

EXTRA POINTS:

MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS vs. WISCONSIN BADGERS

<u>At the 50...</u> Stand alone!	Minnesota OL Conner Olson started his 56 th career game last week against Indiana, snapping a tie with Ohio State OL Billy Pierce for the most ever in the Big Ten. Since the beginning of the 2017 season, Conner has made 26 starts at LG, 15 at C, and 15 at RG. He's one cog in an O-Line that is rated No. 1 by Pro Football Focus. "Conner Olson the last four or five years has been the heart and soul of our offense," TE Ko Kieft said. "It's the classic quote, 'You want him in your foxhole.' He'll do anything for you."
<u>The 45...</u> No easy sledding here	This game for the "Axe" shakes down as a battle of two of the best defenses in the country. Wisconsin ranks 2nd in total defense (237.7) while Minnesota ranks 4 th (289.5). The Badgers, who are also first in the country in rush yards defense (64.3), yielded 194.5 total yards per game in the first six games of the win streak prior to getting gashed for 452 – 351 thru the air – in the 35-28 win over Nebraska last week. For the season, Wisconsin has yielded 707 yards rushing in 328 attempts for a 2.2 yards per carry average. Factoring in the 30 sacks and the team has allowed 3.0 yards per carry. Minnesota ranks third in the Big Ten in rushing yards per game with 204.6, behind Michigan (218.4) and Wisconsin (229.4).
<u>The 40...</u> Try stopping Mr. Allen	The Golden Gophers have one of the strongest run defenses in the country, ranking t-12 th nationally and 4 th to Wisconsin in the Big Ten (103.6) and 23 rd in opponent yards per carry (3.5). They held Colorado to minus-19 yards on 21 carries and over the next two weeks they surrendered a total of 99 yards on 59 attempts to Bowling Green and Purdue. However, that defense will be tested by Wisconsin and 17-year-old Braelon Allen. No team has rushed for more yards than Wisconsin during its seven-game win streak (268.3).
<u>The 35...</u> Maybe call a pass?	Wisconsin ranks first in the Big Ten in rushing yards but that success hasn't carried over to short-yardage situations. According to Pro Football Focus, the Badgers have converted 28 of 50 plays on 3 rd - or 4 th -and-2 or fewer (56 percent). The Badgers' 57.8 percent conversion rate on rushing plays ranks 104 th in the FBS. A big reason why? Wisconsin runners have been hit at or behind the line of scrimmage on 62.2 percent of those rushes, which ranks 121 st nationally. The FBS average is 48 percent.
<u>The 30...</u> Faith got them through a trying time	Minnesota QB Tanner Morgan's family had a scare back in May 2020 when Tanner's dad, Ted, was diagnosed with brain cancer. On May 12, Tanner, however, felt inspired by his father and his handling of the disease. "Glioblastoma is never a good brain cancer to have, and it's not something that's easy to recover from. But one of the main aspects was seeing how my dad responded to it. Instead of falling apart or having a negative mindset, he leaned into Jesus and the power that we have as believers in Christ with the Holy Spirit." His father was pronounced cancer free in August and he attended the Gophers' opener vs Michigan.
<u>The 25...</u> Down but never out	Wisconsin was left for dead after the first month of the season and a 1-3 record. QB Graham Mertz had thrown 2 TDS vs 6 INTs and had been sacked 7 times, and the run game was nearly non-existent (60 carries for 117 yards vs ND and Michigan). During the win streak, no team has run for more yards, Mertz has thrown 7 TDs against 3 picks and he's been sacked just once in the last 4 games. The defense has played even better, forcing 18 turnovers in the last five games. "It could've been easy for us to say, 'All right, screw it. We're down right now. Whatever, let's just get through the season,'" LB Leo Chenal said. "But a lot of guys, a lot of leaders stepped up and everybody followed them saying, 'All right, we can do this. Let's run this.' We built a lot of confidence the past few weeks and we've just got to continue it for next week."
<u>The 20...</u> I'm coming back!	If Minnesota needed a pick-me-up before meeting Wisconsin in "The Axe Game" on Saturday, the announcement by Mohamed Ibrahim that he would be returning next season might be the push it needs. The All- Big Ten performer rushed for 1,076 yards and 15 TDs last season and added his ninth straight 100-yard game in the opener this year with Ohio State by rushing for 163 yards on 30 carries before leaving late in the third quarter with a ruptured Achilles tendon. Ibrahim called his rehab from the injury "the toughest thing I've ever done, physically, mentally and emotionally."
<u>The 15...</u> Living up to the legacy	There's a club in Madison that only an inside linebacker can join. It's called "Death Row" and leading tackler Leo Chenal wants to keep past members proud. "'Death row' is a name that the inside linebackers have had for a long time—(Jack) Cichy, T.J. Edwards, those inside linebacker greats who have passed through here," Leo Chenal said. "It means toughness, grit, hard work, just blowing people up. It's something you've got to earn, and it's something I wear proud." And Chenal doesn't take the responsibility lightly. He writes those two words on his right arm before every game.
<u>The 10...</u> We're just fine, thank you!	The Gophers have lost RBs Mohamed Ibrahim, Trey Potts, Bryce Williams, and Preston Jelen for the season with injuries, and now freshmen Ky Thomas and Mar'Keise Irving have had to shoulder the load. Against Maryland, the duo became the first freshmen to each run for 100 yards in the same game since at least 1942 (Irving 105, Thomas 139). Then at Northwestern the following week, they became the first Gophers duo to go for 100 yards in consecutive weeks since Laurence Maroney and Gary Russell did so back in 2005 (Irving 110, Thomas 106). Thomas followed that with 126 yards at Iowa, the most yards the Hawkeyes had allowed a RB this season. Since becoming the featured back on Oct. 23 vs Maryland, Thomas has four 100-yard games in five tries (536 yards, 113 carries, 4.7 yards-per-carry, 3 TD). Irving has 391 yards on 70 carries (5.6 yards per carry)
<u>The 5...</u> 1-0, 1-0, 1-0, 1-0, 1-0, 1-0	This rivalry has been played an FBS-high 130 times, beginning in 1890. Wisconsin leads 62-60-8 and is 13-2-2 when the Badgers are only ranked for this game. All the Badgers need to do now is win Saturday to capture a spot in the Big Ten title game for the 7 th time in the last 11 seasons.