



CINCINNATI BENGALS

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DARRIN SIMMONS

**Assistant head coach/
Special teams coordinator**

Looking forward to some Big-10 punting competition?

"Yeah, I could already feel those questions coming right away. That Ohio State-Michigan deal is going to be a big training camp story. I feel very good about Brad. He brings something different that we haven't had here in a bit. He's a hang-time guy. He loves getting the ball up, and does a really good job of getting great hang time. I think he led college football the last two years in hang time. It's unique too, with the last couple punters we've had here — with Kevin (Huber) and Drue (Chrisman), and obviously Brad, Brad's from Columbus — so we like to keep it here in the Midwest."

Why a draft pick and maybe not a veteran free agent?

"Well, we explored that, but when you have veteran free agents, there have to be two sides that have to work together — getting a contract done. There's certain limitations we have when you go through and try to do something like that, so we felt like this was a better avenue for us to take."

Did Duke Tobin communicate that when they made the trade to get this pick — that that was what they kind of had in mind to get a punter?

"No, we had a couple players there (we liked at that spot in the draft). I think obviously getting that other pick certainly helped for the ease of moving (down), but I think that certainly helped having an extra one there."

Does Charlie Jones qualify as a fear-of-God returner?

"He's close — he's very close. I'm very excited to get him too. Troy (Walters) and I both went up to Purdue to work him out. He was somebody I evaluated before the combine, then liked what I saw at the combine even more and when I went up to see him work out. He's a sure-handed guy. He was the 2021 Big-10 Special Teams Player of the Year. He decided to move on and go to Purdue to get some catches at receiver, and I think he proved that. I think his numbers went down as a returner (at Purdue), but (the receptions) skyrocketed, and he put himself in the position he's in because of what he did on offense. It shows that he's well-rounded. I think he led college football in catches. He is an explosive player, he's had a touchdown on a punt return, he's had a touchdown on a kickoff return, he's a good cutter, he has great quickness, and he had a really good workout that day with me up there."

What did you see from him that you guys haven't seen in a while?

"Well, hang time. I think this guy gets the ball up in the air really well. Obviously, there is something to playing in this climate ... that does matter to me some. He's obviously played a lot of big games at Michigan. The other attractive thing for him is that he held for Jake Moody, who was a third-round pick this year too. I feel really good about the other half of his job, which is holding. He's very well-rounded, he's mature, and I like the fact that he can get the ball up in the air for you."

Do you think this pick is a by-product of specifically how the AFC Championship game ended?

"Oh, I don't think that changes that portion of it. At the end of the year, you evaluate what you have, and what you'd like to potentially improve on your team — whether it's one game, or it's over the course of 10 games, or it's the course of over 20 games, whatever it may be. If you feel like you have the chance to bring in competition and maybe improve your situation, that's what you do."

How hopeful are you to maybe solidify a spot that's been a question mark the past couple years?

"Yeah, I think this helps with that, certainly. I feel very confident in Brad's ability to come in here, and do what he needs to do to be an effective punter in this division."

How much did you workout with Brad and what did you see from him?

"I did. It's a nice trip up to Ann Arbor. Drove up there. He met me on Good Friday. I thought he had a really good workout that day. It was kind of cool and kind of windy, but he displayed all the things that I've wanted to see from a punter that day. He's really mature too, and I think that means a lot too for that position ... We've got three young guys now, all within the first three years of their career

here. So he's a mature guy, and he'll bring a lot to that position group."

You said with Evan McPherson there was a sound the foot made when striking the ball. With a punter, and in this particular case with Brad, same thing or different?

"Yeah, I think you do feel the same thing. I think the workout that Evan had was very unique — I've never felt that before. I've felt that with other punters working out. I think everybody has a different set of clubs in their bag. Some guys hit good seven irons, some guys hit drivers really well, this guy really does a good job with great control. I've been talking about hang time a lot — I think he's also a very, very effective directional punter. He does a good job of working the ball into the boundaries. He understands weather patterns and weather conditions very, very well, which is a big bonus here in this division. There are a lot of positive, positive things that I felt not only in Indianapolis, but the workout in Ann Arbor that led us to this spot."

A lot of college punters like to blast it as far as they can. Is there a maturity level for guys ...

