

Duck defense not missing a beat with LaBounty

Continues to make plays

By Ashley Conklin
Emerald Sports Reporter

The way defensive coordinator Denny Schuler tells it, Oregon's football team doesn't miss Matt Brock one bit.

When you have a guy like Matt LaBounty to replace him though, that's understandable.

Brock was the Ducks starting left defensive end and a first team all-Pacific-10 Conference player a year ago before being drafted by the Green Bay Packers. His understudy, LaBounty (a sophomore), has more than filled Brock's shoes in his first year as a starter, and is a big reason why Oregon is 3-1 overall and ranked 23rd in the latest Associated Press poll.

"There's no question he's playing every bit as well as predicted," Schuler said. "He hasn't been a real flashy guy with glittering stats, but he's playing as well as he can play."

"Matt taught me a lot, but I was more worried about doing my own thing," LaBounty added. "I just wanted to do what I could."

As a redshirt freshman last season, LaBounty had a knack for turning in the big play when spelling Brock.

In only 137 defensive downs, LaBounty had four quarterback sacks and six tackles for losses. He was third on the team in quarterback sacks, and the coaches couldn't wait to see what he could do on a full-time basis. Needless to say, he hasn't disappointed.

This season, LaBounty is fifth on the team with 29 total tackles, second in quarterback sacks with three and leads the team in tackles for losses with six for 35 yards lost.

LaBounty said he believes being a relative unknown a year ago helped him to make the big play.

"I didn't play that much and so people didn't know what kind of moves I had, and didn't

know what to expect," LaBounty said. "The way our defense is set up one or two guys can usually get open to make a big play."

When one looks at LaBounty, he or she might not think of him as a defensive end right away. While he has the height at 6-foot-4, he only weighs 240 pounds. However, the size factor hasn't proven to be a disadvantage for him.

"Size is the only thing he needs," Schuler said. "I don't know if he can carry more size on his frame. He might be at that point where he can put on another 10 pounds at most. If he can gain some weight in the maturing process it could really help."

"I don't think it's a problem for me," LaBounty said. "If I can stay low and use good technique I'll be alright."

If there is one thing that Schuler likes about LaBounty, it's how solid a technician he is.

"He's a smart player and has very sound technique," Schuler said. "I would say he has the lowest 'pad level' on the team. 'Pad level' is a term we use for how low someone plays."

"Matt gets underneath a lot of linemen and is able to overcome his lack of size against the 300-pound tackles," Schuler said. "Three things about him are that he's a smart guy, a good technician and is always in position."

While LaBounty has asserted himself with his play, he said he notices the differences between being a back-up and starting.

"You play with more intensity," he said. "You always want to go out and have a good practice and if you don't have a good one, you want to come back and have a good practice the next day."

"You have to be 100 percent prepared for every team," he said.

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Photo by Bill Haines

Matt LaBounty (right) helped the Oregon defense harass Arizona quarterback Ronald Veal into a miserable game last week.

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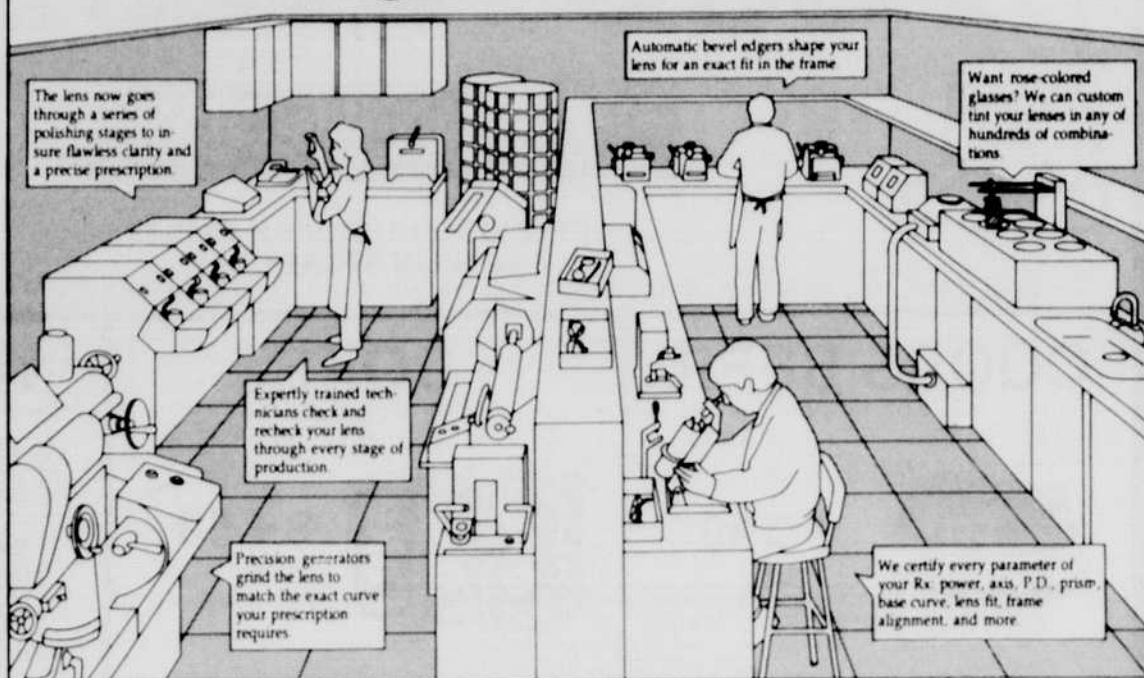
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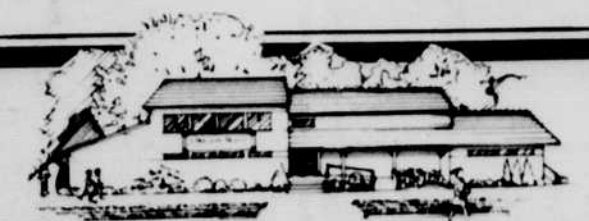


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