

Kaeding signs five-year deal

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Just beginning his third NFL season, Kaeding yesterday signed a five-year, \$12.2 million contract extension that will guarantee him approximately \$3.5 million.

The negotiations took just a few days. The Chargers made their first offer early last week.

"It's exciting," Kaeding said. "It happened pretty fast. We had the bye week, so it was important to get it through and get it done before the ball started flying. I was very happy with the speed (of negotiations) and the end result. It gives you the kind of security you look for, especially being here in this organization with these guys that I came in with. I couldn't ask for anything better."



U-T file photo

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Kaeding is one of 17 core players the Chargers have signed through at least 2009.

"I really felt confident coming into last year," said Kaeding, who was 21-for-24 (87.5 percent) in 2005, the third-highest success rate in team history. "I put together a really good year. I was hitting the ball as well as I ever have during this past offseason. It's carried over into this season. I'm looking forward to doing it for 14 more weeks and, with this team, continuing it into the playoffs."

Earlier yesterday, still unsure when the deal would be finished, Kaeding said the team's desire to extend him was a confidence boost from the organization.

A third-round pick in 2004, Kaeding has made 47 of his 55 kicks (85.5 percent), including 29-of-31 from inside 40 yards. He has made his past 13 field goals, including four over 46 yards, and has a string of 78 consecutive PATs. The team record is 87 straight PATs set by Rolf Benirschke from 1983 to '86.

Kaeding's struggles on kickoffs last season did prompt the Chargers to draft a kicker in the sixth round of the most recent draft. But Kurt Smith was not the cannon leg the Chargers envisioned, and Kaeding's kickoffs have been much improved. Four of his nine kickoffs reached at least the goal line in the Chargers' last game. His newfound distance on kickoffs is partially the result of increased strength gained in the offseason. Also, a balky back that bothered him last season is no longer an issue.

"Nate is an outstanding talent and a year-round worker at his craft," Chargers General Manager A.J. Smith said. "He is highly competitive and mentally strong. He has the whole package we look for which should enable him to be very productive and very successful for the long haul."