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Gridiron

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The four-year starter

no one knows
Zimmerman snaps it up for final game as Cyclone

Deep snapper has played in every game since 2008

By Dan Tracy
@iowastatedaily.com

If you follow ISU football and don’t know who Dakota Zimmerman is, that’s fine. He likes it that way.

“As long as no one knows my name, I’m very, very happy because I don’t want to be known,” Zimmerman said.

While a handful of ISU seniors such as defensive backs Ter’ran Benton and Leonard Johnson and left tackle Kelechi Osemele have spent more time on the field and in the limelight, Zimmerman has quietly but consistently been one of the most important four-year starters on the team.

“He’s been so steady for so long and the consistency at that position is not unnoticed, especially by a coaching staff,” said ISU coach Paul Rhoads. “He’s done his job as good as anybody on this team has in [my and his staff’s] three years.”

Give up yet?

Although he’s had his hands on the football more than 300 times and has made three tackles in his ISU career, Zimmerman hasn’t toted the football into the end zone or made a touchdown-saving tackle at the goal line. Among his teammates and coaches, he’s known as an unsung hero, a mentor and a leader of the group known as “The Bomb Squad.”

Dakota Zimmerman is Iowa State’s deep snapper.

Snapping leads to scholarship

The Haysville, Kan., native played a variety of positions in high school including fullback, tight end, linebacker and defensive end — where he was named all-state honorable mention as a junior and senior. Zimmerman also handled the snapping duties for all four years of his high school career.

Recruited by former ISU secondary coach Shawn Raney, Zimmerman was asked to put together a short highlight film of him snapping so that he could secure a spot at a specialist camp Iowa State was hosting in the summer of 2008. Despite howling winds outside, Zimmerman, sporting a cutoff T-shirt, went out in the front yard with his father Randy and filmed a short video of him snapping the football.

“I did 20 snaps and was like, ‘Is this good enough?’” Zimmerman said.

The film was good enough, and after Zimmerman showcased the quickest and most accurate snaps at the camp, former ISU coach Gene Chizik offered Zimmerman a chance to join the team as a preferred walk-on with the chance to eventually earn a scholarship. Zimmerman, who also considered attending Kansas, Kansas State and Texas Tech, was intrigued not only by the chance to play Division I football but also to obtain a degree in construction engineering.

After spending his freshman season as a walk-on, Zimmerman was awarded a scholarship when Rhoads took over as head coach in 2009. Zimmerman admits that as a freshman he had difficulty dealing with the pressure of making a quick and accurate snap, especially late in games but eventually he grew out of it.

As a sophomore in 2009, Zimmerman fired back nine snaps to punter Mike Brandtner and another on kicker Grant Mahoney’s first quarter 52-yard field goal as Iowa State upset Nebraska 9-7 in Lincoln. Zimmerman looks back at that performance both individually — the nine snaps on punts were in his words “perfect” — and as a team as his most memorable game in an ISU uniform.

Consistency, perfection, leadership

Since his first game on Aug. 28, 2008, at home against South Dakota State, Zimmerman has snapped the ball every time the Cyclones have lined up in its punt, field goal or extra point formations. In that time, Iowa State has punted the ball 227 times and has attempted 75 field goals.

Since 2008, the Cyclones have had two field goals highlight film of him snapping so that he could secure a spot at a specialist camp Iowa State was hosting in the summer of 2008. Despite howling winds outside, Zimmerman, sporting a cutoff T-shirt, went out in the front yard with his father Randy and filmed a short video of him snapping the football.

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Since 2008, the Cyclones have had two field goals
and a punt blocked, but, Zimmerman said, none of the three blocks were due primarily to an errant snap.

Consistency is a word that many, including Zimmerman himself, uses to describe his four years on the squad.

"The main thing is being consistent. I really like how this whole time I've really never, knock on wood, had that bad of a snap," Zimmerman said.

"It's one of those deals where if you don't have a reason to be looking for him, you're not really going to know who he is."

Zimmerman doesn't mind being consistent but he'd prefer being perfect.

"I hate it when people say, 'When you try to be perfect, you make more mistakes.' I totally disagree with it because I have to be perfect," Zimmerman said.

Zimmerman, along with the other snappers, punters and kickers on the team, heads out to practice an hour early so they can have the entire field to work with as they try and perfect their respective crafts.

