

# 9 fingers, no problem: New Broncos tight end Troy Fumagalli had stellar college career

By Joe Dahlke

Fox 31

April 29, 2018

Broncos fifth-round draft pick Troy Fumagalli had a successful career at the University of Wisconsin and he did it all with nine fingers.

Fumagalli is missing the index finger on his left hand and hasn't had it since he was 2 days old.

His finger was amputated at the knuckle because he was born with amniotic band syndrome, a condition in which the umbilical cord wraps around appendages and restricts blood flow.

"It's honestly not a big deal at all," Fumagalli said told the Chicago Sun Times before the draft.

"It's funny because it has blown up now, getting ready for the next level. Growing up, it wasn't talked about. High school, it wasn't talked about. College, very little."

"I don't care if anyone asks me about it," the tight end told ESPN in 2016. "I guess I've just been used to it my whole life.

"If you were to ask me if I imagined a finger on my left hand, I feel like that's in the way of things. I wouldn't want it there. It's kind of weird, if you think about it like that."

Fumagalli, who has been a star throughout his football career, led the Badgers in receptions each of the past two seasons.

The 6-foot-6, 248 pound Fumagalli worked hard for his career too. He turned down full-ride scholarship offers at other programs to be a grayshirt at Wisconsin — which meant he had to wait to earn a scholarship.

He earned that scholarship as he became the No. 1 tight end for the Badgers and proved his blocking ability.

A career that included being named the offensive MVP during the Cotton Bowl on Jan. 2, 2017 where he had six receptions for 83 yards and a touchdown in a 24-16 victory against Western Michigan.

During that game, he had a one-handed catch with his left hand.

Last season as a senior, he caught 46 passes for 547 yards and four touchdowns. He also earned second-team All-American honors from four NCAA-recognized outlets and was named a finalist for the John Mackey Award.

Fumagalli was the 156th overall pick in the draft. The Broncos acquired the pick after trading down with the Seahawks.

# Denver Broncos select Wisconsin TE Troy Fumagalli in 2018 NFL Draft

By Jesse Temple  
Landof10.com  
April 28, 2018

Former Wisconsin tight end Troy Fumagalli has been selected by the Denver Broncos in the fifth round of the NFL draft with the No. 156 overall pick.

Fumagalli compiled a stellar career at Wisconsin. He played in 52 games with 32 starts at tight end. He finished his career ranked seventh in school history with 135 receptions and 13th all-time with 1,627 receiving yards while adding 7 touchdown catches.

As a senior during the 2017 season, Fumagalli earned Big Ten Tight End of the Year honors and first-team All-Big Ten from the coaches. He was a John Mackey Award finalist for nation's best tight end and a Burlsworth Trophy finalist for best player to begin his career as a walk-on. Fumagalli also was a second-team All-America selection from the America Football Coaches Association, Associated Press, Football Writers Association of America and Walter Camp.

"He's one of the special guys," ESPN NFL Draft analyst Todd McShay said. "He gets it. He's a hard worker, former walk-on. He's everything you expect coming out of the Wisconsin program. Listen, he's not a vertical threat. He's not much after the catch. But he works hard on his blocking. He's improved in that area. And he just has a knack for getting open. Especially in the play-action game and in the red zone, he is really good on contested catches, too."

Fumagalli's breakout season took place in 2016, when he started all 14 games and more than doubled his previous career totals. He recorded 47 catches for 580 yards and earned offensive MVP honors of the Cotton Bowl against Western Michigan. In that game, Fumagalli caught 6 passes for 83 yards with a touchdown. He opened that season with 7 catches for 100 yards against LSU.

Troy Fumagalli's career stats

Games	Starts	Receptions	Yards	Touchdowns
52	32	135	1,627	7

Fumagalli became a favorite target of quarterback Alex Hornibrook in 2017 and led the team with 46 catches for 547 yards while adding 4 touchdowns. He opened the season with 5 catches for a career-high 105 yards in a victory against Utah State. In Week 2, he added a career-high 8 passes for 92 yards with a touchdown against Florida Atlantic and carried that success forward throughout the season.

Fumagalli's draft stock seemed to take a hit once his senior season ended. Matt Miller, an NFL draft analyst for Bleacher Report, tweeted in February that he believed Fumagalli was "too stiff for the NFL" because he lacked flexibility and agility. Fumagalli did not participate in Wisconsin's pro day in March while recovering from a sports hernia.

Fumagalli becomes the latest in a long line of former Badgers tight ends to become NFL draft picks. Wisconsin tight ends who have gone on to successful NFL careers in the past decade include Travis Beckum, Garrett Graham and Lance Kendricks.

# How they fit: Broncos' Day 3 picks

By STAFF

DenverBroncos.com

April 28, 2018

Pick No. 156 (fifth round): Wisconsin tight end Troy Fumagalli

A former walk-on who became a second-team All-American selection by the Associated Press, Troy Fumagalli was a big part of the Badgers' offense, particularly in his final two seasons. He totaled 1,127 yards on 93 receptions with six touchdowns, and he helped as an extra blocker in Wisconsin's run-heavy offense.

As a receiver, Fumagalli excels at finding soft coverage over the middle, providing a safety-valve option that quarterback Alex Hornibrook clearly cherished. With soft hands and an ability to snag passes in tight coverage in crowded spaces of the field, Fumagalli averaged 12.1 yards per catch.

His large frame didn't just allow him the ability to make big catches. He was also a very capable blocker for running backs Corey Clement in 2016 and Jonathan Taylor in 2017.

