



Kelley Cox Post Independent

Alex Zupcsek, a sophomore exchange student at Coal Ridge High School, is fitting in well on the gridiron for the Titans.

## A high-impact import

Coal Ridge exchange student contributing to football team's success

Jeff Caspersen  
Post Independent Staff

PEACH VALLEY — Coal Ridge High School has no rugby team, so Alex Zupcsek turned to the next-best thing: football.

It's a decision that's been as beneficial to the Romanian exchange student as it has to the school's football team.

"There's no rugby here, first of all, and I like contact sports," said Zupcsek, a high-caliber rugby player back in his native country. "I like man sports. Football looked very fun when I saw it on TV. It was really spectacular. There were all these people coming to the games."

It didn't matter that Zupcsek, a sophomore, knew little about the sport. He's a big kid who craves con-

tact, precisely the type of player Coal Ridge coach Scott Parker is willing to work with.

"The thing we noticed most is that he loved contact and, just being a sophomore, that's the thing we noticed most," he said. "We can find a place for this kid."

Parker and his staff actually found a few places for Zupcsek, who serves as the Titans' nose tackle, place-kicker and punter. He's excelling at all three positions.

"He's a great nose guard," teammate Giovanni Hernandez said. "He just plugs the hole and nobody gets through. And he can punt like no other, even on a bad day."

And then there's his place-kicking ability.

"You know, he's an exceptional kicker," Parker said. "He's made a

couple from beyond 40."

Zupcsek took some time to find his niche. When he first signed on for football, coaches tried putting the 6-foot-1 sophomore on the offensive line. That didn't go so well.

"I was blocking but sometimes I was holding and everything," Zupcsek said. "Then they thought to try me on defense. I tried linebacker. That didn't work so well. I didn't really know the rules so well and all the plays."

Nose tackle came next.

"That's not so hard," Zupcsek said. "You just go after it."

Parker knew immediately he'd found the ideal spot for his newest player.

## Minnesota mired in Moss mess

Receiver's release just another issue for Vikings to deal with

Jon Krawczynski  
The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Brad Childress and the Minnesota Vikings have another big mess on their hands.

Randy Moss' abrupt departure was just the latest in what has been a season long on drama and short on success for a 2-5 team that started with Super Bowl aspirations.

Two people with knowledge of Moss' status told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the Vikings officially waived Moss, less than a month after he arrived in a trade from the Patriots. The people requested anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information publicly.

From Brett Favre's late arrival in training camp, through an NFL investigation into improper messages allegedly sent by the quarterback a few years ago and now with Moss' release, the Vikings season has been plagued by distraction and is in danger of spinning completely out of control.

"Every time I come to work I see the news trucks sitting out there," linebacker Ben Leber said. "I feel like something is going on. I roll in and keep my ears open."

It all started with another summer-long courtship of Favre, who again considered retirement after leading the Vikings to the NFC title game in January. Childress sent three of his highest-profile players to Favre's home in Mississippi in August to convince the gray-haired quarterback to make one more run.

Favre has struggled on and off the field this season. His 69.8 quarterback rating ranks 29th in the NFL and he has thrown 11 interceptions after being picked off just seven times all of last season.

He is also in the middle of a league investigation into allegations that he sent a game-day hostess inappropriate messages while both worked for the New York Jets in 2008.

Then Childress, with injuries to Pro Bowl receivers Sidney Rice and Percy Harvin, sent a third-round draft pick to New England on Oct. 6 for Moss, a player with a long history of clashing with management and coaches.

"Pull out your number 84 jerseys, man," Moss said at the time to a euphoric Vikings fan base. "I think this is going to be a fun ride."

More like a stunningly brief one. This ride didn't last much longer than an inexperienced cowboy atop a prized rodeo bull, and it may have inflicted just as much damage.

ZUPCSEK A14

MOSS A11

## Busy baseball offseason begins faster than usual

Ronald Blum  
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baseball's offseason market got busy even faster than usual Tuesday, with teams forced to make quick decisions on contract options as they prepare offers to a relatively weak free-agent class headed by Cliff Lee and Carl Crawford.

Under modifications agreed to by players and owners in September, free agents can start negotiating with all clubs on the sixth day after the World Series, which is

Sunday, rather than the 16th.

Teams and players must decide single options by the third day after the World Series. For mutual options, the side making the first decision must act by the second day, with the other party deciding by the fourth.

Lee is the top available pitcher on the free-agent market, and the New York Yankees are set to pursue him.

Traded from Seattle to Texas during the season, Lee helped the Rangers reach the World Series for the first time, and Rangers president Nolan Ryan hopes to

re-sign him.

Crawford also is expected to be highly sought-after, with the Los Angeles Angels and Yankees thought to be interested in the speedy outfielder.

The Yankees hope to re-sign their trio of Derek Jeter, Mariano Rivera and Andy Pettitte — who still hasn't decided whether to pitch next year or retire.

Other free agents include Philadelphia right fielder Jayson Werth, Boston catcher Victor Martinez, White Sox first baseman Paul Konerko, Tampa Bay slugger Carlos Pena and closer Rafael Soriano,

and Angels designated hitter Hideki Matsui.

Texas must make a quick decision on whether to exercise its half of a \$9 million mutual option on Vladimir Guerrero or pay the designated hitter a \$1 million buyout.

In a sign the market might be tight after the top free agents, Arizona declined a \$7.5 million option on first baseman Adam LaRoche on Tuesday. He gets a \$1.5 million buyout after hitting .261 with 25 homers and 100 RBIs in his first season with the Diamondbacks.