11-9-2002

Game Day Kaimin, November 9, 2002

Associated Students of the University of Montana
Still kicking

For junior place kicker Chris Snyder, football has been more than just a game — it’s been a way to keep the memory of his father alive.

By Bryan Haines
Story by Bryan Haines Photos by Lido Vizzuti

Still kicking

Thump.

A second later, a football leaves a kicker’s foot and is sent hurtling through the air. That dull sound of a foot hitting pigskin is the soundtrack of a trade, like the whir of a sewing machine as a needle and thread stitch together pieces of fabric.

This is the sound, the sound of a clear knockout of a football across a field, that stitched together the Snyder family.

Thump.

Kicking runs through the Snyder family as thick as blood. It was imbedded in the father, Lawrence, then passed down from him to his son, Steve. The family trade was passed again to another son, Chris, who is now kicking for the University of Montana Grizzlies.

While the trade may have changed a little (Lawrence was a straight-on style angle while approaching the ball), the one thing remains the same:

Thump.

So it had to be those three defining moments — when Steve fulfilled a childhood dream, when Lawrence experienced one of the happiest moments, as a father and when Chris knew that he wanted to become a kicker — would all happen at the same time, with all three Snyders together.

When Chris was in fourth grade Lawrence brought him to one of Steve’s high school football games. Steve was a senior at Mead High School in Spokane, Wash. Like his father before him and Chris after, Steve earned all-city honors at Spokane as a place kicker.

In all of Steve’s games, never had he been a game-winning field goal until that fateful night.

Chris doesn’t remember how far the kick was, who it was against or even the final score of the game. All he remembers is his dad’s reaction. After the kick sailed through the uprights, the proud father started jumping up and down with joy as tears streamed down his cheeks.

It was a vision that Chris still sees clearly in his mind, as if he were watching it on television, and the reason Chris decided to kick.

“I remember how happy he was,” Chris said. “Right then I said to myself that someday I want to make my dad that happy.”

It was a promise that Chris never got the chance to fulfill.

His father’s jubilant reaction to Steve’s game-winning field goal was the most energy and action that Chris had ever seen from his dad. During all of Chris’ childhood, his father was constantly asleep in bed or in the hospital, as he battled heart disease. The disease severely limited Lawrence’s physical activities, and he had to carry an oxygen machine with him when he went out.

But despite being weak and extremely sick, he was always at his children’s games.

“At my soccer games, if it was too cold, he would move the car so that he could see,” Chris said. “He was always at the games — every single one.”

Eventually though, the heart disease started taking its toll on Lawrence.

Trips to the hospital were becoming more frequent, but with every trip Lawrence would tell Chris, “Don’t worry, daddy will be home tomorrow.”

And every time, Lawrence came home.

Once again, on April 25, 1992, his heart forced Lawrence to go back to the hospital. As Chris was leaving his father’s room, Lawrence looked at his son, and said, as he had so many times before, “Don’t worry, daddy will be home tomorrow.”

Lawrence passed away later that night.

It was a shock at first to Chris, who was 10 at the time. He understood that his father was sick, but he believed his father would be home the next day, just as he said. Looking back, Chris is grateful for that final night before his father passed away.

“I was at least able to see him and tell him I loved him one final time,” Chris said. “Now, whenever I talk to my mom or whoever it is in my family, I tell them I love them, because you never know.”

Lawrence’s passing was hard for all eight Snyder children, but especially Chris. He never got to know his father on an adult level, something he deeply wishes he could have, and in the age of ten, he saw his father forced to grow up without a dad.

But Chris took comfort in the fact that he brought his father endless happiness when he was alive. “Chris knew he brought so much joy to his dad,” said Sharon, Chris’ mother. “There were no negative memories, only positive ones.”

Sharon carried the family through the ordeal.

With her husband gone, Sharon was now the sole parent for eight children, four who were still living at home. Having to provide for four kids with only one pay check was sometimes hard for Sharon and her family. There were times when the hospital bills left the Snyders with little money.

No matter what though, there was still plenty of food on the table and clothes on her children’s backs. Anything else the children got was a bonus.

