

Four closing on a record

Oregon's foursome of talented tailbacks have run wild this season and the Ducks are nearing a school record

For the first time since the days of Bobby Moore and Don Reynolds, it is the year of the tailback at Oregon.

As the Ducks near the school rushing record of 2,527 yards for one season (they presently have 2,168 yards with one game left), a lot of the credit goes to the tailbacks, who have accounted for nearly half of the yardage.

"Yeah, I've noticed the tailback has been emphasized more this year," says sophomore Dwight Robertson, who has gained 453 yards at the position this season. "And people are seeing that we have a pretty wide open offense. Last year, it was kind of dull."

Robertson says Oregon uses the tailback "sort of like Southern California." However, the Ducks haven't become totally dependent on it like the Trojans have.

"Knowing coach (Rich) Brooks, he doesn't want a tailback-oriented offense, he wants a balance," says Robertson. "Right now, we have a pretty balanced offense."

"We like to make the quarterback, tailback and fullback

equal running threats," says Duck offensive coordinator John Becker. "If you look at it statistically, I bet you'll find it is pretty equal. But at Southern California, everyone in the park knows their (tailback) is going to get the ball."

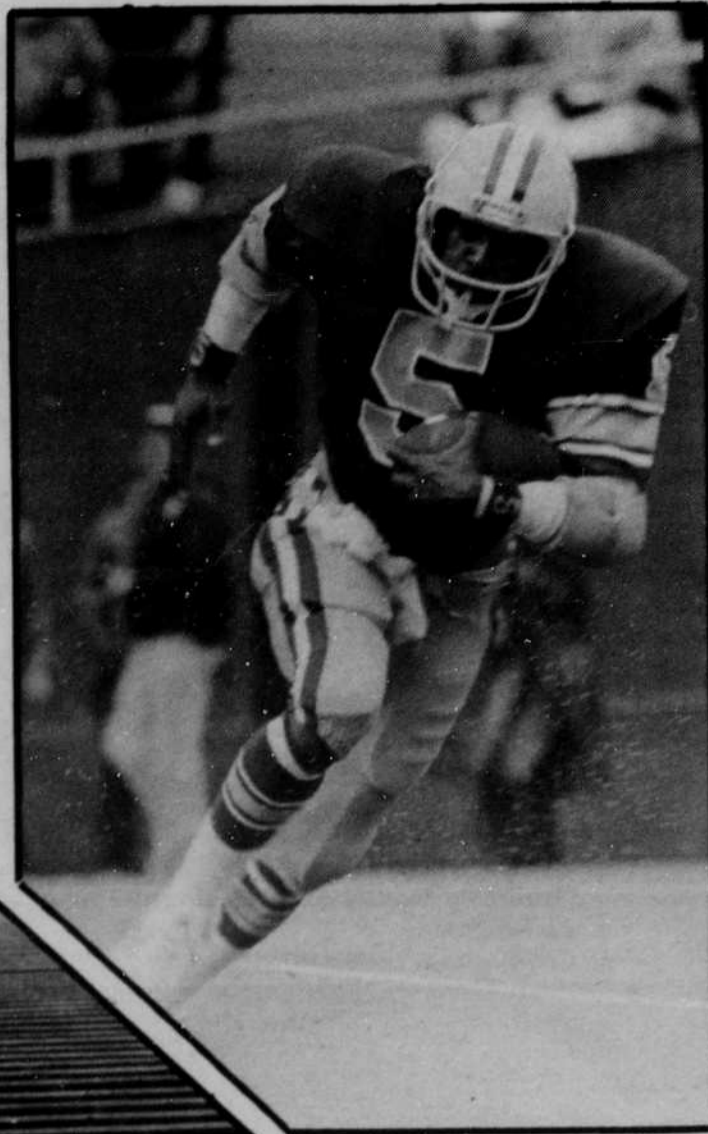
And Becker doesn't want the Duck tailback becoming the workhorse of the offense.

