

# Interview with Joe Nedney, San Francisco 49ers kicker

by Mike Herman, exclusive to [Footballguys.com](http://Footballguys.com)

Very few people get a chance to play in the NFL. Fewer still get to play for their favorite team from childhood. But Joe Nedney did just that. He now enters his fifth year with the 49ers, the team he rooted for while growing up in San Jose. His journey back home was made all the more improbable by a medical history that would have led many players to an early retirement from their football career. In high school, Nedney's lung collapsed three times. After surgery, he had to switch from wide receiver to kicker in order to continue his football career. He missed a year's worth of games in 1998 with the Arizona Cardinals and 1999 with the Oakland Raiders due to a torn left ACL. In 2003 with the Tennessee Titans he tore his right ACL in the second quarter of week one, and missed the remainder of the year. In 2004 he tore his left hamstring in the final week of preseason, and missed the entire year. Since joining San Francisco however, Nedney has missed only one game in four years.

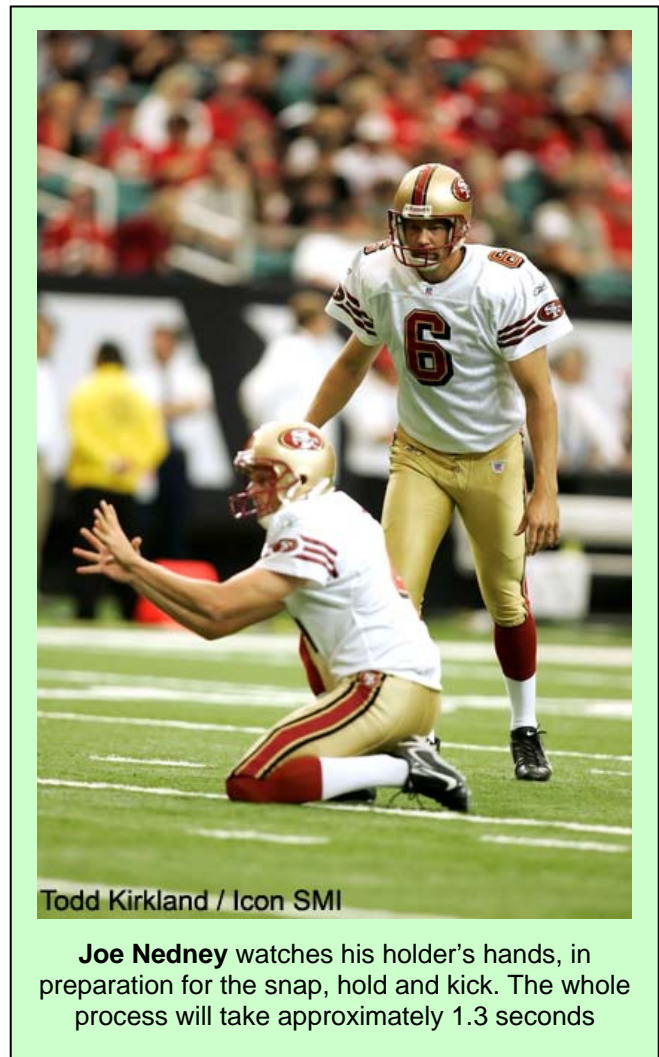
As part of Footballguys' ongoing kickology research, we asked kickers around the NFL a series of questions regarding the details of kicking. Following are Nedney's answers.

**FBG:** Regarding the fundamentals of a kick: from set-up through the snap, the hold, and the actual kick, could you describe the whole sequence of a typical kick?

**Nedney:** The holder and kicker set up 8 yards from the line of scrimmage. The kicker gives the holder a spot where he'd like the ball to be placed. The kicker takes his steps back and over, nods to the holder when he's ready, and the holder signals for the snap. The snapper snaps, the holder holds and the kicker kicks, hopefully successfully, all in under 1.3 seconds.

**FBG:** Regarding different weather conditions, are there any adjustments you make when kicking in the rain? Wind? Bitter cold?

**Nedney:** All adjustments to the elements are made during the pre-game warm-up. Wind direction and intensity will alter the flight of the ball, and it's the responsibility of the kicker to figure all that out before game time so he can do his job successfully during the game. Rain usually affects the snapper and holder more because they are handling the ball. Field conditions vary in wet or cold weather and footing can be challenging. Again, this should be handled during pre-game.



**FBG:** Regarding playing surfaces, are there any differences between kicking on grass vs. Fieldturf or other artificial surfaces, and if so are there any adjustments you make?

**Nedney:** Field turf is different than grass, obviously. Some field turf has longer, thicker synthetic grass blades which makes striking the ball "clean" a little more difficult. Natural surfaces "give" so if a kicker strikes the ground before the ball, he will make a divot. Field turf doesn't allow for that. A kicker's foot may skip off the turf if he hits the ground before the ball, causing a miss-hit. There is, in my opinion, less margin for error on field turf and striking the ball "clean" becomes that much more important.

**FBG:** Do you make any technique adjustments when attempting a long field goal, as compared to a medium or short range kick?

**Nedney:** I make no technique adjustments on long field goals.

**FBG:** Are there any particular stadiums in the NFL that you've come across so far that are more challenging to kick in than others?

**Nedney:** Any outdoor stadium with grass in November and December can be a challenge. Some that stand out are Heinz Field in Pittsburgh, Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Candlestick Park in San Francisco, Soldier Field, Lambeau, Meadowlands, and Buffalo. Love those domes.....



**Candlestick Park, San Francisco**

“Any outdoor stadium with grass in November and December can be a challenge.”

**FBG:** Does the K-ball used in games really make as much difference as we're led to believe?

**Nedney:** The K-ball has improved over the years, but it varies from ball to ball. Not all leather panels are the same. Some balls are knobbier, more rigid, and just plain hard while others can be smoother, softer and more pliable. The referees give equipment guys about 15-20 min. of supervised time to rub down the 12 K-balls. That translates to a little over a minute per ball. That's nowhere near enough time. A bad K-ball can cost a kicker 5 yards on field goal distance. The sweet spot on a bad K-ball is much smaller which increases the chance of a miss-hit.

**FBG:** Field goal accuracy across the league has gradually improved over the years. The last two years have seen an even bigger improvement than usual. What do you think may have led to this?

**Nedney:** Field goal accuracy has improved simply because placekickers have improved. The entire kicking position has become more of a craft and the kickers in the NFL are all very good at what they do. Also, teams don't tolerate a 70% kicker anymore like in decades past so there had to be improvement. The quality of the playing surfaces has helped too. We're kicking off fairways today as opposed to some of the conditions years ago.



**FBG:** Is there one thing about being a kicker that most people probably don't realize?

**Nedney:** I don't think the average fan realizes the amount of strength it takes to hit a kick-off 70 yards or make a 50-yard field goal. We are considered by most to be non-athletes, but everyone I've ever taken out onto the field to watch me kick first-hand leaves with a different perspective. We make it look easy, but it's not.