

Hicks wants to live the pro punter's life?



Photo by Dave Kao

Oregon senior Kevin Hicks hopes Saturday's Civil War game against Oregon State won't be his last as a punter.

By Steve Turcotte
Of the Emerald

What has been an enjoyable hobby for Kevin Hicks soon may turn into a full-time job.

While Hicks, the senior punter for Oregon's football team, has one eye cast on Saturday's season-ending clash with Oregon State University, he has another eye cast on what may lie ahead afterwards.

The Civil War game marks the end of his collegiate playing career; Hicks hopes it will not end his football career.

"I would like to play pro football," says Hicks. "I would like to think I have a chance at playing in the pros."

With his statistics, Hicks may get that chance. Until last week, the Ducks' punter was the leading kicker in the Pac-10. After a sub-par game against Stanford University, he stands third in the conference with a 41.9 average. He barely trails Glen Harper of Washington State University (42.2) and Kevin Buenafe of UCLA (42.1).

"I have been working for the conference title all year," says Hicks. "Last year was getting to know punting and how to compete in the Pac-10, but this year I have felt all along that I have a chance to win."

Last year, after transferring from Santa Barbara Junior College, Hicks averaged a respectable 39.6 yards per punt for the Ducks and finished seventh in the conference. This season, he has been among the league leaders — he was averaging 42.2 yards a kick before dropping off against Stanford.

Hicks and Oregon coach Rich Brooks feel his improvement stems from a summer and fall of dedicated kicking.

"There has been an awful lot of improvement from Kevin just this season," says Brooks. "He is more consistent and is kicking into the short end of the field."

"I think I have more control of my kicks this season — I can place the ball where I want to, now," says Hicks.

When Hicks can't kick, he's shown he can run. Against UCLA, he scrambled 23 yards out of punt formation for a first down.

Punting is a three-pronged endeavor. Accuracy,

hang time and distance are factors a top-flight punter must possess.

And with Hicks, the Ducks have all three rolled into one. Hicks has kicked more than 15 punts out of bounds inside opponents' 20-yard line, has a hang time of about 4.5 seconds and can boom the long ball, as evidenced by a school-record 71-yard boot against University of Arizona last season.

"His hang time has been very good this season," agrees Brooks. "He approaches 4.8-4.9 once a game, and that is the kind of hang time the pros kick at."

"He has also put other teams deep in their own territory."

As a Pac-10 punter looking for a niche in professional football, Hicks is not alone. University of Washington's Jeff Partridge, fourth in the Pac-10 last season, kicked for the Los Angeles Express of the United States Football League while last year's conference champ, Mike Black of Arizona State, has found a home with the Detroit Lions.

Hicks want a professional punting job too, be it Canadian or American football.

And according to Gil Brandt, the Dallas Cowboys' vice-president for player personnel, he may find one.

"I saw him last week — we are quite enthused about him," says Brandt, known as one of professional football's best scouts. "It wasn't exactly a punter's field at Stanford, so it was hard to tell, but from what I hear and what I saw he has some talent."

However, kicking in the National Football League isn't all glamour. Punters often have a packed suitcase in one hand and an airplane ticket in the other. Ray Guy of the Los Angeles Raiders, who leads the NFL in punting on a yearly basis, has found the good life in pro ball. His is the exception though, to a life of trades, waivers and cuts.

"Kickers bounce around all the time in professional football," admits Brooks, "but I think Kevin is a definite pro prospect. He hasn't even realized his full potential. Once he does, he is going to be an outstanding kicker."

Hicks feels there is a spot in the big time if he can find the right spot with the right team.

"I'll go anywhere," says Hicks, "if someone gives me a chance."

Hill favored in NCAA chase

The Oregon men's cross country team, fresh off a victory at the District 8 Championships last weekend, travels to Bethlehem, Pa., Monday for the NCAA Championships and a chance to better its 10th place of a year ago.

Oregon should be in the team title chase, but Arkansas, University of Texas-El Paso and defending champion Wisconsin will be the teams to beat. Oregon assistant Coach John Gillespie feels the Ducks could be a factor or an afterthought come Monday.

"If we run well, we'll be up there," says Gillespie, "but we could run our best race possible and not place high."

