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Not just a man's game

Photo by Dave Harris - Franklin kicker Katrina Cass made nine extra-point attempts, including all four in the season opener, in her first season on the varsity football team.

Females getting kicks in too

By Marcos Rodriguez - Citizen Sports Writer

Published: Wednesday, November 25, 2009 5:41 PM PST

Female football kickers first came onto the high school scene during the 1980s. As the years have progressed, their presence has become more of a commonality in football programs.

Coaches have said that the one trait vital to a kicker's success has always been consistency. In Bradshaw Christian High School head coach Drew Rickert's experience, dependability has been an attribute associated more so with the female kickers in recent seasons.

"For kickers, the girls have often produced more consistency than the boys," said Rickert, who is in his fourth year as the varsity football team's head coach. "I can see this trend continuing for the future."

It's a trend worth following for Rickert since he boasts the second best high school kicker in California and No. 28 in the nation, according to Maxpreps.com. His kicker, Ashley Smith, has recorded 65 extra-point attempts in her first and only season with the Pride. Moreover, Rickert felt her most eye-opening performance that came in a 55-0 win earlier this year.

"Against Forestville, (Smith) was eight for eight. That to me was very impressive," Rickert said.

With an offense that scored 41 or more points in nine consecutive games, Rickert had plenty of use for Smith. In playoff games where scores are typically tighter and lower scoring, Smith might be called upon for a game-winning field goal or crucial extra point.

Rickert is not worried. In fact he's been in this position before.

This isn't the first time Rickert has utilized the talents of a female kicker on his football team. When he coached at Martin Luther King in Riverside, he used a female kicker who also proved to be an asset on his team.

He believes these girls offer a great attitude for their team and bring a relentless work ethic to practices as well as games.

These trendy coaches like Rickert find it refreshing that their teammates treat the girls as if they were their kid sisters.

"(Smith's) been a huge part of our success," he said "She'd been reliable and the team always makes sure she doesn't get hit while kicking. She has definitely been a positive for the team."

Valley head coach Preston Jackson had seen a similar impact from his two female kickers this past season. Despite a winless season, the two twin sisters, Rosina and Alina Perez, had played sparingly this past year.

Yet they had always showed the willingness to come out of their comfort zones in practice.

"They were both an important part of our team. They both had opportunities and used them to fill a role for our team," Jackson said. "They came to me late in the season and asked about trying to play different positions. They just wanted to be on the field more."

Using female kickers in other positions on the field is something that has yet to be experimented with in many programs. If their consistency and desire to better their skills is any indication, this could be another trend emerging in the not too distant future.

But until then, football programs such as Franklin and the Elk Grove junior varsity team will continue to utilize them as kickers.

Franklin used the kicking abilities of a female high school senior. Katrina Cass, that helped her team gain another playoff berth for their respected program. She has tallied nine PATs on the season, including splitting the uprights on all four attempts in a season-opening win over Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Jackson said female kickers bring camaraderie and stability to team's that otherwise lack consistency. That reason alone is why Jackson sees female kickers becoming the norm as opposed to just a trend.

"It's become more common," said Jackson. "It's not an oddity anymore. It's opening the door for the girls to play other positions as well."

Those doors have remained open in the eyes of Rickert. The Pride coach felt his program has made a conscience effort in allowing anyone the opportunity to play football.

Gender is not an attribute he has held in high regard.

"We just want to play the best players," Rickert said. "It doesn't matter who they are. If you have a good work ethic we'll take you on."

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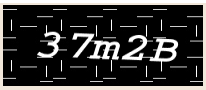

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