

Oregon Daily Emerald

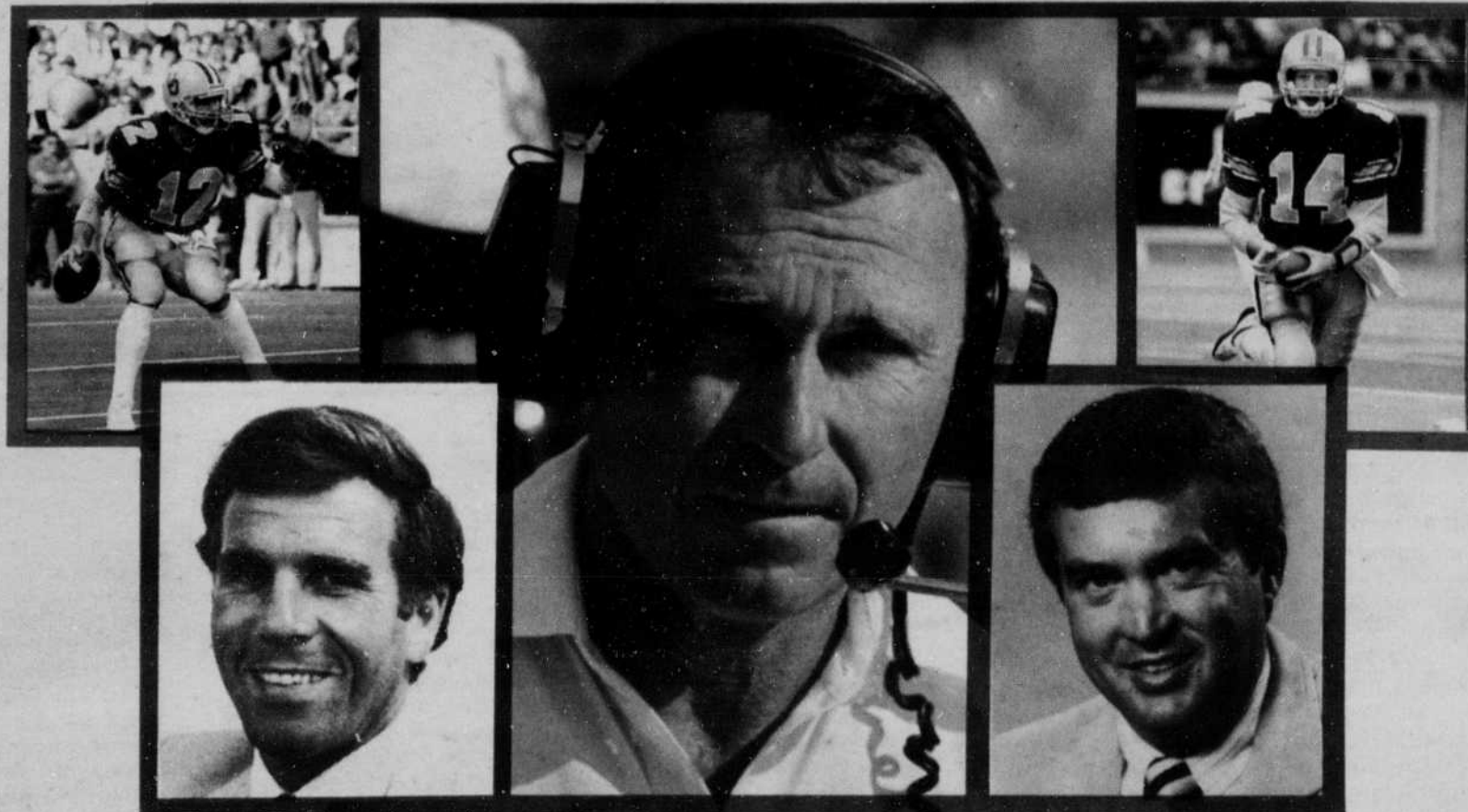
Monday, December 14, 1987

Eugene, Oregon

Volume 89, Number 71

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File photos

Rich Brooks (center) has built a solid foundation for the University football program with the help of athletic directors Rick Bay (lower left) and Bill

Byrne (lower right) and developed quarterbacks Chris Miller (upper left) and Bill Musgrave.

