

## TOPIC OF THE MONTH FOR FEBRUARY 2012

### JOINING A COLLEGE FOOTBALL TEAM AS A FRESHMAN

The months between the end of football season during a player's senior year and the start of college the next fall are exciting, confusing, and exhausting. Hopefully, every athlete who plans to move on selects a college for its academic merits and "goodness of fit," not because of athletics. The decision to join a college football program is not simply a matter of finding a team that will take you. Each team has an existing work force of older players who already know one another, who have previous experience with the coaching staff, and who know how "business" is conducted. All freshmen are at a distinct disadvantage, so do not assume that a high degree of success in high school will lead to instant success among these grown men (ages 21-23). Successful transition to the college game requires investigation of the team, formulation of realistic goals to reach before the freshman year, and structured practice towards the standards exhibited by college players. The following suggestions are made for football kickers, punters, and snappers, but much of the information is also valuable for players at other positions or in other sports.

The biggest challenge is cutting through everything you heard (or thought you heard) during the recruiting/college selection process to reach a clear picture of what will really happen in the fall. Confusion starts because the family does not understand all conditions affecting a freshman student-athlete.

- Reporting Date
2. Skills Enhancement before Fall
3. Residence Life
4. Transportation

Information needed to plan effectively and to set realistic goals comes from asking questions during the winter or spring.

1. Questions to Ask the Head Coach
2. Questions to Ask the Equipment Staff (Managers)
3. Questions to Ask the Sports Medicine Staff (Trainers)
4. Questions to Ask the Strength/Player Development Staff
5. Questions to Ask the Athletic Academic Support Staff
6. Questions to Ask Current Players on the Team

Although college personnel provide extensive orientation for freshmen, football players must join a work in progress.

1. Suggestions for Surviving Pre-Season Camp

## 2. Proper Role as a Freshman

### REPORTING DATE

The first detail to ascertain is your reporting date. If you sign a scholarship, you will report for pre-season practice in August. If you intend to walk on or if you were promised a scholarship at some future date, you may or may not be included in pre-season. The recruiting coordinator is usually most aware of your status, but some head coaches maintain this list. Do not trust promises made by assistant coaches. Get a signed letter during the spring. Your status can change as late as August.

1. All NCAA college football teams must abide by national roster restrictions when they start practice in August. (Division I FBS colleges are allowed 85 full-scholarship athletes and may have a total of 105 players on the roster in August. The average Division I FBS team reported 117 players last year - 85 scholarship and 32 walk-on. Since no more than 20 walk-on players can come to camp, the coaches must tell some walk-ons who survived spring practice that they will not attend pre-season workouts. How could they put walk-on freshmen ahead of experienced walk-ons?) The roster restrictions disappear when school starts, unless the college sets limits. Most walk-on freshmen in Division I FBS must wait until school starts to join the team. In other divisions, coaches establish roster limits at each position, giving preference to returning players.

1. The purpose of the 21 pre-season practices is to prepare the 2-deep depth chart to play on Saturday. Most starting roles were determined during spring practice, when the offense and defense were installed. Returning players have spent all summer preparing for anticipated positions. Most freshmen will become the "scout team," players who simulate opponent formations and plays to help train the starters. Entering freshmen who do attend pre-season practices are joining a "work in progress," not starting at ground zero. Freshmen who join the team once school starts must expect to play support roles, not take repetitions away from the starters.

1. Although some true freshmen may play, the team had to plan using existing personnel. True freshmen will have to move up through the ranks at any position. The college football staff that is relying on 18-year-old freshmen to lead the way is poorly prepared. Ahead of you, the team has four years of players who have sacrificed time and effort to earn themselves positions. (Picture yourself as a returning sophomore or junior who is told that a "rookie" is better prepared to help the

team.) If you are invited to camp, the coaches may be using you as a "rabbit" to make the older players give more. If you join the team once school starts, consider yourself an apprentice in training toward the time that you will have the support of the players and coaches.

1. If you were promised the "opportunity" to start as a freshman, realize that other people were probably offered the same enticement. That promise does not mean that you were offered a slot at pre-season practice. Freshmen no longer get a few days alone with the coaches before the older players report. You may not get many repetitions, and you will not work with the first string snapper or holder. More importantly, your job during pre-season is to deliver footballs accurately and on time, allowing the coaches to train the other 10 or 21 players on the field for special teams situations. If you waste everyone's time, the players will not trust you and the coaches will lose patience. That "opportunity" offer usually means that the coaches wanted you for insurance, in case some tragedy destroys their other plans. They count on every freshman class having several specialists who enroll, believing that they can win a job.

