

Irish zapped '76 Ducks

By Paul Danzer
Of the Emerald

Notre Dame showed that it's as strong as ever, and Oregon showed that it is still trying to find an offense, as the fourteenth-ranked Irish blanked the Ducks 41-0 Saturday.

Emerald, Oct. 17, 1976

If the excerpt above sounds like the same old story — it is. This version is six years old.

It comes out of a little berg called South Bend, Indiana. It involves an airplane, a Holiday Inn, a wild party, and a not-so-wild football game.

It is the story of the first clash between the Fighting Ducks and Fighting Irish. It took place Oct. 15, 1976, in front of 59,075 fanatics who ate up every bit of destruction the Irish could create on the gridiron en route to a 41-0 shellacking of Oregon.

Notre Dame was ranked 14th in the nation when then Oregon coach Don Read led the Ducks up against the Irish for the one-and-only time. Notre Dame entered the game with a 3-1 record, the only blemish being a 31-10 season-opening setback against Tony Dorsett and the Pitt Panthers.

The Ducks, on the other hand, entered the contest with a 3-2 mark. They owned wins over Utah, Utah State and Colorado State, but had lost Pac-8 games to USC (53-0) and Cal (27-10).

Among other difficulties, the Oregon quarterback situation

was up in the air when the Ducks left Eugene. Starter Jack Henderson was questionable because of a broken hand. They didn't know whether he would be able to take a snap.

Friday evening the Oregon entourage was still in the dark, largely due to a delay in their flight plans which kept them from practicing until after dark on a field with no lights.

"You can hardly believe you're any place," said Read, describing the landing on a gravel-like runway when Oregon finally reached South Bend.

Read should have known it was going to be a long night.

The Ducks had one wing of the South Bend Holiday Inn all to themselves. Unfortunately, the other three wings were swarming with Notre Dame boosters who had no need to rest up for the game. The celebrating spilled into the courtyard and into the daylight hours, making it impossible for the Ducks to get an adequate night's sleep.

"I went and pleaded with some of them to quiet things down a little bit," recalled Read, now head coach at Portland State. "It didn't do any good. It probably just revved them up again."

That is the way things went on Saturday too. The supposedly run-oriented Irish surprised the Ducks with several gadget plays which helped them to blow the game open. The first came midway through the first quarter when a freshman receiver named Dave Waymer threw a

pass off an end-around to Dan Kelleher at the Oregon 1-yard-line. From there Irish quarterback Rick Slager carried it in, and the rout was on.

Before it ended Notre Dame accumulated 519 yards of total offense, including 213 through the air. They ran 30 more plays and had 17 more first downs than Oregon.

In addition to being stymied by the likes of Ross Browner and Willie Fry on the defensive line, the Oregon QB situation remained chaotic. Henderson started the game, but was bothered by his wrist. When Read went looking for reserves he found that his number-two man had left his knee brace in Eugene and was unable to play.

"We actually had three coaches warming up on the sideline," said Read. "We really didn't know what to do."

Read eventually brought on sophomore Rick Washut, who finally got the Ducks into Irish territory in the fourth quarter.

Despite the Ducks dismal showing, Read called the game "a good experience."

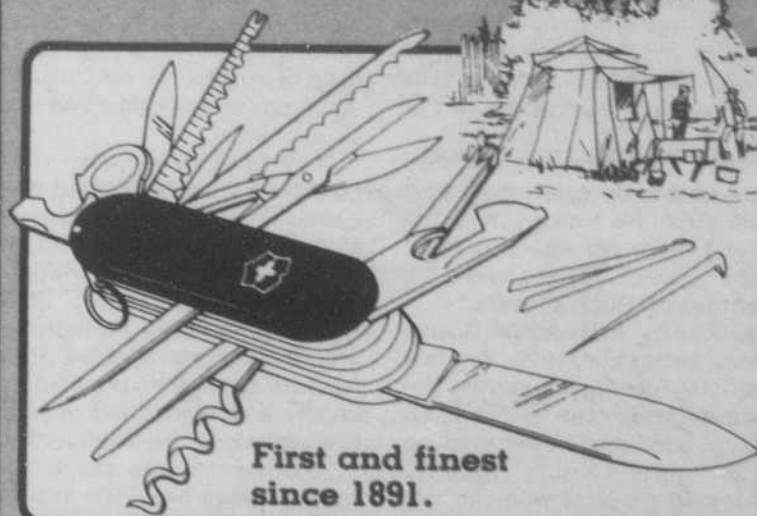
"We played a tough game," he said. "They were just so big and physical up front that we were unable to handle them."

It is the atmosphere that Read remembered best. "From the tailgate parties to the students' parades and cheers, it's all exciting. It makes a great football atmosphere and tradition.

"Every minute you are there, there is something going on," he said.

If nothing else, it makes for a good old story.

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