

Hargain lives up to potential, stars for Duck offense

By Ashley Conklin
Emerald Sports Reporter

A year of experience and maturity has meant all the difference in the world on the football field for Tony Hargain this season.

After struggling through his first two seasons at Oregon, Hargain, a junior, has lived up to his enormous all-around athletic potential to start at split end for the 3-1 Ducks, and play a leading role in the offense.

"I wasn't ready for the intensity of college football," Hargain said. "I didn't do a good job of changing for the degree of play (at the college level)."

After catching 18 passes in 11 games as a redshirt freshman two years ago, Hargain slumped to only five receptions last season, all in the first seven games. Hargain knew it was time to do something about his lack of production, and worked hard this summer to get ready for the 1989 season.

"I stayed up here this summer and worked out," Hargain, from North Highlands, Calif., said. "If I want something I really have to go after it."

"I control my own destiny," he added. "It wasn't that I didn't have the athletic ability to play. I wanted to play more

so I worked harder to get it."

If there was one thing that Hargain had from the beginning, it was athletic ability.

Hargain played flanker his first two seasons, and even quarterbacked the team briefly when Bill Musgrave was out of action. And then there was basketball season where Hargain has picked up three letters, and will return to the court this season. After last season, the football coaches just wondered when Hargain would arrive.

His off-season work ethic and production this year have put all those thoughts to rest though.

"I wanted to come in and start," Hargain said, "and help the team as much as possible."

Hargain is tied for the team lead in receptions with 14, has 207 yards in receptions for a 14.8 average and two touchdowns.

Hargain has also had some big games and big plays for the Ducks this season, catching five passes against Arizona and hooking up with Musgrave for a 40-yard pass play at Stanford.

Yes folks, Tony Hargain has arrived.

"He's come up with some big plays for us," offensive coordinator Mike Bellotti said. "He's become a solid performer at the Pac-10 level."

"He's tougher mentally this season," Bellotti said, "and that factor has made him much better. I'm happy for Tony because he's a great young man who has continued to improve, and because he has, he's made himself into a complete football player."

While many might not see much connection to catching passes on the gridiron to handing out assists on the basketball court, Hargain and Bellotti see a definite correlation.

"It helps me judge different situations," Hargain said. "The quickness in basketball helps me to react to areas the defense leaves open in football. Basketball is a faster sport and you have to react quicker with your eyes and hands, and that carries over to football."

"The basketball thing keeps him in shape," Bellotti said. "He misses our off-season lifting that would help his upper-body strength, but it's great from an athletic standpoint and helps his quickness and elusiveness for football."

Despite playing both flanker and split end, Hargain has no preference between the two, and has no desires to quarterback again, despite having played the position during high school.

"You get an equal number of passes thrown to you at either position," he said. "You just have to wait for your number to be called. The coaches make the game plan and you can't change that."

"I think if I wanted to play quarterback, I would have gone to a school that wanted me to start at quarterback," Hargain continued. "Basically I want to stick with being a receiver and work on having another good season."

After two years of playing under former offensive coordinator Bob Toledo's system, the Ducks brought in Bellotti for this season. However, Hargain said the changes between the two offensive systems have been minimal.

"Basically we have the same

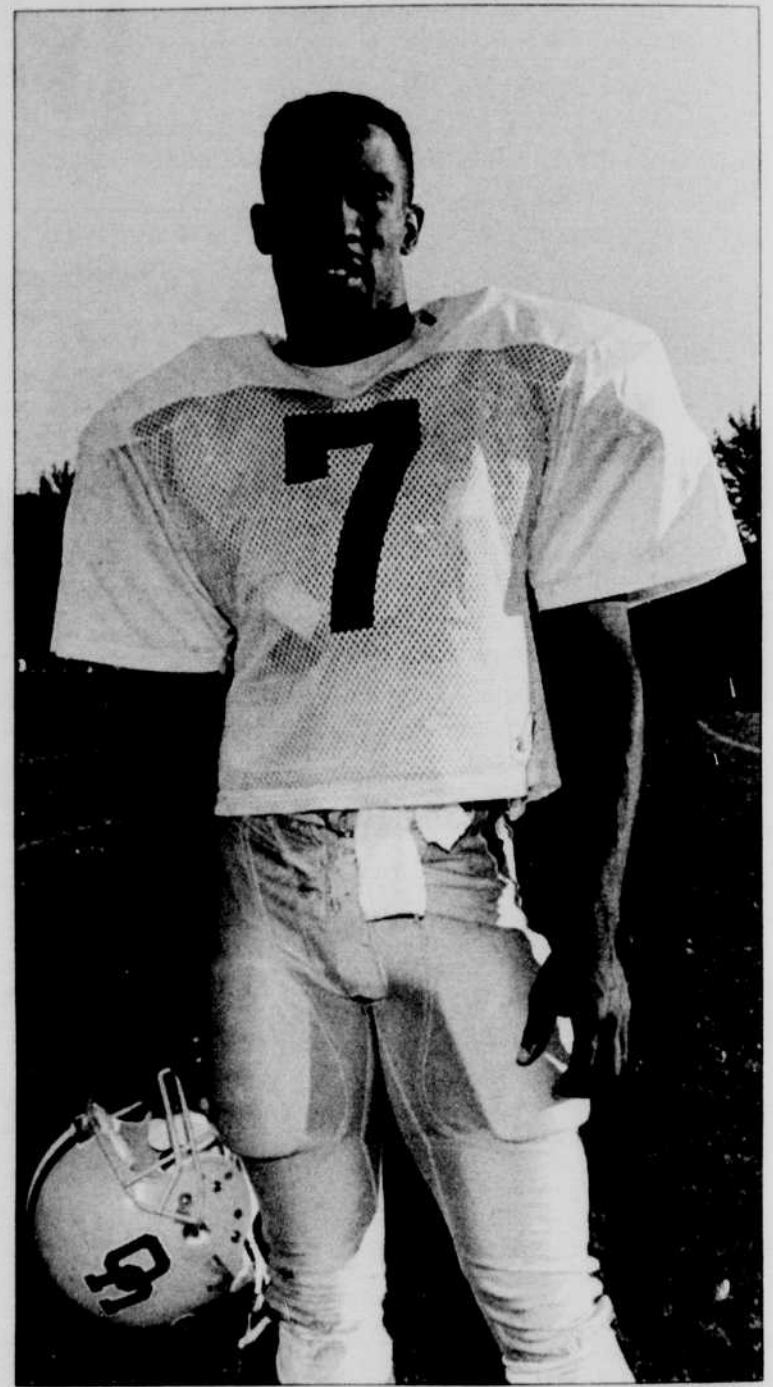


Photo by Andre Ranieri

Hard work and perseverance have helped Tony Hargain to become a key cog in the Oregon attack

schemes," he said, "just different terminology. Bill (Musgrave) mostly has the same reads as before, and so do we."

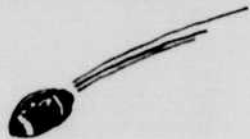
Hargain likes how the Ducks, ranked 23rd in the latest Associated Press Top 25 poll, are playing with Bellotti's offense as they head into Saturday's game with No. 21 Washington State.

"I think our passing attack is really strong right now," Hargain said, "and we can use the pass to set up the run."

"This is an opportunity to improve as a team and gain some national recognition," he added, "and hopefully I can continue to improve and get some national recognition for myself."

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