“The only word I can describe my mom with is amazing,” Snyder said. “No matter what, she still made time for all of us despite everything.”

Sharon’s strength and how well she raised her children still amazes Montana head coach Joe Glenn.

“It is a testament to his mother about how strong she is,” Glenn said. “You can give a lot of credit to his mom. She is a great lady, and the whole family has just been great.”

Every single family member helped each other through their father’s death, but no one was more important to Chris than his older brother Steve.

Steve filled the role of a father figure in Chris’ life. Although Steve had left for college after Lawrence passed away, he came home every weekend for Chris’ games. During the summer he would shag balls for Chris as he worked on his kicking.

“From this day, we are the closest,” Snyder said. “A lot of people have a tough relationship with their brothers, but I am not afraid to say ‘I love you’ to my brother. He is awesome.”

So it had to be those three defining moments — when Steve fulfilled a childhood dream, when Lawrence experienced one of the happiest moments, as a father and when Chris knew that he wanted to become a kicker — would all happen at the same time, with all three Snyders together.
Griz within reach of I-AA win-streak record

Myers Reece

GameDay Kaimin

The Griz have been winning for two years, breaking records and sitting at the top of the polls — none of which are secrets. But now, they have another rubicon to pass against Sacramento State — breaking the all-time I-AA record for consecutive victories.

The Pennsylvania teams from 1992-1995 won 24 games in a row, and the Griz are currently at 23. While the record may be the subject of conversations around Missoula, it's not in the Griz locker room.

Sophomore Leoander Segars reaches out to catch a pass around Northern Arizona's nine during last week's game at Washington-Grizzly Stadium. Segars scored one touchdown helping the Griz to defeat the Lumberjacks 58-24.

"It's kind of like a no-hitter that's in progress," Griz head coach Joe Glenn said. "No one wants to talk about it until it's over."

Maybe Glenn and the boys don't want to jinx it, but it is certainly a big deal — not only locally, but also across the football nation. In order to attain that achievement, however, the Griz have to beat Sacramento State first.

Montana owns a 7-0 series record over the Hornets, but a few of those haven't come easily. The last two meetings at Washington-Grizzly Stadium have been close, including a 24-20 squeaker in 2000.

Even though the Hornets are the huge underdogs, Glenn remembers how closely they have played the Grizzlies in Missoula the last two times.

"The last two games have been wire-to-wire here at Washington-Grizzly stadium," Glenn said. "Last time Sac State pretty much had the game, but we squeaked it out in the end. The game before that went to double overtime."

Sac State's offense is led by a trio of senior running backs, all of whom Glenn named as threats. Quarterback Ryan Leadingham became the school's all-time leader in pass completions last week. He has completed 368 passes, breaking the old record of 365.

That's quite a feat for a four-year career. But Leadingham's only a sophomore.

The other two offensive leaders are senior running back Garrett White and sophomore receiver Fred Amey. White is a versatile utility player, whom Glenn calls a "jack of all trades," lining up at different positions throughout the game. Amey leads the Big Sky in all-purpose yards.

But as good as Leadingham is, he'll have a tough time keeping away from UM's sack specialists and he'll most likely be forced to keep the ball in the air.

Montana leads the Big Sky in sacks, and the defense proved how powerful it actually is last week against Northern Arizona. The sacks and onslaught was led by defensive end Tim Bush. The junior from Kellogg, Idaho, had six tackles and was credited with four sacks, even though he was in on five. He won Big Sky Defensive Player of the Week, and was voted top defensive player of the week in I-AA by Sports Network.

He also moved ahead of teammate Troy Young for the Big Sky lead in sacks.

Last week against NAU, Montana held the Lumberjacks to 18 yards rushing on 23 attempts. Over the last two games, the Grizzlies have allowed only 27 rushing yards on 56 attempts. As for their own rushing, they have been pretty successful with freshman running back J.R. Waller gaining 159 yards on the ground last week, after racking up 156 the week before.

"We would like to give J.R. the ball and keep the offense balanced," Glenn said. "But we just have to establish a game plan based on what defense they throw at us. If they're jamming eight men in the middle, then maybe J.R. won't get 25 carries."

