

# Riley Dixon Q&A: Broncos rookie punter is still waiting for his next trick play

By Nick Groke

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When the Broncos used a seventh-round draft pick on Syracuse punter Riley Dixon earlier this year, the team set up a heated punting battle in training camp. And Dixon won out. He played in his first NFL game last month.

At a walk-on at Syracuse, Dixon grew into one of the best collegiate punters in the nation, earning all-ACC honors his senior season with a 43.7-yard punting average. A native of upstate New York, Dixon grew up in Blossvale and prepped at Christian Brothers Academy in Syracuse, before playing with the Orange.

As Dixon continues to find a rhythm of consistency in his first pro season, he talked about his wild reputation as a trick-play specialist and his burgeoning world travels:

Q: When Joe DeCamillis took over as head coach last week, were you hoping your role might expand? Maybe some fake punts in the the special teams playbook?

A: I just expected Joe D to do the job he always does, be a great coach. I just stick to doing my job.

Q: But you're well-known in some circles. You were very good in college on trick plays.

A: I used to love that stuff in college. It was a little nerve-wracking at times knowing we had plays running right up the middle against punt formations. You just hope your guys make their blocks and you hope the other team does what you scouted them to do. That's a little bit more adrenaline than I normally see.

Q: What was your best offensive play? I have one in mind.

A: There were two that stuck out. The double-overtime touchdown pass against Villanova to put us ahead, that was a big one. And the one against Notre Dame, a 42-yard run up in the middle to put our team in position to score before half, that was pretty big too.

Q: Those were key, yeah. But the one I'm thinking of ...

A: Yeah, you're gonna say LSU.

Q: You leaped straight over an LSU dude.

A: That was an interesting play.

Q: You were jazzed on that run.

A: I was a little excited. I got the juice going on that one. That was a big game. We needed a momentum swing. To me, that's what I saw it as. I got pumped up.

Q: You don't practice that, do you?

A: Jumping over somebody? No, no. It was more or less I didn't want to get tackled. I had 3 or 4 yards to go for a first down. I wasn't going to run through him. So instincts took over.

Q: Madden fans love you for it. You rated 100 on agility and acceleration. That's unheard of.

A: My social media blew up. I had a bunch of kids say, "You're the GOAT!" I was like, what's the GOAT? (Greatest of all time.) It took me awhile to figure it out. They still comment on all my pictures. GOAT, GOAT, GOAT. I had a picture posted for 30 seconds and had four comments that all said, GOAT. You guys are on this stuff.

Q: Why was your number 92 at Syracuse? That's strange.

A: I didn't get to pick it. I was a walk-on my freshman year and they called me up on the phone and said, 'Hey what number do you want?' And I was like, "What do you got?" He said, "How does 92 sound?" I said, "Can I get a different number?" He said, "Nope, you're 92." I said, "So why did you ask?!"

Q: How is your rookie year in the NFL going so far?

A: Not so bad. I always wish I could be doing better. But I'm happy with where I'm at. I'll continue to do my best to get better every week.

Q: It is a big adjustment. Not just with football.

A: With life, definitely. But I'm still kicking. No matter what, I just have to punt the football and put it where the team needs it. I'm having a blast. Just settling in, trying to do my job. A bunch of professionals here. I'm trying to learn from these guys and how they get better every day, taking notes.

Q: You're a New York guy. How was that trip to the other coast last week against the Chargers?

A: That was my first trip west of Denver, in my life. At Syracuse, we had a game my freshman year at USC, but I didn't travel, I stayed home for that trip. It was cool to finally go to California. It's always fun to explore new places.

Q: Do you get to have fun on the road at all?

A: It's mostly business. I'll go get some food and then come back and lock into meetings and get to work.

Q: I heard you're an avid outdoorsman.

A: Oh yeah. I was home last weekend in upstate New York and went duck hunting with my cousin and a couple of his buddies. Good times. It's one of my favorite things to do.

Q: Colorado's got to be a good spot for you then, yeah?

A: It's not bad out here at all. I do more water fowl up there. And obviously I don't know the land out here. So I haven't hunted out here yet. I have to take care of my business first. When I get some free time, hopefully I'll look into it.

# Riley Dixon enters competition for punting job

By Aric DiLalla  
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As the quarterbacks and running backs jockey for spots on the depth chart, perhaps the most competitive battle comes at a position that only sees the field for a handful of snaps per game.

When the Broncos drafted punter Riley Dixon in the seventh round of the 2016 NFL Draft, a spot long held by Britton Colquitt suddenly went up for grabs.

“We had some real good inside information because [Special Teams Coaching Assistant] Chris Gould was with him at Syracuse, so we knew what kind of kid he was and how talented he was,” Special Teams Coordinator Joe DeCamillis said in late May. “Just watching the film, we felt like he was what we need to compete at that job. He’s got a chance to be an NFL punter. That’s kind of why we pulled the trigger where we did. I thought the scouting staff did a great job of getting him where we did. Hopefully he has a chance to come in and compete.”

Through the first two weeks of Organized Team Activities, Dixon seems to have done just that, and he’s had plenty of opportunities to work. In addition to his normal punting duties, Dixon has often been present doing scout team work. While the intentions are different in those drills – coaches want shorter hang times and lower kicks to benefit returners – he’s gotten the benefit of added work.

At a press conference to end the second week of OTAs, DeCamillis seemed pleased with how the competition has progressed.

“It was a good week for him,” DeCamillis said Thursday. “It was a good week. I thought both of those guys had good weeks. [P] Britton [Colquitt] had a good week also. It’s exactly like we thought it was going to be. It’s going to be a tough deal. Whoever is the best guy and the best one at the end, that’s who we’ll take at the end of camp.”

Dixon, who said he’s still acclimating to the schematic and rule differences in the NFL, is working more with the gunners than he did in college, and he’s also getting used to a new protection package.

But in his mind, while everything operates at a higher level in the NFL, he’s “still kicking a football.”

“I think I’ve done okay,” Dixon said. “Not the greatest for my performance, but you know, there’s room for improvement. Still getting acclimated and learning the new schemes but I’m still settling in and figuring it out but I think it’s been okay. Not bad, but not as good as I want it to be, you could say.”

At 6-foot-4, Dixon’s height allows him to put “a nice smooth swing on the ball,” and at Syracuse he averaged 42.6 yards per punt and forced fair catches on 42.4 percent of his punts. And, in 2013, he knocked a school-record 75-yard punt.

As he tries to earn the job in Denver, he’s enjoying his relationship with Colquitt, and he’s not attempting to “impress anybody or [do] anything outside of my abilities.”

“He’s a class act guy,” Dixon said. “He’s an unbelievable punter and he’s an even better person. So he’s really made all of this a lot easier than I could’ve foreseen it being with somebody else. He’s awesome, he’s been nothing but help and smiles and that’s all I can ask for.”

When Dixon isn’t on the practice field, you might find him down a dirt road in his truck. Dixon, who grew up in upstate New York, said the outdoors are “a big part of who I am.” And while his NFL contract means he might be able to afford a new truck, he said he’s more than happy with his 2013 model.

Back at UCHealth Training Center, though, he’s firmly focused on the the competition, and he knows the results lie with his own work ethic.

“I don’t really see [the competition] as anything other than me trying to be the best punter I can be,” Dixon said. “If I can be that, the rest of it’s out of my hands. So, like I’ve said previously, I’m just here to kick footballs. If they tell me I’m good enough, that’s great. If they tell me I’m not, I’m gonna keep working. That’s all I can do.”