Reserve quarterback and holder Brett Bueker receives Zimmerman's snaps on field goals and extra points. Bueker relays any corrections Zimmerman could make on his snaps just moments after each kick in practice and games.

"Usually it's right on the money, so I don't have to do a whole lot of critiquing on him," Bueker said.

Iowa State's field goal and extra point units struggled early this season, but in its last four games has made five of the last six field goals and 10 straight extra points.

"He's always really focused and dialed into his business," said senior kicker Zach Guyer of Zimmerman. "It's a huge part of what we do, it all starts with the snap."

Messingham has seen Zimmerman emerge as leader of both the punting and kicking units — which collectively are known as "The Bomb Squad" — in a manner of leading by example.

"As his time here has went along, people gravitate to him and it's easy, his personality is one of 'don't ask questions why, just go get it done' and that's kind of how he goes about his business," Messingham said.

Search for a successor

In many college football programs, a deep snapper tends to be a two-, three- or, in Zimmerman's case, a four-year starter. That being said, Zimmerman's impact on the team has become more of a realization as his college career draws closer to an end.

"The importance of it is becoming more real as we get to the end of his time and we're having to figure out who is going to replace him," Rhoads said.

"You always get a little nervous when [a deep snapper] is finally a senior that's been starting for you, it starts to hit home a little the farther you are along in the season that, 'Oh boy he's a senior,'" Messingham said. "We've got to find somebody to replace him and it will be tough to do."

While the ISU coaching staff will face the task of replacing Zimmerman, the deep snapper will begin preparing for his future. Zimmerman, who will graduate in May, would jump at the chance to snap for a NFL team next season but has a backup plan, as he's already been discussing job opportunities with engineering firms in the Midwest.

In the meantime, Zimmerman is focused on Friday night's game against No. 2 Oklahoma State, the 25th and final time in his ISU career he'll trot onto the field at Jack Trice Stadium unknown by most but appreciated by many.

"You grow up playing football all your life and it hasn't really set in that it will be the last time I'll get to play at [Jack Trice], but it's going to be pretty emotional I imagine," Zimmerman said.

Dakota Zimmerman will take the field Friday night for the 25th and final time in his ISU career.