1. On the other hand, if you definitely will start as a freshman, you must arrive on campus already prepared to play at the college level. You must train on your own through the spring and summer, anticipating the leadership role you will handle during pre-season. As early as possible, get answers to the questions listed below, develop a weekly practice plan including "live" snaps, and seek advice from experienced college players.

1. Not all players involved in pre-season practice will have the opportunity to dress for games. Most NCAA FBS (I-A) conferences (like the SEC and ACC) limit teams to 70 players for conference games, either at home or on the road. That means that at least 15 scholarship players will be sitting in the stands with their parents. (This is usually injured athletes and true freshmen who have just joined the team and who will be red-shirted.) For every walk-on who dresses, another scholarship player is a spectator. The only games on the schedule when the coaches are free to dress everyone are the non-conference contests. Division I-AA (FCS) teams are limited to 55-60 players for conference games.

1. Despite the large number of players involved with practices, college coaches at all levels are seeking a nucleus of 50 to play each season ---- the 2-deep depth chart (44) plus

extra quarterbacks and the kickers, punters, and snappers.  
SKILLS ENHANCEMENT BEFORE FALL

The second detail is to determine how best to enhance your skills before fall. College coaches may suggest that you enroll in summer school so that you can practice with the team.

1. No college football coach can attend any practice until the official start of pre-season camp in August. Former players practice "voluntarily" under their own leadership.

1. The summer before your class enrolls you may have to pay all your own expenses. Most scholarships start in the fall.
2. Coaches will not provide housing or lifestyle supervision.

1. Technically, if you signed a scholarship, you may receive service from sports medicine and strength training staffs in the summer before your freshman class reports in the fall.

1. If you will be a walk-on, you are prohibited from receiving service from any football staff personnel during the summer before your freshman class reports, even if you enroll in summer school. (Attending summer school does not increase your chances of making the roster for pre-season practice.)

Some colleges admit "provisional" freshmen (those with academic records weaker than the overall pool of the entering class) to summer school as a condition for fall enrollment. The majority of students on campus in the summer are either advanced scholars or people making up deficiencies. Think clearly about living away from home unsupervised in the midst of them, particularly since no one can coach you. If you attend summer school for any reason, you must make good grades to be eligible in the fall.

Since college kickers, punters, and snappers must practice on their own, arrange to meet your new teammates periodically throughout the summer. Near your home practice with kickers, punters, and snappers who play for other colleges. Find someone who will agree to be your practice partner for years. If you do not have the discipline to arrange these relationships, you will not survive with a college team. When you seek professional instruction, be sure to specify the goals you wish to meet. In general, do not make any changes in form within two-three months of joining the team. Do not let your college coaches change your form during the season. (A quarterback can learn a new play within a week, but installing a new offensive scheme would take months.) Adjusting to form changes takes several months. As a freshman, you will make mistakes and identify areas needing work. Plan to make change immediately after the season.

If you must start as a freshman kicker, punter, or snapper, your skills are much more important than your weight-lifting prowess. Focus on flexibility, balance, accuracy, speed in ball handling, and running times, not on strength or distance. Every time your body gains an inch or a pound your balance changes. You cannot prevent natural growth spurts, but kickers and punters should never gain body mass during the summer or fall.

Determining what development is needed is really up to you. The athletes around you will be accustomed to caring for their bodies as if they were gymnasts. Only you know the condition of your internal machinery. If you have not been taught how to improve that machinery, now is the time to learn. Your capacity to kick, punt, or snap as a rookie will increase as you gain control of your movements, not because you add mass. (Kicking and punting are one-legged activities. The important foot is the one on the ground. The swing of your kicking leg is hostage to the balance on your plant foot and the resulting movement of your hips.) Start by taking an inventory of several basic skills.

When you run for form (not for speed or distance), how symmetrical are your movements?

- Do both arms swing forward and backward beside your body, instead of across your chest? Are the motions of your left arm and your right arm the same?
- Does your head stay still, instead of bobbing up-and-down or weaving side-to-side? (Remember that a heavy helmet will amplify these movements.)
- Are your chest numbers visible forward on all steps, instead of leaned over the grass or twisted sideways?
- Are your steps short enough to free the back foot from the ground before the front foot lands? (Is your body weight forward, instead of back on your heels?)
- Looking at you from behind, do your legs track straight to the hip where they are attached, instead of crossing over? Looking at you from the front, do your feet land under your shoulders, instead of crossing inside? Do your knees stay straight, instead of driving inward?
- How high do your heels rise behind you?
- Do you start without pushing off or reaching back one leg? Do you start with the same foot each time?

