

TOPIC OF THE MONTH FOR MAY 2004

GRADING THE SKILLS OF KICKERS, PUNTERS, SNAPPERS

If you want to take a "snapshot" of your performance level, record accurately one set of 10 repetitions at the beginning of a practice. In advance, prepare a score sheet (see directions in each section) and locate a stopwatch and several people to help. Always stretch and warm up adequately, but do not "practice" the test. You may use the scales within each section to grade each individual repetition or to grade your averages.

- GRADING A SET OF PLACEKICKS
- GRADING A SET OF PUNTS
- GRADING A SET OF SNAPS
- GRADING A SET OF KICK-OFFS

Once you settle on a score sheet that works well for you, make a supply of photocopies to keep on hand. Test yourself periodically, but not daily. Use test results to formulate goals for practices.

Since statistics from games reflect opportunity, not skill level, rely on results from these test sets as evidence during the recruiting process. Describe your operating standards. Furnish current times and projected times when you arrive on a college campus. If all 10 attempts are good, you could include a test set on your marketing videotape.

GRADING A SET OF PLACEKICKS

In the center of a piece of paper, draw to scale a large goalpost, leaving white space above to record ball height at the point the ball crosses the goalpost. Since the bar on a goalpost is 10 feet above the ground, use the line from the ground to the bar as 1 unit of measure. Make the crossbar (which is slightly less than 24 feet across in high school) greater than 2 units of measure. For a 30-foot tall goalpost, draw uprights that are 2 units of measure long extending upward on each end of the crossbar. Before each set, decide the distances for each of the 10 kicks. PLAN A: Take 10 kicks from the same distance (preferably 20 to 30 yards only) but from 10 different places straight across the field (hash to hash or wider). PLAN B: Take 4 PAT kicks from the middle at the 10 yardline (20 yards), and specify locations for 6 field goals (like +15 left hash or +35 middle). If you have a snapper and a holder, have someone use a stopwatch to record the get-off time for each kick.

GET-OFF = Start the watch at the first motion of the snapper. Stop the watch when the kicker's foot makes contact with the ball.

For each set of 10 "line kicks" or 4 PAT's and 6 FG's, have someone write on your goalpost picture the number from 1 to 10 on the exact spot where each football appeared to be when the kick reached the goalpost, regardless of distance from the goal. Plot wide kicks outside the uprights at the height they appeared to be at the end line. Plot short kicks below the goalpost. After each set, rather than counting "makes and misses," assign quality points for accuracy (to the middle) and height (above the ground) for the PAT kicks and for field goals of up to 30 yards. For accuracy scoring, write the number "1" below the crossbar just inside each end. Write the number "3" below the middle of the crossbar, and place a "2" halfway across on each side. For height scoring, outside the uprights place a "1" above the height of the crossbar to represent heights of 10-20 feet, place a "2" above it more than halfway up the upright to represent heights of 20-33 feet, and place a "3" higher than the top of the upright to represent heights greater than 33 feet. (See the sample below.) Use the scales below to grade your charted results.

Y
3

QUALITY POINT GRADES FOR PLACEKICKING

	PAT KICKS (10 Yardline) AND SHORT FIELD GOALS WITH "LIVE" SNAPS						
	GET-OFF TIME	HEIGHT	ACCURACY	QUALITY POINTS			
X	<u>1.49</u>	<u>1.5</u>	+ <u>2</u>	= <u>3.5</u>	!	!	
Y	<u>1.28</u>	<u>3</u>	+ <u>3</u>	= <u>6.0</u>	!	X	!
Z	<u>1.16</u>	<u>1</u>	+ <u>0</u>	= <u>1.0</u>	Z	!	!
						<u>12321</u>	1
						!	
1	_____	_____	+ _____	= _____			
2	_____	_____	+ _____	= _____			
3	_____	_____	+ _____	= _____			
4	_____	_____	+ _____	= _____			