The Griz hold the Big Sky record for overall consecutive victories, as well as having the most consecutive conference wins (24) and consecutive road conference wins (13). They are currently tied for the Big Sky record with the 1992-1997 Montana teams for consecutive home conference victories at 19. Montana's last conference loss was a 51-48 overtime loss at Portland State in 1999.

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Montana

2002 Record • 9-0, 4-0 Big Sky
2001 Record • 15-1 Overall, 7-0 Big Sky

**Offense**

David Gober

Running Back
5-9, 190 freshman from Anaheim, CA

Mr. Gober is the second half of the Griz running attack this season with fellow redshirt freshman J.R. Waller. He is returning this week from an ankle injury and he hopes to continue his strong season where he has carried the ball 72 times for 352 yards. This weekend against the Sico State Hornets, Gober will return and continue his strong play.

**Special Teams**

Mark Spencer

Punter
6-5, 200 senior from Fallbrook, CA

Mr. Spencer, a junior college transfer from Palomar J.C., has returned from a stellar junior campaign averaging 37.9 yards per punt as a senior. Last year against MSU, Mr. Spencer had a 77-yard punt which landed on the ‘Cats’ 4-yard line. We here at GOK, expect more great kicks from this Griz veteran.

**Numerical Roster**

**PROBABLE STARTERS IN BOLD**

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**GRIEZ DEFENSE**

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**2002 Record • 9-0, 4-0 Big Sky**

**2001 Record • 15-1 Overall, 7-0 Big Sky**
Mr. Kroeker is the defensive machine for the Hornets this year, tallying 77 tackles in nine games, four of those for loss. He also has one interception and one forced fumble. At the end of this year, Mr. Kroeker will most likely earn All-Big Sky honors. But against the Griz, he will have his hands full trying to cover the running backs out of the backfield and attempting to penetrate the running backs out of the backfield and attempting to penetrate the pocket protected by the massive O-line.

Mr. Leadingham is an offensive machine for the Hornets. In less than two years, he has thrown for nearly 2000 yards to go along with 12 TDs. Against the Griz on Saturday, he will seek to light up the secondary with long passes to wide receiver Fred Amey.
Western Illinois finished its 2001 campaign with a less than stellar 5-5 record. This year, Tony Moss, the Leathernecks' head coach, said, "We won the conference championship in 2000, and a lot of these players were on that team."

So far this year, the Leathernecks from Macomb, Ill., are 8-1, ranked No. 8 in the nation, and they are on the verge on winning the Gateway Conference championship for the second time in three years. Western Illinois is the closer in the eight-team Gateway Conference, which finished fifth in the eight-team Gateway Conference.

"This is a championship team," Moss said. "The Leathernecks are led by solid specialists in the country," he said. "The offense and defense are solid." The Western Illinois offense is led by senior wide receiver Stacy Coleman, who leads the Gateway Conference with 52 catches for 753 yards to go along with 7 touchdowns. Throw in tight end R.J. Luke, a senior transfer from Penn State who is second on the team in receptions and reliable quarterback Russ Michna, and you are left with a potent passing attack.

The Leathernecks are averaging 241 yards a game through the air to go along with 174 on the ground. Putting these two together creates a balanced offensive assault.

On the other side of the ball, the Leathernecks are led by Buchanan Award finalist junior linebacker Lee Russell, one of only four juniors nominated for the award. He leads the team with 81 tackles and three interceptions, two of which have been returned for touchdowns.

"He is the backbone of our team," Patterson said. "The specialists are the backbone of the team, Patterson said. "They give us the best duo of specialists in the country," he said. "The offense and defense are solid."

The Western Illinois Leathernecks are led by All-American-worthy contributions from punter Mike Scifres and kicker Justin Langan. Scifres is the only 1-AA punter among the nine other 1-AA finalists for the Roy Guy Award for the top punter in the nation.

"Mike is a logical All-American," Patterson said. "He is averaging 47.8 yards per punt without the aid of wind or high elevation."

