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Gameplan College Football Preview

"If Ronald Reagan can do for the economy what Rich Brooks has done for Oregon's football program, we've nothing to worry about."
Football Action Magazine

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continued from page 1B

"It's pretty obvious the depth on our defense is definitely a lot better than the depth on our offense," the coach said then. "We showed we're a very good defensive football team. But at this point, I can't say the same thing about the offense."

The offense never really progressed to the strength and depth of the defense.

In 1980, Oregon scored 263 points in 11 games for an average of nearly 24 points per game. Last year, the Ducks scored only 155 points for a 14-point average. In 1980, the Ducks more than doubled their touchdown total of 1981, scoring 33 touchdowns in 1980, but only 16 in 1981.

Weak rushing
Largely responsible for the Ducks' diminished touchdown total was a lethargic rushing game that only averaged 2.6 yards per carry. When that statistic is compared to the 4.3-yard average of 1980, one sees where the Ducks began to go wrong.

In 1980, Oregon exploited the speed and quickness of quarterback Reggie Ogburn to work the perimeter on either side with amazing success. Quickness to the outside by Ogburn and tailbacks Reggie Brown and Dwight Robertson opened up the inside game and allowed the Ducks to utilize a more diversified attack.

But an injury to Lusk in spring drills prior to the 1981 season slowed down the quarterback, who was already at least a step slower than Ogburn. Moreover, the Ducks were determined to make the inside power game work — a move that not only limited the Ducks, but led to their ultimate downfall.

From the elusive veer option attack, the Ducks brought in two big running backs and tried to slug it out between the tackles from the 'I'. They didn't go anywhere.

Apparently, Brooks has learned from that mistake. "We'll go back to the option phase of our offense that

was so successful in 1979 and 1980," Brooks said at the beginning of spring practice. "We'll emphasize the split backs and use little or no 'I'-formation."

Last year, the Ducks went into the power 'I' largely because of diminished quickness and inexperience at quarterback. But the combination of the 'I' with the split set also led to too many complications in the offense. That inevitably led to many Duck mistakes.

"We want to limit the complications of the offense so that we can execute more effectively," Brooks says. "This (year's offense) will not be an offense with multiple characteristics."

Musical quarterbacks
But the need for a versatile quarterback bears itself out in the fact that Oregon's quarterback must not only be quick to the corner, but also must have a good arm. Because of injuries to Lusk and to his replacements, Oregon was forced to play not the best quarterback, but the most healthy one. And knowing exactly who that was from week to week involved little more than a guessing game.

Because of this and other complications, passing at Oregon also took a turn for the worse in 1981.

In 1980, Oregon quarterbacks Ogburn and Lusk completed 145 of 255 passes for 1,830 yards and 12 touchdowns. In 1981, the Duck quarterback entourage completed 154 of 280 passes for 1,561 yards and only six touchdowns. Last year the Ducks were intercepted 15 times, compared to only nine times in 1980.

Probably the greatest evidence for Oregon's poor showing at quarterback can be found in the virtues of having one quarterback for the season and several backups. In 1980, Ogburn demonstrated advantage in this by leading the Ducks to victory in all but one game he played in. Lusk was called on during the year when Ogburn was unable to play and the sophomore quarterback performed admirably.

Lusk gained the starting nod in spring drills last year before his injury cast doubts on his role in the

1981 season. Obviously, the season was not what he had hoped it would be.

Additional injuries during the season left the quarterback wishing for a spot in the limelight until the final game of the season. Freshman quarterbacks Mike Jorgensen and Mike Owens battled with the ailing pre-season favorite for playing time. Before long, all three signal-callers had gone down at some point with an injury.

The long thin line
But probably the greatest example of where the Ducks need to improve this year is the offensive line. Oregon went the entire season without half of the people who figured to start on the offensive line in 1981. When potential all-Pac-10 center Mike Delegato went out with a broken foot midway through the season, the week-to-week starting assignments on the line became anybody's guess.

Additional mid-season injuries, combined with inexperience and just plain poor execution on the line meant that Oregon would not be pushing anyone around in the trenches. The Ducks' straight-ahead attack, therefore became null and void.

Injuries that hampered the Oregon offensive line last year included: early injuries to Stuart Yatsko and Scott Shepherd and mid-season injuries to Rick Price, Brian Castle, Gary Zimmerman, and others.

This year, Oregon made moves in the line that they hoped would greatly enhance the team's running game. Ed Stringer, a 6-6, 260-pound junior college transfer has been shining the brightest of the three JC transfers to enroll at Oregon, but overall it will be members from last year's beleaguered line that will be battling for starting roles come September.