"I just think I'm a well-rounded player and I think the pro-style offense — [Tight Ends] Coach [Geep] Chryst coached in the league for so long and he has a plan, a system and a scheme," Fumagalli said. "All the things we do at the tight end position, both blocking and catching, I think things like that will translate to the next level."

Fumagalli should prove to be a good run blocker for the Broncos following his time at Wisconsin, but he should also give the Broncos the ability to play in sets featuring two tight ends, if the team desires. After years of searching for a middle-of-the-field weapon, the Broncos may now have several, including 2017 fifth-round pick Jake Butt.

"It sounds like a great room with a great group of guys that I've been fortunate enough to watch play in the Big Ten and played against some of them," Fumagalli said. "I know their game and what a lot of them do and I'm excited about it."

# Central Florida's Shaquem Griffin, Wisconsin TE Troy Fumagalli not letting amputations affect draft prospects

By Joel Erickson

The New Orleans Advocate

February 27, 2018

Central Florida defender Shaquem Griffin and Wisconsin tight end Troy Fumagalli share a unique piece of their personal history as they head into Indianapolis this week for the NFL scouting combine.

Griffin is missing his left hand. Fumagalli is missing the index finger on his left hand. Both were amputated due to Amniotic Band Syndrome, a condition where a baby's appendages develop improperly after being wrapped in fibrous bands in the womb.

Neither Griffin or Fumagalli believes the amputated body parts should have any effect on where they're taken in April's NFL draft.

"It's not a disability until you make it (one)," Griffin said.

Griffin would be the first player drafted with a missing hand since the Boston Yanks drafted Ellis Jones, a Tulsa offensive lineman whose arm was amputated eight inches below the shoulder, in 1945, according to NFL.com

Fumagalli would not be the first NFL player with a missing finger. Giants defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul has played with missing digits since a 2014 fireworks accident, Hall of Fame safety Ronnie Lott had his pinkie finger amputated above the first knuckle to keep playing and legendary Saints kicker Tom Dempsey was born without fingers on his right hand or toes on his right foot. Fumagalli's status as a tight end, though, makes a difference; a player's index finger is typically key in the act of catching passes.

Neither player considers their condition a handicap.

"If you have a handicap, that means you can only do certain things," Griffin said. "I'm not limited to nothing."

Fumagalli feels the same way.

"I don't think it'll be a big deal," Fumagalli said. "I'm so used to dealing with it, in everything I've done, I think that I haven't found anything I can't do yet, with it."

Both players entered the draft process trying to disprove knocks on their game that are actually far more familiar.

Griffin and Fumagalli were both stars in college. Griffin was the 2016 AAC Defensive Player of the Year and a 2017 second-team All-American who demolished Auburn in the Peach Bowl. Fumagalli was a two-time All-Big Ten selection who often served as Wisconsin's No. 1 target in the passing game and has a reputation for sure hands.

For Griffin, the key will be defining what position he plays at the NFL level. A defensive back at the start of his career at UCF, Griffin blossomed when he was moved to linebacker as a junior and was given a chance to rush the passer. Relentless and athletic, Griffin racked up 18.5 sacks in just two years. Griffin measured in at 6-foot, 223 pounds in Mobile, smaller than a typical NFL linebacker, although he did go out and earn the Senior Bowl's Practice Player of the Week award for his play on the practice field. Teams did ask to see him play safety in Mobile.

Griffin, a charismatic athlete with an easy smile, believes his history of versatility helps him.

"From a rush standpoint to being in the box and making tackles on running backs to lining up at safety and being able to cover wide receivers in 1-on-1s, that allows me to create a platform that coaches can see this guy can literally play anywhere," Griffin said.

Fumagalli must prove he has the speed to create separation in the NFL, even though he caught 93 passes over his final two seasons at Wisconsin.

In a deep, athletic tight end class, Fumagalli's speed will be key, because his history with the Badgers means he's got more blocking experience than most tight ends. NFL Network draft analyst Mike Mayock said Monday that "90 percent" of the tight ends in this draft were receivers only, and Fumagalli has had to do it all at run-heavy Wisconsin.

"We do a lot of zone (blocking), a lot of power," Fumagalli said. "At Wisconsin, I've been split all the way out, I've been in the slot, I've lined up in the backfield. That's the benefit of playing in a pro-style offense. You get used to a lot of different spots."

That's the way Griffin and Fumagalli like it: Being evaluated for their football skills, rather than the limitation they overcame long ago.

"It's been like that through my entire life where I had to make sure that me showing what I can do on the field dictates what people see when they see me playing," Griffin said. "As long as I'm going fast and making plays, they're going to forget how many hands I have."

# Who is Troy Fumagalli? 5 things to know about the Wisconsin TE

By Kyle Stackpole  
Land of 10  
February 27, 2018

Wisconsin football tight end Troy Fumagalli is off to the professional ranks.

The 3-star recruit turned Badgers standout will likely hear his name called during the 2018 NFL, even if it comes on the third day.

That's quite the accomplishment for a player ranked as the No. 57 tight end prospect in the country for the Class of 2013.

Who is Troy Fumagalli? 5 things to know

1. Troy Fumagalli started his career as a walk-on

Fumagalli arrived at Wisconsin in 2013 as a preferred walk-on with no guarantee of making an impact for the Badgers.

But after redshirting that season, he contributed right away. He played in all 14 games (two starts) and finished the season with 187 yards on 14 catches.

His performance impressed the coaching staff, so much so he earned a scholarship prior to the 2015 season.

