

definite form of legitimacy there can be. It just clicked for me, and has been clicking ever since.

Now, as a rising junior, I'm a proctor for Harvard Summer School. I'm the primary question-answering resource for 13 rising high-school seniors. Each of them is older than I was when I first came here, one Transition Year old and completely clueless about all things American. They're full of questions—mostly about where classes are and what Harvard life is like. They all seem a lot harder working, and immensely less shy, than I was when I was where

they are. They know a lot more about the college application process than I do, and seem a lot surer about what they want. I can answer some of their questions, though, and can show them where some things are and how some things work.

My favorite question I've been asked so far was asked of me on one of the very first days of the Summer School term. My co-proctor and I walked some students from our hall to dinner in Annenberg, where we sat together after navigating the still-confused crowd in the servery. I can't remember many details of the table conversation. But,

I do remember looking down at my glass of water and seeing the reflection of the vaulted ceiling dancing across the liquid's surface. I looked up as one of my students, holding his own empty glass in his hand, excitedly asked, "Do we get free refills?"

I smiled.

"Yes," I answered. "The refills are most definitely free." ▽

*Berta Greenwald Ledecy Undergraduate Fellow Cherone Duggan '14 is passionately committed to her main curricular and extracurricular activity: unstructured time.*

## SPORTS

# It's Up—It's Good!

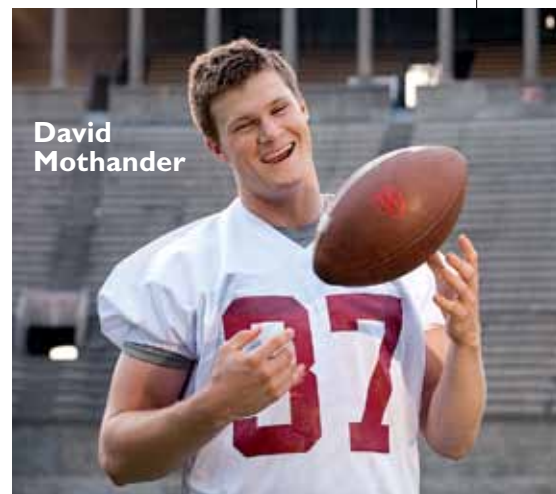
*Placekicker David Mothander explains how to split the uprights.*

**T**HE PLAY that shone the brightest spotlight on David Mothander '14 hardly typifies what he does on a football field. Last November, with Harvard leading Yale, 14-7, in the second quarter, the Crimson and their placekicker, Mothander, lined up for a 22-yard field-goal attempt from the Yale 12. Instead, with a perfectly executed fake, holder Colton Chapple '13 flipped the ball to Mothander, who sprinted unopposed into the end zone. Touchdown, Harvard.

Mothander (*MOE-tander*) is very comfortable with the football in his hands: he played quarterback at St. Margaret's Episcopal School in San Juan Capistrano, California. Quarterbacks are often the best

all-around athletes on their high-school teams, and many play other positions on college varsities. "I think there were eight high-school quarterbacks in [my Harvard] class alone," he says.

At six feet, three inches, Mothander's a bit taller than most placekickers, and his experience as a goalie in high-school soccer (he also lettered in baseball as a pitcher and shortstop) may have taught him how to put leg into the ball. Goalkeepers take plenty of goal kicks—the object, naturally, being to send the ball as far as possible from the goal and out of the opponents' reach—to hit it "long and high," as Mothander says. Very similar, in other words, to a kickoff.



Those who watch the National Football League get used to seeing placekickers convert 80 percent or more of their field-goal attempts despite hitting balls spotted 40-plus and even 50-plus yards from the goalposts. Placekicking in the college game is a considerably less routine matter, but Mothander has been a solid performer. Last season, he converted six of eight attempts and hit a long one of 42 yards. He also aced 48 of 50 extra points. As a fresh-

## Placekicking: A Brief History

**In its early years,** American football used a round ball that players would hold in their hands, drop to the ground, and kick on a low bounce. With the advent of the forward pass, the ball took on its current elliptical shape, making it easier to throw—but causing unpredictable bounces. So the drop kick gave way to placekicking, with tees (for kickoffs) and holders (for field goals and extra points).

For many decades, placekickers weren't specialists: position players moonlighted at the task. Gino Cappelletti of the Boston (now New England) Patriots, for example, was a wide receiver, and the legendary Lou "the Toe" Groza of the Cleveland Browns was an offensive tackle. Groza converted 88.5 percent of his attempts in 1953, at a time when most National Football League (NFL) teams missed more than half their field goals.