PLACEKICKING GET-OFF TIMES

From first move of snapper to contact with foot

1.26 - 1.28	A+
1.29 - 1.31	A
1.32 - 1.33	A-
1.34 - 1.36	B
1.37 - 1.40	B-
1.41 - 1.44	C
1.45 - 1.48	C-

PLACEKICKING QUALITY POINTS

For PAT's + 20-30 yard FG's using height + accuracy 1-3

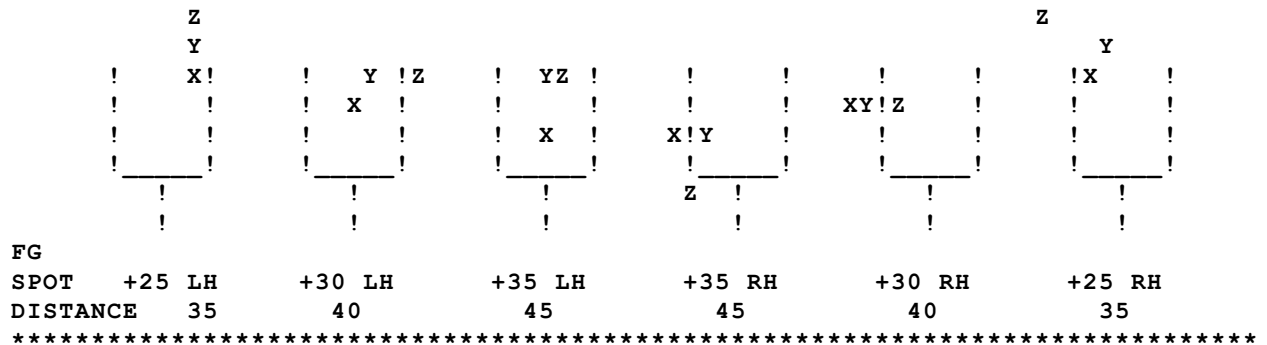
5.70 - 6.00	A+
5.40 - 5.69	A
5.00 - 5.39	A-
4.70 - 4.99	B+
4.30 - 4.69	B
4.00 - 4.29	B-
3.70 - 3.99	C+
3.50 - 3.69	C
3.30 - 3.49	C-

PLACEKICKING MAKES

Kicks 1-10 across all distances

10 of 10	A
9 of 10	A-
8 of 10	B
7 of 10	B-
6 of 10	C
5 of 10	C-

For study of patterns of makes and misses, label a series of goalpost pictures with specific distances and locations. Use the same locations for tests on different days. After each test set of kicks, transfer the results to the appropriate picture. (See the sample below. The chart reveals real problems kicking from the right hash.)



At the PAT distance (20 yards or 60 feet), a kicked football should be at least 33 feet above the ground and could be as high as 60 feet. To avoid the hands of a blocker in front of the snapper (7 yards or 21 feet before the snap), the football should be at least 11 feet above the ground on the first 20 feet toward the goalpost, making 33 feet above the ground the minimum "safe" elevation. Practicing without the other players on the field leads to a false sense of security. Raise your angle of trajectory. Since goalposts in college are 2 yards narrower than in high school (18 feet 6 inches, or roughly 6 yards), focus on the middle 4 yards of the goalpost for all kicks. The goal is for all PAT's and FG's to go down the middle high.

The standard get-off time is 1.30 seconds. The key person in the snap-hold-kick relationship is the holder. As soon as the kicker sets the tee (or marks the spot), the holder should place the back hand on the tee (or ground) so that the snapper can align and focus his effort. (That hand should stay down until the ball is in the air.) The holder gets a nod from the kicker, then signals the snapper. The snapper snaps whenever he is ready. When the holder's hand leaves the ground to catch the ball, the kicker starts the approach to the plant spot. Waiting for the holder to catch the ball allows the opponent to push farther forward, increasing the chances of a block. Starting too soon or moving too quickly leaves the body weight too far back when the plant foot lands, decreasing balance and ball height. Practice with "live" snap and hold throughout the year to establish timing and smoothness.