And his production continued from there. As a redshirt sophomore, he made four starts, hauling in 28 passes for 313 yards and his first-career touchdown. In both seasons, the Badgers notched at least 10 victories and won their bowl game.

2. Troy Fumagalli had a breakout season in 2016

Fumagalli served as a role player in his first two game-eligible seasons but became one of Wisconsin's top offensive threats in his redshirt junior season.

He led the team in receptions (47), finished second in receiving yards (580) and found the end zone twice as the Badgers won the Big Ten West title and earned a Cotton Bowl victory over Western Michigan.

His efforts earned his second-team All-Big Ten by the coaches and third-team All-Big Ten by the media.

3. Troy Fumagalli won the 2017 Big Ten Tight End of the Year

Fumagalli expectations before this season were sky high. He was named to the watch list for the Mackey Award, given annually to the country's best tight end. Sports Illustrated and ESPN tabbed him as a first-team All-American. Those aspirations did not come to fruition, but Fumagalli was still viewed as the best tight end in the conference. In 12 starters, he had 46 receptions for 547 yards a career-high 4 touchdowns.

Fumagalli ended his career with 135 catches, 1,627 yards and 7 touchdowns and was a part of the winningest senior class in program history. This group finished 45-10, 29-5 in the Big Ten and won four bowl games.

#### 4. Troy Fumagalli will participate in the 2018 NFL Scouting Combine

After thorough evaluation, the National Football Scouting Inc. (NFS) invited more than 300 prospects for the 2018 NFL Scouting Combine, which will be held from Feb. 27 to March 5.

And Fumagalli will be one of 336 players attending this year's event. He's one of 17 tight ends, ranging from Hayden Hurst (South Carolina) to Davis Wells (San Diego State).

Fumagalli will go through on-field workouts, medical testing and have a chance to sit down with all 32 teams with the hope he can improve his stock ahead of the NFL Draft.

#### 5. NFL draft analysts are skeptical of Troy Fumagalli's athleticism

Wisconsin assistant coach Mickey Turner, who worked closely with Fumagalli the past three seasons, views him as a "three-down tight end."

He can block. He's a quality route runner. He can catch deep balls or passes over the middle. But a few NFL draft analysts have commented on his athleticism, or lack thereof. Bleacher Report's Miller him called Fumagalli "too stiff for the NFL" and labeled him as the "Biggest Faller" in his pre-combine tight end rankings. His NFL.com draft profile reads, "He lacks athletic ability to consistently get open as a pass catcher, but he can poke holes in zone coverage and work himself free in play-action. Fumagalli could be targeted on day three by teams looking to add depth and competition for their two tight end sets."

NFL.com views Fumagalli as a fourth- or fifth-round pick in the NFL Draft, while will be held April 26-28.

# Badgers football: Wisconsin's Troy Fumagalli ready for NFL success after emerging into one of country's top tight ends

By Jason Galloway  
Wisconsin State Journal  
December 28, 2017

Troy Fumagalli said before this season began that he believed himself to be the best tight end in the country.

Over the past 13 games, the University of Wisconsin senior nearly convinced everyone else he was, too. Fumagalli received second-team All-American honors by four of the five outlets recognized by the NCAA this month, and anonymous NFL scouts told Bleacher Report this week that Fumagalli compares favorably to New England's Rob Gronkowski, Washington's Jordan Reed and Kansas City's Travis Kelce. "He's got a huge frame and his radius of catching the ball, it's unique," UW quarterback Alex Hornibrook said. "Not many people can get the balls that Troy can."

Even during Fumagalli's early years at UW, teammates lauded his catching ability as the best on the Badgers' roster.

Perhaps an even bigger reason why he's drawing comparisons to the world's best at his position, though, is because he's developed into arguably the most complete tight end in college football. "I try to make (blocking) a part of my game as much as I can, and I try to be a complete player," Fumagalli said. "You don't see as many complete guys around, so that's one thing I try to take pride in — doing what's asked of me to the best of my ability."

Fumagalli's receiving numbers don't necessarily stand out. Heading into Saturday's Orange Bowl against Miami, he's caught 43 passes for 516 yards and four touchdowns.

Much of that's a result of what UW asks of him in the run game. Per Pro Football Focus, Fumagalli's 2.14 yards per route run actually stands as the highest among Big Ten tight ends and the fifth highest among all draft-eligible players at the position.

"I think a lot of tight ends that you see now in college football are split out, and they don't do the things that we ask Troy to do," UW offensive coordinator Joe Rudolph said. "But when you talk about someone being able to run block from on the line, from off the line, from split out. You talk about pass protection and understanding it. ... When you talk about just the route-running ability and ability to make plays on the ball. He's got incredible hands and is a smart player."

"I think all those things will lend to him being very successful (in the NFL)."

Fumagalli, a former walk-on, wasn't always capable of the role Rudolph described.

When UW head coach Paul Chryst and the current staff took over in 2015 before Fumagalli's redshirt sophomore season, the Badgers' running game took priority over everything else offensively. For the first time in his career, Fumagalli worked day in and day out on becoming a better blocker.

"When (Chryst) came in, the focus was on the run game first," UW right guard Beau Benzschawel said. "It felt like the first three spring practices, just straight runs. No passes whatsoever.

"I think we as a team kind of view the run game more importantly, and I think (Fumagalli) kind of saw that as his opportunity to play, and obviously he's capitalized on it. He's kind of been forced to do it, but I think he's also made it a personal thing, too, to be a great blocker and help this offense and this team be the best they can."