History, however, will be on the Ducks' side. Oregon has run in the NCAA meet 14 of the last 17 years, winning four team titles and crowning four individual champions.

All-American Hill has been labeled one of the favorites in the individual race.

"Jim should be a bonafide candidate for the individual title," says Oregon coach Bill Dellinger.

Dellinger will stick with the same team that he used in the Pac-10 and District 8 meets. Four Ducks — Hill, Brad Simpson, Harold Kuphaldt, and Matt McGuirk — return from last year's NCAA team. Dellinger has added added junior Mike Blackmore and Chris Hamilton, who are running second and third on the team, and Dan Nelson to this year's team.

University of Arizona and UCLA will join Oregon as Pac-10 representatives in the meet, which is scheduled to start at 11 a.m. Eastern time.

This one ran away from home

By Rich Skeen
Of the Emerald

Anyone who has had to transfer schools knows the process can be difficult. But for Oregon cross country runner Chris Hamilton, transferring was as easy as a one-mile warmdown.

Hamilton left the University of Portland — where he set school records in both the 5,000 and 10,000 meters — because he wanted to take cross country and track more seriously.

"I wasn't happy at Portland," says the Parkrose High School product. "The school just didn't have the commitment to track that I did."

"If a distance runner is going to be a success, he's got to come to Oregon," explains Hamilton.

Yet, despite winning the state 1,500 title his senior year, Hamilton was not heavily recruited by the Ducks. Still, he felt he could compete at the major col-

lege level.

Then, times of 13:56 in the 5,000 and 29:13 in the 10,000 (good for 19th place at the 1982 NCAA Championships) at UP caught Oregon's interest.

Hamilton sat out last year (an NCAA requirement for transferring athletes), but once he became eligible, he wasted no time.

In his first cross country meet, he finished second at the Garrie Franklin Memorial. He finished 10th at last Saturday's District 8 Championships after an injury-hampered 24th at Pac-10s.

Running for a team, and a coach, that emphasizes cross country and track leaves Hamilton feeling fine.

"I'm delighted (to be at Oregon)," says Hamilton. "I consider coach (Bill) Dellinger the best distance coach in the country and my running is improving every week."

Hamilton leaves no doubt that Dell-

inger is the reason he is in Eugene.

"He's a real authority on coaching," says the Oregon junior. "I've never doubted any of his methods."

A computer science major, Hamilton is especially excited about running in Oregon's colors.

Although he isn't apt to set many records at Oregon, Hamilton figures to be a big factor for the Ducks at Monday's NCAA Cross Country Championships. His 10th at District 8 made him Oregon's third finisher, and that made a prophet out of Dellinger, who said, "I think Hamilton can be one of our top three runners by the end of this season."

In the spring, Hamilton is itching for high finishes in the NCAA 5,000 and 10,000 races. For now though, Hamilton is happy to be at a school that's all business when it comes to cross country and track.

Women cagers in tourney

Oregon's women's basketball team opens its season this afternoon with a game against San Francisco State University in the three-day Cal Poly-SLO Straw Hat Classic.

The Ducks are considered the favorite in an eight-team double elimination tournament, which includes the likes of San Jose State University, University of California-Davis and University of Pacific.

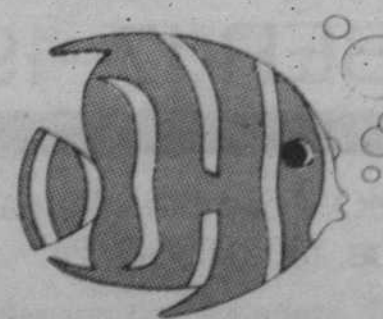
The Ducks, 15-14 and 8-4 in the Nor-Pac Conference last year, will rely on All-American hopeful Alison Lang for much of their offense. Oregon coach Elwin Heiny feels freshman redshirt Laurie Tennant should give the Ducks a boost as well.

The tournament final is set for Saturday at 8 p.m., after which a Straw Hat Classic all-star team will be named.

Badminton flies

Oregon's Club Sports Badminton team fared well in tournament play at University of California-Davis last Saturday, winning several singles titles.

Aloysius Tan won men's Class C singles competition, and Mitsuko Uto was a victor in women's C singles.



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