

## Sports

# Rissone excels as Duck wrestler

By Mike Maloney  
Emerald Contributor

If you wanted to congratulate Joe Rissone for being named to the Nevada prep football "Team of the Decade" you would have to catch him at practice.

But it wouldn't be football practice.

Rissone, who led his high school gridiron squad to a 14-0 season and a state title, is now the starting 190-pounder on Oregon's nationally ranked wrestling squad.

"After high school, I decided I wasn't big enough to play lineman in college football," Rissone said. "And I just liked wrestling more."

Not that his credentials in his "second" sport were any less impressive. As a senior, Rissone wrestled to a 44-0 mark en route to an individual state title and prep All-American status.

"Joe pretty much dominated the high school wrestling scene," Oregon wrestling head coach Ron Finley said. "He pinned the majority of his opponents."

Rissone began his Oregon career in the fall of 1985, posting a 6-3 mark in his freshman campaign before being sidelined when he blew out his knee during a practice session.

"Joe was pretty impressive until the injury," Finley said. "We didn't know if he could make it back."

Rissone had major surgery during the off-season and came back his sophomore year, his mobility limited by an overbearing knee brace.

"I couldn't move or shoot with that on," Rissone said.

He was befallen by bad luck again his junior season, this time separating his collarbone. He sat out that year on redshirt status and once again started on the road of rehabilitation.

"Sometimes I wondered if it was worth it," Rissone said. "I didn't know if the rehabilitation would pay off."

He was able to wrestle a complete season last year, yet never quite got on track and finished with a 10-10 record.

"Until this year I think Joe was real wary of re-injuring himself," Finley said. "He came ready to wrestle this fall."

This will be Rissone's last season in an Oregon wrestling uniform, and already it looks as if it will be his best.

He has jumped out to a 10-4 record, including two victories over Stanford All-American Ron Perry.

Rissone pinned Perry in their first meeting - one of his team-leading four falls - but Oregon wrestling assistant coach Chuck Kearney said the second win was the biggest.

"Joe dominated Perry on points in their second meeting," he said. "It proved that the first win wasn't a fluke."

He also took second place at this year's prestigious Oregon Classic, his only loss coming at the hands of Oklahoma State All-American Randy Coulter.

Kearney said the coaching staff knew he was capable of such outstanding performances all along.

"He's the toughest wrestler in the practice room," Kearney said. "But now he's believing

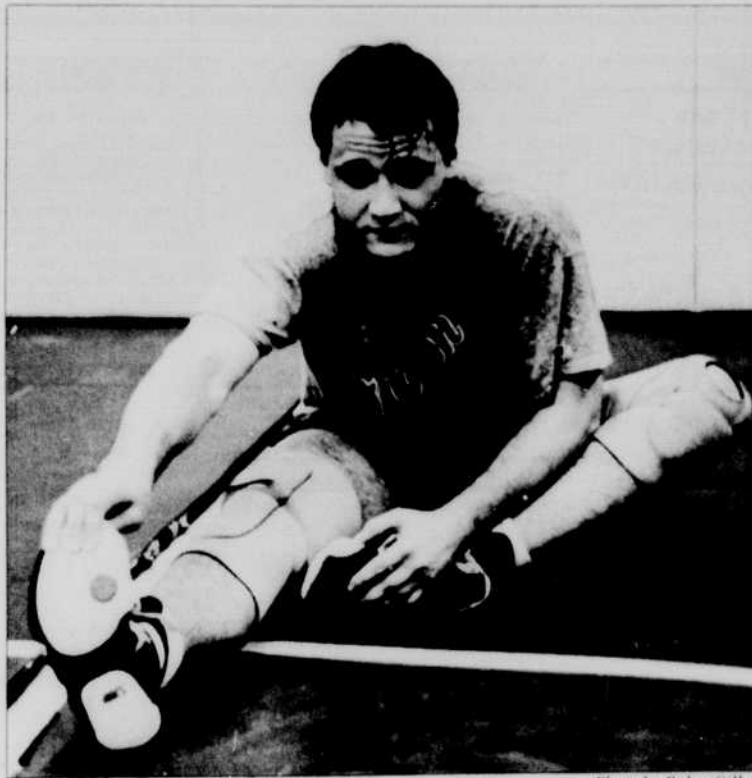


Photo by Nolan Giller

**Joe Rissone's wrestling success has earned him the starting 190-pound slot on the University wrestling squad.**

in himself during competition more than he has in the past. We knew what he was capable of all along."

Both coach and wrestler agree that this new-found confidence stems from a level of conditioning that Rissone did not achieve in the past.

"Injuries interrupted Joe's training in the past," Finley said. "Now he is in by far the best shape of his career."

"I'm finally wrestling a full match," Rissone said. "Last season I'd be tired after one round."

Finley said Rissone's improvement should show in this season's Pac-10 tournament - a tournament he has yet to place in.

"If Joe keeps improving, he could qualify for the NCAA's and even place there," Finley said, noting the 190-pound weight division is "wide-open."

Regardless of whether he achieves All-American status, Joe Rissone has had an impressive career at the University of Oregon. However, when asked about the highlight of his half-decade in the green and gold, he does not speak of a heroic take-down or pin.

"I think my highlight is being a part of the effort it took to go from the tragic van accident a year before I came here to where we are today," he said.

This spring Rissone will graduate with a degree in sociology. Although he has been wrestling since he was 8-years-old, he's not sad about seeing his career come to an end.

"I've been in the wrestling room an awful long time," he said. "I've had two knee surgeries, a number of rotator cuff injuries, and generally been beat up every day. It's an amazing relief to almost be done."

He has earned the rest.

## Ducks face Bulldogs, Beavs

The Oregon wrestling team hosts Fresno State at McArthur Court tonight at 7:30 p.m. before traveling to Corvallis to meet Oregon State at Gill Coliseum Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

The Ducks are ranked 23rd in the nation in the latest edition of *Amateur Wrestling News*. Dan Vidlak,

who wrestles at the 118-pound class leads the team with a rating of sixth in the nation.

Oregon leads the all-time series with Fresno State at 14-4-1. The Ducks also lead the series with the Beavers 57-13-1. The Bulldogs are 6-1 this season, and Oregon State has posted a 9-7-1 mark.

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