



Photo by Mark Pynes

Hicks kicking it up

1981 average Duck punt — 35 yards
Hick's 1982 average — 40.6 yards

By Steve Turcotte
Of the Emerald

Kevin Hicks, the Oregon punter, may not exactly have known what he was stepping into when he signed to become a Duck last spring.

Little did Hicks know, but Oregon football fans had high expectations of Duck punting this year after last year's disappointing effort.

"What I heard when I got here was that the fans started booing the punters last season," said Hicks, a junior from Carpinteria, Calif. "I was told that if I didn't punt well I was going to get booed also."

But fortunately for Hicks, and for the Ducks, the chorus of boos which echoed through Autzen Stadium last year for the punting, have been replaced by cheers and even a standing ovation.

That's right, a standing ovation for a punter.

With the problems that the Duck's offense has undergone this year, there has been little to cheer about. And against Fresno State, when Hicks boomed a punt, he received a standing ovation from many of the Duck partisans.

"I looked up after that punt and saw the crowd standing and cheering, it was great," admitted Hicks. "I wanted to go back out there and punt again. That really got me pumped up."

Hicks' credentials at the junior college level are what earned him his ticket to Oregon as a punter.

As a sophomore at Santa Barbara Junior College, Hicks finished fifth in the nation in punting. In addition, Hicks played quarterback for two years at Santa Barbara. He averaged 43.7 yards a kick his sophomore year which was enough to impress the Ducks coaches into giving him a try.

"We needed immediate help at punter," said Oregon coach Rich Brooks. "One of the priorities after last year was to get help in punting. We looked at other junior college punters but Kevin was fifth in the nation and he liked us and we liked him."

It was obvious from the moment that Hicks stepped on the field for the Ducks last spring that he was going to be an asset the Ducks were going to need.

"We could tell at spring ball that he was going to be a good one," Brooks said. "He has really improved since then."

Hicks' steady improvement began during his junior college years when he began kicking regularly. Although he didn't kick his freshman year at Santa Barbara, the improvement during the course of his sophomore year was evident, even though he was handling the quarterbacking chores simultaneously.

"I didn't punt my freshman year because we had another punter already," Hicks explained. "I wanted to concentrate on quarterback anyway. Sophomore year I punted because the other guy quit the team."

"Things just started happening. I had a 47-yard average for the first six games until I broke my ribs. I was really enjoying punting."

Hicks finished with the 43-yard average, despite the rib injury. He was named all-conference, all-State and All-American as a punter. It was quickly becoming obvious that his career was going to be as a punter and not as a quarterback.

So Hicks packed up his credentials and came to Oregon, ready to put the boobirds on the sidelines.

"I came up here to punt the ball as best as I can," Hicks said. "I have been working very hard. I think things can get even better. I know they can. I want to improve all the time."

The improvement is growing clearer each game.

After four games, Hicks has a 40.6-yard average, which is already head and shoulders above last year's Duck team average of 35.0 yards per kick. Hicks' longest punt has been of some 55 yards and he has even managed to put a few out of bounds, pinning opponents deep in their own territory.

But according to Brooks, and Hicks himself, there is still plenty of room for improvement.

"I need to increase my hang time more," said Hicks. "I also need to start putting more distance on my kicks. I think it will come with time."

"I think there is excellent potential in Kevin," Brooks said. "He still needs more technique changes, though. He needs to get the ball higher and farther."

"He swings across his body when he kicks too much instead of across the ball. But he is constantly working on it."

Hicks has some established goals for his kicking this year. Not only does he wish to improve week after week, he wants to be competitive in the Pac-10 punting race, as well.

"I want to be the Pac-10 punting leader this year," Hicks stated. "Mike Black from Arizona State is real tough, though. He will be tough to beat, but I think I can."

"I just want to say at the end of the season that I improved."

As a punter, Hicks is forced into kind of an unusual situation. On one hand, he is the punter and wants to go into the game and prove he can get the job done. But on the other hand, he wants to stand on the sidelines and watch the offense take the ball into the end zone.

"I think I should be punting about four or five times a game," said Hicks, who has averaged seven punts a game so far this year. "I want to punt, sure. But I also want to win games."



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