

All about the snap

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When you look up and down the Cal football roster, you'll notice that there are a handful of juniors that could possibly test NFL draft waters once the spring rolls around. The name you might not be expecting to head that list though is 6-foot-1, 248-pound long snapper [Nick Sundberg](#). Arguably the premier athlete at his position this season, Sundberg is one of the true unsung heroes of the Bears' success over the years.

When talking football, you can go on for hours upon hours and the words "long snapping" probably won't ever come up in a conversation. By the nature of the beast though, that's a good thing for Sundberg and his compatriots.



Look for Sundberg to snap on Sunday's in the near future.

Unquestionably one of the more thankless positions on the football field, a team's ability to produce a quality long snapper on both punts and field goal attempts is obviously, but not so evidently, a crucial part of successful special teams play.

Although most athletes who put on the pads don't exactly crave to become a special teams regular much less a superstar, there are a handful of exceptions. The most noticeable of which might be former Buffalo Bills' Pro Bowler **Steve Tasker**, who made a career out of his strong and yet unique skills amongst the "third" phase of football.

For Sundberg though, a native of Phoenix (Ariz.), and self proclaimed "outdoor adventuress," becoming a long snapper is exactly what the doctor ordered.

"When I first started doing it, I was awful," Sundberg admitted. "I knew this would be my way to still continue playing football. I wasn't tall enough to be an offensive lineman and I wasn't quick enough to be a linebacker. So I was fine with it."

Of course, Sundberg, a Legal Studies major at Berkeley, also finds the time to feed his "wild side" as well.

"I went skydiving after the Las Vegas Bowl. It's the most ridiculous thing I've ever done," he explained. "When you first jump out you feel the urge to want to fly but after a quick second you just let go. It's an unreal feeling. Bungee jumping is ridiculous too. There's a place right next to the Circus Circus Hotel that I try to go to every time I'm in Vegas. I've talked to a couple of my teammates about going skydiving but they all think I'm crazy."

Just one of a handful of athletes at North Canyon High in Phoenix back in 2004, Sundberg started his high school football career as an offensive lineman. After a coaching change right before his senior season though, everything went out the window. One of the coaches hired was **Ben Bernard**, the nationally renowned long snapping guru.

Bernard's presence changed Sundberg's football career for the good.

"In the beginning it was tough because I was so bad," he recalled. "When I started working with Coach Bernard, [Jonathan Weeks](#), who is the long snapper at Baylor now, was just about to finish up his high school career. I used to work out with him and saw how well he would snap the ball. I wanted to be as good as him."

Before long, with the tutelage of Bernard by his side and his penchant for being the best at whatever he does, Sundberg quickly developed into a proficient long snapper. Cal head coach [Jeff Tedford](#) heard from special teams coach [Pete Alamar](#) about Sundberg, with the Bears special teams coach on the lookout over the summer for a long-snapper. The Bears had lost their anticipated starter, **Chris Janeway**, to a career-ending knee injury. Cal eventually offered Sundberg a full scholarship to play football in Berkeley, matching Colorado's offer, and the rest is history.

Since his arrival on campus in 2005, Sundberg has brought on nothing but praise from his coaching staff, as he's a big reason why Cal hasn't had a punt blocked in over two seasons.

"What Nick does is such an important part of the game," Tedford said. "I don't want to jinx it by saying it because the last time a reporter did a story on him the very next game he had a bad snap. But there's a reason why we are very

efficient in getting the ball out in special teams play. Nick is so fast and accurate with that."

A player who people consider to be ultra competitive, Sundberg has continued to work on his long snapping duties, turning what was a very good skill into a great one in a matter of two years.

"Being a good long snapper takes dedication, it's as simple as that," Sundberg said. "[Matt Rios](#) (current Cal commit) has a full scholarship here to Cal and yet he's still out there six days a week working with Coach Bernard."

"Whenever I'm in town, I would call coach up and we'll be out there the next day snapping. Last week, the (Arizona State) game ended at like 11 and we were all out there with Coach Bernard the next day snapping."

Beyond his pure talent as a long-snapper, Sundberg has started what appears to be a legacy at Cal. Due to his talent and personality, he's set the bar for other long-snappers in the future. With a close connection now to Coach Bernard, the Bears knew exactly who to call on for a future long-snapper. Rios is arguably the top long-snapping prospect in the country, and his connection with Sundberg is obvious. Not only does he practice under Coach Bernard, but he attends the same North Canyon high school in Phoenix.

Although being a long snapper seems like an easy thing to do, Tedford's praise for Sundberg comes from a honest place considering the difficulty of being perfect with each snap.

"This job is harder than it looks," Sundberg explained.

NFL teams have noticed it as well, which is why some pundits consider Sundberg to be a possible draft candidate once the next draft rolls around.

"I honestly don't know what I'm going to do yet," Sundberg described when asked if he would consider leaving school early. "I would have to see who else is coming out and evaluate everything that goes into it."

Tedford though is very confident about Sundberg's possibilities on the next level.

"I would think so," he answered when asked if Sundberg had a shot at the NFL. "Let's put it this way. Nick definitely has the potential."

Chris Nguon is the lead football writer for [BearTerritory](#). He's well known for his recruiting coverage in the star-studded Oakland Athletic League, plus his numerous contributions with The Daily Californian, UC-Berkeley's only independent, student-run newspaper. Nguon is also a correspondent with the Oakland Tribune, and will cover Cal football in the fall of 2007.