Bad forecast
Aside from the injuries, the change in styles, the complicated system — there could be a much simpler answer: Maybe the Ducks were just not as good as people thought they were.

Gone from the team were Ogburn, Vince Goldsmith, Jamey Mathews, Scott Setterlund, Bryan Hinkle, Mike Babb, Mike Nolan and Rick Schwartz. Add the loss of those standouts to the inexperience and difficult circumstances faced by the team and you end up with a frustrating season.

In addition, the Ducks carved out two straight winning seasons with the help of emotion. That intangible can turn a mediocre club into a good one.

All the pre-season excitement from last year leaves an aching echo in the cold wind at Autzen Stadium this spring.

But Lusk says that all that can have its positive effect on a team when it comes back to face a spring of miserable weather.

"We're making a lot of improvement in practices," the Oregon quarterback says. "We've had a lot of setbacks — and we're not going to make any promises — but I think the team is better as a result of it all."

"You can't help but have a bit of the memories from last year in the back of your mind, but you learn from your mistakes — you learn to overcome adversity."

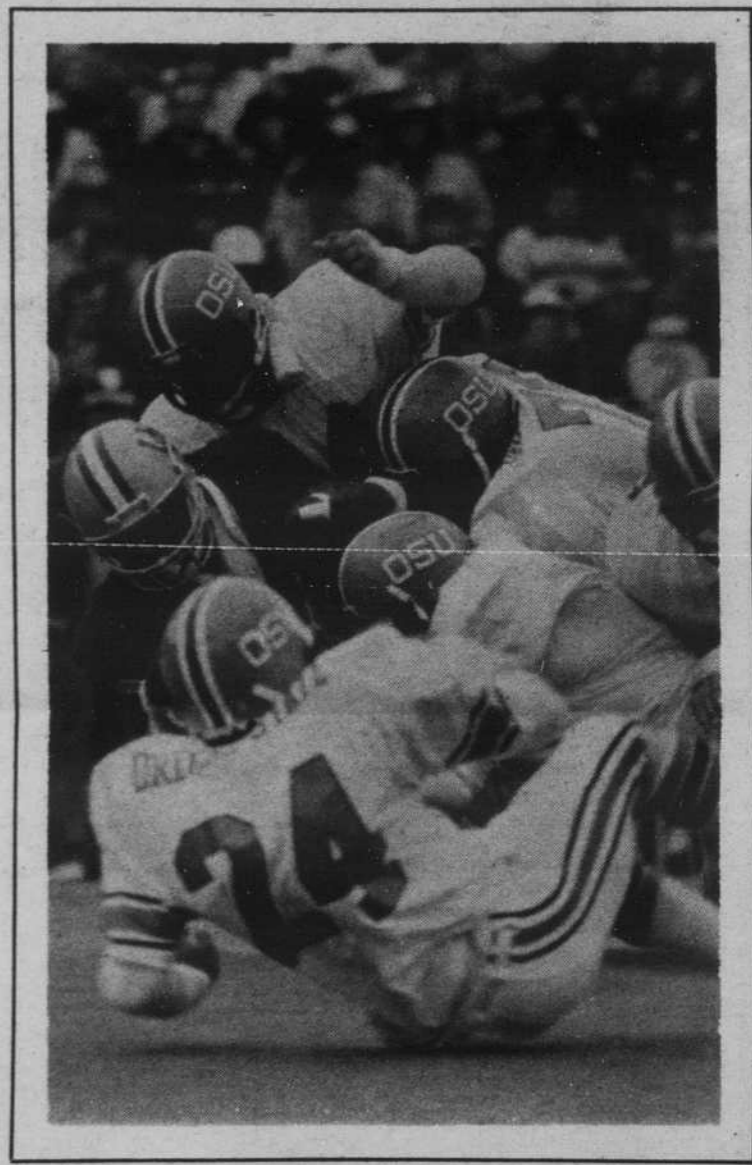
It's easy for people to dwell on the past, and if the Ducks are to do that, it's better to focus on the bright things of an otherwise dreary season, Lusk says.

"It's nice to look back to the Oregon State game and say, 'Hey, see what we can do when we play together as a team?'"

Oregon coaches are finding out now just who can play.

"There have been a few changes," Lusk says, "and it takes a little longer for the offense to work well together, but if we get the support from the big guys up front (offensive linemen), everything should fall in place."

If not, they could always wait for better weather next spring.



Injuries hastened the Ducks' demise

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