

Lakers junior Luke Burgess takes a punt on the big time, NFL-style

DAVID POLKINGHORNE

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A LAKE Wendouree junior footballer is taking a punt on becoming the next Ben Graham in the NFL.

Luke Burgess flies out to Las Vegas on Friday where he will be attending one of the United States' biggest training camps for punters.

"We go to a Chris Sailer camp for punters _ it's like a national competition," Burgess said.

"And hopefully colleges see us and pick us up from there."

The aim of the trip is to get a college scholarship to be a punter for one of the universities in the US.

"(The goal is) to finish in the top 15 and then hopefully get a full college scholarship out of it."

Hampton University, Virginia, and Brevard College, in North Carolina, have both expressed an interest in the 18-year-old.

"I've spoken to two colleges at the moment and they want to see more of me when I get there because they can't take the punt on someone unless they've seen them."

Burgess has spent the last year training with OzPunt _ an Australian punting, kicking and holding academy _ where he has been working on his technique, as well as doing extensive leg-strength training.

It seems to be working, as the former Damascus College student is averaging 36.6m with 4.4 seconds of hang time.

Former Geelong footballer Graham averaged 39.6m in his three years with the New York Jets.

Now Burgess has the chance to chase his dream.

"I've always had a dream to go to the States and be a punter, and when Ben Graham and Sav Rocca got there I thought I might as well give it a shot," he said.

"They like the Aussies because they can kick."

But that is not the only quality that Aussie rules players bring to an NFL team.

"They see that we are physical and we can stand up to them."

Burgess is not fussy about where he ends up, just as long as it is "somewhere warm".

On Monday, Graham's Arizona Cardinals are up against former Collingwood and North Melbourne full-forward Sav Rocca and the Philadelphia Eagles for a Super Bowl spot.

But Burgess believes little-known Mat McBriar, from Melbourne, is the best Aussie getting around as a punter in the NFL.

McBriar graduated through the college ranks, as Burgess wants to do, and averaged 43.1m per punt in 2007 for the Dallas Cowboys.

Colin Ridgeway was the first Australian punter in the NFL.

The former Carlton footballer was a Dallas Cowboy in 1965, nearly 30 years before Darren Bennett joined the San Diego Chargers.

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Good article, good luck to the kid :) I've been following both Benny and Sav since they went over. Benny has had an interesting year, getting bumped from the Jets, getting taken back for a game, then having one game with the Saints over in London, then on to the Cardinals! What people have to remember to put things into perspective is that the punters stand 15 yards back from where the ball is snapped from. And the final distance of a punt is taken from where the ball is snapped, so you have to add 15 yards (~14 metres) onto that final distance to get the *real* distance :)

Posted by **Extremo** on 13/01/2009 2:57:04 PM

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Lake Wendouree junior Luke Burgess heads to a special gridiron punting camp in Las Vegas to chase the chance of playing college football. Picture: Lachlan Bence

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