How flexible are you? (You should stretch every day for at least 20 minutes, holding each position for 20 seconds.)

1. Standing with your feet about shoulder distance apart, can you bend forward at the hips with a flat back and put both palms flat on the ground without bending your knees? Can you stay in this position for 20 seconds?
2. Seated on the ground with both legs straight forward, can you bend forward at the hips with a flat back and grip the insteps of your shoes without your knees bending? Can you reach 6-10 inches past your toes?
3. Seated with your legs in a wide "V" and knees flat, can you bend forward from the hips with a flat back and get your jaw as far forward as your ankles? Can you lay your chest on the ground?
4. Seated in an outside hurdle with one leg flat on the ground and the other knee at 90 degrees to the body (chest straight down the field and knee straight to the sideline with foot behind you), can you sit up straight with no hand on the ground? Is one side easier than the other? (Never lie back in this position.)
5. Seated with legs in butterfly position for groin stretching, do your knees go down to the ground?
6. Standing on one foot and pulling the other leg back and up to stretch the quads, can you get your toes as high behind you as your shoulder blades? Does one leg go higher than the other? (Hips should go forward.)

How good is your balance?

1. In front of a mirror, standing with feet about shoulder distance apart and weight evenly distributed on both feet, can you raise a foot without your hips or head shifting to the side?
2. Standing on your plant foot, can you extend your kicking leg straight in front of your hip at waist height without moving the ankle or knee on the plant side and without moving your hips backward?
3. Standing on your plant foot, can you take 10 complete leg swings forward and backward (with arms moving) without the plant foot moving?
4. Looking at you from behind, when your kicking/punting leg swings forward, will it be aligned directly in front of the hip/shoulder on that side of your body? Will your toe be visible over that shoulder?

Does your routine include plyometric jumping 3 days per week to add leg speed and explosion? Do you work your legs in a swimming pool against water resistance or use stretchy bands?

Visit the team during spring practice to observe how the coaches organize skill development at your position. (Do not

fall into the trap of comparing yourself to the players.) Ask for drill sheets and pictures of coverages. From the lists of questions below, get answers that will drive you to practice what is needed, not what you want to do or have done in the past.

1. As a kicker, spending hours thumping PAT's and field goals into a 20-foot tall goalpost from a mechanical ball holder will not lead to success. (To avoid the hands of blockers, footballs need 11 feet of elevation over your snapper, which means at least 33 feet of height when a PAT passes the goalpost. Distance comes from height.)

- Work drills to improve balance, range of leg motion, leg speed, and foot-on-ball contact.
- When you practice, find tall objects to kick over, or stay close enough to judge the angle of trajectory.
- Practice across the field over the top of the posts.
- Get someone to hold for you.

2. As a kick-off specialist, driving footballs into the end zone is not enough. (You need sufficient hang time to get runners at least 40 yards downfield on every attempt.)

- 3. Work your step path to the ball without kicking until your approach is smooth and your head stays still.
- 4. When you practice, limit yourself to 10-12 repetitions into a designated target area.
- 5. Kick-off over objects that are 60 to 70 feet tall.
- 6. Get someone to clock hang times.

7. As a punter, rocketing footballs downfield is not the factor that will get you playing time. (You must handle the ball in 1.2 seconds and limit your steps and leg swing to 3½ yards, as well as send the ball where the coverage is running. A 40-yard punt needs 4.5 seconds of hang time.)

- 8. Drill ball-handling skills every day without punting.
- 9. Learn not to move your head to watch what your hands are doing. Move your eyes. Keep your hands low.
- 10. Go through the full process "dry" (without a ball) until your motions are smooth.
- 11. Practice across the field, making punts land within a lane. (Look at the pattern after each set of punts.)
- 12. Get someone to clock handle times and hang times.
- 13. Get someone to throw or snap for you.
- 14. Practice holding for placekicks.

15. As a snapper, practicing 100 daily repetitions in your backyard will not simulate the speed of the game or prepare you to fit between two guards. (Footballs must arrive at a punter's hip in 0.8 seconds. PAT/FG snaps must be less than knee height and over the "spot." You must have sufficient balance to block or step immediately after each snap.)