By his junior season, Fumagalli likely had all the tools necessarily to play at the next level. He still opted to return for his senior season, however, and after an All-American year, Fumagalli said he believes he made the right decision.

"I did think I became a better football player (this year)," Fumagalli said. "I took steps forward. "I think I do a lot of things well both running and passing, but there's always improvement. There's always areas that I can improve, whether it's pass blocking, getting some more power in the run game. All those things, as you try to challenge yourself and become a better player, you've always got to find one or two things that you need to get better at."

# Will TE Troy Fumagalli's missing finger be scrutinized by NFL?

By Andy Fenelon

NFL.com

October 3, 2017

Troy Fumagalli is missing a finger on his left hand. He lost it in a kitchen blender accident when he was a kid.

Or was it chopped off by a fan blade? Perhaps it was that time he reached under the lawn mower on an autumn Saturday afternoon before he started using that day of the week to abuse opposing Big Ten defenses.

Ask the Wisconsin Badgers' star tight end what happened to his left index finger and you might get a different answer every time.

"Every once in a while," Fumagalli says, "if my friends are there, and someone asks me, I'll say, 'Oh, I got bit by a shark.'"

It's all in fun for Fumagalli, who -- if truth be told -- lost the finger from a birth defect that forced an amputation the day after he was born. He's very comfortable in his own skin, discussing freely something that to him has been a non-issue for a long time.

He boasts a football resume -- including a 2016 Catch of the Year nominee in last season's Cotton Bowl -- that should remove all doubt from everyone else's mind.

But here he is, closing in on the 2018 NFL Draft, and questions about the viability of his left hand arise in a nit-picky NFL scouting world that has never before seen this -- a player playing a position that logically you might think would require the use of all five digits on his dominant hand.

"I haven't been in there (Madison) yet," said a director of scouting for an NFC team this past fall, "but it's a situation that will still need to be scrutinized."

THE MOMENT HAD ARRIVED TOO SOON. A month early, to be exact. Carrying her third child in utero, Char Fumagalli's water suddenly burst.

Doug Fumagalli, president of the local youth football league who played wide receiver at Holy Cross in the mid-'70s, was running the two-minute offense to perfection, throwing the family's weekend plans out the window en route to the hospital near their home in Naperville, Ill.

Having given birth twice before, six and eight years earlier to boys, Char knew the drill well. But this one was different, from start to finish.

She was expecting a weighty boy from previous visits to her obstetrician, and who knows how much bigger Troy would have been had his mother gone full term with him. As it was, he came out 7 pounds, 5 ounces with a month of growth unfelt.

It wasn't her son's size, however, that Char first noticed.

"I thought I saw something on him but I just thought he needed to be cleaned up," recalled Char. "I just thought he needed to be cleaned up and he'd be fine."

Char's husband wasn't so certain.

"I think there's something wrong," Doug whispered to Char, as the nurse took Troy out of the room to be cleaned and examined.

"No, I'm sure there's nothing wrong," she said back in a hopeful voice.

The nurse who had taken Troy away was not the one who returned with him. It was the pediatrician who gave Troy back to his mother, and what Char thought she had seen before he was whisked away was still present. The index finger on Troy's left hand was purple and enlarged. To Char and Doug, it stood out, well, like a sore thumb.

What Troy had was something called Amniotic Band Syndrome, a condition that occurs when the unborn baby becomes entangled in string-like amniotic bands in the womb, strangling appendages by restricting blood flow, and affecting the baby's development.

With Troy, these fibrous strings had wrapped around all 10 digits on his hands, but only the left index finger had become necrotic. Babies with ABS can lose multiple fingers and toes, even entire limbs, the pediatrician explained. Troy's issue was limited to just one finger and the rest of the impacted digits all had sensation when pinched.

"We went from feeling extremely sad to extremely lucky all within seconds," said Char, who believes her youngest son could have lost all of his fingers had he spent more time in her womb. "When they put everything in perspective you realize, 'You know what, if it's just a finger we lose, it's not the end of the world. We'll make the best of it; this will be okay.'"

Doug, on the other hand, was not taking the one-moment-at-a-time approach his wife was. The index finger on what would turn out to be Troy's dominant hand would be amputated the next day, right down to the knuckle, and Doug's thoughts fast-forwarded years down the line.

How would others treat him? Would he get teased in school? Would he be the last picked for his team? Would he be able to play the sport that had earned Doug -- and eventually his two older sons -- college scholarships?

"Would he," Doug asked himself, "be viewed as different?"

A series of surgeries to remove the bands on the rest of Troy's fingers followed in the year after the initial amputation; scars from those procedures are present today.

But emotional scarring from all the things Doug had feared have been, for the most part, absent. The family treated the missing finger as normal -- 6-year-old Ross even took his baby brother to kindergarten for show-and-tell -- and Troy followed suit.

In fact, most people hardly notice. Former Badgers coach Gary Andersen went several weeks into his first spring camp in Madison before seeing the index finger on Fumagalli's left glove flapping in the wind. Current Badgers head coach Paul Chryst, oblivious a month into his first spring camp, had it pointed out to him by one of his assistants.

For others -- even those close to Fumagalli -- it took even longer.

"It had to be a couple of months into our freshmen year," said Badgers safety Joe Ferguson, one of Fumagalli's best friends on the team. "I was kind of freaked out at first. He explained he was born like that. As time went by I watched how he did things -- how he would write, how he would do things. It's funny how he points at things; he points with his middle finger.