"Yeah, 100 percent. He understands net (average) ... I think the difficult (thing) — it's becoming increasingly difficult — is the way that the rule differences are in college football (compared) to our league. In college football, everybody can release on the snap, so hang time is not a premium thing for a lot of college punters. So it's difficult to evaluate. This guy can get the ball 50 yards down the field, but it's under four seconds of hang time. You can get away with that in college football, but we've proven that you can't get away with that in our league. But I do think being a part of the program Brad was part of at Michigan, and being around a (good) coach — his position coach has got the last name of Harbaugh, too — he understands what the premium is of not exposing your team to some of the returners that you could face, in terms of the distance they've got to catch the ball. That is a huge, huge, huge bonus for me in that regard — that exact thing right there."

You've increased your team speed overall this draft. How many guys do you look at and think you can get special teams snaps from them?

"I think almost every one of them we've taken so far may have some type of role with me. Our first-round pick, (and) it's obviously been well-documented what we got with (Jordan) Battle too — he's a very, very experienced guy. DJ Turner is one of the fastest DBs, if not the fastest DB at the combine. Charlie (Jones), we've already talked about what we're going to get out of him. There's a lot of positive, positive things — even Chase Brown did some of it early on in his career at Illinois. There's a lot of positive, positive things with these guys that I think are really going to enhance what we're going to do."

You didn't need an opening day starter in this draft, but you just needed to build and bulk up. Did you do that?

"Yeah, I think all these guys are going to help us. If they're not Day 1 starters for us, they're going to help me in a big way. Each one of these guys will certainly be able to find a role and something productive to do. The positive thing is that each one of these guys have played on special teams in their college career."

What do you see from Jordan Battle on special teams?

"There are a couple guys when I sit in all these interviews at the combine — and especially with all the skill position players — (where) you come out of there when you get done talking with those guys, with a feeling (where) you're like, 'Man, if there's any way we can get that guy on our team, we want that guy on our team.' Just from a 15-minute conversation. And that (Battle) was one of the guys I put a big red star on — 'We want this guy on our team.' He's very well-rounded, he's very instinctive, and he understands the game. You can tell he's been, obviously, very well-coached. He's been a part of a great program at Alabama, and he's had to play a lot of special teams. He's been productive, he's got a lot of tackles in his career, and he'll have a huge role for us here."

How high on the priority list was it to address a returner and also a punter?

"I think it all kind of evolves as the draft evolves. I go into it every year thinking that, maybe we don't have a premium need at kicker or a premium need at long snapper, but I felt like we needed to enhance — and bring some competition to — the punting position. And if the right returner happened to fall to us, and one that was available at the right time and at the right price, then why not take a chance on one of those guys and see if it enhances your team? I think it changes and evolves as the day goes on. But with the punting position, I felt like it was a spot we wanted to bring some competition to."

The Michigan State punter was drafted, then you drafted Robbins. Were these the two guys you thought could come in and compete right away, or were there more?

"I think that those are the top two guys in my mind. There was another one that I think could've potentially figured in. I think he got taken a couple picks after we picked Brad, so maybe we had him slotted halfway close. But I do think that all three of those guys have an opportunity to have productive NFL careers."

Do you think this is the fastest Bengals team since you've been here?

"That's hard for me to say right now. I do like the speed that we've added the last three days. I do certainly like all the positions that we've added, and the speed that they have. These are all sub-4.5 guys who can run."

Is there one thread among the drafts from the past few years? What's been maybe the hallmark of these last three-four

drafts?

"I think that the job that Duke, Mike, and all the scouts — Steve, Andrew, Christian and Trey ... the job that they do of lining up our draft board after conversations they've had with us is spectacular. They're really close (on the ratings) as the draft goes down. We're very close on all the positions. The one thing I don't think we've done over the course of the last three, four, five drafts is that we haven't really had to reach a lot. They've drafted based on the grades they've had, and based on what's on the board. I think they've stayed very consistent. I think there are times when the boat starts to go off the river a little bit, and they pull it right back on and get it lined back up again. Sometimes cooler heads prevail. I think they've stuck to the draft board, and I think they've done a hell of a job of getting it lined up and putting the players in the proper order as they fit for us — not for everybody else and not what the league values, but how they fit for us. I think that's been the difference."

In the third round you could've gone a variety of directions, but it looked like you stayed with the grade there on Battle ...

"I don't want to speak for the people that make that decision, after sitting in the room, (but) I think the consensus was that we have a high, high, high grade on a safety here — a safety we felt was the top safety available, and the top safety, really, maybe in the (entire) draft for us. That's a perfect example of a potential position of a little need. We lost a couple guys there — it's been no secret. We added one there in Nick (Scott), and we had a chance to add another one here in Jordan, so it fell right to us and it worked out perfectly. But that was a chance for us to move and maneuver around a little bit, and we didn't. They did a good job of being resilient and sticking to what the grades were."

