

Miller cleared for starting role against WSU

By Allan Lazo
Of the Emerald

Oregon received good news this week when quarterback Chris Miller was cleared to start, and the Ducks will need his offensive firepower to contend with the high-scoring offense of Washington State University as the Cougars come to Eugene Saturday.

The Ducks, 4-3 overall and 1-3 in the Pac-10, meet the Cougars in a 1 p.m. contest at Autzen Stadium. WSU, 3-4 overall and 1-2 in league, is fresh off a 49-42 win over Stanford in which they scored 42 second-half points.

Miller will get the starting call Saturday after he suffered a mild concussion from a "flagrant head butt" on a late hit by University of Washington linebacker Reggie Rogers.

Miller sat out three quarters of

the Washington game, but Oregon coach Rich Brooks announced Thursday that the sophomore quarterback will be able to start Saturday's Homecoming game.

Miller said that his head was clearing although he still suffered minor headaches from a mild concussion, but was cleared for practice on Wednesday.

While Miller will start the game, the Ducks know that they can count on senior Mike Jorgensen to move the team after he came in relief of Miller against Washington.

As for the Cougars, Mother Nature, not the Ducks may be the biggest obstacle in the way of WSU's patented option-offense. Cougar coach Jim Walden thinks the Oregon weather may neutralize his team's offense.

"We don't handle the ball well in Oregon because it is always raining. So we end up not running many options because we can't," says Walden who claims that the slickness of the wet turf keeps them from running the option play.

"The weather restricts us and takes away one of our attack points which is a favor to the Oregon defense or any defense," says Walden.

The rain may be the only thing to slow WSU's option attack because no other Pac-10 team has been able to stop them.

The Cougars boast the second best scoring offense (26.4 points a game) in the league and top the Pac-10 conference in total offense with 405 yards a game. WSU's offense has also scored a league-leading 23 touchdowns this year.

The key man in the Cougars' offensive scheme is quarterback Mark Rypien. Rypien leads the Pac-10 in total offense and touchdown passes. The sophomore signal caller has completed over 50 percent of his passes for 1,318 yards and 10 touchdowns.

"I guess he's been performing better than any quarterback in the league since he is leading the league," says Walden. "I don't have any complaints and I'm glad he is here and not somewhere else."

But the real offensive threat for the Cougars is running back Rueben Mayes. Mayes leads the Pac-10 in rushing with 861 yards on 139 carries, which also puts

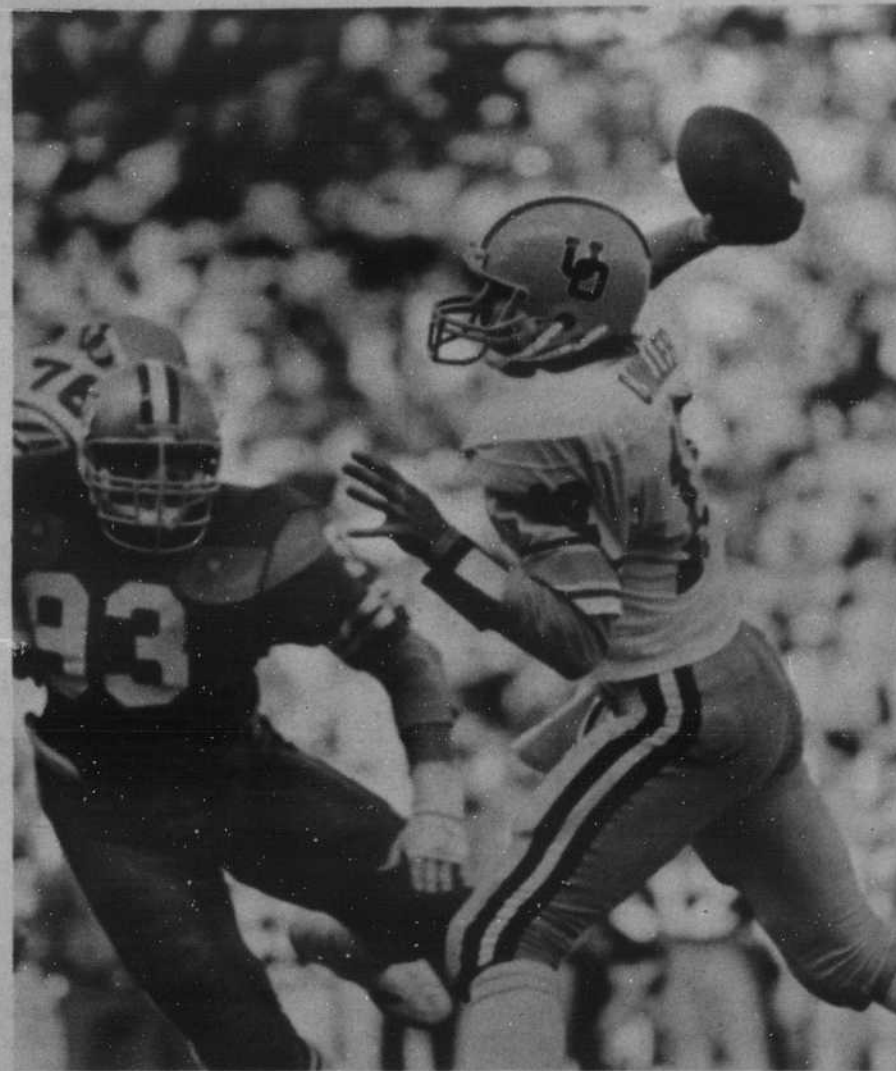


Photo by Kirk Hirota

Oregon quarterback Chris Miller will be back in the starting line up for Saturday's Homecoming game against Washington State University after suffering a mild concussion last week.

him fifth nationally. Last week in Stanford, Mayes rushed for 216 yards and scored five touchdowns which was the league's highest single-game

rushing performance. For last week's efforts, Mayes was named the Pac-10 offensive player of the week.

"I'm sure we're going to be up for it but it is a difficult offense," says Brooks of WSU's offense. "I'm sure we probably won't have the same results (on defense) we have had the last two weeks."

Brooks knows WSU's offense can put points on the board in a hurry. The Cougar scored 28 points in the fourth period against Stanford.

"They do more things that are likely to hurt us—by spreading us out all over the field and throwing the ball as well as running the option," says Brooks. "We haven't seen an offense like this all year so that is an added complication."

While the Ducks enter the game as two point favorites, the frustration level on the team is high. Oregon has dropped its last three contests to the top three teams in the league (Arizona, USC, Washington), but all have been hard-fought contests which could have gone either way.

"It's kind of frustrating to the fact that we have lost three, but the reverse of that is that we have outplayed the other teams," says Jorgensen who had a stellar performance off the bench against the Huskies.

"Of course, outplaying them doesn't get it done if he scoreboard doesn't read in your favor," says Jorgensen.

Oregon realizes that the scoreboard will be the key this week as WSU coach Walden admits his Cougars are "not a very good defensive team but that has been overshadowed by how bad our special teams have played."

Brooks says he doesn't think his team has a chance to win if they can't score 30 points against the Cougar defense that is ranked ninth in the league.

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