

Sports

Saturday's performance ends kicker's slump

By Craig Harris
Emerald Sports Reporter

It just took a bit of confidence and a big play situation to turn Oregon's kicker Kirk Dennis from a goat into a hero.

Dennis banged three field goals, the longest 53 yards, and connected on both extra point attempts to propel Oregon past Washington in front of 44,421 frenzied fans in Autzen Stadium last Saturday.

To add icing on the cake, the Pacific-10 Conference named him special team player of the week.

And although things are going well for the 5-foot-11-inch junior, until the Washington game Dennis took his share of knocks from the media by only hitting two of his first five field goal attempts.

During this time, Dennis said his faith helped him.

"In the Word there are all kinds of Psalms and Proverbs that were supporting, but, it didn't just apply to football, it applies to the classroom and life in general," Dennis said.

He also added that he just

needed a chance.

"I always felt like I was producing for the team, but going two for five doesn't sound too good. I knew I had the ability to make the big plays, I just needed the opportunity," Dennis said.

That opportunity came right before the half after Washington failed on a fourth-down conversion and the Ducks marched to the Huskies' 20, setting up Dennis' 37-yard field goal.

"There is no question he was instrumental in the win," Oregon coach Rich Brooks said. "We could have been down 17-14 before the half, but we got a few big plays and he kicks one into the wind to give us great support going into the locker room."

A disgruntled Huskies coach, Don James, agreed.

"He played a big role and did his job to keep them in the game and put us in negative situations. He gave his team a big lift and his 53 yarder put us in a hole," James said.

His third-quarter rocket kick is only four yards shy of the school record held by Roy Geiger, a mark Brooks thinks



Photo by John Guistina

In Saturday's game against Washington, Dennis kicked three field goals, one a 53-yarder.

will be shattered before Dennis' tenure is over.

"He has great confidence in himself and the ones he missed weren't necessarily his fault. He has great ability, and he is a heck of a kicker. He showed it to everybody on Saturday," Brooks said.

Does he have a chance to make it into the big leagues?

"I think he does, but he has a lot to prove this year and next. He needs to get a little more range on his kickoffs and he just needs to keep doing what he is doing on his field goals and he'll be fine," Brooks said.

Although the praise is gratifying and the pressure situations are exciting, Dennis said his most significant achievement came in the summer of 1985 when he traveled with Youth With a Mission through six European countries.

"We were in Prague, Czechoslovakia and Randers, Denmark doing crusades with Luis Palau (an evangelist) and there were more than 50,000 people each week at the rallies. We also went to Poland, Austria, and East and West Germany. It was the biggest highlight of my life. But, going to Ohio State was pretty fun too," Dennis said with a laugh.

After the crusade ended, Dennis' traveling still didn't stop. He flew nine hours back to Eugene and went straight to the

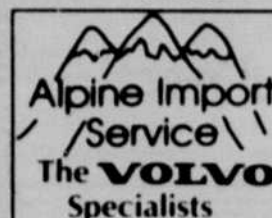


Photo by Rene Williams

Junior placekicker Kirk Dennis finds rewards off the field as well as on, where he's shaken an early slump.

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