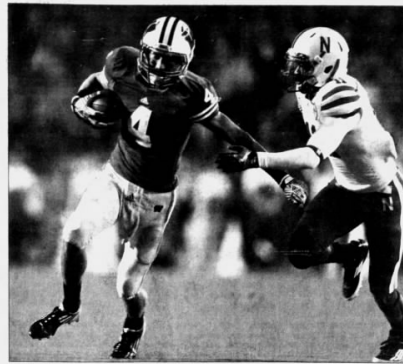


PHOTO BY M.F. KING - State Journal

UW receiver Jared Abbrederis caught five passes for 95 yards, including a 36-yard TD, Saturday against Nebraska.

## Stumble doesn't lead to fall

Sophomore receiver Jared Abbrederis makes up for an early fumble with a series of big plays.

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Barry Alvarez touched on some familiar themes last week when he served as guest lecturer to the University of Wisconsin football team.

The Hall of Fame coach and UW athletic director emphasized two oldies, but goodies — don't flinch in the face of a challenge and elite players have to play like it when the stage is brightest — as the seventh-ranked Badgers prepared for their epic Big Ten Conference dual with eighth-ranked Nebraska.

Alvarez always harped on those touchstones during his 16 seasons as UW coach and it's clear that sophomore wide receiver Jared Abbrederis was paying attention during the latest verbal power point.

Abbrederis, a walk-on from Wausau, created his own adversity in the first quarter Saturday night, fumbling at the end of a scintillating 21-yard punt return. It was the first time the Badgers had lost a fumble this season.

Instead of good field position for UW and its first real jolt of momentum, the Cornhuskers recovered and drove 30 yards for the initial touchdown of the

game. "Abby was devastated there," UW coach Bret Bielema said.

"Any time that we turn the ball over and give them a chance to score it hurts," Abbrederis said. Instead of flinching, though, Abbrederis ticked off a series of huge plays, including a TD catch that put the Badgers ahead for good en route to a resounding 48-17 triumph at Camp Randall Stadium.

"I just had to let it go and move on from that," Abbrederis said. "I was hoping the defense would get a stop for me and have my back on that."

He went airborne, stretching out to land in a 30-yard pass from senior quarterback Russell Wilson with 2 minutes, 49 seconds left in the first half to give UW a 20-14 edge.

That big play came after Abbrederis made an 18-yard reception to trigger the first scoring drive by the Badgers, one that ended with a 1-yard run by junior tailback Montee Ball.

Abbrederis also headed in a 14-yarder on a drive that ended with a 1-yard burst by Ball.

For good measure, Abbrederis picked up a 15 yards on a well-designed reverse in the third quarter that led to a bobbing, spinning 4-yard TD run by Ball. Abbrederis added 8 yards on another reverse in the fourth that helped set up a 15-yard scoring run by Ball in the fourth quarter.

In all, Abbrederis caught five passes for a team-best 95 yards, rushed twice for 23 yards and totaled 153 all-purpose yards.

Abbrederis said he didn't get caught up in trying to make amends for his mistake. "I was just trying to do everything I can to help us win," he said. "You've just got to take it play by play."

Adversity was a shared challenge in the first half. In addition to the giveaway by Abbrederis, the Badgers trailed for the first time this season and at home for the first time since Arizona State on Sept. 18 of last season.

"When we face adversity and overcome it, obviously that's good for us," Abbrederis said. "Next time it happens, if it does, we'll be able to look back at what we did and just keep on going."

The TD catch by Abbrederis was meaningful for Wilson, who now has thrown at least one touchdown pass in 20 straight games. The streak dates back to 2009 when Wilson was a sophomore at North Carolina State. The NCAA record is 30 held by Graham Harrell of Texas Tech.

Count Abbrederis among those who would prefer UW keep playing instead of taking next week off.

"I'm looking forward to getting that and the next game," he said.

Spoken like a guy who didn't flinch in the face of a challenge and stepped up on a night when the college football world was watching.

## Oates

Continued from Page D1

their reach anymore. "I just knew there was a lot of hype going into this game," Bielema said. "That's why I challenged our players to embrace it all week because I knew if we went out and played well and did what we did, we would get a lot more attention."

Attention shouldn't be a problem for UW from now on. Even before the game, the fallout, win or lose, figured to have more impact on the Badgers' national profile than on their future in the Big Ten race.

If UW is going to make a bowl Championship Series game or go ahead and say it, Badgers fans — the national championship game, it must go undefeated and it must score style points when the college football world is watching.

Saturday, in just such a game, the Badgers won in the same spectacular fashion they had shown while powering through a flimsy four-game non-conference schedule that looked better on paper than it did on the field.

UW turned quarterback Russell Wilson loose on a Nebraska defense that has three preseason All-Americans and, for the most part, the offense was unstoppable.

The Badgers defense shut down the Cornhuskers' powerful running attack after the first quarter and forced Taylor Martinez to throw, a development that led directly to three game-turning interceptions.

In retrospect, the visiting Cornhuskers fans should have stuck with their traditional red clothing because it would have matched their faces after UW treated Nebraska like it was an UNLV in South Dakota.

"We've been doing a heck of a job as a ballclub pulling out these wins and doing them in a fashion that's known as sexy in Wisconsin," safety Aaron Henry said. "Guys are just playing great football. All in all."

Wilson, the senior transfer, had been creeping to the Heisman Trophy discussion, but his candidacy took a quantum leap Saturday. The only knock on him was that he hadn't done it against good or even average defenses. Well, Wilson did it against Nebraska's fabled Big Ten shirts, throwing for 255 yards and two touchdowns while running for another score.

The biggest reason UW dominated the game is that it exposed Nebraska's one-dimensional offense while revealing a rare three-dimensional offense itself.

Three-dimensional? That's right, hard running by Montee Ball, pinpoint passing by Wilson and — this is new — Wilson's ability to make plays with his feet even against a fast defense like Nebraska's. As he has been all season, Wilson was a third-down

## OATES GRADES THE BADGERS

### OFFENSE

**A-** The blitz baffled just early, but Russell Wilson's quick feet and more elusive calls minimized the damage. Wilson was a third-down machine. Montee Ball gained some tough yards against a strong defensive front.

### DEFENSE

**A-** Nebraska's no-huddle hurt UW early. Once the Badgers forced Taylor Martinez into throwing situations, interceptions followed. Picks by Mike Taylor, Aaron Henry and Antonio Fenech turned the game around.

### SPECIAL TEAMS

**D** Jared Abbrederis' fumble on a punt return handed Nebraska seven points. The blocked extra point looked very costly at the time. The kickoff coverage on Ameer Abdullah was subpar, but at least he didn't break one.

### OVERALL

**A-** With the whole world watching, UW overcame some early punches to the mouth to dominate Nebraska. Offensive coordinator Paul Choffey's game plan was brilliant. The defense stifled Nebraska's vaunted running game.



Russell Wilson celebrates his 30-yard TD run with Grade Ewing in the third quarter that gave UW a 34-14 lead.

machine against the Cornhuskers.

As for the consequences of UW's victory in the Big Ten race, the split into divisions largely rendered this outcome meaningless. The second tiebreaker is now the record within the division, which means that all the Badgers and Cornhuskers take care of business in their respective divisions; they could well meet again in the first Big Ten championship game.

The Leaders Division is almost a quarterback-free zone this season and UW has the quarterback, and the team, to win it all. But the Badgers want so much more than that this season and now they've put themselves in position to get it.

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