

◀ GRID PROFILE ▶

Thompson adjusts to punting, after starting as a placekicker

By Robert Weber
Emerald Sports Reporter

At first glance, Tommy Thompson appears to be just another freshman trying to get used to college life, but this 5-foot-10, 160-pound freshman is not your average college newcomer.

You see, Thompson not only makes all of his classes, but he has also found time to punt for Oregon's football team. Heading into this weekend's game against Arizona State, Thompson is ranked 15th nationally with a 41.96-yard average.

Entering this season, Oregon Coach Rich Brooks knew that, once again, one of the team's weak spots would be the punting game. After using four punters in the past four years, Brooks was looking for somebody to step forward and fill the large gap left by Marc Penso's graduation.

"After Penso graduated last year," Brooks said, "we were left with a large void. Things didn't look real good during spring practices."

Senior Liam Hayes and sophomore Ben Rough were expected to be the top contenders for the spot, but Thompson simply outperformed them once he arrived on the scene and doesn't look ready to give up his starting position.

"It was close the first two weeks," Brooks said, "but he was consistently better than Hayes."

Thompson came to Oregon with the idea of claiming the punting job, but he knew he would have to work hard over the summer to prepare himself.

"When I came to Oregon I knew that punting job was open," Thompson said, "so I spent the entire summer working on my punting game."

While at Lompoc High School in Southern California, Thompson set state records for extra points with 63, and points scored with 99, as a placekicker. He was recruited throughout California and all over the West Coast as a placekicker but knew that he would probably have to punt the first year wherever he went.

"Placekicking is my first love," Thompson said. "The only reason that I punted in high school was because my coach made me."

Thompson was recruited as a placekicker after his senior season and many California

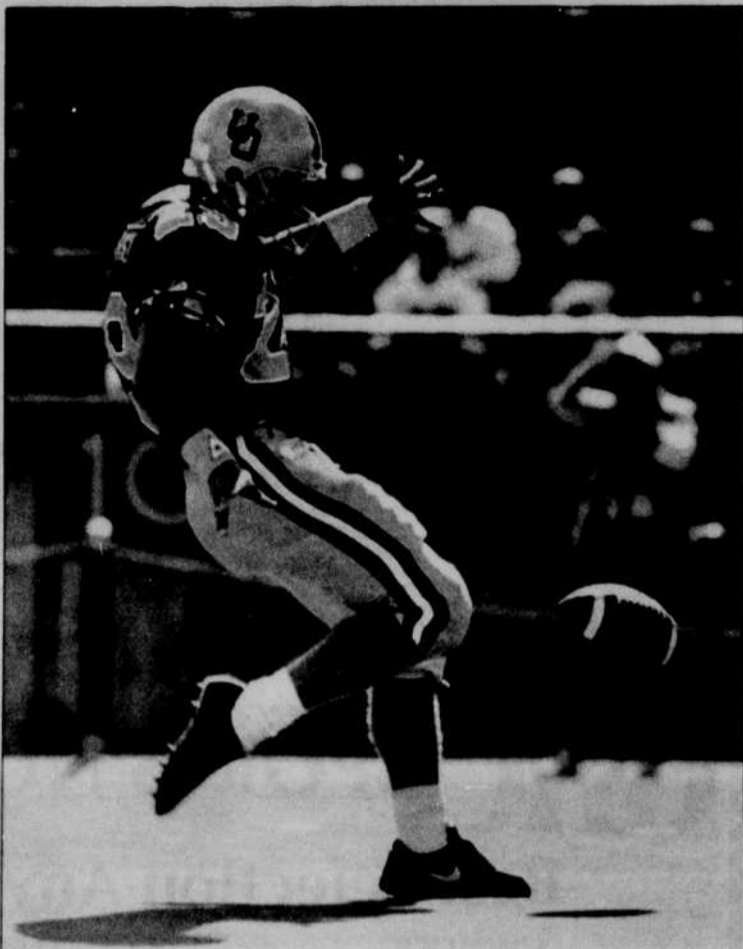


Photo by Eric Evans

Oregon punter Tommy Thompson has gone from someone who hated punting to one of the best punters in college football.

schools showed some interest in him. After thinking about going to UCLA or USC, Thompson reconsidered and decided to accept a scholarship to Oregon.

"I seriously thought about going to UCLA because they had no kickers or punters on their depth chart," Thompson said, "but UCLA and USC don't offer scholarships to kickers until they earn the starting spot. Even though I thought I could win the job at UCLA, I couldn't take a chance, so I decided to come to Oregon and try to win the punting job."

In the past year, he has gone from somebody who was being forced to punt to being ranked nationally and playing for a Pacific-10 school.

The Ducks have played in some big games already this year, putting a lot of pressure on somebody who just nine months ago was kicking field goals in high school, but Thompson says that he feels more pressure in practice than he does during the games.

"Any punter has a lot of pressure on them with Coach

Brooks," Thompson said. "I think there is more pressure in practice than there is in a game."

"In practice Coach Brooks is always there by you and if the punt isn't right then he's going to get on you," Thompson added. "In the game he's not right there next to you so I feel a lot

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