"For one thing, I don't have a back who can carry the ball 44 times a game like Charles White at USC," says Becker. "I

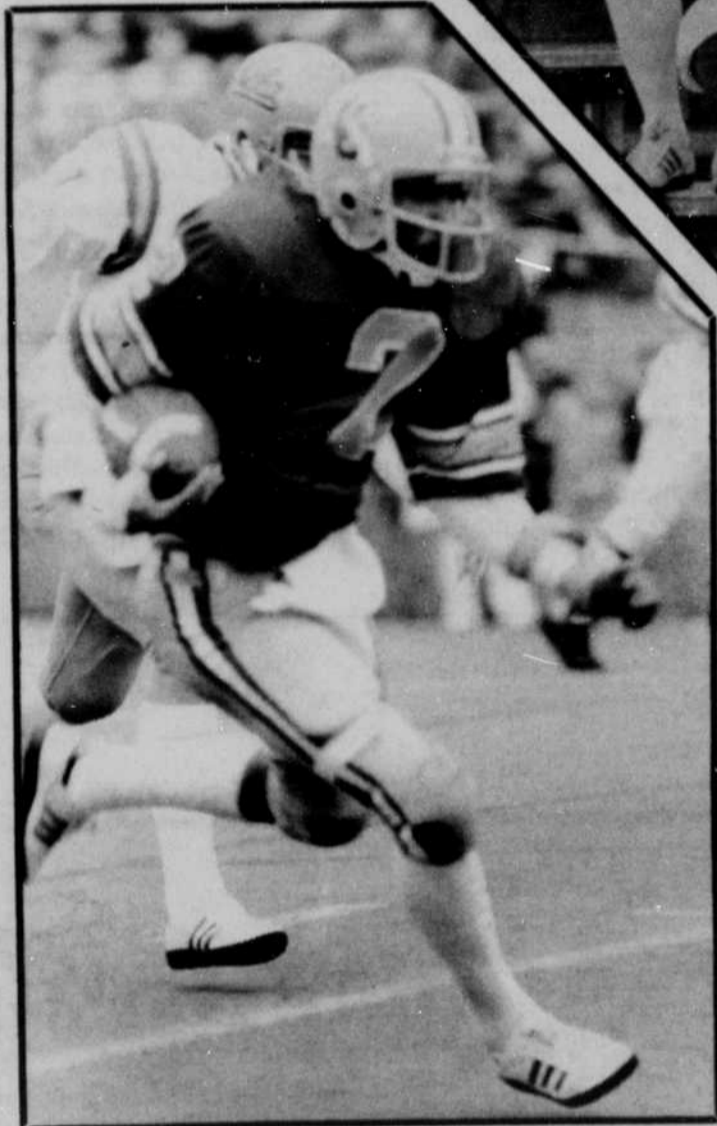
wouldn't do that to a guy. I just don't believe in it."

Robertson, fellow sophomore Reggie Young, and freshmen Harry Billups and Charles Bisharat have done most of the work at the tailback spot this season with Robertson getting the bulk of the yardage.

"He doesn't have the best speed but he has the most experience," says Becker of Robertson. "He has a better grasp of things and that comes from playing."



Slashing through opponent's defenses this season have been Reggie Young (21), Charles Bisharat (32), Harry Billups (5) and Dwight Robertson (2). Billups (above) is averaging six yards per carry while Robertson (lower left) has rolled up 453 yards for the second highest total on the Oregon team.



While Robertson has already bettered his freshman total of 300 yards, he isn't quite satisfied. "I'd like to at least end up with 900 yards and I'd like to carry the ball more," he says.

Robertson has been helped considerably by the Oregon weight program. "I lift mostly to prevent injuries," he says. "I came out of high school benching about 160 (pounds) and now I do about 225 or 230."

However, while Robertson may be in the forefront, the others certainly have assisted in Oregon's success at tailback. Becker describes Billups as "a tremendous player. He's a real intense kid and smart and he has a lot of things going for him."

Billups is a freshman from Irvine, Calif., where he averaged over five yards a carry last year at University High School, picking up 595 yards on 115 carries. Speed may be his greatest asset — he's been clocked at 9.5 for the 100-yard dash and 21.6 for the 220.

Even though he has only carried the ball 15 times this season, Billups is averaging almost six yards a carry. He is also learning what playing tailback is like at the college level.

"Let me put it like this," Billups says. "I never would have been run down by a linebacker in high school. It's more of a punishing thing here. That's why I plan to workout in the offseason." Billups has been hampered by injuries but has still managed 263 yards. He

had 75 yards on seven carries against UCLA, including a 47-yard romp. Freshman Renstrom has a 5.7 average on 19 carries. Another freshman, Charlie Bisharat, has seen limited action with just six carries.

Much of the tailback success comes from the option installed by head coach Rich Brooks and directed by quarterback Reggie Ogburn.

"Last year and the year before, we had a straight drop back quarterback and didn't run the option," says Robertson. "But he (Ogburn) adds a new dimension to the offense."

The tailbacks are also pleased by the tutoring they have received from Becker.

"He wants you going up the field and not across," says Billups. "That is one thing he stresses. But he lets you use your own style because you can't change a natural style. He pretty much lets you do your own thing."

Story by Steve Jett
Photo by Bob Baker and Steve Dykes

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