Zimmerman joined the team as a preferred walk-on and earned a scholarship in 2009.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pick</th>
<th>No. 2 Oklahoma State vs. Iowa State</th>
<th>No. 18 USC vs. No. 4 Oregon</th>
<th>No. 25 Baylor vs. No. 5 Oklahoma</th>
<th>SMU vs. No. 11 Houston</th>
<th>No. 23 Texas vs. No. 16 Kansas State</th>
<th>No. 17 Nebraska vs. No. 20 Michigan</th>
<th>California vs. No. 8 Stanford</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jake Calhoun, assistant sports reporter (47-30)</td>
<td>Oklahoma State — Cyclone fans could hit 50,000+ for all six games for the first time ever Friday night. My guess is all of those will not be there at the end of the game.</td>
<td>Oregon — All together now ... Quack ... Quack ... Quack ... Goooo Ducks! (Mighty Ducks anyone?)</td>
<td>Oklahoma — This and a win over Iowa State, and Oklahoma will get to Bedlam with a chance to get back in the national championship hunt.</td>
<td>Houston — If this were 1985, I’d pick SMU in a heartbeat. But now, I’m picking Houston based solely on the chance that Keenum and Co. could score 80.</td>
<td>Texas — My upset pick of the week. Feels just like a Mack Brown win right? Coming off a week where they did nothing, they would be the team to come out and win.</td>
<td>Michigan — Won’t be an upset. Nebraska hasn’t looked good defensively apart from shutting down an anemic (and distracted) Penn State offense.</td>
<td>Stanford — I just wish I could grow a beard as brilliant as Andrew Luck’s. I also wish I was going to make the kind of money he will some day. Sigh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Tracy, senior sports reporter (49-28)</td>
<td>Oklahoma State — Paul Rhoads characterized an upset as “unheard of.” The only thing we’ll be hearing at Jack Trice on Friday night will be “Touchdown, Oklahoma State.”</td>
<td>Oregon — While animal ducks prefer waddling, these Ducks prefer cracking (or should I say ... quacking) opposing defenses with their break-neck speed.</td>
<td>Oklahoma — I don’t know about the Sooners, but I sure as hell am overlooking Baylor and getting ready for Bedlam.</td>
<td>Houston — Conference USA, a non-AQ conference, has two teams in the AP Top 25 poll while the Big East, an AQ conference, has none. Interesting ...</td>
<td>Kansas State — Even Mack Brown thinks Bill Snyder is old.</td>
<td>Nebraska — For his first trip to the Big House, Bo Pelini is packing three things: his favorite gray hoodie, a chainsaw and a vial of children’s tears. #bopelininfoacts</td>
<td>Stanford — I guess lumberjacks can’t lead a private school on the West Coast to an undefeated season, but they can lead said school to a route over mediocre Pac-12 teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake Lovett, editor in chief (53-24)</td>
<td>Oklahoma State — Iowa State can only stay in the game if it brings out some early fireworks against an awful OSU defense.</td>
<td>Oregon — I like many OU players, also move that Landry Jones brings back The Stache.</td>
<td>Oklahoma — Just when SMU thought it had escaped its “Death Penalty,” Case Keenum and Co. lay down the law and host a public execution of the Mustangs.</td>
<td>Texas — The battle for third-best in the Big 12 will be won by the Longhorns, who boast the Big 12’s best run defense, who will stifle Collin Klein and Co.</td>
<td>Michigan — Oui. Oui. Michigan running back Fitzgerald Toussaint will be the difference against Nebraska’s laissez-faire run defense.</td>
<td>Michigan — Confident in the Wolverines’ ability to beat the Buckeyes.</td>
<td>Stanford — Unless Aaron Rodgers, the best quarterback on the planet, has some eligibility left, Luck and the Cardinal will route the Berkeley Bears.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Pick: Dean Berhow-Golt, asst. sports editor (18-17)</td>
<td>Oklahoma State — Even if Iowa State manages 50,000 fans for a Friday night ESPN game, that’s not going to stop Justin Blackmon.</td>
<td>Oregon — I don’t care how good looking Matt Barkley is. You can’t talk me into it. Unless you look at his smile ... Look away!</td>
<td>Oklahoma — If the Cyclones were able to hang up 425 yards and 26 points on this team, Oklahoma might be able to have 1,000 yards.</td>
<td>Houston — Look out for the Eric Dickerson/Craig James combo. Oh wait, they’re not there anymore? #FireCraigJames</td>
<td>Kansas State — Coming off of an emotionally charged win over Texas A&amp;M, Klein may not account for six TDs, but he’ll score enough to win.</td>
<td>Michigan — Denard Robinson and Co. should have a good day on the ground as Nebraska is eighth in the Big 10 and Michigan in 13th in the nation in rushing per game.</td>
<td>Stanford — Andrew Luck’s first week of Rumspringa didn’t go so well. Maybe it’s time to bring back the beard and also bring back a W in the win column.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Primetime game presents greatest challenge

This season has been a roller coaster of ups and downs for the ISU football team. A three-game winning streak to start the season was met with a four-game losing streak, followed by a two-game winning streak for the Cyclones’ only conference wins of the season.

Now, the Cyclones (5-4, 2-4 in Big 12) face their biggest obstacle this season by far — No. 2 Oklahoma State.

The Cyclones have not been fazed by the notion of being the underdogs, having only been favored in two games — against Northern Iowa on Sept. 3 and Kansas on Nov. 5 — this season.

However, saying that the Cyclones are underdogs in this game — which will be the first primetime Friday night game on ESPN in school history — is, in all honesty, an understatement.

Oklahoma State comes to Ames undefeated through 10 games, having beaten its opponents by an average of 25.4 points per game while averaging 51.7 points per game itself — which is second in the nation.

ISU coach Paul Rhoads is usually optimistic about his team’s chances against a favored opponent, but at his weekly news conference Monday, he sounded a little less optimistic and a little more realistic about the Cyclones’ chances of an upset this week.

“We’ve got to play our best game, and there’s got to be some things that adversely affect them,” Rhoads said. “We can’t go out and play our game and go up and down the field with this football team.

“They’re going to have to turn the ball over, they’re going to have to uncharacteristically throw some bad balls, miss a block, slip out of a route, things like that are going to have to take place to give us the opportunity to pull off what would be an unheard of upset.”

An “unheard of” upset. Never would you hear Rhoads — a man whose passion for his football team knows no bounds — consider the upset of a favored opponent as “unheard of.”

