

Kyle Ringo Blog: Darragh O'Neill aims to be Ray Guy finalist

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Colorado junior Darragh O'Neill was named to the Ray Guy Award watch list for the second consecutive year on Wednesday but has his sights set on either winning the honor this year or finishing as a finalist.

O'Neill has been the Buffs punter the past two years and is the best returning punter in the Pac-12 Conference. He had never played organized football prior to joining the program in 2011 after a standout prep career at Fairview High School.

"It's always good to be recognized and appreciated for what you do," O'Neill said. "Being on the preseason watch list doesn't really mean that much. I'm hoping to be one of the finalists hopefully, top-10, top-three hopefully come October and November.

"That's really all that matters to me."

O'Neill said his primary focus in the offseason has been working on hang time, which will help reduce the number of punts that opponents are able to return. O'Neill says that while there are 10 other players on the punt coverage team, he believes it falls to him to get the necessary hang time and also place his punts correctly to make it hard for returnmen to do anything with his kicks.

O'Neill recently spent a weekend in Detroit working with former Ball State punter Scott Kovanda, who was a Ray Guy finalist last season and has had several tryouts with NFL teams this spring and summer. O'Neill said Kovanda was very helpful in offering tips on technique. O'Neill also has been watching plenty of film of other successful punters trying to pick up subtle details that help those players succeed.

"It was just kind of a player-to-player kind of meeting," O'Neill said. "He helped me a lot in that."

O'Neill produced a net average of 39.3 yards per punt last season when he attempted a whopping 76 punts. He placed 25 of those punts inside the opponent's 20-yard line.

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