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FLASHBACK: STEVE ZAHURSKY, '99

It is to the roar of a crowd that former Kent State Golden Flashes Steve Zahursky, '99, charged onto the field with the Jacksonville Jaguars for another body-pounding game in the National Football League (NFL).

Although this was Zahursky's third year in the NFL, his excitement as he takes to the field is still raw. "It's special in the sense that I'm playing a sport that while growing up, I'd go to the stadium and be a supporting fan of," he said. "Now, to walk out of that tunnel and hear people screaming for me and my teammates, I know they are in the same frame of mind that I was when I was younger."

More than an interesting twist of fate and good fortune helped this Euclid, Ohio, native achieve what is an American dream for many high school and college football players – turning pro. It was also more than the doctor's pronouncement to Steven John Zahursky's parents, Betty and John Steven Zahursky, upon their son's birth that, "You already have a full-grown football player here. He weighs 10 pounds, 13 ounces."

Rather, for Zahursky, a 6'6", 305-pound guard for Jacksonville, making it as a professional football player

can be reduced to two words: hard work. And according to those who have coached Zahursky at the high school and collegiate levels, a strong work ethic is something in which he is well versed.

"He was good, but not of the caliber that would have made you predict that he would become a NFL player," said Paul Serra, '62, a coach of Zahursky's at Euclid High School. "But, he is a good worker. While working up the ranks, he continually developed and improved his talent by working hard. His work ethic really is fantastic."

"Z" was really self-motivated," agreed Charley Molnar, a former Kent State offensive coordinator. "He had the desire, toughness and work ethic necessary to be successful."

These factors were especially important after Molnar moved Zahursky out of a tight end slot and into an offensive lineman position for the Golden Flashes. To become a true competitor in what was for him a new slot, Zahursky needed to hit the weights, bulk up and get stronger, all of which he did because of his ambition and drive to succeed. He went on to start every game his last three seasons, serve as co-captain of the Golden Flashes in his senior year, and get named to the first

team in the Mid-American Conference.

"Steve has had a competitive spirit all of his life," said Betty Zahursky. "He may not have [had] a high-profile position with the (Cleveland) Browns, but true fans realize lineman are important. He takes it seriously and works very hard. He is never satisfied with his effort on the field and always strives to do better. He works hard during the off season, too."

In the spring of 1999, some of that off-season hard work culminated in the completion of his criminal justice degree at Kent State.

"Athletically, my experience at Kent State made me a stronger person because of the fact that I learned how to lose, deal with it and keep working hard. We had tough years there," said Zahursky. "But getting my degree was the best thing that happened to me at Kent State. You can't play football forever. Earning my degree was the main thing."

With that accomplishment under his belt, and the option of becoming a parole or probation officer post-NFL-career, Zahursky continues to focus on throwing the best blocks possible for the Jaguars during glamorous game days and not-so-glamorous, grueling practices, which are five days a week, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

In his spare time, Zahursky, who has three older sisters, enjoys golfing, swimming, watching movies (a favorite being *A Few Good Men*), listening to country music, playing video games and spending time with family and friends.

In July 2000, during an outing with friends at the Lonz Winery, located on a small island in Lake Erie, Zahursky was reminded to appreciate life. When a terrace at the winery collapsed, falling 15-feet, one man was killed and 75 other individuals were injured.

"My friends and I helped a number of people who were hurt," said Zahursky. "It made me realize that you won't do everything in life you hope to. That you need to appreciate life, not take it for granted and to be thankful for things that are important."

His experience also reinforced his belief never to grow complacent in his personal or professional life.

"I never feel satisfied with what I've accomplished because there is always more that I can do," said Zahursky. "I want to keep striving to do more things in life, knowing I'll never be able to do everything. I know, too, that I am blessed with the family that I have and the best job you can have – one that many people only dream of."

— L I N DANES