



created by current students for former students

déjà vu for a former football player

By Alexander Barton,
BS 1998

The experience of déjà vu evokes memories that seem so familiar that they could have happened in another lifetime, or even in a dream. Some think it is a look into the future, like Nostradamus' foresight or a fortuneteller's crystal ball.

Déjà vu engulfed me when I was recently invited back to Madison for the Centennial Celebration of the Department of Life Sciences Communication (LSC), my alma mater.

The centennial offered an experience that was eerily familiar. It involved retracing my steps up Bascom Hill as an undergrad, eating ice cream cones at Babcock Hall, listening to music with libations at Memorial Union -- and running out of the tunnel onto the football field at Camp Randall.

Fortunately, it did not involve streaking or an arrest, but please allow me to explain: I was a Badger football player as an LSC undergraduate when Barry Alvarez was coach.

Very few people have earned the honor of running onto the football field at Camp Randall with 80,000 Badger fans screaming at the top of their lungs. The experience has been described by a few as a combination of running with the bulls in Spain, charging a hill, or storming a beach during battle. The trick is that you have to keep up and stay with the pack, or you risk getting run over.

As an LSC alumnus and new member of the Dean's Club, I was invited by LSC Chair Jacquie Hitchon McSweeney to join her as Guest Coach for the Wisconsin/Marshall football game on September 6, 2008. The student athletes on the team nominated her as a revered professor.

As a player, being around Coach Alvarez was a unique opportunity. You literally felt like you could reach out and touch greatness. He had an aura surrounding him that was truly amazing and this transcended to his players. Running out of the tunnel behind him as a Badger football player was one of the most incredible experiences I have ever had.

On Saturdays when I was on the team, we all made our way out of the McClain Center filled with adrenalin. You could start to feel the building shake from all the people jumping up and down. Then, as you turned the corner, everyone on the team started running up the tunnel to enter the stadium. The noise of the crowd seemed palpable.

When you exit the McClain Center onto the street, there is a gauntlet of fans all screaming at each other and everyone is wearing red. "Let's go red!" is all you can hear. You are surrounded by giant athletes, and so you are forced to keep up with the pack or face getting run over.

As the entire unit of players and coaches makes its way to the field, it enters another tunnel, which slopes downward, and it becomes really dark. This is usually about the time you start to lose your breath, but at the end of the tunnel you start to see the bright green turf and beautiful sunlight, which pull you forward.

The echoes of the band playing "On Wisconsin" are deafening. As you reach the end of the tunnel, you spill out onto the field and are greeted with screams of passion from a sea of red. It takes your breath away.

On this particular Saturday, more than a decade later, I was reminded of the feeling I had the first time I ran out of the tunnel to face the Colorado Buffalos in 1995. It all came back -- it was déjà vu.

As I was running out on the field



as a Badger alumnus, I was taken back to a time when I was just a bright-eyed undergraduate wondering what the future had in store. Various thoughts and voices raced through my mind:

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As you reach the end of the tunnel, you spill out onto the field and are greeted with screams of passion from a sea of red. It takes your breath away.”

Was this just a dream or is this actually happening again? Keep running I thought...

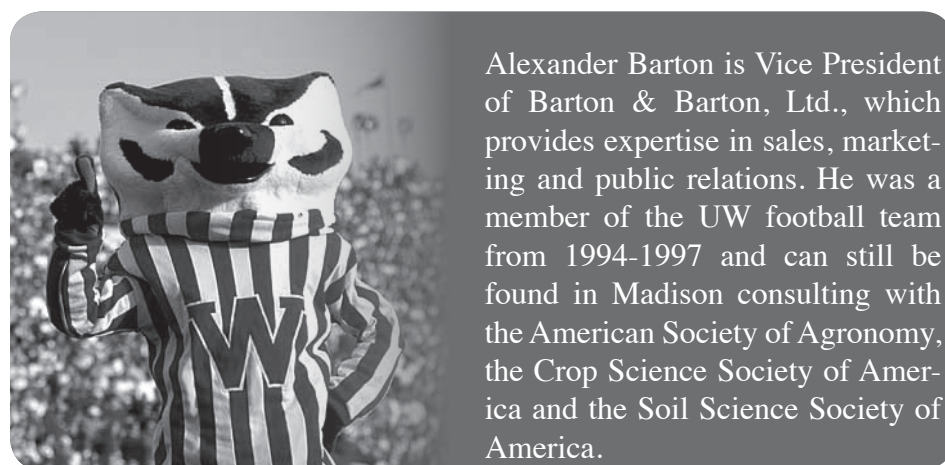
Would I be great like the fine men on the Wall of Fame? Keep breathing I thought...

Am I great now and if not, is there still time? Keep running and breathing I thought... and don't fall down.

Then, all of the sudden, it was over and I was standing on the

sidelines watching my team like so many lucky Saturdays before. I noticed the names and retired numbers of the great players of the past. I noticed the players on the field who might achieve the same recognition

one day. I also noticed how young the players were and I saw the look in their eyes which was all too familiar: aspirations of greatness. So, as I soaked all this in, more than 10 years later, as a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I had some clarity. I remain part of this great endeavor, and I wanted to scream it at the top of my lungs. I felt pride in my University and in myself. On Wisconsin!



Alexander Barton is Vice President of Barton & Barton, Ltd., which provides expertise in sales, marketing and public relations. He was a member of the UW football team from 1994-1997 and can still be found in Madison consulting with the American Society of Agronomy, the Crop Science Society of America and the Soil Science Society of America.