

Resilient Crosby regains focus

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Long before the Super Bowl rings or 20-year NFL career, Matt Stover's first claim to fame was being a regional punt, pass and kick champion out

of Dallas.

Funny as it may seem now, back then it was quite an accomplishment for an 11-year-old with his whole life in front of him. It opened doors he never could have imagined, including the chance to meet then-Cowboys kicker Rafael Septien.

In an age when kicking coaches were hard to come by, Stover asked if he could work with Septien sometime. After all, the Cowboys' training facility was only 3 miles from his family home.

He never heard back.

"From that, I pretty much said I'll never do that to a kid," said Stover, now 45. "I'll always work with him if he wants me to work with him."

A decade later, Stover kicked his way into the NFL. He won his first Super Bowl as a rookie on the New York Giants' injured reserve list in 1990 and won another kicking for the Baltimore Ravens in 2000.

During the offseason, he maintained a residence in Georgetown, Texas, where his wife was from and his in-laws lived. Then one summer, a local teenager asked if Stover would mind meeting with him sometime.

That kid was Mason Crosby.

True to his word, Stover obliged and told Crosby to meet him at a local football field. From the start, he could tell how talented the teenager was with a booming right leg and uncommon poise for a kicker barely in his teens.

Their association pretty much ended there as Crosby went on to to kick at the University

of Colorado and Stover continued his career with the Ravens. Whatever success Crosby's had, Stover attributes it to his natural ability, composure and coaching.

Still, those brief sessions meant a lot to Crosby.

"A lot of the things that Matt Stover kind of taught me in high school

and gave me his knowledge ... and into his insight and his mind is stuff I still carry today," Crosby said. "A lot of the mental side of the game, how to approach things, I credit him with a lot of that for whenever I worked with him in high school."

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Photo/Getty Images
Mason Crosby hasn't missed a kick so far this season after last year's struggles.

Crosby notices different kind of change

By SARAH BARSHOP
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GREEN BAY – Mason Crosby may not have made any drastic mechanical or mental changes to his approach to kicking field goals after a season in which he ranked last among NFL kickers with a 63.6 percent conversion rate, but there is one change that he made in the offseason that stands out to him.

"I do feel like this training camp and this offseason I did a good job of not holding onto much," Crosby said. "Situations happened, there are missed kicks and we moved on.

"(I) just really dove into my relationships with my family and friends, and making sure the relationships I have are intact. Those things are extremely important and I think those things help you get through a lot of stuff."

By "not holding on to much," including a potentially disastrous Family Night Scrimmage performance on Aug. 3, Crosby also learned the benefit of not getting caught up in his job when he had the chance to be home, where he focused his attention on his family – wife Molly, three-year-old son Nolan, and four-month-old daughter Charlotte.

"I go home and we don't talk much about football. We have two kids now and we just enjoy each other," Crosby said. "You've got to really see what is important and make sure that each thing has its place. I put a ton of importance on what I do here, so I want to give them all my time and all my effort when I'm at home, and then really lock in whenever I'm here at the stadium

"I think for me, it helped me to move on. If there's a missed kick or missed situation, I just move on a lot quicker and just go to the next one."

Crosby may "move on" from the field goals he misses, but it doesn't mean he forgets them. A year after making a career-best 85.7 percent of his field-goal attempts, Crosby suffered through a stretch where he made just 12 of 24 kicks (50 percent) and finished

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the regular season having to make his last four kicks just to end up at 21 for 33.

The kicker said he learned from his struggles last season, and the missed kicks were just a reminder of how important his work during the week is, in preparation for each game.

"I've really taken a step in the right direction in making sure I really put in the work during the week so that I feel as prepared as possible," Crosby said. "If anything, what last year was, and what early in camp was, was just a reminder of those things that I really need to dive into every week and make sure that I put in that work so I'm prepared when that game comes and when that situation comes."

Crosby's recent body of work - he is 4-for-4 on the season and has made 16 straight field goals, dating back to Week 15 of last season against Tennessee and including the six field goals he made in preseason play - shows that the new situational approach he has taken is working.

"For me, it's all about situations, all about different opportunities that are going to present themselves," Crosby said. "I kind of put myself in those as much as possible, mentally and physically on the practice field, so when game time comes, that's all I have to think about."

For now, it appears to be working. Crosby survived training-camp challenges from Giorgio Tavecchio and Zach Ramirez, and while he accepted a \$2.4 million pay cut before the season started, he can earn it all back if he kicks the way he believes he can.

"I like exactly where he is now," special teams coordinator Shawn Slocum said Thursday. "He's really striking the ball well, I think he's got a lot of confidence. His volume of work has been really good. We haven't had a lot of field goal opportunities in the games, but his practice work has been outstanding. (On Wednesday in practice), he was 100 percent. He's looking good."

"There's always a physical aspect of playing the game, but especially at this position there's always a mental aspect because your mentality will affect you physically in terms of how you execute the technique. Mason's done a good job, and through the end of training to this point he looks good."

Despite the success he has had so far, Crosby knows it is still early in the season. He made his first five field-goal attempts last season before missing at least one kick in eight consecutive games in which he attempted one. Still, he said he feels good about where he is at - in his personal life, and on the football field.

"(It's) early and I feel really good with how I've worked through a lot of different things," Crosby said. "A lot of stuff that has popped up in this last year, but I feel good. I feel good with my personal life, I feel good with my professional life, and I'm really enjoying the time I get to be in this locker room with my teammates, and I'm just very thankful."

"I look at every opportunity as a chance to get better and to go out there and put points on the board and help this team win so I have a good mindset. I feel very, very comfortable with what I'm doing and I'm really happy about that."

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