"We've tried to get him to talk about it, but he's made it not a big deal. It doesn't bother him at all and that's the attitude he takes. He tries to show other people that's the attitude they should take, too. I think he learned from a young age not to listen to what anyone else said about it, and didn't let it hinder him. That's why I think he's been so successful."

AS A LEFT-HANDED PITCHER on the Waubonsie Valley High School baseball team in suburban Chicago, Fumagalli gripped the ball with his middle and ring fingers and stabilized it with his thumb. He was able to get wicked movement on a ball hitters had trouble tracking.

He was a legitimate college prospect in the sport, which partly explains why big-time football programs weren't knocking his door down with scholarship offers. He missed some recruiting opportunities in football, including Wisconsin's Junior Day, because of baseball commitments.

His focus in high school was on the round ball -- he thought about a career in baseball often -- until growth plate surgery on his left elbow forced him to turn his full attention to football as a junior. At 6-foot-4, height was never an issue, but his weight hovered around 200 pounds and Big Ten recruiters had trouble imagining him filling out that lanky frame.

All the MAC schools were after him, including Northern Illinois, and other small schools like Western Kentucky had offered him full rides for football. But Fumagalli's heart was set on the power conferences, whose teams' interest in him was tepid at best.

It was all so perplexing to Fumagalli, who was all-state in baseball and football and saw first-hand how he could compete at the highest level with the likes of O.J. Howard at a high school Under Armour combine he attended in Florida his junior year.

"I told (recruiters at the Big Ten schools), 'You guys are making a big mistake here,'" said Waubonsie Valley football coach Paul Murphy. "He was playing two sports and was still growing. He had this baby face and wasn't even shaving yet; he had no hair on his legs. I said, 'You guys can't project what he's gonna look like in a year or two from now? When he's in your weight program, when he's on your food table, you can't project what this kid is gonna look like?'"

Only two large schools were offering any kind of assistance: North Carolina State put a full-ride offer on the table and Wisconsin was offering a grayshirt opportunity (delayed school entry, one year as a walk-on, three on scholarship). At the time, the Badgers had 10 tight ends on their roster and had used their

last TE scholarship on T.J. Watt, who eventually would switch to outside linebacker, a position he now plays for the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Wolfpack coach Dave Doeren, a former Badgers assistant, recruited Fumagalli hard as the head coach at Northern Illinois, and when he got the N.C. State job in late 2012, he offered Fumagalli a full ride, with the caveat that the family get back to him with an answer in seven days or the offer would be null and void.

By all accounts, it was a grueling decision for Fumagalli, who had fallen in love with the Wisconsin campus on a visit to Madison with his mother. In the end, there wasn't much of a decision to be made because six days in, the offer from N.C. State was prematurely pulled off the table.

Paul Fumagalli says Troy had just switched cell phones and Doeren, with other players he was considering waiting in the wings, was unable to reach Troy to get an answer and had to move forward without him. Meanwhile, Fumagalli had already informed the Wisconsin coaching staff he was going to accept Doeren's offer. Murphy says when he found out it had been pulled, he personally got on the phone with Coach Andersen and asked if the grayshirt deal was still available at Wisconsin. Andersen, whose son Chasen was going through a similar recruiting ordeal at the time, said the offer was still valid. "I immediately called Troy and said, 'Get your butt up to Wisconsin and have a hell of a career,'" Murphy said.

In the back of his mind, Murphy wonders how much, if anything, Fumagalli's missing finger had to do with the light recruitment of his star player. Schools already saw a kid who they weren't sure would ever be able to fill out his frame. And now they could never be certain his dominant hand wouldn't become an issue at the next level either, even though it was never one in high school.

"Nobody outwardly ever said that to me but when you look back at it, probably," Murphy said. "How can this kid play football with nine fingers, you know? When people are short-sighting other people because of a perceived disability, shame on them."

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pediatrician explained. Troy's issue was limited to just one finger and the rest of the impacted digits all had sensation when pinched.

"We went from feeling extremely sad to extremely lucky all within seconds," said Char, who believes her youngest son could have lost all of his fingers had he spent more time in her womb. "When they put everything in perspective you realize, 'You know what, if it's just a finger we lose, it's not the end of the world. We'll make the best of it; this will be okay.'"

Doug, on the other hand, was not taking the one-moment-at-a-time approach his wife was. The index finger on what would turn out to be Troy's dominant hand would be amputated the next day, right down to the knuckle, and Doug's thoughts fast-forwarded years down the line.

How would others treat him? Would he get teased in school? Would he be the last picked for his team? Would he be able to play the sport that had earned Doug -- and eventually his two older sons -- college scholarships?

"Would he," Doug asked himself, "be viewed as different?"

A series of surgeries to remove the bands on the rest of Troy's fingers followed in the year after the initial amputation; scars from those procedures are present today.

But emotional scarring from all the things Doug had feared have been, for the most part, absent. The family treated the missing finger as normal -- 6-year-old Ross even took his baby brother to kindergarten for show-and-tell -- and Troy followed suit.

In fact, most people hardly notice. Former Badgers coach Gary Andersen went several weeks into his first spring camp in Madison before seeing the index finger on Fumagalli's left glove flapping in the wind. Current Badgers head coach Paul Chryst, oblivious a month into his first spring camp, had it pointed out to him by one of his assistants.

For others -- even those close to Fumagalli -- it took even longer.

"It had to be a couple of months into our freshmen year," said Badgers safety Joe Ferguson, one of Fumagalli's best friends on the team. "I was kind of freaked out at first. He explained he was born like that. As time went by I watched how he did things -- how he would write, how he would do things. It's funny how he points at things; he points with his middle finger.

