

Sports

Ducks deserve fan support until the final whistle sounds

This is an open letter to all those wild-and-crazy knuckleheads responsible for pulling down the the west goalpost at Autzen Stadium following the Oregon football team's 29-22 upset win over Washington. The message is simple: let's keep the early and unexpected success of coach Rich Brooks' gridders in perspective.

Of course, when I use the

Commentary by
Aaron Knox

term knuckleheads, I do so in the best possible sense of the word. It has been so long since any enthusiasm has been displayed for Oregon football that I am loathe to discourage it in any display.

But pulling down the goalpost? Even the most optimistic fan would have to agree that it is a trifle early for that. Seven Pacific-10 Conference football games remain to be played, including three more at Autzen. Although watching the goalpost come down was an awe-inspiring sight, it could get expensive if it becomes a weekly occurrence.

In these days of fiscal

restraint on the part of the Athletic Department, it would be incongruous to shell out the money to replace the goal every week. Besides, that unbridled enthusiasm may wane if the Ducks lose a couple more games between this Saturday and the next home date, Oct. 31, against California.

Although Saturday's clash with USC is certain to be played before a near-capacity crowd, the question remains: will those same fans come out in three weeks, after a grueling two-game series featuring the home tilt with the Trojans and a trip to the Rose Bowl on Oct. 17 to meet UCLA? If the Ducks lose one or both of those games, will it dampen the spirit of the faithful?

History indicates that it could, but history does not include a performance by an Oregon team on a par with that provided by the 1987 Ducks.

In 1984 the Ducks jumped out to a 4-0 start against inferior competition (Long Beach State and Pacific were the non-conference victims). They even checked in at number 20 in the Sports Illustrated poll after four games. After the Ducks fell by two touchdowns on the road against Arizona, a paltry crowd of 29,581 showed up for the



Photo by John Giustina

The crowd on hand for Oregon's win over Washington Oct. 3 was a record-breaker, but will those same fans come out in the rain if the Ducks don't continue their winning ways?

next home date against USC.

The record of past fan support does not improve with age. In 1970, Jerry Frei guided the Ducks to a 5-2 start and a national ranking in the Associated Press coaches poll. Just 34,000 witnessed the Ducks 10-7 win over then-top-ranked USC, which thrust the Ducks into the

rankings. But that was an impressive turn-out compared to the 24,700 who showed up two weeks later, after Oregon fell to Washington by 10 points in Seattle.

It is ironic that a community so hungry for college football success would turn out to be such a fair-weather friend. In this of all years, the win-loss record may not be indicative of accomplishment.

Doesn't anyone remember that the Ducks were picked to win only three or four games, and finish seventh or lower in the conference standings, by most of the national publications before the season began? The early success of this year's team should not justify a wholesale re-evaluation of expectations on the part of the fans.

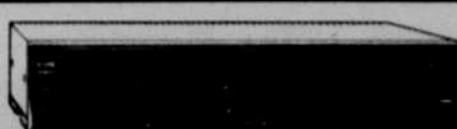
The goalpost-destroyers may be the only ones suffering from delusions of grandeur. For a more sobering approach to the weeks ahead, one needed only listen to the sounds emanating from the Oregon locker room in the wake of last week's stunning victory over Washington.

Brooks was asked if it was his biggest win. "That hasn't happened yet," he snapped. Strong tackle Gary Stefanick in one breath called the win over the Huskies "my wildest fantasy come true;" in the next he was saying, "we have to put this

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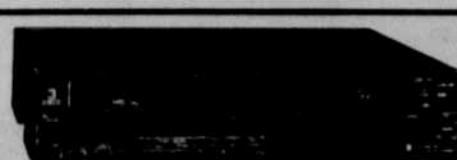
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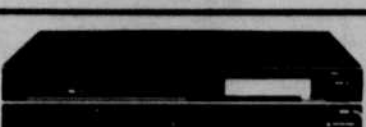
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