GRADING A SET OF PUNTS

On a piece of paper, draw a football field with an end zone and 5-yard lanes going across. Divide the field into three equal thirds going up-and-down to represent the hash marks. For each test set of 10 punts, have someone write on this sheet the number from 1 to 10 on the exact spot where each punt hits the ground (not where the ball rolls or bounces). Before each set, decide the direction for each of the 10 punts. If all 10 are to go down the middle, then all 10 numbers marked on the paper should appear between the hashes. If the first 5 are to go right and the next 5 are to go left, then numbers 1 through 5 should be outside the hash to the right, numbers 6 through 10 should be outside the hash to the left, and no marks should appear in the middle of the pictured field. Have someone use a stopwatch to record either the handle time or the hang time for each punt. (Timing both on the same punt requires a stopwatch with split times or two stopwatches). Write each time on the sheet near the number which represents where the punt landed, or at the bottom of the page construct a chart which has 10 lines across and columns for handle time, hang time, distance, and accuracy.

HANDLE TIME = Start the watch when a thrown or snapped football touches the punter's fingers. Stop the watch when the punter's foot makes contact with the ball.

HANG TIME = Start the watch when the punter's foot makes contact with the football. Stop the watch when the football first touches the ground or a player.

To simplify charting distances, stand at the -35 yardline to catch each ball before punting. Have someone snap to you or throw underhand for each of the 10 punts. Whether the ball is thrown or snapped, assume that the line of scrimmage is the 50. Punt distances are figured from the line of scrimmage to the landing spot, not counting bounces or rolls. You will need a 48-55 yard trajectory from the spot where you actually punt the ball (3-4 yards for steps going forward from the -35 yardline) to get a 37-44 yard punt. After the set, figure the distance for each punt. (Since the line of scrimmage is the 50, a number at the +7 yardline anywhere across the field would be 43 yards of distance. A number 6 yards deep in the end zone would be 56 yards of distance but might be figured as 30 net yards after the ball is put in play at the +20 yardline.) Count how many punts out of 10 landed in the correct third of the field. Use the scales below to grade your charted results.

PUNTING HANDLE TIMES
From fingers at catch
to contact with foot/
No snap times included

PUNTING HANG TIMES
Assuming coverage of
40 yards = 4.6 seconds

PUNTING DISTANCES
Assume 15-yd snap
In air only/no
roll or bounce

1.10 - 1.19	A+	4.60 +	A+	42.0 +	A+
1.20 - 1.24	A	4.50 - 4.59	A	40.0 - 41.9	A
1.25 - 1.29	A-	4.40 - 4.49	A-	38.0 - 39.9	A-
1.30 - 1.34	B+	4.30 - 4.39	B+	37.0 - 37.9	B+
1.35 - 1.39	B	4.10 - 4.29	B	35.0 - 36.9	B
1.40 - 1.44	B-	3.90 - 4.09	B-	34.0 - 34.9	B-
1.45 - 1.49	C+	3.80 - 3.89	C+	33.0 - 33.9	C+
1.50 - 1.59	C	3.60 - 3.79	C	31.0 - 32.9	C
1.60 - 1.69	C-	3.40 - 3.59	C-	30.0 - 30.9	C-

Hang times must be sufficient to get coverage down field. To prevent returns, your runners should be within 5 yards of the receiver when the punt arrives. Assuming any coverage players can run a 40-yard dash in 4.5 or 4.6 seconds, a 40-yard punt would require a hang time of 4.5 seconds. (If your coverage is slow, you should decrease distance and increase hang time.) The goal is for all hang times to be greater than 4.50 seconds. Set yourself a realistic goal ---- not for average hang time, but for the lowest allowable hang time. DO NOT OUTPUNT YOUR COVERAGE!

