

From Spain to Berwick, Retana w

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BERWICK'S JORGE RETANA, an exchange student from Spain, participates in pregame calisthenics before a game against Wyoming Area at Crispin Field in Berwick earlier this season.

Special to the Press Enterprise/Tom Brooks

BERWICK — When Jorge Retana was shown a video of Crispin Field in its heyday, he knew he had to play football for Berwick.

Playing a physical sport is nothing new for the foreign exchange student, having played rugby in his hometown of Segovia, Spain, roughly an hour north of Madrid, his birthplace. Retana, who sees similarities between tackling and kicking in the two sports, has shown significant growth over the first two months for the undefeated Bulldogs, while learning the intricacies of the sport. The most significant development he's gained so far isn't the X's and O's, but a bond he knows he won't be ready to say goodbye to come summer break when he goes home: His friendships with everyone on the team.

"The guys were quick to make him feel welcome. They embraced him and quickly saw that he was the guy's guy and perfect for the locker room. He busts chops and is always the first guy there for everybody," Berwick coach CJ Curry said. "They saw in his situation he wanted to be part of something bigger than himself, and what better place than with our football team? He's always grinding, always trying, and the first one cheering on his teammates on Friday night."

Celebrating the goodwill for his teammates isn't the only impact Retana has made this season. When the Bulldogs need players to play out of a position to replicate upcoming opponents, the junior is always the first to volunteer. Having only played against Mid-Valley and last week against Naticoke — getting off a pair of punts and kickoffs — Retana shows a certain physicality that may earn him more playing time.

"We're trying to get him in for an extra point. Even after long practices, he stays behind and continues to practice them. Even last week, he got a kickoff within the 10-yard line, and not a lot of kids can do that. He then got under one and apologized, but the kid couldn't return it," Curry said. "But beyond kicking, he is so physical and has natural hands and movement."

Retana may not know the ins and outs of football, but Curry says he is a quick learner — especially visually — and that helps him on the practice squad when he plays all over the field.

This quick learning has also been evident in the classroom. Accustomed to sitting in one classroom with the same students all day, where the teachers rotate, Retana now has a "different and motivated connection" with Berwick's staff.

That bond with Berwick is still strongest on Friday nights.

"It was really cool to see him become immersed in America, Berwick, and football so quickly," Curry said. "I asked him what his favorite thing was about America, and he said, 'Coach, I fell in love with Crispin Field on Friday nights.' Seeing him be part of one of our better seasons in recent history, and it's so exciting he gets to see the stadium fill up again."

It all started when the Division II club rugby player, out of four divisions, was shown a video by his host parents, Stephanie and James Whitmire. The latter played on the 1992 national championship team, which provided him with the context of what the sport meant to Berwick.

Retana saw the spirit of Berwick on Friday nights in that film, and it's now a reality for both him and the team pursuing those lofty expectations all over again with a familiar name guiding them on the sidelines.

He loves it so much he even wants to save his last punt of the year for his plans on his return home to Spain. He wants to spend his senior year with the Bulldogs, experience the crowd at Crispin Field and tackle expectations with his new friends for one more fall under the lights.



ill forever be known as a Bulldog



ABOVE: Berwick's **Jorge Retana**, an exchange student from Spain, enters the field with the Bulldogs prior to a game against Wyoming Area earlier this season in Berwick.

LEFT: Berwick's **Jorge Retana** joins the huddle with the rest of the Bulldogs prior to a game against Wyoming Area.

RIGHT: Berwick's **Jorge Retana** enters the field with the Bulldogs prior to a game against Wyoming Area.



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