

## How a Kid with Autism is Defying the Odds

Zachary Blake is from the small town of Mitchell, Indiana. He is 17 and plays on the JV football team. He started every game last year and is training hard to make the varsity team.



Zach might sound like your average high school football player but he is far from it. At 18 months old he was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. The doctor told his mom, April, he would never be able to do what “normal” kids do. Since that moment Zach’s life has been about defying the odds.

Growing up Zach had difficulty making friends and faced bullying from other kids. He sat on the bench for two years in middle school because his football coach did not understand his condition. He was 12 by the time he learned to tie his shoes so memorizing plays is a consistent challenge.

Against all the odds Zach never gave up on football.

He worked hard every practice and always believed in himself. Zach’s time finally came when he tried out for the JV team and made it! He now had a coach that supported him and gave him the opportunity to succeed. His teammates say, “Zach is the hardest working player on the field”.

Zach’s “it” is to play college football for Purdue and win the Heisman. Zach is an inspiration to his teammates, friends and anyone else who hears his story. He hopes that by working hard and never giving up he can make it easier for kids coming up behind him.

Zach’s advice is, “To keep working on your dream until you succeed”.

Be a Believe in it<sup>®</sup> Athlete like Zach and go make your “it” happen!