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Taking a punt ... former Sydney Swans forward Nick Davis practises his punting yesterday at Centennial Park. The 28-year-old will head to the US next month to show off his wares to prospective NFL franchises.

Photo: *Peter Rae*

120 kicks a week: preparation for a punt at American big time

Andrew Stevenson | February 5, 2009

AS BEFITS preparation for a sporting career in which the best often spend less than one minute each game on the field of play, Nick Davis went through an entire training session as an NFL punter in Sydney yesterday without shedding

a bead of sweat.

Now more than three months into his dream of converting a stellar AFL career into a life in American football, Davis is just about ready to sell himself on the US stage.

Yesterday, two days after former AFL star Ben Graham became the first Australian to feature in the NFL's showpiece, the Super Bowl, Davis was kicking the NFL ball sweetly, garnering about 50 metres with torpedo punts and keeping the ball hanging high enough and long enough in the sky to suggest he might just have what it takes to follow in Graham's footsteps.

It's always been a dream, says Davis, 28, who is honest enough to admit acting out the dream became a reality only when his AFL career turned into something of a nightmare as he butted heads with Swans management and then couldn't find a start with Brisbane.

Davis - who lasted 10 years in the AFL despite being a character at odds with the increasingly corporate constraints of a game obsessed with leadership groups - admits the training is not going to make him the fittest man in the world.

"Obviously, it's not much in terms of aerobic fitness but it is hard on the legs and the back," he said.

He limits himself to a maximum of 120 kicks a week - slightly more than he kicked with Sydney - and works hard on stretching, flexibility and his core strength to keep his body in shape for the punt.

"My good ones are good but it's the consistency they're after and six out of seven of them are definitely good enough," he said.

Davis might have been accused of having a short attention span but he's nothing on an NFL coach surveying a potential kicker. Try-outs last three or four kicks and it's not a time to slice.

Next month Davis will try selling himself as he joins a troupe of hopefuls on a sales tour organised by OzPunt, a management company that aims to recruit, train and place punters with American franchises and colleges.

Davis played against Graham, the former Geelong captain, and had the chance to measure himself beside Rocca when he was a prodigy with Collingwood. "We used to have kicking competitions back then and we were pretty much level, so I can get a bit of a guide from that," he said.

Although torpedo is the favoured style, Graham has used the drop punt, and Davis and OzPunt director Paul Shepherd say it could become a staple in the NFL. With a slight sacrifice of length, accuracy and consistency are enhanced, according to Davis.

"Watching the game there's not a lot of times you have to kick 60 or 65 yards. It's more get the ball up there and let your team get down there and tackle them. You'd definitely be able to get 100 per cent consistency with a drop punt as opposed to 90-95 per cent with the torpedo."

While Davis has a strong AFL pedigree, Shepherd says it will count for nought in the NFL. Shepherd has tried recruiting rugby kickers - more familiar with the torpedo kick - to no avail and says reputations count for nothing.

"I don't care if you're playing second grade for the Cessnock Goannas and they don't care. We'll train you and they'll sign you, so we're not real fussed about tapping NRL guys on the shoulder," he said.

Except, perhaps, if they want to try and get on the field where the real money is made.

Shepherd is keen to talk with Brisbane Broncos forward Sam Thaiday and claims to have spoken with several other players. There's even a list, Shepherd claims. "They [NFL scouts] have given us a list of some guys and we have quietly approached some guys as well," he said. "There is definitely an opportunity for rugby union and rugby league guys to seriously get on the field in the NFL. It is not a pipe-dream. I tell you what, it's a massive payday. Once you start playing on the field you're looking at \$10-15 million. There's some serious money to be made."

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