"We've tried to get him to talk about it, but he's made it not a big deal. It doesn't bother him at all and that's the attitude he takes. He tries to show other people that's the attitude they should take, too. I think he learned from a young age not to listen to what anyone else said about it, and didn't let it hinder him. That's why I think he's been so successful."

AS A LEFT-HANDED PITCHER on the Waubonsie Valley High School baseball team in suburban Chicago, Fumagalli gripped the ball with his middle and ring fingers and stabilized it with his thumb. He was able to get wicked movement on a ball hitters had trouble tracking.

He was a legitimate college prospect in the sport, which partly explains why big-time football programs weren't knocking his door down with scholarship offers. He missed some recruiting opportunities in football, including Wisconsin's Junior Day, because of baseball commitments.

His focus in high school was on the round ball -- he thought about a career in baseball often -- until growth plate surgery on his left elbow forced him to turn his full attention to football as a junior. At 6-foot-4, height was never an issue, but his weight hovered around 200 pounds and Big Ten recruiters had trouble imagining him filling out that lanky frame.

All the MAC schools were after him, including Northern Illinois, and other small schools like Western Kentucky had offered him full rides for football. But Fumagalli's heart was set on the power conferences, whose teams' interest in him was tepid at best.

It was all so perplexing to Fumagalli, who was all-state in baseball and football and saw first-hand how he could compete at the highest level with the likes of O.J. Howard at a high school Under Armour combine he attended in Florida his junior year.

"I told (recruiters at the Big Ten schools), 'You guys are making a big mistake here,'" said Waubesa Valley football coach Paul Murphy. "He was playing two sports and was still growing. He had this baby face and wasn't even shaving yet; he had no hair on his legs. I said, 'You guys can't project what he's gonna look like in a year or two from now? When he's in your weight program, when he's on your food table, you can't project what this kid is gonna look like?' "

Only two large schools were offering any kind of assistance: North Carolina State put a full-ride offer on the table and Wisconsin was offering a grayshirt opportunity (delayed school entry, one year as a walk-on, three on scholarship). At the time, the Badgers had 10 tight ends on their roster and had used their last TE scholarship on T.J. Watt, who eventually would switch to outside linebacker, a position he now plays for the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Wolfpack coach Dave Doeren, a former Badgers assistant, recruited Fumagalli hard as the head coach at Northern Illinois, and when he got the N.C. State job in late 2012, he offered Fumagalli a full ride, with the caveat that the family get back to him with an answer in seven days or the offer would be null and void.

By all accounts, it was a grueling decision for Fumagalli, who had fallen in love with the Wisconsin campus on a visit to Madison with his mother. In the end, there wasn't much of a decision to be made because six days in, the offer from N.C. State was prematurely pulled off the table.

Paul Fumagalli says Troy had just switched cell phones and Doeren, with other players he was considering waiting in the wings, was unable to reach Troy to get an answer and had to move forward without him. Meanwhile, Fumagalli had already informed the Wisconsin coaching staff he was going to accept Doeren's offer. Murphy says when he found out it had been pulled, he personally got on the phone with Coach Andersen and asked if the grayshirt deal was still available at Wisconsin. Andersen, whose son Chasen was going through a similar recruiting ordeal at the time, said the offer was still valid. "I immediately called Troy and said, 'Get your butt up to Wisconsin and have a hell of a career,'" Murphy said.

In the back of his mind, Murphy wonders how much, if anything, Fumagalli's missing finger had to do with the light recruitment of his star player. Schools already saw a kid who they weren't sure would ever be able to fill out his frame. And now they could never be certain his dominant hand wouldn't become an issue at the next level either, even though it was never one in high school.

"Nobody outwardly ever said that to me but when you look back at it, probably," Murphy said. "How can this kid play football with nine fingers, you know? When people are short-sighting other people because of a perceived disability, shame on them."

# Badgers football: Tight end Troy Fumagalli has gone from walk-on to one of the nation's best

By Jason Galloway

Wisconsin State Journal

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After watching Troy Fumagalli develop into an All-American talent and likely NFL draft pick, Waubesa Valley High coach Paul Murphy recalls a conversation with his former player when Fumagalli first left his hometown of Aurora, Illinois, to play for the University of Wisconsin football program.

The unpredictability of Fumagalli's success wasn't just that he began his career as a walk-on in 2013. He stepped into a crowd of 11 tight ends all hoping to work their way onto the field, a cluster that included four freshmen and two sophomores. Of those six, four began on scholarship at UW.

"Are you sure this is what you want to do?" Murphy asked. "There's 11 guys."

"Coach, I'm going to be the No. 1 tight end before it's all said and done," Fumagalli responded. "I have no doubt with my ability and my work ethic, I will rise to the top."

Fumagalli did that and more. After redshirting his first year on campus, he started two games as a redshirt freshman and earned a scholarship before the 2015 season, when he caught 28 passes for 313 yards and a touchdown. He started all 14 games for UW last year while leading the Badgers with 47 catches for 580 yards and two touchdowns.

UW opens the season tonight against Utah State at Camp Randall Stadium, and Fumagalli enters the final year of his college career with preseason All-American honors from the Associated Press, Sports Illustrated and ESPN among others.

It's quite a transformation from the little-known, 215-pound kid who struggled to attract Big Ten interest. Scouts had doubts he could physically compete at the highest level of college football.

