

One of the most specialized skills in rugby is goalkicking.

It's a critical part of the game – punishing opposing infractions with three points, or adding two to a much-welcome try. But it's not something you can just teach someone. Teams, especially in college, rely on players to arrive with some kicking talent, and then hope to nurture it. Strange, then, that most kickers end up playing the same position - flyhalf.



For the Bowling Green Falcons, kicking had never been a problem when they had Nick Viviani at flyhalf, who currently plays for the Chicago Lions. Viviani played for the Falcons from 2007 to 2010 and was accurate from anywhere on the pitch. He hit 48 percent of his penalty kicks and 78 percent of his conversion kicks; high standards for the next person in line.

“He could pound penalty kicks from 55+ yards out,” Bowling Green’s Roger Mazzarella told RUGBYMag.com. “In the 2007 Midwest semi-final against Northern Iowa, Nick hit three kicks from that distance.”

Enter Dane Szente, a prop, who came to Bowling Green from Elyria Catholic High School where he played football, rugby and wrestled for the Panthers. Szente had experience from the kicking tee as he had done so in both football and rugby, but dropped the routine when he came to the Falcons.

“When I got here, I didn’t even think about kicking because of Nick,” said Szente. “In high

## Unlikely Kicker Propels BG

Written by Cody Secker

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school, I did all the kicking and had my own routine, but I knew I didn't have to worry for a while."

When the time came, scrumhalf Mike Powell took over the majority of the duties, but when Powell started to struggle, Szente brought back his old habits. Beginning in the fall of last year, Szente started to take kicks sparingly and when he started to knock them through consistently, people noticed.

"At first, coach [Tony] Mazzarella told me I should give more reps to the guys who will actually be kicking," Szente laughed. "Our captain, Dom [Mauer], told coach I was actually doing pretty well and to give me more chances."

From then on, the attempts started to increase and starting in the spring, he was kicking fulltime while also dominating from the prop position. "There was never any doubt as to whom to go to when Mike was struggling a bit and Nick was gone," Mazzarella said confidently.

Szente explained the success for his golden leg has to be credited to his prior experience in both rugby and football in high school. Though he hadn't kicked in a few years, he mentioned all he had to do was go back to his routine and make some adjustments.

"I used to place the ball like I was kicking for football, that didn't really work," Szente joked. "Once I got the position correct, I went back to an old routine; line the ball and tee with one eye, pick an aiming point, take 2-3 steps back and one long stride forward and let my foot do the rest."

Since his promotion, Szente has been a pleasant surprise for both Mazzarella and his Falcon teammates. For comparison, last fall Bowling Green scored 70 tries and converted only 27, thus far this season the Falcons have scored 26 tries and Dane has converted 21 of them.