"These specialists are the backbone of the team," Patterson said. "We have good depth on the offense and a lot of these players were on that team."
**Around the Sky**

**Eastern Washington (5-4) at Montana State (4-5)**

This is an important game for both of these teams’ Big Sky hopes. Eastern Washington is 2-3 in Big Sky play, while Montana State is 2-2. The winner of this game could find itself right near the top of the conference, while the loser could find itself in a hole too deep to climb out.

Only Montana (4-0), Idaho State (4-2), and Portland State (3-2) have conference records above .500. A win or loss in any game could lead to conference contention or relegation for any of the teams in the conference, with the exception of 0-5 Weber State.

Eastern Washington’s quarterback Josh Blankenship continues to put up unheard of numbers for the offense. He leads the conference in every major quarterback statistical category including pass efficiency, strengthened by his incredible 2.5 touchdowns to 0 interception ratio. EWU is third in the nation in passing offense, fifth in total offense, and tied for fifth in scoring offense.

Montana State has played fairly well lately, winning two of its last three games. One reason for the Bobcats’ improvement might be switching quarterbacks. Original starting quarterback Tyler Thomas was benched in favor of true freshman Travis Lally. In the four games the freshman from Aumsville, Ore. has started, he has produced big numbers, including 319 yards last week against Sac State. Lally won Big Sky Offensive Player of the Week for his performance, and is currently third in the conference in pass efficiency.

Montana’s standout running back Ryan Johnson is second in the conference in running the ball, averaging 102.8 yards per game, and is still on the “Payton Watch” list.

The conference’s best offense, EWU, will have its hands full against the Big Sky’s second best defense. EWU averages 456.1 yards per game, but MSU only gives up 322.4 yards per game. However, in the end, Blankenship will simply prove to be too much for the ‘Cats in this important Big Sky battle.

**GDK prediction: 31-13 Eastern Washington.**

**No. 13 Portland State (6-3) at Weber State (2-6)**

Portland State is coming off a huge conference win over Idaho State, snapping PSU’s four-game winning streak. PSU, playing at home last weekend, won 27-24 in dramatic fashion on a last-second, 20-yard field goal by Mike Cajal-Williams. Willis won Big Sky Special Teams Player of the Week along with MSU’s kicker/punter Nate Cook.

That victory gave PSU a 3-2-1 conference record, placing them right behind 4-2 Idaho State for second place. Weber State, on the other hand, is 0-5 in conference play, and has lost its last five games overall.

This game is very important for Portland State’s Big Sky hopes, but meaningless for Weber State except for pride.

Portland State’s star sophomore running back Ryan Fuqua continues to lead the conference in rushing by a large margin with 126.7 yards per game. Senior quarterback Justin Woodson is finally back on track after heavy preseason expectations. His 10 touchdowns to 10 interception ratio might not look spectacular, but considering the way he started the season, it is all that he can ask for right now.

PSU has been doing just enough to win games all season, including its performance last week. Ranked last in passing offense and scoring offense, the Bobcats have not been spectacular in their wins. However, as their record proves, the Vikings know how to get it done when it counts.

Weber State is in the conference in rushing offense, turnover margin, pass efficiency, and second to last in an array of other statistical categories.

Weber State leads the overall series 13-9, but lost last year 65-43. Don’t expect 108 points to be scored again, but do expect PSU to win. Portland State is good, Weber State is not.

**GDK prediction: 31-13 Portland State**

**Northern Arizona (5-4) at No. 23 Idaho State (5-3)**

Last week, Idaho State’s four-game winning streak was snapped with a devastating 27-24 loss at State. The Bengals are angry, a little heartbroken and ready to take it out on Northern Arizona.

Northern Arizona lost to Montana last weekend, and in the process showed that its defense wasn’t immune to the run. Grizz freshman J.R. Walker ran for 159 yards against the NAU front. Idaho State comes into the game with the best scoring defense in the Big Sky, allowing a measly 17.1 points per game. They are also second in total offense, and third in scoring offense.

Northern Arizona enters the game with less impressive numbers. NAU is last in total offense and pass defense, but is second in rushing defense, allowing only 92 yards per game.

