

## Former Viking Birk Talks “Faith and Football” in Rochester

(ABC 6 News) – Over the years, the Minnesota Vikings have had no shortage of Pro Bowl football players suit up in the purple and gold—one of those former greats was in Rochester on Tuesday night.

Super Bowl XLVII Champion, 2011 Walter Payton Man of the Year recipient, and former Vikings Pro Bowl center Matt Birk spoke at Rochester Lourdes high school. Focused on “faith and football,” Birk was also promoting his book, *All-Pro Wisdom: The 7 Choices That Lead to Greatness*.

“Sports are a great thing. It brings people together, almost unlike anything else in society,” Birk said. “There’s such an opportunity (in sports) to help kids develop physically, emotionally, and even spiritually.”

Birk played for the Vikings from 1998-2009 and ended his career with the Baltimore Ravens. In his career, Birk was a four-time 1st-Team All-Pro selection, and a six-time Pro Bowler—accolades which help him help others.

“In the NFL, I learned so much about life. Not everybody gets that opportunity,” Birk said. “I just thought, when I was done with my career, what good is it for me to keep all this knowledge and wisdom to myself. I just wanted to share it with people.”

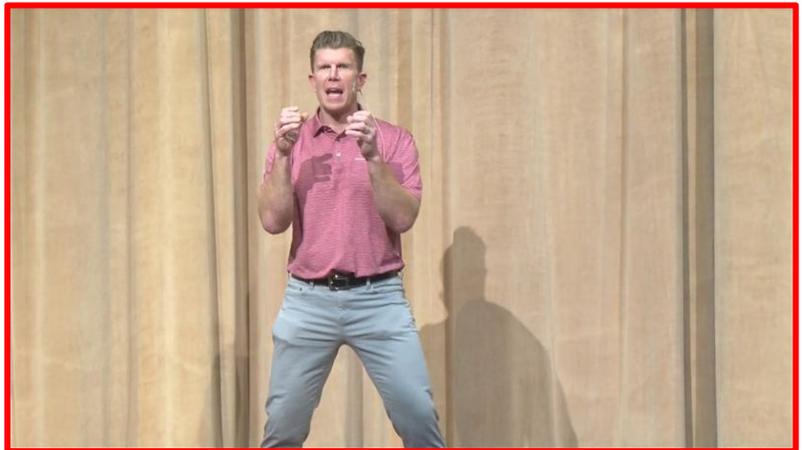
Before speaking at Lourdes, Birk even had some time to offer his opinion on the current state of the Vikings—specifically, their offensive line issues, where they had numerous issues in 2018, and have a lot of starting jobs up for grabs.

“I don’t know how much more they can do. I don’t know how much money they have or if there is anyone else out there worth getting, but they certainly need to find more than one lineman through the draft,” Birk said. “You never know what’s going to happen throughout the course of the season. It’s open competition for a lot of spots. Competition can bring the best out in people, and you’ll see who rises to the challenge.”

Birk played collegiate football at Harvard, but he’s a St. Paul native, playing high school football

at Cretin-Derham Hall. Birk said he couldn’t specifically pick out his favorite memory as a Viking, because growing up, he had a lifetime of memories.

“To be able to play 11 years for the team you grew up watching, that doesn’t happen. I feel so blessed,” Birk said. “Noon and 3:00 home games, we’d be out in the parking lot on a beautiful fall



afternoon. My mom and dad had pretty epic tailgate parties after games, especially after wins.”

“I would just be enjoying the moment with my family and friends, those who helped me get to that point and cared about me, whether I played football or not. To be able to bring those people along for the ride, that was special.”

On Tuesday night, while speaking to mostly high school coaches and athletes, Birk’s message to the audience was to “enjoy the moment” while it’s there.

“You will never have more fun than you do playing high school sports. I don’t care if you go on to play in college, or if you’re fortunate enough to play professionally, it’s a special time,” Birk said. “I think, nowadays, a lot of times we are getting so caught up in ‘am I going to play beyond high school,’ and ‘what can I do to do that and get recruited’. I just want to tell them to just enjoy it.”

“Enjoy this moment, because you’re never going to have it again, you’re never going to have more fun.”