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## Sports

paul danzer

### Will Oregon offense finally fly?

With just under 10 minutes to play in the first quarter of Oregon's third home football game against Fresno State, tailback Harry Billups bounded through a hole in search of a first down. He found it, then fumbled the ball forward. When flanker Osborne Thomas fell on the ball at the Fresno 49-yard-line, Billups had a 26 yard gain.

At the time it was Oregon's biggest offensive play of the season.

It stayed that way until Billups flipped the ball to Thomas again last Saturday in Husky Stadium. This one went for only 23 yards, but more importantly, when Billups took a pitch from quarterback Mike Jorgensen and lofted it toward the end zone, the Duck offense came down with its first touchdown of the season.

Suddenly, 184 minutes and 55 seconds of offensive futility were forgotten. The offense that at times during the first three games had trouble finding its way out of the backfield, had finally found its way into the end zone.

If the faithful of the No.



Erik Widmark

1-ranked Huskies were shocked by Thomas' leaping grab, Oregon followers might have been equally as stunned. For the first time all season the offense appeared to have a sense of direction, traveling 80 yards on 10 plays.

There were three beautiful third down conversions along the way, an ingredient which was scarce in the first three games.

Oregon surprised the Huskies with several more big plays. The most notable were an acrobatic Kevin Lusk to Greg Moser 47-yard touchdown pass and a 22-yard jaunt by Terrance Jones for Oregon's second and third TD's.

Even if it wasn't enough to knock off the nation's top team, it was exciting.

But what Oregon fans who attended Autzen Stadium for the first three games of the season saw was anything but pretty, and rarely exciting.

The numbers put things in perspective. Prior to last Saturday's spree, the offense had produced just three points. Those came on Paul Schwabe's 43-yard field goal two minutes into the season against Arizona State. The Ducks have just 53 first downs compared to their opponent's 87. They have turned the ball over 16 times. They have connected on 19 of 68 third down plays.

There is nothing there to write home about. Unfortunately for the Ducks, they didn't have to write, the Oregon fans were

there to see it all. But what they missed this weekend is worth noting.

Against the Huskies, Oregon showed some of the flair that was lacking in the first three games. Not only did they score three touchdowns, they pilled up 307 yards in total offense, which is a third of their total for four games. They converted on six of 15 third down plays, including three for big plays on the game's opening drive.

"I believe if we had played as well as we did this week, we'd be 3-1 right now," said offensive coordinator Erik Widmark, who has been on the hotseat while the offense has been firing blanks.

He's probably right. But the fact is they are 0-4 and have had enough problems on offense to deserve a sympathy card from Rodney Dangerfield.

Turnovers are the biggest blotch in the Duck record book so far. Miscues have halted potential scoring drives in all four games, with Jones' fumble in the fourth quarter Saturday with Oregon ahead of the Huskies the most painful blow.

The Ducks have fumbled 16 times, losing nine of them. But it is the passing game, which has made just 33 connections offset by seven interceptions, which Widmark is most concerned with.

"We have to be better throwing the ball," said Widmark, who calls the plays from the press box. "We've made progress and I do have a lot more confidence in it," he said of the passing attack which he shied away from using in the early games. "But it didn't come along as fast as it needed to, given the people involved — it's not new to any of them."

Widmark was referring to veterans such as Lusk, Moser and Thomas who have been around since the option attack carried the Ducks to six victories with Reggie Ogburn at quarterback two seasons ago.

Oregon fans have vented their frustrations over Widmark's play selection since the Ducks ran the ball in five of six third down and long situations in the season opener against Arizona State. And with good

Continued on Page 11

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