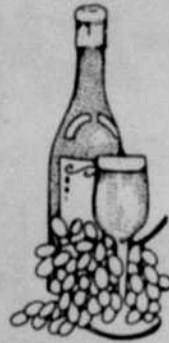


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Sports

Nelson will test character against WSU

By Aaron Knox
Emerald Sports Editor

The past six months have been trying times for sophomore quarterback Pete Nelson, who will start tomorrow for the Oregon football team against Washington State in the Ducks' last road game of the season. Nelson hasn't just experienced Murphy's Law, he has become the living embodiment of it.

The latest test to his character will at least take place on the field. Nelson knows if he doesn't move the team and move it quickly, wounded freshman Bill Musgrave stands waiting in the wings. Nelson, however, will have nothing to do with anything resembling a quarterback controversy. "I love Bill to death. He's a great quarterback and it makes me happy to see him doing so well," he said.

There didn't seem to be much controversy at the beginning of spring drills last May, either. Nelson was the heir apparent to record-setting passer Chris Miller, with game performance under his belt and three years of eligibility ahead. In his only extended playing time as a freshman, he completed 10 of



Pete Nelson

20 passes for 114 yards against a brutal Nebraska rush.

Then came a series of setbacks that effectively removed Nelson from the starting quarterback picture: a dismal spring, the emergence of red-shirt freshman Musgrave as a potential superstar, and a serious ankle injury that required surgery during fall drills.

To add insult to injury, Nelson suffered a severely strained lower back against California three weeks ago after the Bears had knocked Musgrave, ranked eighth na-

tionally in passing efficiency, out of the game.

In what seemed like the blink of an eye, Nelson dropped from within sight of his dreams into a nightmare that at times seemed would never end.

"It's been very frustrating and very depressing," Nelson conceded earlier this week, adding: "At times I've started to wonder if the man upstairs is watching out for me. I get the ankle cut (operated on), am able to come back quickly and feel good, but then I get it in the back."

Before you start to worry for this young man's emotional well-being, however, listen a little longer to what he has to say. His story, that of a prep phenom moving up to the big time and coming to grips with reduced stature and better competition, is not new or unusual.

What is unusual is the speed with which Nelson has adapted to his role as backup to Musgrave as the season, which began with such promise, winds down to its final two weeks.

"I tried to hide my feelings because of our early success (4-1 after five games, including wins over Washington and USC), and tried to share in that, but it was tough, because I didn't really feel like part of the team. Now I just want to contribute — if it's as a backup, that's fine. I want to do anything I can to help this team for the next couple of years," Nelson said.

It won't be as a backup Saturday, even though Musgrave began practicing with the team on Wednesday and should be available if called upon. Offensive coordinator Bob Toledo said the performance of Nelson would dictate the possible use of Musgrave, who did not play at all last week except as kicker Kirk Dennis' holder on special teams.

"Pete is the starter, and it's up to him to move the team. He doesn't have to worry about us putting in Bill if he gets the job

Turn to Nelson, Page 9

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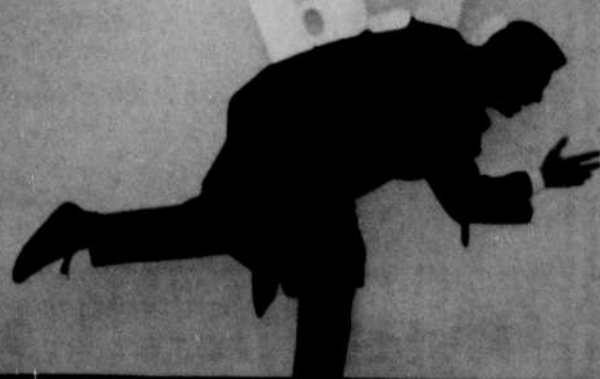
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