Coffin corner punts are usually intended to go out-of-bounds as close as possible to the goal line. (To chart a test set of coffin corner punts, count yards outward from the goal line, instead of distance from the line of scrimmage to the sideline exit.) If they land and stay within the playing surface, you must assume that they were caught and returned. Because distances are shorter, you should focus on increasing hang time.

Any grouping of punting "landing spots" should be no more than 9-10 yards wide ---- for the benefit of the runners. You get better results if you focus on 1/6 the width of the field (9 yards). (On a high school-ruled field, the top of the numbers painted on the field should be 9 yards from the sideline, so judging six 9-yard lanes is possible.) Concentrate on making your "pattern" tighter. Practice across the field within a 5-yard-wide lane.

Getting the play off is more significant than how well you punt. The snapper gets 0.8 seconds, and the punter should handle the ball in 1.2 seconds from catch to foot-on-ball contact. Decreasing handle times will increase hang times because of efficiency and balance. Practice ball-handling drills.

GRADING A SET OF SNAPS

On a sheet of paper, draw circle charts for punt snaps and for field goal snaps. For PAT/FG, the target zone is a circle with 12" to 14" diameter centered above the tee and beside the crouched body of the holder. For punts, the target zone is a circle with 12" to 14" diameter centered at waist height over the leg that punts. (You can sketch rectangles to represent the people.) For each test set of 10 snaps, have someone write on this sheet the number from 1 to 10 on the exact spot where each snap went. Have someone use a stopwatch to time from first movement of snapper to first contact.

To simplify charting and standardize times, snap to a stationary target, not to people. Options for targets include:

- Circular pocket net with 14" diameter attached to a frame
- Bicycle tire attached to a board or fence
- Basketball hoop turned upright and attached to a board or fence
- Chalk circles drawn on wall padding in a gym or weight room
- Chalk circles drawn on a large blocking dummy or on goalpost pads

Having a large flat surface surrounding the target zone assists the person marking locations and guarantees the same distance for stopwatch comparisons. Mark the distance from the target at 7 yards for PAT/FG and at 14 yards for punt. Take either 5 PAT/FG snaps and 5 punt snaps, or test 10 of one kind. Use the scales below to grade your charted results.

<u>SNAPPING TIMES (PAT/FG)</u>		<u>SNAPPING TIMES (PUNT)</u>		<u>SNAPPING ACCURACY</u>	
7 yards of distance		14 yards of distance		Number of snaps	
Goal = 12-18 inches height		Goal = 30-36 inches height		<u>inside</u> the circle	
0.25 - 0.26	A+	0.65 - 0.70	A+		
0.27 - 0.28	A	0.71 - 0.75	A	10 of 10	A
0.29 - 0.30	A-	0.76 - 0.80	A-	9 of 10	A-
0.31 - 0.32	B+	0.81 - 0.83	B+		
0.33 - 0.35	B	0.84 - 0.87	B	8 of 10	B
0.36 - 0.38	B-	0.88 - 0.90	B-	7 of 10	B-
0.39 - 0.40	C+	0.91 - 0.93	C+		
0.41 - 0.43	C	0.94 - 1.00	C	6 of 10	C
0.44 - 0.45	C-	1.01 - 1.05	C-	5 of 10	C-

Any group of snaps should go directly over the place the ball will be used for kicking ---- over the tee/spot for PAT/FG and over the kicking leg for punts. (Holder should leave back hand on tee/ground until the ball starts backwards. Punter should line up punting leg directly behind ball.)

PAT/FG snaps should be 12"-18" above the ground at catch. Aim for the elbow joint above the hand on the tee. (Snapper should not see the body of the holder.) Punt snaps should arrive at waist height. Aim for the hip pocket of the punting leg. (Snapper should not see chest numbers of punter.) Practice into a stationary target, rather than throwing to people. People move to catch the ball, so you get poor feedback on narrowing your pattern.

