

Kickin' for a living

Houston kicker Kyle Bryant just wants a chance to show the NFL he is ready to suit up on Sundays

By JEFF WEBB
Sports Editor

HOUSTON — Nine feet doesn't leave much room for error. But nine feet is all former Texas A&M kicker Kyle Bryant has to work with when he lines up to try field goals and extra points for the Arena Football League's Houston Thunderbears.

Bryant kicked for A&M during the 1997 season, helping the team to a Big 12 South title while breaking school records for scoring and field goals made in a career.

"I'd like to stay as long as they'll have me, but I'm always looking to get better."

— Kyle Bryant
Houston Thunderbears kicker

Houston signed Bryant after former Thunderbears kicker Rich Fall was placed on the injured list. Houston coach Steve Thonn said Fall hurt his arm and Bryant was signed the next week.

"We brought Kyle down for a tryout when our kicker had a broken arm," he said. "He kicked great in the tryout with the wind, against the wind and with every condition out here. We let the guy

with the broken arm kick one more game, but he couldn't do it. We signed Kyle right after his tryout."

Now, Bryant practices with the team on a small field at Alvin High School, simulating the small arena league goal posts by kicking field goals on regulation-width posts at a severe angle.

"We go from one end of the spectrum to the other from our practice environment to where we play," Bryant said. "Indoors is a kickers' paradise."

Bryant played his first arena league game against the Iowa Barnstormers in Des Moines, making his only field goal attempt in the game and hitting seven of nine extra points.

"It takes a little bit of getting used to," he said. "You have to realize that the success rate in the AFL is a lot lower for field goals than in the big game."

The only low point for Bryant was his fourth game in the AFL against the Milwaukee Mustangs on ESPN.

Missed field goals and extra points plagued Bryant, but the Thunderbears beat the Mustangs to clinch a playoff berth.

"In his first few games, he kicked real well," Thonn said. "He had one rough game, but now he's come on strong again. All arena kickers will have that kind of game. The arena game is tough on kickers."

Bryant may have had a bad game like all arena kickers, but said he wants to have games like NFL kickers in the future.

"I'd like to stay here as long as they'll have me, but I'm always looking to get better," he said. "My ultimate goal is to be on an NFL team as soon as I can."



Photo by Jake Shrickling

"Hopefully, this will give me a little more exposure than just the phone calls I've been making and, at the same time, it will get me more experience than some of the guys that came out of college at the same time I did."

Some scouts said Bryant's weakness was just that — a weak leg. However, Thonn said leg strength was a positive when Bryant tried out earlier in the year.

"He's got a strong leg and I hear that was his knock coming out last year," he said. "He's worked on his strength a little

bit more. He's definitely a guy that someone should get in camp."

"If the NFL calls, we will let him out of his contract. We'll try to get him to kick one more game with us, but we want him to go."

Bryant said he has adjusted well to the arena game and appreciates the support of his new teammates.

"I came into the season kind of late," he said. "I can't help but thank the players that are here because I came into a program that they have established into a winning season. I just want to do the

best that I can for them."

Bryant said he wants the chance to become a NFL kicker, and it is a goal he plans to pursue for a long time. However, he refuses to lose sight of the reason he suits up to kick for any football team.

"I have the desire more than ever to keep playing, but when the fuel runs out, I'll have to stop," he said. "When you get your chance, though, you have to make the most of it."

"Right now, I'm just having fun playing the game of football."

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