

# Sports

## Dennis Clay: out of the shadow

By Paul Danzer  
Of the Emerald

He isn't an All-American.

While Oregon cornerback Steve Brown plays in the spotlight of national recognition from Playboy magazine, his counterpart Dennis Clay is doing his job in the shadows.

The 5-9, 175-pound senior cornerback has been doing his job so quietly that the Emerald had trouble finding a photo of him. But he's been doing some job.

After starting all four games this fall at cornerback, Clay leads the team with interceptions at two and is sixth on the team in tackles with 28.

"The first game I didn't play that well," said Clay of his exploits this season. "It seems like each game I'm getting better. I'm able to read stuff a lot better now. I'm more confident."

Clay started four games last season, and several the year before. But Saturday when the Ducks travel to Los Angeles to challenge the USC Trojans at 1:30 p.m., it will be a special start for the Los Angeles native.

"I always like playing USC or UCLA," said Clay. "My parents and a lot of friends will be there. I am going to try to go all out for them."

It won't be the first college appearance at the LA Coliseum for Clay, who went home to play when the Ducks upset UCLA two years ago. And it won't be his first start against the Trojans either. He was a starter when the Ducks and USC battled to a 7-7 draw in their last clash two years ago at Autzen Stadium.

That game was one of the highlights of Oregon football while Clay has been here. In 1980 they were on their way to a 6-3-2 season. Now they are on their way to LA with an 0-4 mark. The Trojans are 2-1 on the season, with wins over Indiana and Oklahoma to counter a season-opening loss at Florida.

"It's always frustrating to lose," said Clay of the poor start of the season, which has seen the offense sputter through the first three games while the defense was coming up with tough efforts. "But, you can't blame it all on them. Last week we kind of let them down in a way," said Clay in reference to last Saturday's Husky comeback in Seattle.

The only people Clay has let down this season have been the opposing quarterbacks who try to keep the ball away from Brown.

"He has done real well this year," said Duck defensive coordinator Andy Christoff of Clay. "With Dennis, Steve Brown, and Wendell Cason we have three real quality cornerbacks. It makes a coach feel



Photo by Mark Pynes

Steve Brown, No. 28, has been in the spotlight this season, as he was here when he returned a punt for a touchdown against San Jose State, but Dennis Clay, No. 10, hasn't been far behind.

real secure having them back there."

Not only is Clay a talented athlete, but he is successful off the field as well. He will graduate in June with a degree in Sociology.

"Besides being a heck of a football player, he is a real fine individual," said Christoff.

After graduation Clay plans to return to Los Angeles, where his father is a county sheriff, to work with parolled convicts.

His first interception came against Fresno State, and it came in the defense Clay finds toughest to play — the goalline defense.

"Because you're all by yourself, you have to read the receiver's eyes to determine when the ball is going to get there," Clay said of the goalline defense. That is exactly what he did in picking off Jeff Tedford's pass for Stephone Paige in the corner of the end zone.

"I saw him put his hands out. I turned around and the ball was there. I just reached up and grabbed it," he said of the spectacular theft.

A natural athlete, Clay used all of his 31-inch vertical leap on the play. Before coming to Oregon he used that ability on the basketball court at Pierce Junior College in California. He played just one year of high school football, but returned to the sport after his freshman year at Pierce.

As one of the smaller players on the field, Clay is not enthusiastic about trying to stop the running game, especially if a pulling guard is in the way.

"I just try to dodge those guys, stay out of the way and wait for the ball carrier," he said.

Clay has not gone totally unnoticed opposite Brown. He has talked to several pro scouts, and received letters from pro teams, he said. But he isn't overly concerned with a pro football career. "If it happens, it happens," he said.

Playing opposite Brown is an advantage, according to Clay. "I think it's kind of in my favor because they might not challenge him, so I get to make more big plays. We sort of complement each other."

Clay came up with another big play last weekend, when he thwarted a Husky drive in the first quarter with another timely interception.

Although he probably won't join Brown on the pages of Playboy, Clay has his sights set on making his mark for Oregon this year.

"At the start of the season I wanted to come up with five interceptions this year, not break any coverages or miss any tackles. And I hope for some kind of Pac-10 honor."

"So far I think I'm on track."

If he keeps it up, he won't be tough to find anymore.

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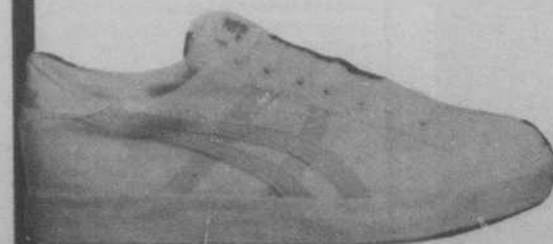
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