The holder is the key to timing on PAT/FG plays, but you will need less than 0.80 seconds on punt snaps. For both distances, the ball should travel on a flat path from ground to hands (no arc or "rainbow"), with the back nose higher than the front nose at catch.

GRADING A SET OF KICK-OFFS

On a piece of paper, draw a football field with an end zone and 5-yard lanes going across. Divide the field into three equal thirds going up-and-down to represent the hash marks. For each test set of 10 kick-offs, have someone write on this sheet the number from 1 to 10 on the exact spot where each kick-off hits the ground (not where the ball rolls or bounces). Before each set, decide the direction for each of the 10 kick-offs. If all 10 are to go down the middle, then all 10 numbers marked on the paper should appear between the hashes. If the first 5 are to go right and the next 5 are to go left, then numbers 1 through 5 should be outside the hash to the right, numbers 6 through 10 should be outside the hash to the left, and no numbers should appear between the hashes on the pictured field. Have someone use a stopwatch to record the hang time of each kick-off. Write each time on the sheet near the number which represents where that kick landed.

Place your kick-off tee in the middle of the field at the -40 yardline (60 yards). (Kick-offs in college will come from the -35 yardline.) Kick-offs should be taken from the middle of the field because ball placement forces the opponent to concentrate personnel between the hashes ---- freeing space for your coverage players to run down the sides. You will need a 68-75 yard trajectory in college to handle kick-offs down the middle or angled toward the corners. (Touchbacks in college are valuable only at the back of the end zone.) After the set, figure the distance for each kick-off. (A number at the +7 yardline anywhere across the field would be 53 yards of distance. A number 6 yards deep in the end zone would be 66 yards of distance.) Count how many kick-offs out of 10 landed in the correct third of the field. Use the scales below to grade your charted results.

<u>KICK-OFF HANG TIMES</u>		<u>KICK-OFF DISTANCES</u>		<u>KICK-OFF ACCURACY</u>	
Assuming coverage of 40 yards = 4.6 seconds		From -40, not -35/ Includes EZ yards		To 1/6 width of field (9 yards) in correct lane	
4.10 +	A+	68.0 +	A+		
4.00 - 4.09	A	65.0 - 67.9	A	10 of 10	A
3.90 - 3.99	A-	62.0 - 64.9	A-	9 of 10	A-
3.80 - 3.89	B+	60.0 - 61.9	B+		
3.70 - 3.79	B	57.0 - 59.9	B	8 of 10	B
3.60 - 3.69	B-	54.0 - 56.9	B-	7 of 10	B-
3.50 - 3.59	C+	52.0 - 53.9	C+		
3.40 - 3.49	C	50.0 - 51.9	C	6 of 10	C
3.30 - 3.39	C-	48.0 - 49.9	C-	5 of 10	C-

Hang times must be sufficient to get coverage down field. Assuming any coverage players can run a 40-yard dash in 4.5 or 4.6 seconds, the leaders should reach the +30 yardline (30 yards in high school, 35 yards in college) when your ball lands. The goal is for all hang times to be greater than 4.00 seconds. Set yourself a realistic goal ---- not for average hang time, but for the lowest allowable hang time.

Kick-offs taken to the corners are usually intended to land between the 0 and 5 yardlines ---- forcing the opponent to attempt a return and allowing your coverage to "trap" in the corners and prevent a return to the 20 yardline. You "land" the ball ahead of runners going straight down the numbers.

Any grouping of kick-off "landing spots" should be no more than 9-10 yards wide ---- for the benefit of the runners. You get better results if you focus on 1/6 the width of the field (9 yards). (Goalposts are roughly 8 yards wide in high school and 6 yards wide in college. On a high school-ruled field, the top of the numbers painted on the field should be 9 yards from the sideline, so judging 9-yard lanes is possible.) Concentrate on making your "pattern" tighter. Practice over very tall and narrow objects.