

# Red Wolves in the NFL: Blake Grupe

ERIC FLUKE

SPORTS EDITOR

When you look at Indianapolis Colts kicker Blake Grupe on his team's roster, his college is listed as Notre Dame. However, he believes a different school should be listed there: Arkansas State University.

"It's kind of unfortunate that when you look at my name, it says Notre Dame, and I don't necessarily love that because it's pretty clear that I spent five years at Arkansas State and only one at Notre Dame," Grupe said.

Before his senior year pit stop over in South Bend, Grupe was a part of the Red Wolves, playing football in Jonesboro from 2017 to 2021.

Coming out of high school, A-State was the only Division I team that was willing to take a chance on him. That chance, however, gave them one of the greatest kickers that the football program has ever seen.

In his five years in Jonesboro, Grupe made his way to the top of the kicking record books, holding the all-time record at A-State for field goals made with 64 and standing twice in the top five for most in a single season with 19 and 20.

Even if it ended up as the only choice for him, Grupe made a home for himself during his time at A-State. He found his opportunities to grow and become a remarkable player during his time here. He said he credits much of his development

to the people he met on campus.

Grupe said former A-State long snapper Seth Cottengim and punter Cody Grace are two of the most impactful people in his career so far. He said they helped him form the mentality he needed to make it to the NFL.

"Cody definitely taught me how to be a professional and how to take your body seriously (along) with a lot of things that come with being a college football player that I still utilize in the NFL," Grupe said.

He also said a few team assistants helped guide him on the right path to the league, specifically former A-State special teams quality coordinators Bobby Dodd and Kody Schexnayder.

Unfortunately for A-State, Grupe had the opportunity to play for one of the blue blood football programs and took it as the next path in his career. Up in the Midwest, he said it was a completely different environment that he found himself in.

He became part of a program with such a deep and rich background, built from historic traditions passed down generations. Grupe said Notre Dame was much different than A-State, but still found charm in the blossoming team back at Centennial Bank Stadium.

"That's some of the things I enjoyed about both places, the tradition of Notre Dame and all of the people that care about Arkansas State, (along)

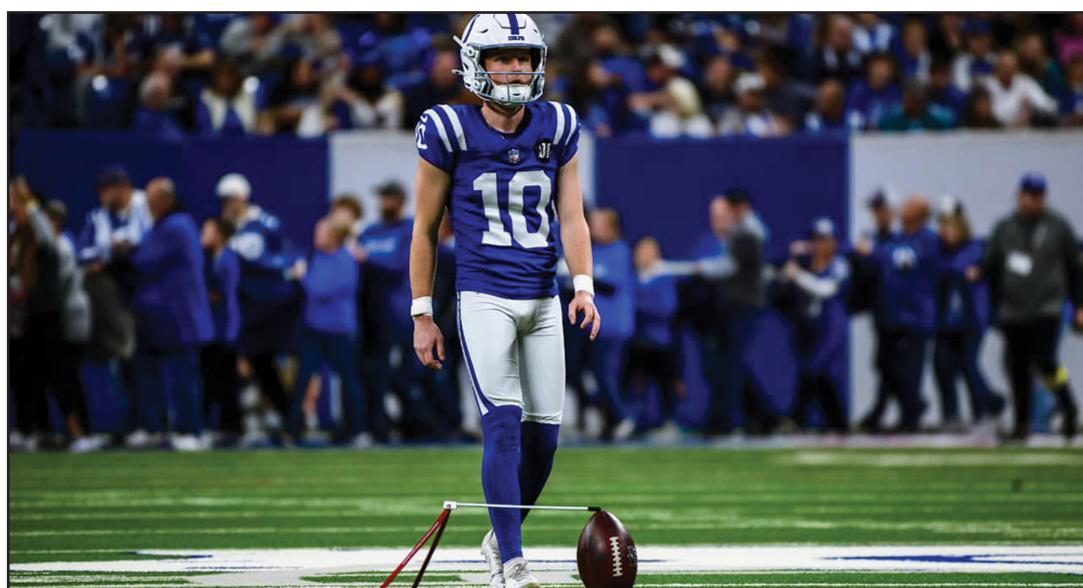


PHOTO COURTESY OF COLTS.COM  
Blake Grupe prepares to kick a field goal for the Indianapolis Colts. Grupe kicked for the Red Wolves for five years, earning the all-time record for field goals made with 64.

with the traditions that are being built even to this day at that school and within that program," Grupe said.

While in South Bend, Grupe made just as much of an impact as he did at A-State, ending his campaign there with 14 field goals made and going perfect on 49 extra point attempts.

Following his final collegiate season at Notre Dame in 2023, Grupe chose to take his shot at the big leagues.

He was ultimately not selected in the draft, but still ended up getting his spot in the NFL, signing with the New Orleans Saints shortly after.

Grupe's time in the Big Easy went well for the most part as he made 75 field goals on 94 attempts with only two extra

point misses on 98 attempts. He went on to play with the team for two years before being cut in November 2025 following a rocky performance against the Atlanta Falcons, where he only made one out of three field goal kicks.

He found himself back in Indiana in early December with the Colts, marking the most current chapter in his career.

In his short time in Indy so far, he already has broken the franchise record for longest kicked field goal, smashing the previous distance of 58 yards with his own 60-yard bomb. He has yet to miss a field goal or extra point attempt and hopes to keep that streak alive going into the 2026-27 season.