“It is true that Iowa State has never beaten a team ranked as high as No. 6 in the nation — the highest-ranked opponent beaten by the Cyclones was No. 7 — so Rhoads’ statement cannot necessarily be considered pessimism.

Sitting just one win away from bowl eligibility, Iowa State would like to end its home schedule with the biggest win in program history.

However, losing while still playing competitively against the Cowboys has positive implications for the Cyclones as well.

“That was a big decision for me, is just having to play all these big-time teams and playing in the Big 12 and playing teams that are top-ranked,” said quarterback Jared Barnett.

“I feel like this will be a good week for the guys that we’re recruiting to see what we can do and to see that they will have an opportunity to play against big-time teams whenever they come here.”

Of course, walking into the cage with the rabid bear on primetime television can serve as a boost to one of the heavily emphasized aspects of college football: recruiting.

“You’re a high school prospect watching a school that’s recruiting you play neck-and-neck with the No. 2 team in the country in a game that’s being broadcast on ESPN, why wouldn’t you want to play for that team and work toward actually beating that school the next time the chance arises?”

“This is one of things where you watch games on TV like this and you think, ‘Wow, I wish I was in that position,’” said linebacker Jake Knott.

“That’s no different now. You want to have that chance to play a team like this.”

Iowa State doesn’t have to win in order to get something out of Friday’s game, it just can’t get blown out with the spotlight beaming down on it.

To say that Iowa State has its work cut out for it as a 27.5-point underdog would be an understatement of epic proportions. No, we don’t think there’s a great chance that Iowa State can pull off that “unheard of” upset.

But it may not even need to for it to be considered a win.

ISD Sports Editorial Board
Jeremiah Davis, Sports Editor
Dean Berhow-Goll, Assistant Sports Editor
Jake Calhoun, Assistant Sports Editor
Dan Tracy, senior reporter
OSU Offense  ISU Defense

Oct. 22
Iowa State 17
vs.
Texas A&M 33

Oct. 29
Iowa State 41
@ Texas Tech 7

Nov. 5
Iowa State 13
@ Kansas 10

Friday, Nov. 18
Oklahoma State
Ames, Iowa
7 p.m.

Nov. 26
Oklahoma
at Norman, Okla.
7 p.m.

Dec. 3
Kansas State
at Manhattan, Kan.
11:30 a.m.
Seniors to watch: Iowa State

CB #23
Leonard Johnson
5'10", 202 pounds

Johnson by the numbers
5: Career interceptions. Johnson had two each in his first two seasons.
46: Games played as a Cyclone. The Clearwater, Fla., native has appeared in every game the Cyclones have played since his freshman season of 2008.
222: Total career tackles, 165 of which were solo. Johnson has 53 tackles this season, ranking him No. 4 for the Cyclone defense.
319: Kickoff return yards on nine attempts against Oklahoma State in 2008, an NCAA FBS record.

Career honors and awards
- 2010 second-team All-Big 12
- 2008 Rivals.com Freshman All-American
- Nov. 1, 2008, Big 12 Special Teams player of the week

Missouri tight end Michael Egnew tries to evade the tackle of ISU cornerback Leonard Johnson during the third quarter of Iowa State’s 52-17 loss to Missouri on Oct. 15 at Columbia, Mo. Johnson had eight tackles, a tackle for loss and recovered a fumble for the Cyclones.

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Other ISU seniors

Darius Darks
WR 6

Darius Reynolds
WR 7

Earl Brooks
DB 17

Grant Mahoney
K 21

Tyler Petersen
WR 21

Ter’Ran Benton
DB 22

Zach Guyer
K 25

Michael Romey
K 27

Patrick Mulcahy
WR 36

Matt Tau’fo’ou
LB 45

Dakota Zimmerman
LS 46

Jake Lattimer
DE 48

Hayworth Hicks
OL 75

Reid Branderhorst
TE 82

Patrick Neal
DE 91

Stephen Ruempolhamer
DL 97
Seniors to watch: Iowa State

Offensive lineman Kelechi Osemele blocks Texas A&M’s Spencer Nealy during the game Oct. 22. The Cyclones lost to the Aggies 33-17. Osemele has started 40 games in his ISU career, the most of anyone on the team.

