Offenses could dominate Independence Bowl

Teams lead with air attacks

By Ashley Conklin
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The Dec. 16 Independence Bowl between Oregon and Tulsa could shape up as one of the best in Independence Bowl history.

While the only common denominator between the Golden Hurricane and the Ducks is that both played Iowa this season — Iowa beat Tulsa 30-32 while Oregon beat the Hawkeyes 44-6 — both teams have explosive offenses that can score from anywhere on the field at any time.

Oregon's offense shattered many individual and team school records this season on its way to a 7-4 record. Meanwhile, Tulsa, behind quarterback T.J. Rubley and split end Dan Bitson have one of the most explosive passing attacks in the nation and finished with a 6-5 record.

The Ducks had their most successful season since 1963 this year, tying Arizona and Washington for second place in the Pacific-10 Conference.

Led by quarterback Bill Musgrave, Oregon led the conference in scoring with 32 points per game and was second in total offense averaging 418 yards per game. The Ducks scored over 30 points in seven games this season and set a new school record with 352 points.

Musgrave led the conference in passing yardage with 2,761 yards, a new school record and led the Pac-10 with 20 touchdown passes, another school record.

The Golden Hurricane are an outstanding team through the air as well with Rubley and Bitson.

Rubley, a junior like Musgrave, has already broken all of Tulsa's career passing records as well as setting a new career record for total offense. This season Rubley has thrown for 2,497 yards and 17 touchdowns, but has completed only 48.7 percent of his passes.

The most explosive weapon the Golden Hurricane has, though, is Bitson.

Just a junior, Bitson has 154 pass receptions for his career, passing NFL receiving great Steve Largent on Tulsa's all-

time list and ranks second behind Howard Twilley who played for the Miami Dolphins in the 1970's.

After catching 52 passes for 1,138 yards and nine touchdowns in 1988, Bitson has been even better this season, hauling in 73 passes for 1,425 yards and 16 touchdowns.

Bitson was recently named a third team all-American by *Football News* and has had seven games with six or more receptions. Included in that list is a 14-catch, 235-yard effort against Iowa and 10 receptions for 238 yards and four touchdowns against Bowling Green.

Not only can both teams strike quickly through the air, they each possess solid ground games for a balanced offense.

The Ducks are led by seniors Derek Loville and Latin Berry, two of the best running backs in Oregon history while Tulsa counters with junior fullback Brett Adams.

Loville rushed for 877 yards, good for fourth in the Pac-10 and is the school's all-time leading rusher with 3,214 yards. Berry enjoyed the best year of his career this season, rushing for 520 yards, good for seventh in the conference. He also ranks ninth on the all-time school rushing list.

Meanwhile, Adams led the Golden Hurricane with 1,071 yards and had six 100-yard games this season. Adams was also Tulsa's second leading receiver with 29 pass receptions.

The Golden Hurricane hasn't had any problems scoring this year either as they averaged 25.3 points per game and scored 30 or more points five times.

Despite the loss to Iowa, Tulsa, an independent, has posted some impressive victories.

The Golden Hurricane defeated Louisville 31-24, Texas El-Paso 23-14, and beat Oklahoma State 20-10. In addition to playing Iowa tough, Tulsa also had a good outing against ninth-ranked Arkansas despite losing 26-7.

Oregon has had its troubles against high-powered offenses this season, dropping a 51-38 shoot-out to Washington State

and falling 45-41 in an explosive game with Brigham Young.

The Ducks have played well defensively behind David Cusano, Peter Brantley and Chris Oldham this season with exception of the Washington State and BYU games.

Oregon was second in the conference in total defense, allowing 336.9 yards per game and only 104.6 yards per game on the ground. The Ducks were only seventh in the Pac-10 in pass defense though, giving up 232.3 yards through the air.

A key match-up in the game will likely be Oldham's coverage on Bitson. Oldham is listed as Oregon's left cornerback, but usually covers the opposing team's best receiver and has regularly shut down the best receivers in the Pac-10 this season.

The *Football News* tabbed Oldham as a second team all-American selection while the Football Writers Association of America chose Oldham as a first team all-American, giving the Ducks their first first-team all-American selection since Lew Barnes was so honored by the *Football News* in 1985.

File photo
Cornerback Chris Oldham has had a banner season, but will have his hands full with Tulsa's Dan Bitson in the Dec. 16 Independence Bowl.