man (he arrived at Harvard after a postgraduate year at Phillips Exeter Academy), he made nine of 15 field goals (including one of 43 yards) and 34 of 35 extra points. He also sent 50 kickoffs downfield for an average of 63.1 yards, and achieved comparable results last season.

New NCAA rules will make kickoffs more effective this year, as kicking teams tee up the ball on the 35-yard line instead of the 30, making kicks effectively five yards longer. In addition, touchbacks will now come out to the 25-yard line instead of the 20, offering returners five yards more incentive to forgo a runback. The changes aim to scale down kickoff returns, which rank among the most exciting but also the most dangerous plays in the game, due to high-speed collisions, frequent instances of clipping (blocking from behind), and the semi-chotic nature of the play itself.

None of this will affect Mothander’s technique, which he began learning before his last year at St. Margaret’s and improved at summer kicking camps. For kickoffs, he uses a nine-step approach (five left, four right), beginning nine yards behind the line of scrimmage, attempting to block the kick. Field-goal kicks need to rise more steeply than kickoffs, in order to clear the line. Mothander uses a four-step approach (left-right-left-right), starting two steps to the left of the ball, and aims to get the kick off 1.25 to 1.30 seconds after the snap. “It’s quick enough to make it difficult to block the kick,” he says, “and long enough to have enough time to hit a solid ball. The mindset that you have to have is that every kick is an extra point, because being smooth through the ball is the best way to hit an accurate ball.” Crosswinds means factoring in the sideways drift, and against a headwind, he explains, “The longer the kick is, the more the wind will affect it, because the ball slows down more as it approaches the goalposts.”

Accuracy involves maximizing the surface area of the foot in contact with the ball, and the duration of contact. The more “foot” a kicker can apply to the pigskin, the more control he’ll have over where that ball goes. That’s done by kicking the ball “soccer style,” the technique that has become nearly universal since the 1960s. Soccer-style kicking, which strikes the ball with the instep, greatly increases accuracy by putting much more foot surface on the ball than the toe-punch technique it supplanted. (The toe-punch does generate power, but is hard to control.)

With field goals and extra points, placekickers often lead their teams in scoring. The job involves pressure, but probably less roughhouse than any other position. On rare occasions, if a returner gets loose for a long runback, the kicker may be the last man able to tackle him. “With any luck,” says Mothander, with a grin, “it doesn’t come to that.”

CRAIG LAMBERT

Head baseball coach Joe Walsh died suddenly at his Chester, N.H., home early on July 31.

Walsh, 58, served proudly in his self-professed “dream job” for the past 17 seasons, winning five Ivy League championships. He played baseball at Suffolk University, where he assumed his first head-coaching job in the 1980-81 season. He came to Harvard in 1996 as the first full-time, endowed baseball coach, a position funded by former player (and now Harvard Corporation member) Joseph J. O’Donnell ’67, M.B.A. ’71.

Walsh’s college coaching record is 569-