Time on the line

When Fumagalli first arrived at UW, he was already a natural pass catcher and had developed a great pair of hands, which proved enough to get him on the field as a redshirt freshman. When Paul Chryst and his new staff joined the Badgers prior to the 2015 season, they required Fumagalli to do much more than just catch passes.

"They were like, 'Hey, listen, you've got to block,'" Fumagalli said. "I mean, not that I didn't before, but it was more serious."

From that moment, Fumagalli began spending 15 to 20 minutes every day on blocking — becoming more comfortable exploding out of his stance, getting used to shooting his hands and working on his first step.

"My first two years here, I didn't do any of that, to be honest with you," Fumagalli said.

It helped that by that point Fumagalli had grown an inch and gained more than 30 pounds since he was in high school. UW's new coaching staff helped him channel that physical growth into becoming a better blocker, teaching him how to keep himself in a good body position to succeed.

Instead of leaning into blocks, he learned to drop his hips and hit a defender the right way, making his progress on the squat rack or the clean rack actually usable on the field.

"I think it's night and day," UW tight ends coach Mickey Turner said of Fumagalli's progression as a blocker. "He always knew what to do, but how you do it is kind of the biggest thing when it comes to this sport, especially at this level.

"Now if he's on the line, he can block a big defensive end just as easily as he can sprint right past a linebacker or safety and go catch a ball. Then you start stacking up all those other positions where he's off the ball, he's split out, he's motioning around. You keep stacking up those little things that he does well, and it makes it tough on a defense to know how to defend it."

Fumagalli, now 6-foot-6 and 248 pounds, proved himself as a more complete tight end last season in his first year as a full-time starter and earned second-team All-Big Ten honors from the conference's coaches.

Quest to be the best

Still, he looked for new ways to evolve as a player this offseason, meeting with new defensive coordinator Jim Leonhard in order to gain a different perspective on his position.

Fumagalli said it started with him being "nosy" and asking Leonhard questions at practice before the two ultimately began watching film. The fifth-year senior learned how to better identify coverages and sought tips on beating defensive backs one-on-one.

"Throughout my career, I was beat by a lot of tight ends, so I can give him a lot of tips on how to beat safeties," said Leonhard, a former walk-on at UW who played 10 years in the NFL as a safety. "As an offensive coach, you kind of see it through their eyes. Just want to change the perspective a little bit and give him some of those things that are hard for DBs that maybe coach Turner or other offensive coaches kind of miss. It's just trying to really think, put them in a defensive player's shoes at times.

"He's very receptive to it, and at this point in his career, I think it's time for him to be able to hear that stuff and be able to apply it."

Prep star has come far

Murphy said he still gives Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz, among other Big Ten coaches, a hard time for not taking a closer look at Fumagalli when he played for Waubonsie Valley High.

No staff in the conference, not even UW's, envisioned Fumagalli enjoying this type of success at the college level.

"I kept telling people, they're making a mistake," Murphy said. "He's going to fill out. Somebody's got to take a chance. None of the other Big Ten schools even gave him a sniff, which is unbelievable to me how

they didn't do their homework on this young man because I knew from the get-go he was going to be a Big Ten tight end.

"He had the grades. He had the work ethic. He had everything you needed, except he only weighed 215 pounds as a senior in high school."

Now, with his skills refined and his body type transformed, he has a shot to play on Sundays in the NFL. He said he briefly considered leaving UW a year early to make the jump.

Murphy said Fumagalli informed him after last season that advisors viewed him as a potential fourth- or fifth-round draft pick, but staying in collegewould give him an opportunity to be the best tight end in the country.

If his preseason awards are any indication, the "best tight end in the country" label may not even be a stretch.

He still needs to earn that title with an outstanding season, but the hype continues to flow for Fumagalli.

"Preseason is preseason," Fumagalli said. "To me, it doesn't really mean too much. It's definitely an honor, but I want to make sure I'm on it at the end of the season. That's more important."

# Troy Fumagalli, Ryan Connelly among Wisconsin walk-ons who could contribute in 2017

By Jake Kocorowski

SB Nation Wisconsin

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It's a tradition that's continued to provide excellence for the Wisconsin Badgers.

Especially since the arrival of Barry Alvarez in 1990, walk-ons have contributed to the success of the UW football program in an uncanny precedent that's grown over the past 26 years. The names Joe Panos, Donnel Thompson, Mark Tauscher, J.J. Watt, Jared Abbrederis, and so many more have not just been the "glue in the foundation," but they have helped UW secure greatness in conference titles and bowl victories on the way to greater achievements.

This year's team is no different. Two team captains—tight end Troy Fumagalli and inside linebacker Jack Cichy—are former walk-ons who worked their way up the ranks, earning the highest respect from their peers. Even with Cichy's season-ending injury, there will be numerous current and former walk-ons who will play key roles on the field for this team.

We should also mention Jim Leonhard, Wisconsin's new defensive coordinator and second-year defensive backs coach. A former walk-on from Tony, Wis., Leonhard became a three-time All-American and 10-year NFL veteran. Last year, he guided the Badgers' secondary to greater accolades with the starters recording 16 of the team's 22 interceptions. It should be intriguing to watch how he adds his own spin to the 3–4 scheme brought to Wisconsin by Dave Aranda in 2013 and refined under Justin Wilcox in 2016.

### Tight end Troy Fumagalli

I'm not sure what else really needs to be said about the 6'6, 248-pound offensive target, who earned preseason, first-team All-American nods from the likes of Athlon Sports, Sports Illustrated, and ESPN, with second-team honors from other publications. He could also be a prime candidate for the Burlsworth Trophy, given to the nation's best player who started his career as a walk-on.

