

Fame and fortune just a kick away for Ashwood hopefuls

SPORT

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Harlequins rugby players are keen to punt their way to the ranks of US College gridiron and the NFL. MARTIN REDDY s25wg520

A COMPETITION to identify Australia's next potential top punter was held at Harlequins Rugby Union Club over the weekend.

More than 25 athletes, chasing their dream of becoming an American football punter, took part.

The competition at Ashwood Reserve was run by an academy called OzPunt, which provides training and contacts for players wanting to pursue an NFL (US gridiron) career.

Players, thought to display potential, will be prepared for trials with NFL and college clubs.

OzPunt scout Cameron McGillvray said Australia was a fertile breeding ground for punters.

"We have seen some great Aussie kickers go over to the States and be in the running to be signed up to some of the big colleges under very generous scholarships. College gridiron is very big business with crowds of 90,000-plus for a regular season game not uncommon," he said.

"We have spoken with some universities who are willing to offer scholarships in excess of \$200,000 for the right kicker or punter from the OzPunt pool of players.

"We are seeing a lot of high quality players coming through the Academy now, who easily convert their Aussie Rules skills over to the Gridiron game."

One of Australia's most successful NFL punters, Mat McBriar, was first spotted during an NFL punting competition at Waverley Park and the MCG more than 10 years ago.

McBriar, a former footballer with Old Brighton Grammarians, landed a position with the University of Hawaii before he signed with the Denver Broncos in 2003. McBriar still punts for the Dallas Cowboys.

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