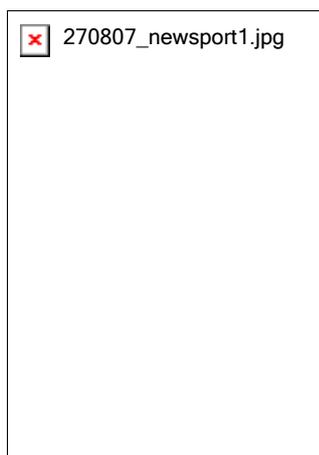


Taking a punt



Stephen Paulke could be the next Aussie to try his luck in the NFL

Stephen Paulke could well be spending next year at an American college if his NFL pursuits come to fruition.

For the past year Paulke, a year 12 student from St Joseph's College Geelong, has been training with "Ozpunt", an Australian punting and kicking academy in Melbourne.

The program involves training camps every three weeks and is designed to foster players' punting abilities, preparing them for college scholarships and NFL contracts.

Following the success of ex-cats player Ben Graham, Paulke, who's a handy player in the Geelong football league, could be the second Geelong person to switch from Aussie rules to gridiron.

"As none of the Americans grow up kicking a ball I guess we've got the advantage," Paulke says.

"It's been a bit difficult changing the style of kicking but once you get used to it, it's pretty good".

Ex-AFL player Cameron McGilivray has been coaching Paulke in the program and thinks that he has a very promising future.

"Stephen's progress has been sensational and right now he's probably the number one ranked player in the program for both punting and field goals."

The scholarships to American colleges are formally offered at the end of the year though McGilivray admits he's already been in discussion with a number of eager colleges. "There's no doubt about his talent, I think he can definitely do well. As NFL recruiters have said to me after watching his audition tape, he's got the 'potential to be a money maker'"

Boasting a personal best punt of 68 yards, Paulke's stats, including his get-off times and hang times, which are equally important as distance, are "almost at NFL standard" according to McGilivray.

"His stats indicate to me that he could be one of the top ten college punters within two years"

Paulke, who's not getting ahead of himself, says he's just excited about the opportunities ahead of him.

"It's a great chance to get to live overseas and I guess there's the reward of playing American football and going to college".

McGilivray, who's spent time in the states trying out for the NFL, says that the college league "is about ten times bigger than the AFL in terms of revenue and supporters. Some colleges have 80,000 seat stadiums and it's not uncommon for all games to be completely sold out a year in advance."

While possibilities of scholarships present a wealth of opportunity and excitement for Paulke, he's still got his VCE to worry about.

"I'll just see what happens at the end of the year. But..." he adds with an understandable sense of excitement, "it really could be any day now I find out."

- JOSH FAGAN

Email your sports stories and pictures to sport@spress.com.au

This article appeared in the September edition of S-press.

[Close Window](#)