This game is another crucial Big Sky battle. ISU is second in the conference with a 4-2 record, but barely hovering above PSU. The Bengals can’t afford a loss. Northern Arizona, on the other hand, is 3-3 in Big Sky play, and could find itself near the top with a win.

Northern Arizona receiver Clarence Moore is leading the conference in receiving yards per game and receptions per game. NAU punter Mark Gould continues to lead the nation in punting. ISU is led by senior quarterback Doug Baughman, second in the conference in total offense and passing yards per game. On defense, ISU’s Jared Allen is the only non-Montana player to be in the top four in the conference in sacks.

In a crucial game like this one, mistakes will be very important. Every play will count, and in the end the better team should win. ISU is the better team.

**GDK prediction: 27-17 Idaho State**

**To sum up the Big Sky: In an important weekend in Big Sky action, the postseason fate of many teams may be decided. Teams like Eastern Washington and Sacramento State are still clinging on to playoff hopes, but know that losses this weekend might crush those hopes. Other teams like Northern Arizona and Montana State know that sticking around in the middle of the pack isn’t sufficient. They need to win to get to the top. Then there are the teams hanging around at the top behind Montana, Idaho State and Portland State. They know that even if everyone else is chasing them, they can’t afford to make any mistakes, or they could suddenly find themselves as the ones doing the chasing. When all is said and done, and the grueling Saturday of Big Sky mayhem is complete, the Montana Grizzlies will once again pick up the newspapers on Sunday and see that familiar headline: No. 1 Montana still undefeated.**

Lisa Hornstein/GameDay Kaimin

**Montana vs. Sacramento State**

With a win against Sac State, the Griz will tie the all-time 1-A record for consecutive victories at 24. The record is currently held by Pennsylvania. Sac State is coming off a heartbreaking loss at home to Montana State, 31-30. Now, after losing its coach to suspension, Sac State has to enter the home of the No. 1 team in the nation. The numbers for the Griz speak for themselves. In the past two weeks, they have allowed only 27 rushing yards in 56 attempts. Not only is quarterback John Edwards performing better than ever, freshman J.R. Weller continues to complement the passing attack and total defense. On top of that, they lead the overall series against Sac State 7-0.

Sac State is led by a trio of solid players on offense. Senior running back Garrett White is an extremely adaptable utility player that lines up at different positions several times a game. Sophomore quarterback Ryan Leidingham is playing well with the help of fellow sophomore receiver Fred Amey, who leads the conference in all-purpose yards.

Sac State has been surprising people this season, but will not be able to surprise Montana at home. Montana should have no problem extending its winning streak to a 1-A record tying 24 games.**

**GDK prediction: 35-17 Montana**

**Maps**

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Lisa Hornstein/GameDay Kaimin

**Surprise, surprise!**

Willie Walden tries to break away from Northern Arizona’s Mike Sands during last week’s game at the Washington-Grizzly Stadium. Walden received for four yards, helping the Griz to their ninth straight victory.
His bond with his family remains as tight as ever. Before all games, Chris is always asking his teammates for any spare tickets to hand out to the clan who makes the trek to Washington-Grizzly Stadium. At least 20 Snyders are in attendance every Saturday. Sharon sits right above the cannon in the north end zone.

"It is such a wonderful place." Sharon said. "Everyone is so supportive here. I sit with a lot of the parents, and everyone calls me 'mom Snyder.'"

Even though most of Chris' family is in the stands, his heart still aches for the one person who can't be there.

"It is hard that the one person who I want to watch my games can't, although I know somewhere he is watching," Snyder said. "I would give up everything I have to have him back."

From his father's passing came a greater sense of understanding and compassion in Chris. After losing his father, and with his family struggling financially at times, Sharon remembers Chris still thinking of others, always trying to help.

In grade school, Chris was part of a buddy program where older kids had a mentally challenged pre-school kid as a buddy. Chris spent recesses with the kids and always played with them. When he got into high school, he was part of a peer advising group that made sure everyone had their college plans settled and financial aid applications sent.

"He would always look out for the underdog," Sharon said. "He made up his mind early that he was going to do good."

