



Autzen Stadium is usually filled with chants of "Choo-Choo" when Young takes the field, and he rarely disappoints his fans. His stature — 5-6, 160 — is something that Young feels helps him in returning a kick. "In a way I think it's an advantage being small because a smaller man is usually quicker and more elusive."



Photos by David Corey

Return of the Ducks

Brown, Young risk their necks every week as return men

By PAUL DANZER
Of the Emerald

The punt goes zooming high into the air above the stadium. Fifty yards downfield, a lone player waits for the ball to come back to earth.

As the rumbling of approaching opponents shakes the ground he stands on, the receiver gathers the ball in and heads up the field.



Steve Brown

To be a return man on a football squad, it takes a combination of speed, guts and intelligence. It also takes a little craziness.

Oregon is blessed to have two of the best in the Pacific-10 Conference in this specialty — Steve Brown and Choo Choo Young. They spend their Saturdays getting their kicks and taking their licks at the receiving end of kickoffs and punts.

"I don't think about how crazy it is,"

says Young, whose specialty is punts, and averages 10 yards per return. "But I do think it takes a certain breed."

"It takes a lot of courage, knowing that when you're carrying the ball there are 11 crazy men coming after you," says Brown, who plays defensive back when he's not returning kickoffs. He has a 27.3 yard kickoff return average after eight games.

"I didn't think about it much at first, but it takes a lot of courage to go out there," says Young, who also carries the ball from the tailback position.

But being courageous doesn't mean they never have second thoughts about returning kicks. According to Young, there was apprehension when he first started returning kicks in college.

"I was really scared in my first game against Stanford last year, and the apprehension lasted through about half the year," he said. "I wasn't so much scared of getting hit as I was of making a big mistake."

Brown's second thoughts have come more recently. "At Arizona State I was wondering why I was doing it. I took a couple of the hardest hits I've ever felt."

Injuries are all too common in this dangerous vocation, but Brown and Young have been lucky on the return end of things. Brown has survived his bruising hits, and the worst injury Choo Choo has received from a return is a cut finger.

But the risk of injury is always present. And while neither Young or Brown dwell on the subject, they do

acknowledge the inherent risks of their job. Young feels there is a greater chance of injury when he is returning kicks than there is on a standard running play, even though his past history doesn't agree. Brown too knows he has more to lose returning kicks than he does defending passes.

How does a return man overcome the apprehension before a kick? "When I line up my entire concentration is on the kicker," explains Brown. "I try to think of the positive things that I can do on the return. I've never dealt on any negatives. And just before the kick my adrenaline really gets me going."

Although there is a plan of attack when the special teams take the field, things don't always work out as they are designed to, and that can leave a kick returner up a creek without the proverbial paddle.

"You tend to have a feeling of where people around you are as you're going forward," says Brown, explaining the search for daylight in such situations. He describes the feeling as a sixth sense which can often

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