LT #72 Kelechi Osemele

6’6”, 347 pounds

Osemele by the numbers
1: Round Osemele was projected to be drafted in the 2012 NFL draft by ESPN.com, FoxSports.com, CNNSI.com and NFL.com.
19: The pick at which CNNSI.com and NFL.com had Osemele going in the draft prior to this season.
40: Games started as a Cyclone, the most of anyone on the team.
Osemele has started every game in each of the last three seasons.

Career honors and awards
- 2011 Outland Trophy watch list
- 2011 Preseason First-Team All-American and First-Team All-Big 12 (Phil Steele’s College Football Preview)
- 2010 Honorable mention All-Big 12 (AP, coaches)
- 2009 Second-team All-Big 12 (AP)
Big 12 power rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RK (LW)</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Record</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. (--&gt;)</td>
<td>Oklahoma St. (10-0, 7-0)</td>
<td>The Cowboys are well on their way to the BCS National Championship game barring a catastrophic meltdown before then.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. (--&gt;)</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>(8-1, 5-1)</td>
<td>All signs point to Bedlam (the Oklahoma-Oklahoma State game) being the decider for the Big 12 Championship, as well as possibly a representative for the national championship game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (--&gt;)</td>
<td>Kansas State</td>
<td>(8-2, 5-2)</td>
<td>A week after a 52-45 loss to Oklahoma State, the Wildcats withstood four overtimes in a nailbiter 53-50 at home against Texas A&amp;M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. (--&gt;)</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>(6-3, 3-3)</td>
<td>The Longhorns pounded Texas Tech and Kansas at home by a combined score of 95-20 before being upset on the road at Missouri 17-5 last week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. (--&gt;)</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>(5-5, 3-4)</td>
<td>The Tigers upset No. 16 Texas last week and will have two chances against Texas Tech and Kansas to become bowl eligible for the seventh consecutive season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. [+1]</td>
<td>Baylor</td>
<td>(6-3, 3-3)</td>
<td>Robert Griffin III has finally descended back down to earth, as the Bears have finally returned to mediocrity in the Big 12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. [-1]</td>
<td>Texas A&amp;M</td>
<td>(5-5, 3-4)</td>
<td>Three straight losses have almost made the Aggies’ Big 12 farewell tour one to forget.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. (--&gt;)</td>
<td>Iowa State</td>
<td>(5-4, 2-4)</td>
<td>The Cyclones stand one win away from bowl eligibility with three weeks remaining, just like last year. That win will not come easy. It may not even come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. [--&gt;]</td>
<td>Texas Tech</td>
<td>(5-5, 2-5)</td>
<td>How did this team beat Oklahoma? From beating No. 2 three weeks ago, to losing 107-13 the next two weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. (--&gt;)</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>(2-8, 0-7)</td>
<td>The Jayhawks had the Bears up against the wall last week, but couldn’t come away with their first conference win of the season.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The best of the best: Chili dishes

Heat up your chilly Friday night tailgate with a dish all of your guests will love: chili. We tested recipes to find the best of each category and these are sure to please.

The best traditional chili

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 1/2 onions, chopped
- 1 15-ounce can chili beans
- 1 qt tomato juice
- 1 pint whole tomatoes
- Chili powder
- Salt and pepper

1. Brown the ground beef in a large saucepan over medium-high heat.
2. Add the onion and cook until softened.
3. Add the remaining ingredients, bring to a boil, then lower the heat and let simmer for about 1 hour.

The best white chili

- 2 15-ounce cans Great Northern Beans or Navy Beans, drained
- 32 ounce box chicken stock
- 1/2 stick butter
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 3/4 cup diced onion
- 1 4 ounce can mild fire roasted diced green chiles
- 1/3 of a 2-ounce can hot fire roasted diced chiles (more for spicier chili)
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon coriander
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1 tablespoon ground black pepper
- Pinch of red pepper flakes
- 1/2 bunch cilantro leaves, chopped
- 4 ounces cream cheese

1. Finely chop chicken breast and cook in a large frying pan. Drain and set aside.
2. Put the beans in a large pot with the chicken stock and bring to a boil.
3. In a saucepan, heat butter over medium heat. Add the garlic, onion and chiles and saute for 5 minutes. Add this to the beans.
4. Add the chicken, cumin, coriander, pepper, red pepper flakes and cilantro. Lower the heat to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, for approximately 1 1/2 hours.
5. Cut the cream cheese into chunks and add it gradually to the pot, stirring until it is incorporated.
6. Serve hot and enjoy.

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