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## Starting Off on the Right Foot

By Caitlin Graveson



Tavecchio made 75% of his field goal attempts while at Cal. Photos provided

Bouncing between the United States and Italy, Giorgio Tavecchio preferred soccer to football while growing up. Now training under famed punter David Akers for the 49ers, Tavecchio is grateful for his experience with the American tradition.

Although playing his entire career in the Bay Area, it was a long journey for Tavecchio to become a professional football player. With a humble, matter-of-fact attitude, Tavecchio is honest about his success and his struggles.

He started playing football his sophomore year at Campolindo, when a friend asked him to try out for the team as a kicker. As a soccer player he didn't really like football, but decided to give it a try.

"I knew there was going to be a free barbeque, so I figured at least I will get free barbecue out of it," he joked. "At that time, I really didn't see it as anything more than just hanging out with my friends."

It wasn't until the summer before his senior year, after attending a few kicking camps, that Tavecchio realized he might have a future in football. However, he didn't get any responses from college recruiters for football and instead decided to walk on to the UC Davis soccer team.

Then on May 28 at 4:01 p.m., just a couple of weeks before his high school graduation, Tavecchio got a call from Cal's special teams coach, offering him a walk-on spot as a kicker.

"I still remember the day and time," he reminisced. "I was dumbfounded. I was jumping for joy."

While it was a tough decision to give up his first passion, Tavecchio decided to play football. "I couldn't turn down Cal football," he explained. "Plus, I wanted to get the best education I could."

Tavecchio began his career at Cal with one goal: to not get cut. "I realized where I was on the totem pole. I couldn't get any lower than where I came in at," he said frankly.

He started practicing just three days before the first game and took over full-time placekicker duties in October after an injury sidelined his teammate. "I should not have played my freshman year, but it was an incredible blessing," Tavecchio recalled.

Still, the transition to playing football fulltime, adjusting to the academic rigor, and living up to team expectations was difficult.

"I lived and died off of the results. I couldn't handle the magnitude of that stage," Tavecchio said of his first year. "If I had a good practice, I would walk around with my chest out. If I had a bad practice, I would walk around with my hood on."

His sophomore year was just as challenging. Cal brought in a freshman kicker on scholarship and Tavecchio commuted from his family home in Moraga to save money.

The struggles helped him in the long run though. "Looking back, it was a blessing because it helped me realize how important my family is to me," he explained. "It made me depend on my faith."

After his sophomore year, Cal got a new kicking coach who provided Tavecchio with the support he needed. "That, coupled with more maturity; I got better," Tavecchio said. "I just had to disconnect myself from the results. I am going to do my best and let God take care of the rest."

Despite his growing pains, Tavecchio ranks fifth on Cal's all-time scoring list, fourth among kickers, and third in both all-time field goals made and extra points made.

After his senior season, he trained for NFL tryouts. The Niners held a pre-draft try-out for all the local colleges. Tavecchio saw the notice in the alumni locker room at Cal one day before the tryout.

"It is just so crazy how things work out," he explained about the coincidental discovery.

Tavecchio was signed as an undrafted free agent on May 4.

Now, training under Akers, Tavecchio is amazed by his journey. "I can't believe it still," he said, "I have been able to remain close to home, which is so important to me, and to work under David Akers."

He is hoping to get some playing time in the upcoming preseason games, but is thankful for the experience.

"I don't know what the future has in store, all I know is that I have been so blessed to have these

opportunities," Tavecchio said. "I just want to do my absolute best and grow as much as possible."



Tavecchio scored 50 points his senior year at Campolindo.

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