The making of a quality football program

By Aaron Knox
Emerald Sports Editor

The evolution of a college football team from a collection of players to the organization known reverently as a Program is seldom dramatic. It has been happening quietly in Eugene for 10 years, and now Oregon football finds itself perched at the threshold of achieving it.

Washington coach Don James, who has his own program of long standing, describes it as "one that takes good athletes and makes them better." It also is an institutional, long-term commitment that involves University administration and the athletic director as well as the head coach.

The early success of the Ducks this year brought rise to national rankings and serious bowl game consideration for the first time in a quarter century. The season is over and the bowl committees went elsewhere, but that is not the end of the story. Head coach Rich Brooks has taken the Ducks from being a perennial patsy toward a program to be contended with, a step with origins dating back several years.

Brooks came to Oregon in 1977 with a five-year plan. He was on the way to realizing it when scandal hit. He led the Ducks to a 6-5 mark in 1979 and 6-3-2 in 1980, but NCAA and Pacific-10 Conference investigations stripped the Ducks of scholarships, bowl game rights and incentive.

Members of the football team received bogus credits in junior college, used a secret travel fund established by assistant coaches and abused long-distance phone privileges.

The investigation resulted — directly and indirectly — in the departure of University president Bill Boyd, the resignation of athletic director John Caine and several assistant

coaches. Brooks survived after an investigation determined he was unaware of the abuses. The Pac-10 also sanctioned USC, UCLA, Arizona State and Oregon State in its most sweeping investigation ever.

The team staggered to seasons of 2-9 and 2-8-1 in 1981 and 1982, despite the presence of a lot of talent and high expectations.

"We had gotten the program to the point it could be competitive with most teams, but then we got whacked," Brooks said, adding the NCAA restrictions forced him to return to the ground floor in the rebuilding process. "It was much more difficult for us to bounce back than it was for a team like USC, which had a tradition of success to draw on," he noted.

Vince Goldsmith, a player at the time, summed up the attitude of the players: "You can go undefeated and try for a national ranking, but you can't go anywhere to prove it," he said. "It pretty much means the team goal is shot to hell."

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The legitimization of Oregon football began in earnest Aug. 1, 1980, when Rick Bay was installed as athletic director. Bay is a man of conviction who backs up his words. He brought those qualities to bear at Oregon.

Bay recently resigned as athletic director at Ohio State rather than support the dismissal of football coach Earl Bruce, and also refused to reinstate receiver Cris Carter after revoking his eligibility for accepting money from an agent.

In 1980 Bay stood behind Brooks when few others would. Current athletic director Bill Byrne has solidified that commitment, and backed it up financially.

In retrospect, the penalties probably were the best thing that could have happened to the Ducks. College athletics were under close scrutiny by the NCAA, and many expressed doubt about the honesty of any program motivated by such huge sums of money.

The fact Oregon came clean early stood

the University in good stead. Oregon cooperated with the NCAA and Pac-10 in every aspect of its investigations, and Brooks emerged from the resultant charges and conclusions relatively unscathed. He offered his resignation, which Bay adamantly refused, and Oregon was on the road to recovery, with its institutional integrity intact, almost before it fell.

Given the opportunity, Oregon embarked on a campaign of legitimization based on personnel, recruiting (both in-state and nationwide), and financial commitment. The success of that campaign can be measured on the field.

When Brooks was hired in 1977, he inherited a team that had won only 20 of its previous 66 games. The team had gone through three coaches in quick succession (Jerry Frei, Dick Enright, and Don Read). Recruiting was constrained by doubts about the stability of the coach and his programs, and fans stayed away from Autzen Stadium in droves.

Since 1983, Brooks has posted a 22-22 mark. His record against nonconference opponents during the last four years is 9-4. Attendance has never been higher, and this season a new home attendance record was set, as the Ducks averaged 39,199 for each of its five home dates. Only six-game home seasons have produced more total fans.

All of which are reflections of off-the-field maneuvers as much as they are on-the-field performance. Before a team takes the field it must be prepared, coached and financed.

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The degree to which a school addresses those needs dictates the won-loss record over time, and quick fixes cannot easily be made in the competitive Pac-10 Conference. Substantive changes throughout the system are required to resurrect a dormant program.

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