

USD's 'STARR' ATTRACTION



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D
Linebacker Tyler Starr dives at Western Illinois quarterback Wil Lunt during their Oct. 6 game at the DakotaDome in Vermillion. Starr made the transition from defensive end to linebacker for the 2012 season, after ranking in the top 10 nationally with 14 sacks as a sophomore.

STATE-U FOOTBALL | TYLER STARR

Many Duties For USD's Starr



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D
University of South Dakota junior linebacker Tyler Starr is pictured during a break in a pre-season practice in Vermillion. The many tattoos Starr has on his body are a way to express himself, he says.

Little Rock, Iowa, Native Balances Challenges On Field, Fatherhood Off It

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Marquice Williams saw first-hand what Tyler Starr can do athletically. He just didn't realize it at the time.

Williams, who joined the University of South Dakota football program as a defensive assistant in January, was moving stuff into his new office on the upper levels of the DakotaDome when he looked down and saw an impromptu dunk contest on the basketball court.

From that far away, Williams had no idea that the tall, blonde-haired kid he saw matching former Coyote standout Charlie Westbrook dunk for dunk was in fact his cornerstone defensive end.

New outside linebackers coach, meet Tyler Starr.

"I remember thinking, 'If you can do that, you don't need to be a lineman,'" Williams, who joined the Coyotes after a stint at Central Oklahoma, said. "Our defense is all about speed and Tyler is too dynamic to be limited."

Everything Starr has done, on and off the field, has been with that mantra in mind: Go, go, go.

The 21-year-old junior from Little Rock, Iowa, has developed into one of the nation's top pass rushers in just 21 games of college action. It wasn't a seamless progression, though.

Starr — with his 6-foot-5 frame and long blonde hair that creeps out the back of his helmet — is not only a Division I football player and a student, he is a father. His son, Hunter James, is a year and a half and frequently attends USD practices and games.

"I've always been a believer in family comes first, so if anything ever happened, it's always going to be my son comes first," Starr said. "At the same time, I want to pursue this dream and financially set myself and Hunter's future."

That kind of a responsibility might overwhelm a college student, but Starr has been able to prioritize his commitments and organize his life, Williams said. If his son is able to

come to Vermillion for a practice, Starr is allowed by his coaches to spend time on the sidelines with Hunter — "We will never tell a kid he can't go spend time with his child," Williams said.

"That forced him into being more mature, and you can just see that he's doing things right," Williams said. "He's more comfortable in this defense. He's standing up, seeing the whole field and realizing where people need to be.

"It's been great seeing him grow."
A change from defensive end to outside linebacker this season may have impacted Starr's stats, but it hasn't changed the way he looks at football. He was among the top 10 nationally with 14 sacks last season, and though he only has seven this season with one game left, Starr has tried to remain confident on a team that sits 1-9 overall.

"The way the season's went, if you start out hot, say something happens and you get down a little bit, it's hard to keep your teammates up when things aren't going as planned," Starr said after an afternoon practice at the DakotaDome.

"You have to stay at it."
Later, on the subject of adjusting to all the changes (new coach, new defense, new league, etc.), Starr tossed out one of his favorite phrases: "Greatness doesn't happen in a day."

Before The Emergence

Development has been the key word throughout Starr's career.

He was never really a highly sought-after recruit, despite playing on a Central Lyon/George-Little Rock high school team that advanced to three Iowa state championship games. Starr was a two-time All-District first team selection and made the transition from safety to linebacker for his senior season.

"He was the kind of guy you'd want to have; a wild man on the field with a lot of excitement," Central Lyon/GLR coach Toby Lorenzen said. "He played at a high level. We had some good teammates around him, but you could see that he was going to be a stud."

Choosing a sport was a tough decision, though, Starr admits. He said he didn't decide to play college football until his senior year of high school — basketball was, as

Williams later found out, another sport Starr pursued.

Starr eventually signed with USD and joined the football program in 2009 under former head coach Ed Meierkort and defensive line coach Jake Sprague. Starr was redshirted his freshman season, which was probably the right move on every level, according to Lorenzen.

"It's been fun to watch his progression and watch him grow up," Lorenzen said. "That was something he needed to do, was grow up a little bit, become accountable for his actions."

As a redshirt during the 2009 season, Starr was earned defensive scout team honors twice despite having to adjust to the pace and tempo of the D-I game.

"I had to get used to the speed change, that was the biggest thing," Starr said. "Once you got those figured out, I had to decide if I wanted to stay with football."

"You can go through the motions or make the best of it, and that's what I did, stuck with it," he added. "NFL has always been a dream, so I'm going to pursue that until it comes to a dead end."

Obstacles

The 2010 season was supposed to be Starr's breakout campaign. He was the one who could have been out on the field at TCF Bank Stadium where the Coyotes would eventually upset FBS Minnesota.

Instead, Starr was again relegated to the sidelines, this time because of academic issues.

It was discovered that Starr was short one credit from the 16 core courses necessary for eligibility by the NCAA Clearinghouse — the requirements are different for Division I and II programs.

"They changed that, and we didn't catch it," Starr said. "I had to drop a class. It was one of those things where you make a mistake and you have to pay for it."

The tide eventually started turning in Starr's favor after he earned USD's 2010 Defensive Scout of the Year award, setting the stage for what promised to be a dominant 2011 season.

In his first game as a sophomore, Starr stepped on to the field at Air Force and

STARR | PAGE 8



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