16. Throw daily from overhead on a "flat" path, working up to 20 yards of distance.
17. Whether throwing or snapping, work into a stationary target no larger than a basketball hoop.
18. Practice facing a blocking dummy that you hit each rep.
19. Get someone to time your snaps.

Mental imagery is also part of your development. Your high school stadium is probably much smaller than the college stadium. (The field is the same size - 120 yards by 53 1/3 yards. Hash marks in high school are 18 yards from the sideline, while college hash marks are 20 yards from the sides.) Many college fields have seating all the way around, so there will be moving objects behind the goalposts. As you practice over the summer, you should picture yourself successful in this facility, so find time to "walk" the stadium, noting all of the following details:

- How tall are the goalposts? What color? (High school goalposts are roughly 8 yards wide, while college and pro goalposts are roughly 6 yards wide.)
- How close are the goalposts to the fence? To seating or buildings back of the end zones? (How much space exists outside the field but inside the fencing?)
- Are nets installed behind the goalposts? How high?
- What objects behind each end zone might distract you during a game? (Examples are flashing scoreboards, the 25-second clocks, flagpoles or people waving flags, lighted or brilliantly painted advertisements, seating for the band, towers for film crews or media coverage, stadium lights, and team mascots.)
- What objects behind each end zone might assist accuracy or serve as practice "challenges?" (Examples include film crew booths, seating section signs, and windows.)
- What features in the stadium might assist directional punts and kick-offs? (Examples include flagpoles, elevated walkways, signs visible above the crowd, tunnel entrances, fence decorations, and scoreboards.)
- How close are the stands to the sidelines?
- How much space is there in the team sideline box? Is there an all-weather surface? What are the chances of mud or puddles? Is the whole area level?
- What kind of surface does the field have? (Is the same surface available at the team practice facility?)
- How well does the field drain after heavy rain?
- Are there uneven spots on the field? How is the footing where PAT's must be kicked?

- How crowned is the field? (Remember that gravity will affect kickers going uphill for field goals from the left hash and downhill for field goals from the right.)
- How loud does the speaker system sound from down on the field? Is loud music played during pre-game?
- How loud does the crowd sound from down on the field?
- What is the normal wind drift through the stadium?
- How high above the field are the openings through which spectators enter the stands? How much wind effect?

#### RESIDENCE LIFE

A third major category is preparing for residence life on a college campus. There are no longer dorms inhabited by athletes only. Housing provided for scholarship football players must be accessible to other students (including walk-ons), but it may be more expensive than other residence halls. Room size, number of roommates, access to high quality food service, and proximity to athletic offices and practice facilities are considerations for freshmen who must master both academics and athletics. Selecting a roommate is always preferable to accepting random designations from housing or the coaching staff. Fall dorm assignments and move-in dates are usually available in the spring. Communicate with your roommate(s) to decide who will furnish such items as refrigerator or carpet. Prepare to deal with personality traits and habits. (If you and your roommate prove to be incompatible, request a change before your grades and your health suffer.)

If you are a scholarship player attending your first pre-season camp, ask if you will move into your permanent residence in early August. When the team is housed together for pre-season camp, players usually have to move again before school starts. If you are a walk-on invited to pre-season practice, ask where and how long you will be housed and fed at team expense. After that date, you are on your own. Choosing to live where the scholarship players are housed gives walk-ons a greater sense of belonging to the team but may lead to greater anxiety if progress toward a scholarship fails to go as anticipated.

#### TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is another major obstacle for freshmen. Even if freshmen are allowed to register cars on campus, parking is rarely adjacent to dorms and is non-existent near most classroom buildings. Parking passes are expensive, and parking

tickets mount up quickly. The equipment manager and the strength staff will report player cars illegally parked. Freshman football players should not take vehicles to campus. If transportation is needed to meetings, practices, or sports medicine, the college or the team usually provides bus service. Football players do not have time to drive around, and no weekend trips home or to a girlfriend will be possible. A better alternative is a bicycle or moped, which can be secured within the dormitory when not in use and which can be parked almost anywhere on campus. A car quickly becomes a liability open to vandalism and a tempting target for mischief from older players. Vehicle privileges should be tied to academic success, even if the reward for earning a scholarship was a flashy new truck or car for graduation.

