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## Grade-A Kicker.

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Byline: Ken Sickenger Journal Staff Writer

Albuquerque High's Erik Hinterbichler was inspired by Scott Norwood's infamous miss in the 1991 Super Bowl

Every time Erik Hinterbichler kicks a field goal for his Albuquerque High School football team, coach Ken Barreras offers silent thanks to Scott Norwood.

It was Norwood, the former Buffalo Bills place-kicker, who made kicking a Hinterbichler family pursuit although Norwood is almost certainly unaware of his influence.

"We're Bills fans," Hinterbichler explains, "and we all watched the (1991) Super Bowl when Norwood missed the winning field goal 'wide right.' My brother (Kurt) was so upset he decided to learn to kick right after the game. I went along to shag balls and just picked it up."

Norwood's ill-fated kick may have cost Buffalo a Super Bowl, but it's proven a huge boon to Albuquerque High.

Kurt Hinterbichler spent four seasons as AHS' varsity kicker from 1995-98, and Erik, now a senior, has held the position ever since. During that time the brothers have rewritten the school's kicking record book several times over.

"They're amazing," says Barreras, who took over as coach prior to Kurt's final season. "They've been extraordinary weapons for this program for the past seven years."

Thanks partly to the Bulldogs' 3-0 start this season, Erik now has possession of most of the team records. They include career scoring, field goals in a season (eight and counting), and longest field goal (a 49-yarder last week against Belen). Erik had shared the long-kick mark with Kurt at 46 yards.

"I e-mailed him to let him know I broke it," Erik says with a smile, "but I haven't heard back. I don't think I will anytime soon."

The sibling rivalry can't fully be described in football terms any more than the Hinterbichlers can be called football players. Like Kurt before him, Erik limits his football participation to kicking field goals, extra points, kickoffs and punting.

To a large extent, it's been that way since they started in Young America Football League.

"They only wanted to kick, but the people in YAFL said, 'No, you have to play other positions,'" says Karl Hinterbichler, Kurt and Erik's father. "At least that's how it started."

Adds Erik: "They tried me at wide receiver and quarterback, but if you do bad enough at it, they'll fire you. I was just a kicker after a while."

Fortunately for his teams, Erik has always approached kicking with the same intense focus he applies to his other chosen pursuits. With the exception of a few minutes spent working with special teams, he sets his own agenda at Bulldogs practice.

"Erik knows what he needs to work on and does it," Barreras says. "Ninety percent of the time he's out here, we leave him alone."

As long as a subject interests him, Erik rarely requires supervision. And his interests and talents span far beyond kicking and the football field.

Carrying a 4.4 grade-point average, Erik currently ranks as his class valedictorian. He takes honors courses, including applied physics, though he remains unsure what field he'll pursue in college.

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But don't describe Erik as a bookworm that happens to kick footballs at least not to his face. Erik's mother, Joan, is a third-degree black belt holder in karate, and Erik is scheduled to test for his black belt in November.

Karl Hinterbichler claims no credit for Erik's interests in football or karate. But Karl, a professor in the University of New Mexico's music department, has influenced one of his son's hobbies.

Erik plays bass cello at school and with the Albuquerque Youth Symphony Orchestra. He plays several concerts a year and has traveled as far as Spain to perform.

Where does he find time to excel in so many pursuits?

"It's hard during football season," Erik admits, "but you find time for things you like to do."

The hectic pace doesn't allow Erik much time for socializing. It would be easy to imagine his schedule and lone-wolf practice habits making Erik something of an outcast among the Bulldogs.

Not so.

"Erik's real shy and quiet, but he's a good leader," says his AHS football teammate Vernon Stallard. "He puts points on the board and puts kickoffs out of the end zone. We depend on Erik, and he almost always comes through."

To avoid pressure, Erik says he tries not to pay attention to the situation when he kicks. But Karl says his son is fiercely determined to do his part for the team.

"He's had some other schools try to recruit him, but Erik's a loyal Bulldog," Karl says.

And, despite his many other talents, Erik Hinterbichler also is a devoted kicker. He has booted field goals as long as 58 yards in practice and hopes to extend his career.

"I'm hoping to at least walk on somewhere, depending on where I go to college," Erik says. "Maybe I could even kick in the NFL someday. Getting paid a million dollars to kick footballs would be great."

CAPTION(S):

PHOTO BY: GREG SORBER/THE JOURNAL

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DOWN THE PIPE: Holder Brennan Baiamonte, left, watches as kicker Eric Hinterbichler rips a 50-yard field goal during practice.

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HIGH STEPPIN': Erik Hinterbichler, the leading scorer in Albuquerque High School history, is also valedictorian and a cellist in the Albuquerque Youth Symphony. Brennan Baiamonte holds in practice.



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