During the spring, tight ends coach Mickey Turner mentioned how he wanted Fumagalli—who led the team in receptions (47) with big games against LSU (seven receptions, 100 yards), Ohio State (seven receptions, 84 yards) and Western Michigan (six receptions, 83 yards, one touchdown)—to be consistent in every game. During fall camp, he appeared to be a dominant presence, showing that he can not just catch the ball but also be a factor in the run game as a blocker.

If he stays healthy, Fumagalli will etch his name onto a list of great Wisconsin tight ends (and NFL prospects), joining Owen Daniels, Garrett Graham, Travis Beckham, and Lance Kendricks.

### Inside linebacker Ryan Connelly

A prime example of being that "glue in the foundation," Connelly solidified the inside linebacking corp in 2016 after season-ending injuries to Chris Orr and Cichy in the first and seventh games of the season. He

responded to increased playing time by posting 59 tackles, seven for loss, and having huge games against LSU and Nebraska—the game earning him co-Big Ten Defensive Player of the Week honors. Though he missed the entire spring and a bit of fall camp with injuries, Connelly was listed as the starter alongside fellow redshirt junior T.J. Edwards on the first depth chart of the season.

“I think Ryan’s played really well. I think that he’s playing fast, he’s trusting himself, and I think he’s a really good football player,” head coach Paul Chryst said on Sunday. “Certainly, we think Chris [Orr] is a good football player, too, but Ryan, he’s looks comfortable and he’s played. I think that experience of playing and starting has helped him in his preparation.”

Tight end Zander Neuville

RELATED

Wisconsin’s tight ends will be the best in the Big Ten

Like Connelly, Neuville missed some time early during fall camp with an injury. However, the converted defensive lineman appears set to contribute starting Week 1 vs. Utah State. Listed on the two-deep alongside redshirt sophomore Kyle Penniston as co-No. 2 tight ends, he should receive plenty of reps in two and three-tight end sets.

It also shouldn’t be just in the run game where Neuville excels in Wisconsin’s offense. He has shown the ability to catch the ball and could be an intriguing option in the passing game.

“He’s a work horse,” Fumagalli said on Sunday. “He does all the things right, and I think he’s going to be really fun to watch.”

Kickoff specialist P.J. Rosowski

Maybe one of the unsung heroes of the 2016 squad (like all specialists, amirite?), Rosowski’s kickoffs helped set opposing offenses deep in their own territory. Fifty-one of his 79 kickoffs reached beyond the end zone, resulting in touchbacks and allowing UW’s top-10 defense to pin its ears back and attack opponents.

Though it appears Rosowski isn’t the back-up punter to Anthony Lotti (that goes to Connor Allen on the depth chart, as Rosowski is actually listed as a kicker now), he will play a huge role in keeping offenses at bay and neutralizing dangerous returners in 2017. He also recently earned a scholarship.

Others

Holder/punter Connor Allen

Allen earned the holder job last season after Drew Meyer exhausted his eligibility and he continues that chemistry with redshirt junior placekicker Rafael Gaglianone in 2017.

Remember, folks: #SpecialistsArePeopleToo

Outside linebacker Tyler Johnson

The season-ending injury to redshirt sophomore Zack Baun opens the door for Johnson, who initially started at outside linebacker before moving to inside linebacker in the spring. After that experiment, he

bumped back outside and now appears to be in position to show what he can bring to the defense as he's listed as one of the back-up 'backers.

"I think when he came here, he really hadn't play a lot of defense, period," Chryst said on Sunday.

"[He's] a guy who has a tremendous amount of respect from everyone on the team, coaches and players, because of the way he works and approaches it. So I think he's put himself in position to grow and truly earn the opportunity that will be there for him. Also at that position, when you're talking about depth, it's been [good] to get Christian Bell back into things, and it'll be interesting to see how he progresses."

On Wednesday, defensive coordinator Jim Leonhard mentioned to reporters a three-man rotation at outside linebacker between starters Garret Dooley and Leon Jacobs, with junior Andrew Van Ginkel, with Johnson contributing if needed. The Menasha, Wis., product did earn praise from one of the key cogs of the Wisconsin defense on Sunday.

"Johnny, yeah, he's been playing really well," T.J. Edwards said. "I think even last year he was a guy who progressed a lot. Even this spring, he was playing very well. This summer camp, he's made a lot of plays, a lot of good plays. He's done some really good things on special teams, so he's going to see a good amount of time on the field, and I'm excited for him. He works really hard, so he's earned it."

Safety Joe Ferguson

The redshirt senior is listed as the No. 2 strong safety behind D'Cota Dixon. Ferguson played like a ballhawk during the spring, making interceptions and plays against the run.

His impressive spring transferred into an extremely solid fall camp. If anything happens to Dixon, Ferguson should be a more-than-capable replacement. He may also again see time as the third safety on the field in multiple-tight end sets, as seen in years past.

"Joe Ferguson is a phenomenal player, a phenomenal person. I love Joe," Dixon said on Sunday. "He always brings energy. He always makes you smile. He always makes me laugh everyday, I swear this kid makes me laugh so much.

"Joe, we call him 'Eight Ball.' I feel like he's a closer. If you need anything done, Joe can get it done. He's always been a playmaker. He'll definitely contribute as well this season."

The rest: No. 2 center Brett Connors, No. 2 right guard Jason Erdmann, inside linebacker Mike Maskalunas