While Grupe has moved

on from Arkansas for the most part, he said he still cherishes the time he spent here. He said he loves both of his alma maters, but his heart is more in Jonesboro. He even made a pit stop through his old stomping grounds last month on a trip for the offseason.

Grupe said he enjoys reminiscing about how much the program grew during his stay. He said he recalls experiencing the shift from the older football facilities to the more recent renovations.

"I really feel like I got to see the place kind of change and transform, and grow alongside it," Grupe said.

During his time with the Saints, Grupe was lucky enough to have someone else

on the team who could relate to these memories of his alma mater: former A-State linebacker DeMario Davis.

"For a few years, me and (Davis) were the only two Arkansas State Red Wolves in the league, so that was cool. We've had a few chats about what went on when he was there, some stories, and how they did things. And we're always talking about the games and how they did that Saturday," Grupe said. "So it's cool to be able to connect with other guys that played at the same university and make those connections."

Grupe has witnessed more A-State alumni join him in the big leagues and form a bond over their school pride. Some of those names include recent Super Bowl LX participants New England Patriots guard Mekhi Butler and Seattle Seahawks wide receiver Courtney Jackson. Whether it was before or after the game, he said he would find time to meet with his fellow Red Wolves.

For the current A-State players who hope to join him in the league and share that Red Wolves brotherhood or for any A-State student with dreams for the stars, Grupe has a message.

"Continue to enjoy the moments and continue to learn, and use everything that makes Jonesboro and Arkansas State great," Grupe said. "Just run with it and continue to grow and be ready when your opportunity comes."

## Red Wolves dominate Bowling Green 91-54



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE ATHLETICS

Forward Aly Tounkara tries to move the ball to an open man.

EVIE ELLIS

SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

The Arkansas State men's basketball team turned in its most effective performance of the season in a 91-54 win against the Bowling Green Falcons, marking their largest margin of victory over a Division I opponent in 15 years.

Despite the Red Wolves' recent victory over Coastal Carolina, the team was stuck in a down streak. The Red Wolves lost five of their previous six games, struggling defensively and failing to finish plays, making this win all the more dramatic.

The Red Wolves set the tone

early off the first possession, as Guard Christian Harmon opened scoring with a three-point basket. The Falcons consistently hesitated to take shots, and even when they made it into the paint several times, the team still failed to convert.

Three minutes in, the Red Wolves hit their second three-point basket, showing a stronger start than usual.

Forward Aly Tounkara was especially noticeable during early game play, completing layups and later slamming a dunk after a Falcons' miss.

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## A-State Baseball: back and better than ever

ERIC FLUKE

SPORTS EDITOR

Now that football season has officially come to a close with the Super Bowl, baseball season is in full swing as the Red Wolves are prepared to take the work from last season and make a major push in title contention.

After a 26-27 season that ended with a first-round loss to Georgia Southern in the Sun Belt conference tournament last year, the A-State baseball team has spent the offseason learning from their mistakes.

One of the big ways the team has worked on the holes in its schemes from 2025 is through recruiting. The incoming class of 2026 signees filled up with 25 new players from both the transfer portal and high school scouting.

While having a few concerns about experience with the new guys, Head Coach Mike Silva said he still has faith that the players he chose have the potential to be as good or even better than the veterans of the team.

"Those guys are as talented as anybody in our locker room," Silva said. "They're going to get exposed probably at times, and how they handle that is going to dictate a lot of the success."

While picking up some new faces for the dugout, the long-time Red Wolves



Photo by Sooyeong Choi | Photo Editor

Pitcher/outfielder Jake Henry Williams stands ready at bat.

have made sure they don't fall behind in the fight for the starting lineup. Their work with strength and conditioning coach Zach Arn and assistant athletic trainer Justin Perreault from the offseason was noted

as a major source of their work towards increasing the standard at which they play.

Through their training, they not only improved their strength and agility, but have also found renewed energy and confidence from their offseason work.

"Their energy, enthusiasm, and excitement level to go and play, I would say even from a year ago, is higher," Silva said.

While the talent is all there for this Red Wolves team, there is the question posed of whether or not the team can make the plays to keep

their strategies together when emotions are at their peak.

"It's really going to come down to execution," Silva said. "Did you go out? Can you stay within yourself and do your job at a high level and trust it?"

When this team plays at its best, Silva said he believes this will be a resilient team that can withstand anything thrown at it. Beyond the whole, he believes each player has their own individual skill set that will be utilized in some way to work around even the most talented teams in the league.

"We feel like each player has an idea of their identity," Silva said. "I think they know that we have to continue to improve through the course of the season and we have to be able to win in a multitude of ways."

Even with the talent and strategy, this season has a bit of doubt cast onto it with uncertainty. However, Silva said no matter how this 2026 campaign turns out, it will be a test to determine where this program is in its development.

"This year is a measuring stick," Silva said. "It's not going to be easy. We're not going to go undefeated. We're going to face a lot of adversity."

What is known for this team is that the city of Jonesboro will continue to support them through thick and thin during the course of this season. Beyond that, this program is continuing to blossom into something great under the leadership of Silva and the backing of the fan base that will become a destination for recruits across the country.

"Our strength is our community. If we get a recruit in for a weekend, I like our chances," Silva said. "They get a chance to be around you guys and the people that live here because this is a really special place to live."

The Red Wolves baseball team will hope for the community to show out this weekend for their season opener series against the Stony Brook Seawolves, where they plan to put on full display the fruits of their offseason progress.