

THE ATAVUS TACKLE SYSTEM

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



## CUSTOMER STORY

### OVERVIEW

Michigan State's defense rebounded from a poor 2016 with a renewed focus on defensive fundamentals. Head coach Mark Dantonio's commitment to cutting edge solutions led him to hire Atavus. The next season, Michigan State's on-field results improved while simultaneously reducing the amount of unnecessary head contact by players.

### CHALLENGE

The 2016 season was unexpectedly dark for head coach Mark Dantonio. Michigan State missed a bowl game for the first time in his decade-long tenure at the Big Ten Conference school. His normally exceptional defense slid to the middle of the college football pack in efficiency. The Spartans finished with one conference win.

To get Spartan football back on track, the coaching staff went in seek of additional methods of helping players understand priorities and execute better.

### SOLUTION

Michigan State football hired Atavus to provide advanced analytical evaluations of their football team and consulting on drills to become a better tackling defense. Atavus reviewed film from every game 2016, identifying points of emphasis for the 2017 season. When the season started, Atavus distributed weekly reports and grades on each player's tackling performances.



### HIGHLIGHTS

- Improved Defensive Efficiency ranking from #83 to #17
- Reduced Yards-After-Contact by 8.4%
- Decreased unnecessary head contact by 22%



***“If you can't tackle, your football career is done. If you can't tackle in high school you will not play in college. If you can't tackle in college you will not play in the NFL.”***

*– Mark Dantonio, Head Football Coach, Michigan State University*

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### RESULTS

Michigan State's defensive performances improved broadly and dramatically from the 2016 season. The Spartans finished with a top 20 ranking in defensive efficiency (vs a ranking of #83 a year before), and a top 10 ranking in total defense. The Spartans decreased preventable yards allowed before initiating contact by 45%, down from 219 yards to 120 yards, and allowed 8.4% fewer yards after contact.

More importantly, the Spartans went 10-3 and blew out Washington State in the Holiday Bowl.

Atavus allowed the coaching staff to be more efficient, providing analytical grades based on film and a focused, personalized regimen of drills and coaching technique.

Dantonio praised Atavus' reporting for helping his staff identify areas that led to the improvement. "Do our guys have a good idea of what they're supposed to be doing? I think they do. We get a very detailed report every week as to who did what tackling," said Dantonio. "There's three phases. You have evaluation of route to the ball, you have contact phase and you have strike timing. We've really researched that and tried to develop our style," he added.

It also helped Michigan State become a safer football team.

While dangerous tackling increased across the Football Bowl Subdivision—indicated by a 100% increase in targeting ejections from 2014 to 2016--Michigan State adopted the Atavus approach of leading with the shoulder and immediately saw positive results. The team decreased the number of unnecessary head contact instances by 22%, from 142 in 2016 to 111 in 2017.

**"WE WANT TO BE ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF EVERYTHING THAT WE DO. THAT'S THE WAY TO IMPROVE. WE BROUGHT IN ATAVUS. THEIR JOB IS TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WILL MAKE YOU A BETTER AND SAFER TACKLING TEAM. IT'S CUTTING EDGE."**

*- Mark Dantonio, Head Football Coach,  
Michigan State University*



### ABOUT ATAVUS

ATAVUS combines analytics and world class coaching philosophy to measure and improve the performance of players, coaches, and teams. Located in Seattle, Atavus partners with local and national agencies to create more effective and safer contact sports.