

# From the beach to the gridiron

For Australian exchange student Dion Stroot, coming here meant giving up his beloved beach-related activities for the shoulder pads and helmets of American football.

Dion Stroot's eyes darted back and forth, following the football through the navy blue bars of his glossy helmet.

It was uncomfortable and new, but he felt protected.

Brilliant white stadium lights illuminated the turf battlefield in front of him where players collided and clashed, straining to get to what he gathered was the Mecca of the offense and the bane of the defense: the end zone.

He wasn't going to play this game, but he knew that. This was something he just could not miss.

And an experience he simply could not have back at home.

"I was standing on the sidelines watching the game in front of me with my pads on for the first time and it was incredible," said Stroot, the junior exchange student from Australia. "That was the first time I really felt like I was part of the team."

Stroot's decision to play football was made long before stepping on American soil, as the legends of the pigskin have made it across the ocean, but the game itself has not.

"I wanted to play football ever since I heard I was coming to Dallas," Stroot said. "It's just something you do, a strictly American thing. You need to play football if you are coming over here."

Stroot, who hails from Perth in Western Australia, is not only new to the game of football, but also the to all the hoopla: spirit parties, pep rallies, and team meals.

"Sports are not attached to the school in Australia," Stroot said. "There is a school volleyball team but nobody comes to that game besides the players. There isn't any sport that everybody rallies

thinks these skills will help him with the sport.

"The fitness aspect of my lifesaving course will definitely translate to football," Stroot said. "But I've never played anything with this many tactics and plays. That will be the toughest part of understanding the sport."

Senior captain Jackson Cole believes Stroot's greatest challenge isn't his lack of physicality and athletic skills, but rather adapting to a completely new sport.

"Some people think that Australian rugby and American football are similar because the balls have a slightly similar shape," Cole said. "But nothing could be



**JACKSON COLE**  
Excited to help Dion take on the sport

ALL OF MY FOOTBALL EXPERIENCE HAS COME FROM FILMS. REMEMBER THE TITANS, LONGEST YARD, THAT'S WHAT MY EXPERIENCE IN FOOTBALL IS BASED OFF OF.

**DION STROOT**

behind in the way that we do here for football. And the pep rally, I've never seen anything like it."

In Australia, Dion participated in a lifesaving class that entailed beach running, surfing and swimming instead of a team sport as part of the curriculum. He

ther from the truth. Dion is definitely giving his best effort to learn the rules quickly, but learning a new sport takes time."

Head varsity football coach Bart Epperson hopes to instill in Stroot not only the same love for the game that he has developed over the years, but also a love for the team around him.

"One goal is for him to enjoy the camaraderie that football offers," Epperson said. "Everyday enjoying working with your teammates."

Cole hopes that Stroot will learn to appreciate the game he has always loved so much.

"For me," Cole said, "I hope to teach Dion at least the basic rules of how to play the game and give him a respect for the sport I've always enjoyed so much. Hope-



**PICKING UP THE PIGSKIN** As an exchange student, junior Dion Stroot picks up the sport of football for the first time this year. He had never played the sport in Australia.

fully through practice, Dion can learn about what I'm sure he will be hearing a lot about during the fall, and who knows, maybe he will become a fanatic and join a fantasy league."

As far the team around him, Stroot has had no trouble fitting in and finds it easy to make sideline conversation.

"Everyone on the team has been really welcoming to me," Stroot said. "And everyone has been easy to talk to and bond with. Especially over our meals. We've had so many meals."

Cole sees Stroot as an open-minded kid who will fit in perfectly with the school community.

"He has a willingness to learn new things that may be foreign to him with a smile on his face," Cole said. "I always see him giving his best effort."

While Stroot has found it easy to adapt to American life and culture, his involvement in the sport makes the transformation complete in his eyes and those

of his friends and family back home.

"When I told some of my friends back home they couldn't believe it," Stroot said. "It was like 'Wow, he's actually playing football in America.' It's such a defining part of American culture that it makes it seem like I'm really here, that I'm actually an American now."



**PADDED UP** Joining the second week of the season, Stroot's first game experience was against rival ESD.

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COURTESY DION STROOT

### FITNESS FANATIC

Stroot admitted to visiting the beach at least twice a week to run, swim or hone his surfing ability.

**15%**

percentage of Australians that say they surf consistently.

**63%**

percentage of Americans that watch the NFL consistently.

STATISTICS FROM NATIONAL SURFING ASSOCIATION, CNN

**114.4**

number of people tuned in to watch the Super Bowl in 2015.

**40,000**

people watched the Bells, the biggest surfing event of the year in Australia.

**20th**

international ranking CNN gave the Australian Margaret River Valley for surfing.

**1st**

international ranking CNN gave Pipeline beach in Oahu, HI.