There's a mini run on punters. How knowledgeable were you guys about those needs for other teams, and do you feel like if you didn't have the extra sixth-round pick, that he may have been your first sixth-round pick?

"Trust me, I have a nice little sheet in front of me that has the teams I identified that have a need at punter. I (know) every pick that they have, so I was very in tune with who those teams were, what picks they had, and if we were going to do it, where we needed to do it. And if we didn't do it here, we potentially lost the opportunity to acquire him somehow someday. Believe me, I was very in tune with what other teams (needed) ... I can't be in other teams' minds when they're going to pull the trigger, because it's different talking about it and actually doing it. But trust me — I was very in tune with what teams had a need at punter."

The last punter the Bengals drafted was Kevin Huber. Are you expecting 14 years from Robbins?

"It'd be a pretty economical deal for everybody (laughs). When the pick in the fifth round came about, one of the first texts I got was from Kevin, 'Are you guys going to pull the trigger here?' 'It's not up to me, bud.' I think we were in a very, very unique position with Kevin. I feel very fortunate to have been around him as long as I was. He was a productive player for us for a long, long time. And if we're able to get something like that out of Brad, then that's a hell of a deal."

BRAD ROBBINS

Punter; Michigan

Were you surprised to get the call?

"Yeah, definitely surprised. Just thinking about it, being a guy from Ohio, I feel like it makes sense to me, just looking at the Bengals' history of guys from Ohio who punted. Definitely surprising, definitely a really great feeling, and I'm just excited for the opportunity to continue the body of work that I presented."

Did you ever follow Kevin Huber? You're a punter and you don't live very far away ...

"I've known mutual connections who have known Huber, but I have not talked to him directly, no."

Have you ever watched the Bengals? Did you watch them much?

"As a kid growing up, I took one thing at a time and really chased going after the college dream first. I definitely watched my fair share of NFL games. I was more just looking at different punters and different kickers as I grew up, rather than just supporting one team. I really looked up to guys who had really strong bodies of work, and guys who have proven themselves as veterans, including Huber. Huber was on that list. Never had the opportunity to talk to him, but I really looked up to that guy. Yes, sir."

What are some other punters you watched?

"Other players I've watched are Andy Lee, Thomas Morstead, Sam Koch. Those are the guys I really tried to model my game after and the guys I looked up to — including Kevin Huber in there, too. They were just guys who you know had long careers, and guys I looked up to and I wanted to model my game after and be just like them."

What makes you such a good hang time guy?

"I was a four-sport guy growing up, right? So, that's baseball, basketball, football and soccer. I compare it best to baseball. Most guys in the NFL, they're in the NFL because they essentially have the 90-mile-an-hour fastball, or a 95-mile-an-hour fastball, right? It's God-given ability, mixed with talent and mixed with hard work. What makes me a good hang time punter is just being consistent in my mechanics, paired with the work ethic I have and paired with God-given ability. It's really hard to teach people to throw the ball 99 miles an hour, right? Some guys can do it, some guys can't. I believe that's a strength of mine. I believe I'm consistent and directional, definitely consistent in touch when it comes to being close to the goal line. But yeah, I'm just excited for the opportunity moving

forward.”

Do you have a favorite punt from your college career?

“If you follow my college career closely, I kind of went through some adversity and figured stuff out, but I got my first start back in 2020 against Indiana. I had started in 2017 and I was out for a couple years. And then in 2020, I came back. I had my first full start against Indiana, and I believe it was my second or third punt of the game, (where) I really started getting that confidence. And I believe it was like somewhere in the upper 50 (yards), maybe into the 60s, and it bounced directly out of bounds. It was definitely one of my favorite memorable punts, and it just spring me forward into believing that this is something I can definitely do moving forward — and this is what I wanted to do for as long as I can.”

This might sound cliché, but you said you played soccer as one of those sports. How much do you feel like that helped you — playing soccer and being a punter on the football field?

“Yeah, I was always one of those guys on the team who had a leg, where if you ever took a shot (from me, it would hurt). People, rather than standing in the way, they’d rather get out of the way. (My kicks) definitely made a few kids cry if (they) hit them. That was how I was known. I was also a goalkeeper, so I definitely punted the ball out of the box (also).

