

KICKIN' IT



St. Lawrence Alpine Ski Team captain has a leg to boot **BY C.J. FEEHAN**

Matt Dodge, captain of the St. Lawrence Alpine Ski Team, has posted a series of top-20 giant slalom results on the EISA circuit, but the greatest athletic risk he ever took was far removed from the mountain. In his sophomore year at the university, with absolutely no experience playing the sport, Dodge walked on to the Division 3 football team as a place kicker — and then held onto the starting job for two consecutive years.



**Matt Dodge scores points as an alpine racer...
...and as a place kicker.**

Granted, Dodge knew how to kick a ball, having played sweeper on his high school soccer team at the New Hampton School in New Hampshire. But he had never suited up for football, a sport to which he was undeniably drawn. “There was something that always intrigued me from being a fan of football,” he says. “I would watch the kickers and say to myself, ‘I think I can do that.’” After an informal tryout at St. Lawrence, football coach Mark Raymond asked Dodge to sign paperwork and invited him to the next day’s practice.

Dodge says he was a little surprised because he never had a particularly strong leg in high school. “When I called my high school soccer coach to tell him I was kicking for the football team [at St. Lawrence], he laughed at me,” recalls Dodge. “There were kids on my team who were much stronger and could kick farther, and he said, ‘Why are you doing that? You’re not even that good.’” Dodge spent his first year on the team focusing on field goals, extra points and kickoffs.

After learning the rules and refining his technique in the first season, Dodge emerged as a leading kicker in the league. By 2010, just one year after he was offered a spot on the team, he was racking up notable statistics. Dodge led the Liberty League in field goal percentage at 85, led his own team in scoring with 35 points, and recorded the longest field goal that year in Liberty League play at 47 yards. The highlight of his career: a 32-yard field goal in a tightly contested game against Hobart, a perennial powerhouse that had beaten St. Lawrence for nearly two decades. At home in front of a Parents’ Weekend crowd, Dodge took the kick late in the fourth quarter to lead the Saints to a three-point victory over archrival Hobart.

Football and ski racing have more in common than you think, says Dodge. As a kicker, he spent his downtime on the sidelines reflecting on the mental aspect of the tasks that lay ahead, very similar to ski races in which such a short period of the day is devoted to actual performance. “You only have two runs in a ski race, and I only made maybe five-to-seven kicks in a football game,” he says, “so controlling that mental talk-back is critical [in both sports].”

Despite his success on the football field, competing in both sports at such a high level came into conflict this fall for Dodge, who ended up devoting himself entirely to the ski team. “We had a kicker who had missed the previous season



Controlling the mental talk-back is critical in both football and ski racing, says Dodge.

and a half due to injury who was returning, and I felt responsible for my role with the ski team to lead practices in the fall,” says Dodge. “It was a very tough decision, but I felt I was more needed on the ski team than the football team this year.”

Head alpine coach Willi Steinrotter says he is thrilled to have Dodge at the helm of his team this year. “Matt has been the ideal student-athlete in our program,” he says, “and has developed into a great team leader.” **SR**