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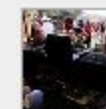
Photo by Blake Sebring

Nick Hoot, right, of the 49ers puts a block on teammate Casey Lawrence during a recent practice of their PAL football team. Nick plays with two artificial legs.

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**Nick Hoot doesn't think about the example he sets for others. He says he likes to play football because it's fun. By Blake Sebring of The News-Sentinel**

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**Nick Hoot, right, of the 49ers puts a block on teammate Casey Lawrence during a recent practice of their PAL football team. Nick plays with two artificial legs. Photos by Blake Sebring of The News-Sentinel**  
Image 3 of 3

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# Forget his disability and huddle up

## Nick Hoot plays PAL football now, and aims for a high school career

*By Blake Sebring  
of The News-Sentinel*

Ask Nick Hoot what's unique about him, and he says, "I've got lots of friends. That's about it."

There's a lot more to it than that. The 12-year-old was born in Siberia without the lower half of both legs, and he's got two fingers on one hand and four on the other. His parents, April and Marvin, have eight kids, including five with disabilities who are adopted. Everything about Nick is unique, but no one looks at him and sees anything out of the ordinary because the Woodburn Elementary sixth-grader won't let them.

That includes playing Police Athletic League football for the 49ers. Ask him why, and you get a simple answer.

"Because it's fun," he said before cracking a wicked grin. "I get to knock kids on their butt."

Life has continually failed to knock him down. He's played baseball, soccer and hockey, and wrestled, but football is his favorite sport. Nick was adopted at 15 months and was watching a Notre Dame football game the first time he spoke. When the Irish kicked a field goal, he held his arms up and said, "It's good." To his mother's everlasting shame, he's become a Purdue fan. His prosthetic legs are even wrapped in Boilermaker fabric.

Last year, his first with the 49ers, Nick tried so hard to keep up that he developed sores on his legs. Now he'll do push-ups when his legs get tired.

"He's got the biggest heart of anybody I've ever seen," 49ers coach Rick Winans said. "Every coach I've ever heard said they wish every player on their team played like that. He's not afraid to do anything, and he always pushes it as hard as he can."

Last week Nick, who plays on the offensive and defensive line, tried so hard that one of his feet was falling off his prosthesis.

His parents used duct tape to keep it on until it could be replaced.

"We're the only parents who bring a first-aid kit that includes duct tape and a screwdriver," his father said. "I don't think he pays attention to it. He doesn't understand why so many people think he's inspiring. He's just himself. That's what makes him great, I think."

Nick is truly oblivious to the impact he's having on others. As his mother said, he has the head and the heart, he just doesn't necessarily have the body to match them.

"He's an inspiration to me because of his will," 49ers offensive line coach Jason Garrett said. "Many times we're out here, and we just forget the disability that he has. At his age, the thing I find unique about him is his character. He's a 12-year-old kid who is facing some challenges that most of us will never see in a lifetime, but he's one of the most authentic kids I've ever met."

Like many things he has already overcome, Nick's ultimate goal seems completely unlikely today - he wants to play high school football.

“As a high school coach, I would have a kid like that on my team, and I'd get him in where he could be successful, whether it is on special teams or wherever he could contribute,” Garrett said. “He's going to set the example and inspire everyone else on the team.”

Maybe the unique thing about Nick is that he always finds a way. With everything that could and maybe even should slow him down, he never does.

“I keep trying and I keep going,” he said. “I'm just a plain old kid out there.”

He's anything but.