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LAND

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MAN OF THE MOMENT: LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCES TO PREPARE FOR THE NEXT ACT

By Sam Young (ND '10)



I experienced many defining moments during my 11 years in the NFL. In addition to meeting life-long friends in my teammates and feeling the bone-rattling roar of 80,000 fans cheering us on, I learned quickly that I needed to prepare for my life *after* football.

MOMENT OF RELEASE

That education started in my rookie year. We were in the middle of training camp. Each day I shared a ride with a teammate to and from our hotel. Then suddenly, he didn't show. Left high and dry, I asked someone at the team office if they'd seen him and was told he was headed to the airport. He had been released.

Fast forward a year and I was the one being released. Sitting in my car, I called one of my good friends and a former University of Notre Dame teammate to tell him the news. It was hitting home for me that I could be on the street tomorrow and wouldn't know what to do. His advice set me on a path for the next 10 years of my life. He said, "Sam, you are given an opportunity that not many people have – following each season, you have three months to do whatever you want. You can invest in yourself."

And with that, my off-season internships began.

I interned in corporate development, real estate development and wealth management. I strengthened my relationships by working with the NFL and business schools. I enrolled in continuing education programs. As I grabbed all these opportunities, I learned what I was good at, and what I wasn't.

I found that all these experiences scratched an itch for me – that thirst for knowledge and improving myself off the field. Yes, football was my profession, but it wasn't going to last, and I needed to put myself in a great position to succeed in my next act.

MOMENT OF ENLIGHTENMENT



OTA drills with Dallas reminded me of my day one at Notre Dame – a little fish in a big pond. But during a pass protection, I performed what I thought was a pretty good block. As I headed back to the huddle, I got a closer look at the player I had just stopped: DeMarcus Ware! I had just blocked this year's inductee into the NFL Football Hall of Fame. I thought, hey, I can do this.

Next play, I don't think I even touched him; fell flat on my face.

I grabbed DeMarcus during a break, introduced myself and asked him for his thoughts on the last period, when I blocked great during the first play and was nonexistent the second. "How can I get better?" I asked. He said something I'll never forget: "Sam, I just have to beat you one play a game, and I'm in the Hall of Fame. You give up one sack a game and you're out of a job."

In essence, DeMarcus was telling me to be analytical in assessing and refining my skills, paying attention to every detail to master my craft. Ultimately, every rep matters, and understanding that fact shaped the rest of my NFL career as well as my activities off the field.

MOMENT OF OUTREACH

Maybe it was the era I came into the NFL, but 10 years in the league seemed like the magic number to me. After a release from San Francisco, followed by interest from Las Vegas, and then COVID, retirement on my own terms in 2021 only affirmed my thinking. I headed to The Wharton School and an MBA, and as I was finishing my studies, I felt it was a good time for another internship.

I made a cold call to Jack Shields, Sr. (ND '83), founder of Project LAND, and someone who has done so much good beyond building the bottom line as a successful entrepreneur and innovator. I told him I'd love to get 30 minutes of his time, which turned into an hour, then two conversations, and finally a chair at Shields Health Innovations.

That call I made to Jack Sr. may have come more easily for me because of another piece of advice I received from Brady Quinn (ND '07) when we were both playing professionally. It was during the last game of preseason, a scary time for many players because cut days are looming, and a quarter of the roster would be sent packing. Brady said, "Sam, it only takes one team to like you. That's all it takes out of the 32."

Brady was saying put yourself out there – the worst thing that can happen is someone says no, or they simply don't respond. And you're no worse off than when you started. On the other hand, you may be surprised by how receptive people can be when you show genuine interest in learning from them and their experiences.

Through my internship with Shields Health Innovations, I learned about Project LAND and its mission. I'm thrilled to be a Class Rep, spreading the word about the tremendous resources and services LAND provides former student-athletes and managers. LAND reflects the Notre Dame ethos and the strong and lasting connections that form between teammates and alumni.

I was asked by a Notre Dame teammate recently about one of my past internships; he's interested in that same experience, and I am so excited to help him with his journey. This could be another defining moment, for us both.

Sam Young (ND '10), serves as a Project LAND Class Representative. Born in 1987, Sam played offensive tackle at the University of Notre Dame and was the first true freshman to start the season opener on the offensive line since they became eligible in 1972. He made 50 starts during his time with the Irish. Named a freshman All-American by Sporting News, as a senior, Sam helped his team finish fifth in the nation in passing and eighth in total offense, while averaging 30 points per game. At St. Thomas Aquinas High School playing left tackle, Sam didn't allow a sack in his junior or senior years, was a Florida Class 5A All-State and, in a bit of a turn, earned the state title in shot put and a school record. He was a Parade All-America first team selection, a Florida Gatorade Player of the Year, and played in the U.S. Army All-American Bowl. Sam was a sixth-round draft pick for Dallas, and played for Buffalo, Jacksonville, Miami, San Francisco, and Las Vegas over his 11-year career. After retiring in 2021, he attended The Wharton School and earned his MBA in 2023. Sam completed seven internships during his pro football off seasons and recently wrapped up his eighth with Shields Health Innovations.
