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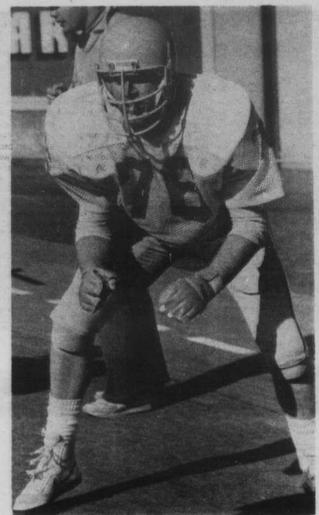
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Football (and spring) FEVER





Photos by David Core

Steve Jenson and Ray Wheatley are expected to provide immediate help for the Ducks' offensive line.

# Filling in the holes

### Oregon beefs up the offensive line with JC transfers

By Steve Turcotte

When injuries played havoc on the Duck offensive line, the men in the offensive trenches were quick to receive most of the blame for Oregon's gridiron failures last year.

Players like Mike Delegato, Scott Sheperd, Rick Price, Gary Zimmerman and Brian Castle were all felled by injuries and thus, the offensive line had about as many starting lineups as the Dallas Cowboys have offensive plays.

So when the Oregon coaches started recruiting players for the upcoming season, they were looking for athletes who fill those holes in the offensive line.

Duck coach Rich Brooks, who does not like to recruit junior college football players, pulled a reverse this year and nabbed three prime junior college offensive linemen. The three — Ed Stringer, Ray Wheatley and Steve Jenson — all have two years of junior college experience and plenty of size to go along.

According to offensive line coaches Neal Zoumboukos and Steve Greatwood, the three are making the adjustment from junior college football to the major college level right on schedule.

"Both Ed and Ray have progressed very well so far," said Greatwood, who coaches Stringer and Wheatley. "Both seem to be making the adjustment from different levels very well."

"Steve is a great young man," says Zoumboukos, who coaches Jenson. "He is a very intelligent player and a very hard worker. He is not terribly fast but he is quick. That's good for an offensive lineman, but an exceptional player on the line will have quickness and be fast."

Stringer, who came from Orange Coast Junior College, is listed at the No. 1 spot on the Duck's depth chart at left tackle, where he is battling, among five others, returning letterman Jeff Pew.

Wheatley and Jenson, on the other hand, are

listed third on the depth chart, Wheatley at right tackle and Jenson at right guard. But that's not to say that the pair will be sitting on the bench once the season unfolds next September.

"I'm glad I made the decison to come here," said Jenson, the 6-4, 255-pound lineman from Mt. San Antonio College. "Oregon is a good school and I like Eugene."

"Here, it's a lot more intense than junior college football. I think the Pac-10 is the best football conference."

"Things are going better than they were last term," chuckled Wheatley, a 6-5, 265-pound offensive lineman from College of the Siskyous in Weed, Calif. "Practice-wise, things are getting easier because we're learning all the time."

Both Jenson and Wheatley are optimistic about their chances for a starting role with the Ducks.

"I'm battling with a couple of other guys for a spot," Jenson said. "It's going to be a growing experience. I think I'll have to have patience. I'm just going to do my best with the ability the Lord has given me.

"But I didn't come here to sit on the bench." Wheatley agrees.

"I think I can play," Wheatley said. "I think I will feel comfortable wherever they put me.

"I like competition. It makes you work hard. Everyone makes everyone else play harder. I hope I have a good shot at a starting spot. I can only go out and perform to the best of my ability."

Wheatley's story is an interesting one in that he is from Spruce Grove in Canada (near Edmonton) and almost became a hockey player instead of a football player.

"I had to make the decision my senior year because the two sports conflicted," Wheatley said. "In hockey, they wanted me to be a goon — someone to go out and get in fights. I really didn't want to do that. I chose football because I guess I prefer it, although I do like them both."

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