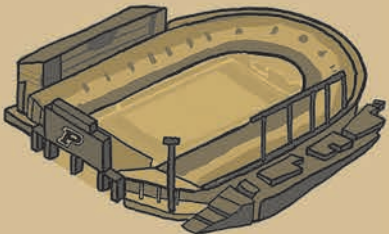
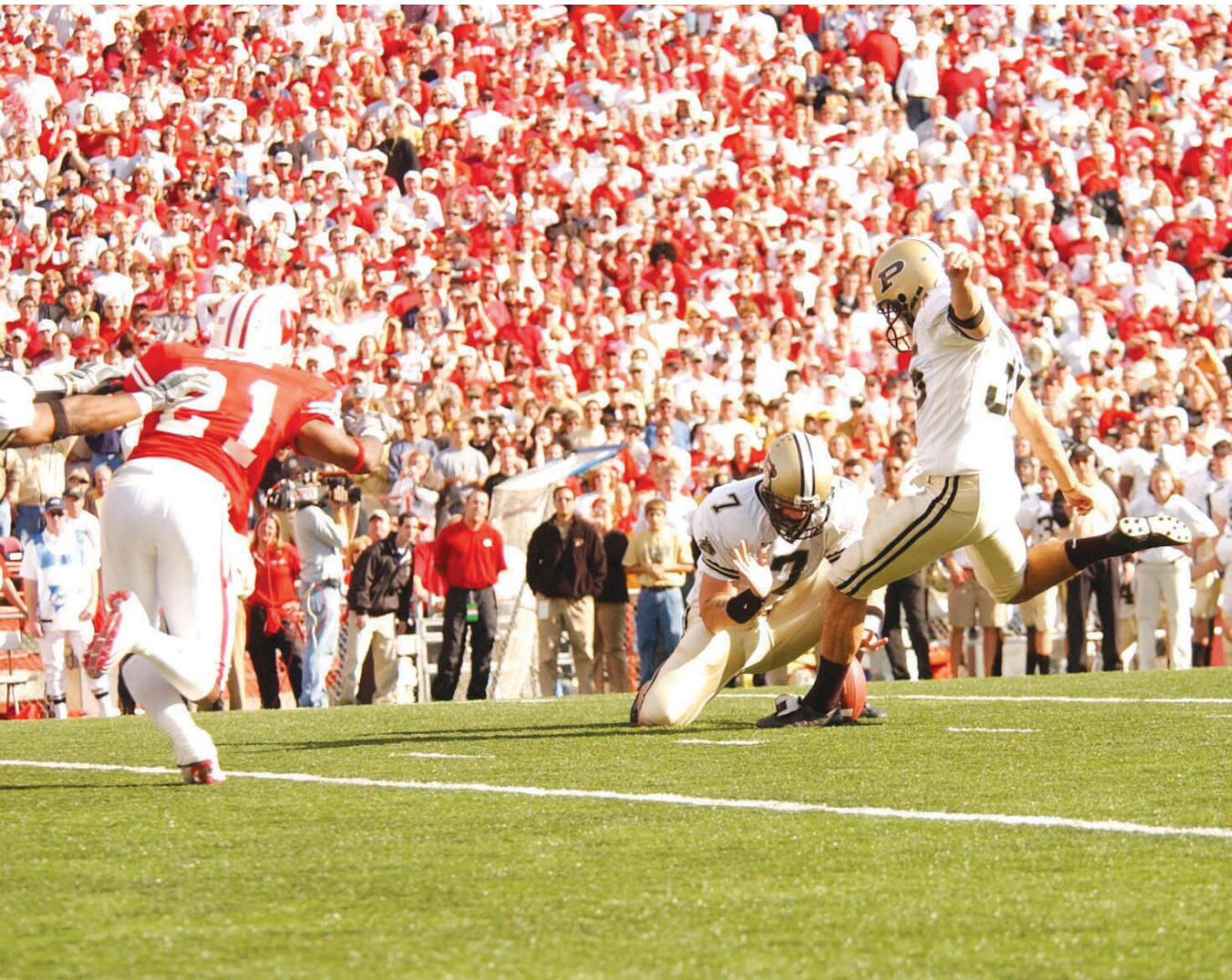




TAILGATE GUIDE



The 20-year drought



Then-sophomore kicker Ben Jones kicks the game-winning field goal in the fourth quarter of Purdue versus Wisconsin, played on Oct. 18, 2003.



Ryan Walters, far right, poses with his teammates in his senior year of high school during the fall of 2003.

BY MARY ROSE HOKANSON
Staff Reporter

In the annals of Purdue football history, time has stood still for a daunting 19 years, 11 months, and two days.

A seemingly impossible amount of time has separated the Boilermakers from their last triumphant day with Wisconsin.

The year was 2003, a time when the Boilermakers' current head coach, Ryan Walters, strolled the halls of Grandview High School during his senior year.

None among the present-day Boilermakers' roster had been initiated into the world of football. Some were merely on the cusp of graduating from Sesame Street to solid foods, while others were still nestled in diapers.

At the same time, the 2003-04 Boilermakers faced off with the Wisconsin Badgers in Camp Randall Stadium in Madison, Wisconsin on Oct. 18.

Both the Badgers and the Boilermakers were ranked opponents at the time. ESPN made the tilt the centerpiece of its coverage, sending the College GameDay crew to Madison.

Late in the fourth quarter, the Badgers had just taken a punt return all the way to the house for a touchdown, knotting the score at 23 and unleashing an electric roar from the crowd.

A drive, which future pro quarterback Kyle Orton then described as the biggest of his career, culminate with a 36-

yard catch by wide receiver Ray Williams.