Chris brought that attitude with him to Missoula. Ever since he was a freshman, Snyder has spent time with children at the Gallagher Children's Home in Missoula. Haloween are spent with kids carving pumpkins, playing catch or swinging outside. This year, there were kids who were at the home last Halloween, and when they saw Chris, they ran up to him and gave him a hug as he walked in the door.

The kids love it when him and other Griz athletes come down," said Jason Vanderwall, coordinator of activities at the home. "It is pretty unbelievable the effect they have on the kids, and it really says a lot about the University."

There have been times when Chris has had school work to do or a test the next day, but it doesn't matter to him.

"I am never too busy. Schoolwork and tests are only so much in your life, and making a kid happy is more important," Chris said. "It really makes you feel like you have done some good in your life."

Chris' actions on the football field mirror his strong perseverance off of it, although that took some time for his teammates to see.

During his first year at Montana, Chris had the dubious luck of having a locker next to Andy Petek and Matt Steinmu. Being a freshman is one thing, but the fact that Snyder was a kicker who was coming in and starting right away only added to the rising he received on a daily basis, mostly by those two.

Chris didn't make a lot of friends in the beginning, and the tag "wussy kicker" was hung on him from the moment he stepped on the field.slowly though, his booming right leg started silencing his teammates and winning them over.

The once exclusive Chris is now friends with everyone on the team, and Glenn said he is one of the funniest players on the team.

Chris' nickname of "wussy kicker" is still how he is known among his teammates, but now out of respect. Many jokingly ask why Chris is on a full-ride scholarship like the quarterbacks or linebackers. But Chris knows they wouldn't want his job and the high stakes involved every time he attempts a field goal.

"When it comes down to it, they probably couldn't handle the pressure," Snyder said. "Hands down, this is the best job in football."

"Never was this more apparent than the Nov. 7 home game against Albany, N.Y. As the first half was winding down, Montana was trying to run out the clock before half time but advanced the ball to the Great Dane's 40-yard line. Coaches were mulling amongst themselves about whether to kneel on the ball and let the clock run out or try a field goal."

Assistant coach Chris Knutsen asked Snyder if he wanted to give it a shot, and Snyder instantly said yes. Knutsen then talked to Glenn about it, and as word got around the rest of the sidelines, his teammates started chanting "Snyder, Snyder, Snyder."

There was no way Glenn really could say no, and the situation was ideal to let Chris try it.

"It was the perfect time, and I said, 'What the heck.' Glenn said. "We had nothing to lose, and the guy's got the leg for it." Fifty-seven yards later, Chris engraved his name into the Grizzly record books, drilling the longest field goal in University of Montana history.

Chris didn't see the ball sail across the uprights because he couldn't see over everyone on the line. As soon as the crowd erupted though, he knew it was good. He took off running across the field, eventually having to stop due to a side ache before being mobbed by his teammates.

"I had never even attempted something like that in a game. It was a great feeling," Snyder said. "I thank coach Glenn and Knutsen for having confidence in me."

By the time he is done kicking next year, Chris should leave Missoula with his name atop every Grizzly kicking record. He had the luxury of being able to kick for four years, and Glenn told Chris when he enrolled that he potentially could break the scoring record. Former Grizzly runningback Yohance Humphrey currently holds that record with 290 points.

But records and accolades carry little meaning to Snyder.

"If I don't get the scoring record and I walk away with four trips to the national championship, I could care less," Snyder said. "Records are great, but they are forgotten."

Snyder wants to be remembered, not forgotten, and he believes there is one sure way of achieving that.

The greatest kicker in Grizzly history, according to Snyder, is Andy Larson. As all Grizzly fans remember, Larson booted the game-winning field goal as time expired against Marshall in the 1995 I-AA championship game, carrying the Grizzlies to a 22-20 win.

"I hope dearly that I get that chance," Snyder said. "Whether you are a quarterback, runningback or whatever, you want the ball with the game on the line."

If that day ever comes, somewhere, his father will be watching. He'll be jumping up and down with joy, tears streaming down his cheeks. Most of all, he'll be proud of the man his son has become.