

Thomas Morstead

08/01/2012 by [Sue Strachan \(https://www.myneworleans.com/author/sue-strachan/\)](https://www.myneworleans.com/author/sue-strachan/)



When I went to interview New Orleans Saint Thomas Morstead I took a look online to get some information about punters, a sometimes-overlooked – but crucial – position on a football team. The first definition I pulled up had nothing to do with football. It had to do with gambling, with “punter” being slang for a speculator in the stock market. Which made me wonder: Is being a punter like gambling? All sports have an element of chance, with the best players knowing how to balance their skill against risk. And punting is much like that: There are a number of particular skills that a punter – and in Morstead’s case, a kickoff specialist,

as well – needs to have, but there's also, I think, a love of the risk. For example: Will the onside kick work? Will the Saints keep the ball, or give the opposing team a great field position?

No one knows until the ball is kicked.

However, Morstead is, if anything, prepared and talented enough to make the odds veer in the Saints' favor.

A player for Southern Methodist University, he was a walk-on, working his way up to first-string position, focusing on punting, but also doing placekicking.

In 2009, the New Orleans Saints drafted him in the fifth round. In the three years he has played for the Saints on its special teams he has had a gross average of 45.8 yards for 161 punts and has been only the second Saints player in club history to receive NFC Special Teams Player of the Week twice – and the first to do so in the same season. He also holds the record for the most touchbacks in one game: nine. His longest kick is 64 yards.

But what Morstead is probably best-known for is an onside kick. It was in the Super Bowl XLIV when the Saints played against the Indianapolis Colts. It was also his first year as a Saint. For the second-half kickoff, Morstead did an onside kick with the Saints, recovering the ball, converting the possession into a touchdown and gaining the lead. It was a crucial play, and the Saints won the Super Bowl. "It's funny that I'll probably be remembered for the shortest kick of my career. So far, anyway," he says.

Morstead has embraced another facet of today's football: social media. He is active on Twitter and Facebook and writes for the Saints' blog.

Off-field he's also involved with PuntPink.com, which he founded to raise money for breast cancer research (his mother is a breast cancer survivor).

In 2011, he raffled off the pink shoes in which he made a record-breaking nine touchbacks in a game against the Indianapolis Colts. Also part of the package were on-field passes and tickets to the game against the New York Giants. Be on the lookout this September for something new on the site.

And while it seems like Morstead seems all business, I would be remiss not to mention a less structured side: "One day I'd like to have a guest appearance as a 610 Stomper. I could shave right now and have a really dirty mustache. I'm ready!" So here's your chance, 610 Stompers: If the Saints took a chance on him, why not you?

When did you become a punter and kicker? I went out for the team as a senior in high school. And I did OK. Then I got an academic scholarship to Southern Methodist University for engineering. I decided to try out for the team as a walk-on, and I made the team. Then my third, fourth and fifth year I was the starting punter and field goal kicker.

But you changed things up a little when you got to the New Orleans Saints. I didn't do a game kickoff until I got to the New Orleans Saints. I let the coaches know by warming up one day – like show and tell – thinking I can kick pretty far and they would notice.

It was four days before the first game of my professional career and they said, “Do you want to do the kickoff? I had never done it before in an NFL game.

Now I kick off at every game, and I may be better known for that than for punting.

What is the difference between what you do as a punter/kickoff specialist and a placekicker (like Garrett Hartley)? At its most simple: a placekicker scores points with a field goal. This job has added pressure; it's black or white – you either make or you don't. There's no gray.

I was fortunate to experience that sort of pressure in college, so it made my job here significantly easier because there are a thousand shades of gray with punts and kickoffs.

How is your football career different from other players? Most guys in the NFL are the cream of the crop – from high school through college. I was a walk-on.

I didn't really get to play sports in high school, I was a late bloomer. I weighed 90 pounds early in high school – 14 years old – and I was 5 feet tall.

I started growing sophomore, junior year of high school, but I was a beanpole – super-skinny.

I started filling out in college. When I got on the team, I was last-string punter – fourth or fifth string – for a year and a half. I then made a bet with a coach that I could make a 60-yard drop kick, which is a rugby kick, and I made it, and he let me do it in practice. Then he let me kick a field goal, then another, and one of the coaches said, “I didn't know you were a kicker.” And I said “No, I'm a punter,” but I want to show what I can really do.

Three weeks later I was on scholarship, and I was the guy. That was the fork in the road.

So what was that like? That whole year was crazy. I went to the NFL Scouting Combine where they get to see all the players on the field at the same time ... I got the draft call from Mickey Loomis, and they were trading up to pick me. I didn't believe him – it was a crazy day.

As a Saint, I remember the third game of preseason that year played in Houston. My mom got her company's suite and managed to fit three times too many people in there. That was really neat for me to walk through the tunnel; I had been out on the field before in college. And I remember thinking that I'm going to play here one day as a pro football player.

During the season, I just remember multiple games at the Superdome. The playoff game against the Minnesota Vikings – that's the most unbelievable game that I've been a part of. Just amazing. To go into overtime, the winning kick by Garrett Hartley to go to the Super Bowl. The elation was just crazy.

How did you get the nickname "The Leg"? This is debatable by other guys on the team. They think I coined the name myself, which I did not.

I still maintain this [version]: The guys used to go bowling during the summer, once a week. It was my first year and I didn't know anyone, so I decided to show up and get to know people. So at that time our special teams captain, Troy Evans, was putting the names of the bowlers in the bowling screen and turns around, and I'm assuming he's going to ask my name as he knows I'm a punter. But he doesn't ask and I don't say anything, so he writes in "Mr. Leg."

Some people on the team like to give me a hard time saying that I was the one who started calling myself that.

Will Troy Evans back up your story? Absolutely not. He's one of the guys who gives me a hard time about it. He probably doesn't remember it because it's not a big deal for him. It was my first day to meet everyone, so I remember everything.

At a Glance

Profession: Punter/Kickoff specialist for the New Orleans Saints – If I only punted, I would be bored to death. **Age:** 26 **Resides:** Lafayette Square District **Born/raised:** Houston, Texas **Family:** Parents: John and Isobel; younger brother, Patrick, currently at Southern Methodist University, majoring in mechanical engineering. Girlfriend, Lauren (we met while in college, though we went to different ones). **Education:** Pearland High School (just south of Houston); attended Southern Methodist University, majoring in mechanical engineering and was pre-med. Still need two classes to graduate. **Favorite book:** I don't read a lot, but I really liked Home Team: Coaching the New Orleans Saints and New Orleans Back to Life, by Sean Payton with Ellis Henican **Favorite movie:** Cinderella Man **Favorite musician/band:** Queen

Favorite restaurant: Irene's Cuisine **Favorite food:** Sushi **Favorite vacation spot:** Cabo San Lucas, Mexico **Hobby:** Trying new restaurants in the city has become a new hobby since moving here.

If you'd like to know more about Morstead's fundraiser, visit:

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