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK THE HEAD COACH

1. How do you anticipate using me as an addition to your existing players? (What are the strengths and weaknesses of this part of the team? What void am I supposed to fill?)
2. How many total players will be with the team? How many specialists? How many freshman specialists, besides me?
3. What is my reporting date? Will I attend pre-season camp?
4. How many players will dress for home games? How many players will travel? How many specialists will travel?
5. Will I dress and/or travel as a true freshman?
6. Which skill should I emphasize over the summer in order best to fulfill your expectations for me? (How can I best help this team to succeed in practices, as well as in games?)
7. What specific performance standards should I meet by August?
  - For kick-off, ask desired hang time and location on the field. Which player has the best chance to get down the field free?
  - For punt, ask desired handle time, location, and hang time. Ask about width of splits on the line, punt formations, and coverages. Ask if you must be prepared to hold for the kickers. Again, who gets down field?
  - For placekicks, ask about get-off times and heights. Ask if approval for the placekicking job is tied to your capacity at kick-off.
  - For snapping, ask desired times and heights. Ask if you must learn to take backward shuffle steps on punts. Ask if you must also snap for quarterback drills.
8. What will be expected during player physicals in August?
  - What running requirements must I meet?

- As a kicker or punter, how important are lifting tests?
  - 9. Will I be able to practice in the stadium anytime this summer? During pre-season camp? During the fall?
  - 10. How do players request videotaping at practices? Is there access to a meeting room to study practice and game tapes?
  - 11. In the fall, must I prepare weekly to imitate the kickers (or punters or snappers) on the opponent team? By what day of the week should I be ready?
  - 12. Will I have to kick hard at both practices on days with two?
  - 13. Which assistant coach(es) will be responsible for kickers, punters, and snappers? How long will he be with us each day? (Typically, specialists have a 15-minute period with several coaches before the start of a 2-hour team practice. That means dressing, getting to the field, stretching, and warming up before pre-practice. Specialty periods during the team practice are for development of the other players on the field, not for kicker-punter-snapper coaching.)
  - 14. What statistics will be charted on a regular basis?
- QUESTIONS TO ASK THE EQUIPMENT STAFF - CALLED MANAGERS

1. What make and pattern footballs does the team use?
  - Can I buy some from the equipment manager? (By NCAA rules, the team cannot give you equipment until your class enters in the fall. It is in your best interests to practice with the type football the team will use.)
  - Will the kickers, punters, and snappers have access to a bag of practice footballs for use by request?
  - If I am the starter, will I get to practice with the "game" balls on Thursday or Friday? How frequently are the "game" balls replaced? Are they broken in at all before the first game?
2. How frequently do the managers check practice footballs for 13 PSI? (You should own a gauge and a pump.)
3. Are kick-off tees and mechanical ball holders available? Should I plan to furnish my own? Will snappers have access to target nets? (Regardless of what you are told, pack your ball holder and a kick-off tee, plus kicking shoes and a set of shoelaces in your player travel bag for each trip.)
4. What brand of shoes does the team contract require?
  - When will the equipment manager take my shoe size and order shoes for me? (If you are a walk-on, you may have to furnish your own shoes the first fall.)
  - Will I be able to choose from a catalog the shoes I will be issued in the fall?
  - How will I get adjustments if the shoes issued are not comfortable or are not suited to the playing surface?

- What if I wish to wear a different brand of shoes?
  - Which manager can help with cleats (if your shoes have screw-in cleats)?
5. What can I do to dry my kicking shoe after a rainy game or practice? Are there provisions for keeping shoes dry? (Some teams have "boots" to fit over your shoes, and some have electric shoe-drying racks. Never wear your best kicking shoes to practice on muddy days. Experiment with different plant shoes for various surfaces and weather conditions. Stuffing wet shoes with newspaper will help.)
  6. What height socks does this team wear? (All players on any NCAA football team must wear uniform type/height socks.)
  7. When will I be measured for pads and uniforms? When will gear be issued? (Because kickers and punters are often smaller than other players, receiving correctly sized equipment may require being served first.)
  8. May I try on a helmet? Will the staff minimize face bars?
    - Might I borrow a helmet at any time during the summer?
    - As a starter, might I be issued a light-weight helmet?
  9. Does the team carry a sideline net for use during games?
- NOTE: The equipment manager has seen many kickers and punters come and go. He understands keeping 4-5 scholarship quarterbacks supplied, but his budget cannot outfit all eager specialists when only two will play. His experience is that walk-on freshmen disappear quickly, so he conserves his resources until you establish a track record. YOU NEED A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EQUIPMENT STAFF. They provide clean laundry and access to fields. Be realistic in your demands for supplies. Make requests as a unit, rather than as individuals.