“It actually dated back to pee-wee football. My dad had tryouts with the New Jersey Generals back in the day, with the original USFL. And during pee-wee football, he told me they were looking for a punter. He was like, ‘Hey, why don’t you go give it a try?’ My first punt was like a 35-yard spiral down the field. And he said I gave him goosebumps. I didn’t really think much of it, but then, going into high school, I started going to camps and I’d hit above five-second hang times as a sophomore. I believe it was Jordan Berry at the time who was working the camp, and he was like, ‘Hey man, you can get college paid for you and potentially turn this into a career.’ That’s really what kind of sprung everything forward. (Now I’m) just looking forward to what’s next and what’s to come.”

What did you think of Darrin Simmons the first time you met him? What were your meetings like?

“(There’s something) with his personality. I really appreciate how he conducts his business, and who he is as a person. I believe he is straightforward. In my personal opinion, I don’t believe he sugarcoats anything — he tells you exactly what he needs, when he needs it and how he needs it. And I feel like that’s how I take coaching the best. He couldn’t be a better fit for me. Just talking to Coach Simmons — throughout the combine, throughout the entire process, throughout the workouts and stuff — I’m just really excited. I think our personalities will mesh well. You know, there’s no one who’s going to take their work as serious as I will.”

What was the workout like up there? It was Good Friday?

“Yeah, correct.”

What was it like? He can be a little quirky ...

(Laughs) “I think I’m quirky too, right? In any kind of capacity, specialists are a little bit quirky, right? In your eyes, you might have seen it as quirky, but in my eyes, I saw it as normal (laughs). Just looking at the workout, it was kind of how the combine is structured, right? Paired with a bunch of holding. Obviously, holding is becoming a huge part of the job for an NFL punter. And with a guy like Evan (McPherson), who’s so consistent and such a good player, you just need to be as consistent as you can for that guy. The ability to gain that trust of the people around you — snapper, kicker, coach, all of them — the quicker you can establish that trust and that relationship, the better off you’ll be in the long run. In my mind, I think the workout went well as far as the kicking and punting standpoint. But a lot of it, I feel like, (was showing how) one of my strengths is being a really, really good holder. I held for (Jake) Moody, who was drafted in the third round (yesterday). He was a (Lou) Groza (Award) finalist, and I’m excited for his future and his career, but I feel like that’s a big part of my game as well — just being so consistent in that regard, as well as being consistent with the hang time and the direction of the punt. There are a lot of facets that a lot of people don’t understand. There are many different parts of being a punter.”

Kicking in the elements can be a big deal, especially in the AFC North. How do you embrace it? How do you handle kicking in conditions that are not ideal?

“So how does a golfer golf during 30 mph winds, rain conditions, whatever? It’s all about the process, and really understanding what your mental makeup is. Being born in Ohio, playing in Ohio and going to Michigan, I’m definitely not afraid of the weather. It’s something I look forward to, and I think it actually increases my game. There are a lot of different types of drops, and different (types of kicks) you have to do, and different timing for different things, in order to be successful in different conditions. I feel like that could be something I could improve on and something I can become consistent at. It could be even more of a strength — the ability to punt in different conditions, and all that kind of stuff, especially in the AFC North is ... really, it’s make or break for you. I’m really looking forward to the opportunity to not only just improve, but to come as close to perfect as I can.”

What was the adversity you referenced in 2017, before you got the job in 2020?

“In 2017, I had a weight room issue. I was out in 2018, and in 2019 I came back the last game of the season. The problem was 2018. After 2017, I was out for 2018, and the guy who played above me in 2018 became an All-American. So understanding the writing on the wall, like hey, what do I do here? Do I transfer? How do I make the best of this situation? Well, I knew I wanted to get my degree. I felt like the Michigan degree weighs so heavily on my future, so that was nonnegotiable — I needed to get that. So I

graduated in three-and-a-half years as quick as I could, just to see what happened. In the meantime, I really dedicated myself to my craft and my performance, and really put it all out there to see what I could do to win the spot back. That was the adversity — the long story short of I went through. (The) 2020 season — like I said, that Indiana game — ended up winning the spot back. I led the Big 10 that year, and then in 2021 was top of the Big 10, and it just kind of stemmed from there.”

Was it an injury in the weight room? Is that what you were referring to?

“Yeah, it was minor, but it definitely took me out for a bit, and now I’m back to 100 percent, obviously.”

What position did your dad play? Was he a punter too?

“His road was a little bit rockier. I don’t know the story exactly. He was a punter. He didn’t go the normal college route like everyone else did. I forget exactly how the story went, but he ended up having a USFL tryout against the Ohio State guy at the time. Yeah, he was a punter — big lefty.”