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Rookie music to Brooks' ears

■ **NFL:** Rookie kicker Steve McLaughlin's guitar is liked around camp

ST. LOUIS (AP) — The St. Louis Rams' new kicker is a natural for that NFL hazing exercise where the rookies are forced to sing their college fight song.

Steve McLaughlin led an alternative rock band called Pet the Fish at the University of Arizona. He brought a strong leg, and a guitar, to training camp.

"It started off as just a hobby," McLaughlin said. "It surprised me how a lot of people took it more seriously than I did. I never let it get in the way of football."

Since NCAA rules prohibit scholarship athletes from holding a paying job during the school year, the band was limited to playing three charity events. But Pet the Fish recorded a demo tape in May for several interested record companies, and a compact disc could be released soon. McLaughlin likens the band's sound to that of early REM or U2.

"I don't like to categorize it, but it seems to appeal to everybody," McLaughlin said.

Even coach Rich Brooks doesn't mind.

"It's nice that he's got some other talents," Brooks said. "He's a pretty good golfer, too."

McLaughlin's kicking certainly caught the attention of the Rams, who took him in the third round of the draft. They've never taken a kicker higher.

They also released veteran Tony Zendejas before training camp, removing the competition. Then they signed McLaughlin to a four-year, \$1.1 million deal. For the clincher, the only other kicker they invited to camp, Steve Starceovich, was cut on Sunday.

"It's a great opportunity for me," said McLaughlin, who also punted in college. "They took me in the third round and when somebody does that it's a good compliment and I just need to show them they were right."

The biggest difference between McLaughlin and Zendejas is leg strength. McLaughlin was 7-for-11 from 50 yards or beyond in his college career, while Zendejas was 1-for-5 beyond the 40 last season with a long of only 43 yards.

McLaughlin kicked a 54-yarder last year, and once booted a 72-yarder in pregame warmups.

He's accurate, too. Last season he set a school record by going 23-for-29, scored 95 points, and won the Lou Groza Award as the nation's top kicker.

Now that he's in the pros, McLaughlin believes it's going to get even easier. The hash marks are set wider in college,

making for more difficult angles.

Another plus is once the \$260 million domed stadium is complete, probably in time for the fourth game of the season Oct. 22 against San Francisco, he'll be kicking indoors in home games. That means no wind variables, no gusts knocking a perfect attempt off line.

"The other guys hate it, they get scratched up and burned," McLaughlin said, referring to the artificial turf required indoors. "But as far as a kicker goes, it's a dream."

McLaughlin said the biggest adjustment will be kicking for money.

"It's just the mental part, the adjustment to the NFL, those sorts of pressures," McLaughlin said. "You're not kicking for fun anymore, you're trying to put food on people's tables."

He said he long ago prepared himself for occasional failure.

"Nobody does the job perfectly, nobody," he said. "You have to understand you're going to miss some, and you've got to make the decision early on in your career so you can deal with the pressure."

And the expectations.

"Hey, kicker in the third round, I know what that means," he said. "But when there's three seconds left and you go in there and nail it, you love the kicker."

Emeralds' woes don't stop Trippy

■ **BASEBALL:** His team may be struggling, but this steady center fielder certainly isn't

By Mark McTyre
Sports Editor

The Eugene Emeralds have had a disappointing week and a half, winning only 3 of 12 games and dropping from 4½ to 8½ games behind Southern Division-leading Portland. But it hasn't stopped center fielder Joe Trippy from being the consistent ball player that he has been all year.

For the season, Trippy is batting .326 in 40 games played, with 10 doubles, a home run, 21 RBI and 15 stolen bases. Within the numbers have come some pretty important hits — his last one being on July 28.

Trippy, who was getting the night off, was called upon by manager Paul Runge to pinch hit for Jason Shy in the bottom of the ninth to lead off the inning. With his team trailing 6-4, the speedy Trippy took advantage of an error by Bellingham's center fielder Alex Morales and stretched what was to be a double into a triple. He would later score as his team went on to win in 10 innings, 7-6.

The fan favorite and his teammates will return to Civic Stadium Thursday, from a five-game series in Everett, to face division foe Southern Oregon.



Joe Trippy, one of the Ems' best offensive weapons, quickly became a fan favorite in Eugene because of his great play and his demeanor with the crowd.

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