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK THE SPORTS MEDICINE STAFF - CALLED TRAINERS

1. When should I come to the training room to get taped before practices? Should I ask for a specific trainer?
2. Can anyone assist me in stretching on days when I am tight? Is there help before games, particularly on the road?
3. Does the team furnish ankle braces? What type?
4. Are linemen (snappers) expected to wear knee braces?
5. What access do I have to ice after practices and workouts? (Is there an ice machine in your residence hall?)
6. Is water therapy available in the sports medicine area? How frequently may I use the whirlpools?
7. What happens if I strain a muscle or sprain a toe?
8. What happens if I break a leg or hurt my back?
9. Will we be drug tested in August? How frequently during

the year are athletes tested?

10. Should I report any prescription medications I use?

11. May I have a copy of the list of banned substances?

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK THE STRENGTH/PLAYER DEVELOPMENT STAFF

1. What will be expected during player physicals in August?

□ What running requirements must I meet?

□ As a kicker or punter, how important are lifting tests?

2. Does the strength program include medicine balls and resistance training bands ---- in addition to weights?

3. How many times per week will we lift in the fall?

4. Will I ever be scheduled to work out or lift before kicking?

5. Will I have to work out or lift on the day before a game?

6. Do you modify the strength program to accommodate the skill needs of kickers and punters?

7. Will I have access to a swimming pool for resistance and cardiovascular training?

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK THE ATHLETIC ACADEMIC SUPPORT STAFF

1. What resources are available in the study area? How late will I have access to computers and printers?

2. What other study areas are available on campus?

3. Do you offer instruction in effective study skills and time management?

4. Will someone teach me how to use the campus computing network? How to use the campus library?

5. When, where, and how will I acquire textbooks?

(Scholarship players may pick up books from the athletic department instead of at the campus bookstore.)

6. What are the study hall requirements for freshmen? (Are walk-on players welcome?)

7. How do I request tutoring? (As a walk-on, how can I benefit from the existing tutoring schedule?)

8. Does the athletic department maintain a file of old tests from various courses?

9. Can anyone proofread my first college term papers and make constructive comments?

10. What is the overall grade point average of the football team? Academic Progress Ratio? Who are the strong students?

11. Does the team recognize players (both scholarship and walk-on) for academic excellence? Does the conference select an all-freshman academic team?

12. Do you communicate with my teachers to verify attendance and grades? How frequently?

13. When will I receive academic advisement?

- I understand that my fall schedule should end by 2 P.M. In other semesters, what provision is made for courses offered only during team training hours?
- Am I free to register on my own? (Seek advisement also from the academic department that will grant your degree. Do not be steered into courses that are not part of your overall plan. To retain eligibility, you must complete 25% of the coursework toward your degree by the end of your second year in college.)

14. What do I do if a professor schedules a lab, an exam, or a review session during football practice time?

15. What do I do if I fear flunking a class? (By NCAA rules, a player must maintain a 12-hour load to be eligible. If you are not playing as a freshman, you should drop the class to preserve your grade point average. If you are a walk-on paying your own bills, the football program cannot demand that you stay in the course. To be eligible a second year, you must have completed at least 24 semester hours with at least a 2.0 GPA, and no more than 6 hours can come from summer school.)

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK CURRENT PLAYERS ON THE TEAM

1. How is practice organized over the course of the week?
2. Where and when will the daily practice schedules for offense and defense be posted?
3. Who really spends time with the unit during team practices? (e.g., graduate assistant, student assistant, volunteer coach, special teams coach, strength coach, or no one)
4. How does the coaching staff treat the specialists?
5. Within the unit, who leads stretching? Who designs daily practice plans? Who is the leader?
6. How frequently do specialists practice in the stadium?
7. As a freshman, will I be expected to carry the equipment? Shag footballs? Have my head shaved? Sing a silly song?
8. During team running, with which other position players will we run?
9. Which trainer does the best job taping ankles for kickers?
10. Will the strength coach listen to requests to modify the prescribed work-outs? Is there access to a swimming pool?
11. Does the equipment staff allow players to check out helmets and footballs for personal practicing?
12. What are the penalties for:
  - Arriving late for meetings or practices?
  - Breaking curfew?
  - Missing a strength workout?
  - Missing study hall (scholarship players only)?
  - Failing to meet pre-season running standards?
  - Leaving a helmet on the ground?

