

ROUGHING THE KICKER: Martinez focuses on future, not past

Following two seasons as an inconsistent punter, Martinez broke the school record in the second game

BY SCOTT J. ADAMS
SPORTS REPORTER

Junior placekicker Paul Martinez bears the typical appearance of any kicker on the field with his smaller face mask, his pristine jersey and his long-sleeved jersey for staying warm on the sideline.

Yet as his concurrent Pacific-10 Conference Special Teams Player of the Week honors earned this season suggest, Martinez is more than meets the eye.

With only two games under his belt as Oregon's starting kicker, the 20-year-old Martinez has been a scoring force that Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti can rely on. Martinez's six field goals against Montana last Saturday were good enough to land the Walnut Creek, Calif., native a spot in Oregon's record book for most field goals made in a game, and also tied a Pac-10 record. As of press date, he leads the nation in three-pointers per game with 11-12 made thus far. Martinez already has more field goals made this season than Oregon had all of last season. The Ducks recorded only nine in 2004.

Heading into this season there was doubt from both fans and media surrounding Martinez, whose performances on the field as Oregon's starting punter were subpar in 2002 and 2003. Martinez steadily progressed as a freshman, but failed to prove himself reliable for Oregon despite being named to the Pac-10's

first-team all-freshman unit by The Sporting News magazine.

Martinez was on the bench for the majority of his sophomore year having only two punts to his name in Oregon's season-opener against Indiana. He did manage to get in some game time kicking experience — a single PAT converted against Idaho.

The biggest disappointment of 2004, Martinez said, was not his lack of playing time but his absence from placekicking.

"2004 wasn't necessarily a wake-up call for me, but I was upset because I wasn't kicking field goals," Martinez said. "I just had to keep a good attitude and wait for my chances to contribute to the team."

Since Oregon's season opener against Houston, the opportunities have come by the dozen for Martinez. He had six attempts against the Cougars and showed his unchanging ability to make field goals at any distance. He made a trio of chip shots from inside the 40-yard line and added a jaw-dropping 51-yarder to silence his critics.

"I didn't even see it go in," Martinez said. "The big linemen were in front of me and I was busy jumping up and down trying to see over their shoulders and they looked back and told me it went in. It was a big experience for me."

The kick marked a career distance record for Martinez, but it was not the

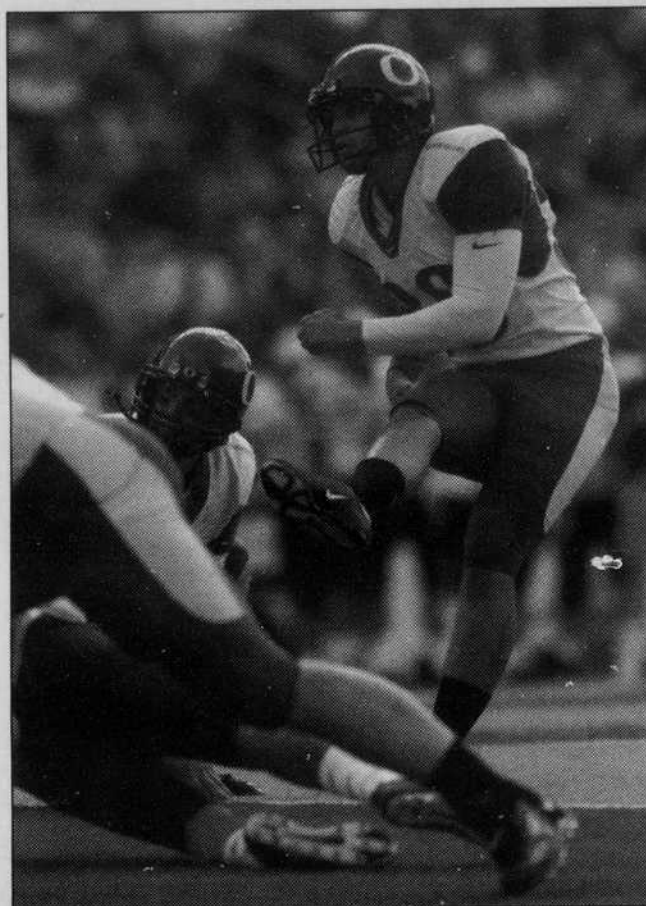
first field goal he has made from 50 yards out. He notched another in his senior year of high school at San Ramon Valley high in Danville, Calif. While attending school there, Martinez was a three-year starting placekicker for head coach Dave Kravitz and was one of the top-ranked prospects in the far west as listed by Superprep. He was also one of the top 15 punters in the nation, averaging 4.5 seconds of hang time on punts that included a 53-yarder scored in 2001. In his senior year, he made 12 of 15 field goals and accumulated 90 points. He earned specialist MVP honors his junior and senior years and numerous accolades from different newspapers in the bay area, including the San Francisco Chronicle and the Contra Costa Times.

Martinez said he relishes having more than his fair share of opportunities to put points on the board for Ducks, but would like to see Oregon reach the pylons more in the redzone.

"I'm surprised with how many kicks I've had. I want to make every kick every chance I get and I love kicking field goals, but it would definitely help our team more if we could find the endzone more often," Martinez said. "It's cool setting records and making field goals is a big deal to me, but so is making PATs and seeing us score touchdowns."

Bellotti would also like to see his team notch more touchdowns and not have to rely on Martinez to be the Ducks' only source for scoring.

"Field goals are nice to have, but six field goals are not going to get us past Fresno State," Bellotti said. "We need



TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTO EDITOR

First-year placekicker Paul Martinez set an Oregon record with six field goals against Montana last week. Martinez is 11 of 12 for the season, eclipsing the team's mark of nine total field goals last season.

to have more scoring production from out offense if we are going to be a conference contender."

Bellotti may not be satisfied with Martinez's number of attempts, but he is more than content with his accuracy.

"He leads the nation by a long way in field goals and has been doing a

great job for us going 11 for 12," Bellotti said. "He's not perfect, but pretty darn close."

Following the close of the 2004 season, Oregon was faced with breaking in a new placekicker for the first time in four years following the graduation

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