The Boilers tried thrice unsuccessfully to score from the three yard-line, putting their fate in the hands of their sophomore kicker, Ben Jones.

Jones, a perfect three-for-three on field goals that day, emerged from the sideline. With the game hanging in the balance, he readied himself on the hash.

What followed was a moment of serenity amidst the clamor. In Jones' own words, "You get to the ball spot, you take your steps back and then it just all goes quiet in my head. You kind of blackout for a minute"

The kick was good, a chip shot from a sharp angle. The pressure to win the game was

off Jones, but now he had a promise to keep.

Should he ever deliver a game-sealing field goal, Jones had told his brother he would perform the "airplane" celebration. With his brother among the witnesses, he kept his word, zooming around the field with his arms to his sides.

Jones' favorite part was the crestfallen Badger faithful.

"I think my favorite part honestly, was to hear that whole stadium quiet," he said. "I mean, those fans up there are very passionate to say the least."

A Series of Unfortunate Events

For two decades, the Badgers have reigned supreme, stamping a trail of Badger red through five different Boilermaker head coaching eras.

Purdue has teetered on the brink of ending the drought on several occasions.

But the statistics alone tell the tale of Wisconsin's dominance. On average, their margin of victory over the Boilermakers in the past 16 matches has been by 19.8 points.

In 2018, former head coach Jeff Brohm's second year with the Boilermakers, it looked like his team was about to flip the script at home.

"I just remember anytime we played Wisconsin, it was always a tough, physical game," former Purdue running back Markell Jones said. "It was tough going for the running backs. Anytime you put on a fight like that, and

the crowd really understands that you're in it, and you fall short like that it's always disappointing."

Jonathan Taylor helped erase the Boilermakers' 27-14 lead with 10 minutes remaining.

Wisconsin took over at its own 32 with 5:01 left. Taylor opened the drive with a 35-yard run, and the Badgers capped it with an 18-yard touchdown pass. Rafael Gaglianone kicked the extra point to forge a 27-27.

The comeback sent the game into overtime, where they ultimately triumphed in the third period, where Taylor gave the Badgers the critical play with a 17-yard run in the final frame.

Taylor finished with 321 yards and three touchdowns on 33 carries for the No. 3 rushing mark in program history. Wisconsin added another tally to their Purdue streak.

"We could have easily won that game" Jones said. "It always seemed like we were always just short of winning and losing football games."

Despite the optimism that surged before the last two matches against a weakened Wisconsin, the Boilermakers' drought has persisted.

"It's gotta be this year. This year's gotta be the year, I think." Jones said.

"For that to happen, I think guys really gotta be focused, and maybe Coach Walters needs to tell them, 'Yo, you guys are zero and 16' and just put a fire in these guys."



Then-freshman cornerback Kenneth Major console then-freshman defensive end Giovanni Reviere after Wisconsin's game-winning touchdown in triple overtime in 2018.

What they're saying

Head coach Ryan Walters at his Monday press conference

On what he's learned from the first three games:

"No need to push the panic button now, but definitely need to continue to grow and improve, which I think this team will do as the year goes on."

On what he's observed about Wisconsin:

"Just schematically way different... They throw the ball all over the place, and we'll try to get some balance. They have two really talented running backs, but you can tell they definitely want to air it out more than they ever have in the history of their program."

Offensive coordinator Graham Harrell after practice Tuesday

On his offense's latest performance:

"As far as throwing the football, I thought last game it was really a sharp...I thought Hudson was seeing it, playing at a really high level, throwing well. We were good on third down, besides the short ones. We just got to finish the drives."

On his approach to coaching situational mistakes out of the offense:

"It's not something you create a crisis about with your guys. If you start playing uptight, I don't think it gives you a chance to be as good as you need to be. We've got to be great fundamentally."

Meet the opponent: Wisconsin Badgers

Over the off season, Wisconsin lured former Cincinnati headman Luke Fickell to be its new head coach. Fickell decided to make a distinct hire in offensive coordinator Phil Longo, who installed an air-raid scheme in opposition to longtime Wisconsin offensive norms.

Along with Longo, Fickell secured a commitment from transfer quarterback Tanner Mordecai. In two seasons with SMU, Mordecai tossed 72 touchdowns and over 7,000 yards.

To begin the year, Mordecai has thrown for 234 yards-per-game and 7 yards-per-attempt. He currently has two touchdowns and two interceptions.

The Badgers offense is supplemented by a pair of upper-classman running backs in Braelon Allen and Chez Mellusi. The duo has accounted for 577 yards from scrimmage so far this campaign.

Strengths:

Ahead of schedule- The Badgers have some of the highest early-down efficiency in the country. They're fifth in getting a fresh set of downs early, meaning before third-down. The Badgers cross the sticks by second down 81.4% of the time, over 10% more often than the 110-ranked Boilers.

Running around- Over their many years of beating the Boilers, the Badgers have typically utilized a bruising rush attack. This year is no different, despite moving to a more pass friendly scheme with the hire of Longo. Wisconsin's "rushing success rate" – meaning how often it gains enough rush yards to stay on schedule for a first-down – is 37.9%, No. 17 in the country.

Weaknesses:

Dying more than doing- Wisconsin tends to struggle on third and fourth down, converting first downs 37.8% of the time in those situations, No. 112 in the country. But given the Badgers' success on early downs, it hasn't bothered them too much.

It's how you start- The Badger defense doesn't have many soft spots, but one area where they're lacking is in starting field position. Wisconsin's opponents start their drives 27.5 yards down the field. That's only two yards worse than Purdue's mark, but it's enough to make a difference of about 50 spots in national ranking.

- Compiled by Israel Schuman, sports editor