□ Underage drinking?

13. How is curfew checked? Do the coaches contact faculty to verify class attendance and academic progress?
14. After classes, study sessions, and football obligations, how much time will I have for myself?
15. Where and when will the dress and travel lists be posted?
16. Which is the designated non-practice day each week? What team-related obligations do we have that day? What tasks do you save for that day? (During the fall, either Sunday or Monday will have no practice.)
17. When and how do we sign up for game seating? (Scholarship players are usually allowed four seats for home games, while walk-ons get two. Players never receive real tickets. A deadline is set for each player to enter on a list the names his guests ---- and his own name if he will not be dressed. Players with more guests can borrow slots from players with empty seats. The typed list will be at the player gate on game day. To enter, those listed must show identification.
18. At what time are sessions during winter workouts?

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR SURVIVING PRE-SEASON CAMP

1. No matter how much you want to prove yourself or what you see other players doing, DO NOT OVER-KICK!
2. Assist other players in your unit. (No matter what the coaches say, you are not competing against your teammates. You are all working against some standard for excellence, like a grading scale in the classroom. The object is to put the best-prepared person on the field on Saturday. This is normally the person the head coach trusts most, not someone who wins a contest. You all need one another.)
3. Praise the snaps and holds, even if they need work.
4. Educate other players in your unit how you want the ball.
5. Arrive early for meetings, taping, stretching, and practice.
6. In meetings, ask what will be expected at each specialty period listed on the practice schedule. (For instance, if punt cover is slotted for periods 7-8, find out where the ball must land to make teaching possible.) If possible, practice the previous day for these periods. You will be too tired to perform well if you spend the 30 minutes before a specialty period going through numerous repetitions.
7. If you develop soreness from practicing or if you sustain even a minor injury, report immediately to the training staff! Do not continue to kick, punt, or snap. It will get worse, and your recovery time will lengthen.
8. Do not practice after a muscle injury until the training staff clears you.

9. Get your plant ankle taped by the training staff before every practice and those workout sessions requiring running.
10. Ice your muscles or use the whirlpool after every practice.
11. Rehydrate (drink fluids with electrolytes) after every practice. (Avoid carbonated and caffeine-loaded beverages until after the final physical activities each day.)
12. Rest your legs between practices. Get plenty of sleep, and elevate your legs whenever possible.
13. Get to know the linemen!!!
14. Observe all training and curfew rules, even if you live off campus. (If you make a mistake, admit it immediately, and take your punishment quietly.)
15. Utilize wisely your time on campus before classes start.
  - Explore campus (on foot or by bicycle).
  - Locate the offices of your professors within their academic departments.
  - Start reading textbooks assigned for fall classes.
  - Locate quiet places to study.
  - Locate computer clusters, and learn to use the campus computing network.
  - Find a convenient laundromat. Wash your clothes!

PROPER ROLE AS A FRESHMAN, REGARDLESS OF YOUR PLAYING STATUS

1. Do not boast to anyone about your skills. (At age 18, you will not be well received within the team. Busy bodies will report back statements you make outside the team.)
2. Never say anything negative about other players on the team.
3. Do not even hint that you expect to play as a freshman. (Regardless of your skills, other players have been working for months to reach their goals. You must earn their respect on and off the field.)
4. Never speculate about the team's capacity to win. (You are an insider in a business that must minimize rumors. Avoid gambling or giving information that could assist betting.)
5. Do not give any media interviews (newspaper, radio, TV, etc. - even hometown newspaper) that have not been arranged through the team's sports information department (SID).
6. If you anticipate being interviewed, in advance write and memorize statements to publicize ---- regardless of what questions you are asked. Safe topics include:
  7. "I have never played a down of college football (or for this team). I am not capable of estimating anyone's performance, including my own."
  8. Praise the thoroughness of preparation designed by the coaches. Mention the names of the coaches.
  9. Compliment the linemen, your snapper and holder, or

others in your unit for their work ethic, their skills, or their efforts to make all freshmen (not just you) feel comfortable with the team.

10. Praise the condition of the practice facilities, the stadium surface, and the efforts of the support staff personnel ---- trainers, managers, and grounds crew.

11. Have patience! All freshmen are miserable. Athletes have more adjustments to make than other students ---- and less time to experience campus life.