

Green enjoying view from the sidelines

By Kevin Gemmell, ESPN.com

PALO ALTO, Calif. -- The loneliest number on the Stanford football team is 38. That would be David Green, the punter.

He's the guy who hopes to get in, but usually doesn't.

The guy who watches from the sidelines as the Andrew Luck-led offense converts third down after third down.

The guy who watches his team go 99 yards and score a touchdown.

The guy whose 41.6 yards-per-punt average would rank him in the top 40 nationally, but he doesn't have enough kicks to even qualify for the national rankings.

"Yeah, I guess you could say I've got a pretty easy job," Green joked.

Easy, but lonely. Green's services have only been requested 10 times in four games -- and four of those came in the season opener against San Jose State. Outside of that game, things have been relatively quiet for the fifth-year senior from Mission Viejo, Calif.

So what does he do on the sidelines? Think of witty updates for his 850 Facebook friends?

"I enjoy the game," he said. "I joke with my friends and enjoy watching us score. But you also have to stay locked in and be ready to go at a moment's notice. Mental focus is the No. 1 priority. On third down, me and [long-snapper Andrew] Fowler will go stand by coach. Then they'll convert a third down. And we'll say, 'That was easy.'"

Green ranks second to last in the Pac-12 in punt attempts. For perspective, four punters in the Pac-12 have at least 20 punts this season. That means Green either plays for a team with a really good offense, or an offense that turns the ball over a lot.

It ain't the latter.

"The goal of every offensive coach is to have an under-used punter and a kicker that kicks a lot of PATs," said Stanford head coach David Shaw. "David's great. He understands that and knows when he gets out there he has a vital role in establishing or re-establishing field position. I think he's getting just the right amount of work."

But that's how it's been for Green. In high school, he estimates he only punted about 12 times in his whole career because Mission Viejo would score 40-plus points per game. Still, he entered Stanford as the No. 1-rated kicker in the country by Scout.com.

"I'm pretty used to it," said the lefty. "But it's really cool. We have a great team. When you're coming off a win, who cares if you only punted twice? It's fun to have good numbers and you want to be on the charts. But at the end of the day, if you only punt twice and win by 40-something, that's fun."

And of course, no practice would be complete without the requisite jabbing from coaches and teammates.

"I give all of those guys a hard time," Shaw said. "I ask them 'What did you even do today? Why do we even give you pads?'"

Green laughs it off.

"It just comes with the territory," he said. "Guys make fun of you. But we do have a very good job. We don't get hit. We don't have sore muscles after practice. We're not in meetings three hours a day. It's a trade-off, but a very good trade-off."

And then, no smiles, no laughing. Green has to flip the switch and potentially dig his team out of a tough situation.

"Those guys exist in a different world than everybody else on the football team," Shaw said. "We have to jab them every once in a while to make sure they are mentally sharp. They know when it's time to come in, they have the most specific job on the field and it's got to be perfect every time ... that's the way it is for them. Nothing, nothing, nothing and then it's fourth-and-4 on our own 20-yard line and there's a minute and a half and we're up by four. You need to boom this ball out there. Those guys have to exist in that world where there is nothing to do and then BOOM, pressure."

Yet during his weekly sit-down with the media, Shaw couldn't resist taking a friendly shot at the punter when asked if they have any fake punts in the works for Green.

"Have you seen him run," Shaw asked. "Even worse, have you seen him throw? Oh my gosh."

Green is running out of time and opportunities to check another achievement off his list -- making a tackle.

“I have zero,” he said. “Not one in my college career. I think I’d love get one. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not afraid of it, but the opportunity hasn’t come yet. I’m not afraid to get hit.”

But if presented with that opportunity, could he make the play?

“I have faith in my teammates,” said linebacker and special-teams tackler extraordinaire A.J. Tarpley. “If it comes down to it, I’ll trust him to make the tackle. But hopefully the rest of the punt team will bring him down before he has to ... but if the game is on the line, I say he makes the tackle.”

At this rate, he might never get the chance.