In the 1960s, accuracy rose markedly with the advent of "soccer-style" kicking,

which a Budapest-born Cornell graduate, Pete Gogolak, brought to American football. He kicked for the Buffalo Bills and then the New York Giants (becoming their all-time leading scorer) from 1964 until 1974.

One of Lou Groza's kicking shoes resides in the Smithsonian, but no NFL rule requires that kickers wear a shoe at all. Rich Karlis, who kicked mostly for the Denver Broncos, was the last of the barefoot placekickers; he ended his career with the Vikings and Lions, retiring in 1990.

In Harvard Stadium, David Mothander practices a kickoff, using the ubiquitous “soccer-style” kicking technique.

to hit a solid ball. The mindset that you have to have is that every kick is an extra point, because being smooth through the ball is the best way to hit an accurate ball.” Crosswinds means factoring in the sideways drift, and against a headwind, he explains, “The longer the kick is, the more the wind will affect it, because the ball slows down more as it approaches the goalposts.”

Accuracy involves maximizing the surface area of

man (he arrived at Harvard after a post-graduate year at Phillips Exeter Academy), he made nine of 15 field goals (including one of 43 yards) and 34 of 35 extra points. He also sent 50 kickoffs downfield for an average of 63.1 yards, and achieved comparable results last season.

New NCAA rules will make kickoffs more effective this year, as kicking teams tee up the ball on the 35-yard line instead of the 30, making kicks effectively five yards longer. In addition, touchbacks will now come out to the 25-yard line instead of the 20, offering returners five yards more incentive to forgo a runback. The changes aim to scale down kickoff returns, which rank among the most exciting but also the most dangerous plays in the game, due to high-speed collisions, frequent instances of clipping (blocking from behind), and the semi-chaotic nature of the play itself.

None of this will affect Mothander’s technique, which he began learning before his last year at St. Margaret’s and improved at summer kicking camps. For kickoffs, he uses a nine-step approach (five left, four right), beginning nine yards behind the ball and about five yards to the left, to set up “a more natural motion,” he says. “You want a consistent approach—be consistent with your plant foot, your strike foot, and hit the ball at the same spot with the same part of your foot.” Kickers aim to contact the ball about one-third of the way up from the ground, and just past the bottom of their leg swing’s semicircular arc.

On kickoffs, the kicker can start the run-

up from anywhere he chooses—theoretically, he could start sprinting at the goal line and hit the ball 35 yards later. Field goals are a different animal: they’re essentially a three-man play that includes a long snapper (making a seven-yard snap), a holder, and the kicker. (Harvard’s long snapper is Tyler Ott ’14; quarterback Chaple has held the ball for Mothander since the kicker’s arrival.)

The second crucial difference is that the defense rushes from the line of scrimmage,

attempting to block the kick. Field-goal kicks need to rise more steeply than kickoffs, in order to clear the line. Mothander uses a four-step approach (left-right-left-right), starting two steps to the left of the ball, and aims to get the kick off 1.25 to 1.30 seconds after the snap. “It’s quick enough to make it difficult to block the kick,” he says, “and long enough to have enough time

the foot in contact with the ball, and the duration of contact. The more “foot” a kicker can apply to the pigskin, the more control he’ll have over where that ball goes. That’s done by kicking the ball “soccer style,” the technique that has become nearly universal since the 1960s. Soccer-style kicking, which strikes the ball with the instep, greatly increases accuracy by putting much more foot surface on the ball than the toe-punch technique it supplanted. (The toe-punch does generate power, but is hard to control.)

With field goals and extra points, place-kickers often lead their teams in scoring. The job involves pressure, but probably less roughhouse than any other position. On rare occasions, if a returner gets loose for a long runback, the kicker may be the last man able to tackle him. “With any luck,” says Mothander, with a grin, “it doesn’t come to that.” —CRAIG LAMBERT

To receive weekly football reports from “Cleat,” sign up at <http://harvardmag.com/email>

**Head baseball coach Joe Walsh** died suddenly at his Chester, N.H., home early on July 31.

Walsh, 58, served proudly in his self-professed “dream job” for the past 17 seasons, winning five Ivy League championships. He played baseball at Suffolk University, where he assumed his first head-coaching job in the 1980-81 season. He came to Harvard in 1996 as the first full-time, endowed baseball coach, a position funded by former player (and now Harvard Corporation member) Joseph J. O’Donnell ’67, M.B.A. ’71.

Walsh’s college coaching record is 569-



564-3, including the Crimson record 1998 season of 36-12. He is survived by his wife, Sandra, and their four daughters.