

Brock, Kozak ready to welcome more Ducks

Survive first NFL season

By Mike Petticord
Emerald Contributor

After the National Football League draft late last month, four members of the 1989 Oregon Ducks football squad — running back Latin Berry, offensive lineman Curt Dykes, and defensive backs Chris Oldham and Daryl Reed — stand at the threshold of their first NFL regular season.

Four other '89 Oregon players weren't drafted but signed free-agent contracts with NFL teams. Safety Derek Horton and receiver Terry Obee signed with the Seattle Seahawks, offensive lineman Chris Husko signed with the Detroit Lions and tight end Joe Meerten signed with the Atlanta Falcons.

Two 1988 Oregon alumni, defensive lineman Matt Brock and linebacker Scott Kozak, have already completed their first year in the NFL and are ready to welcome them.

In the NFL, reunions between old college acquaintances are often brief. Kozak recalls meeting running back Eric Ball, formerly of UCLA.

The reunion took place at the line of scrimmage. The Houston Oilers, Kozak's team, were absorbing a 61-7 beating by the Cincinnati Bengals in icy Riverfront Stadium when Kozak was sent into the game during the second half to mop up.

Ball was carrying the ball for the Bengals and Kozak met him with a flying takedown as the game drew to a merciful close.

Although the rout was symptomatic of a bitter, long-standing Houston-Cincinnati rivalry, the two former Pacific-10 players themselves exchanged friendly greetings after the play.

"It's not often you see a familiar face," Kozak says.

Recipients of numerous Pac-10 honors during their collegiate careers, Kozak was selected in the second round and Brock was selected in the third

round of the 1989 NFL draft by their respective teams.

The Green Bay Packers' training camp "put a damper on the honeymoon," said Brock, who was married after graduating in 1989 but was summoned by the Packers soon thereafter.

"I didn't expect a lot of playing time," Brock said. But he still applied himself to mastering Green Bay's complex "two-gap" defense.

"Each defensive lineman has to play two gaps," Brock explained. "That means I have to be prepared to go inside or outside. We take on the blockers and the linebackers come up behind us to make the tackles."

"If our defensive line is making more tackles than the linebackers during the game, something is wrong," he said. "The coaches will pull out the chalkboard and scratch their heads and take another look at it."

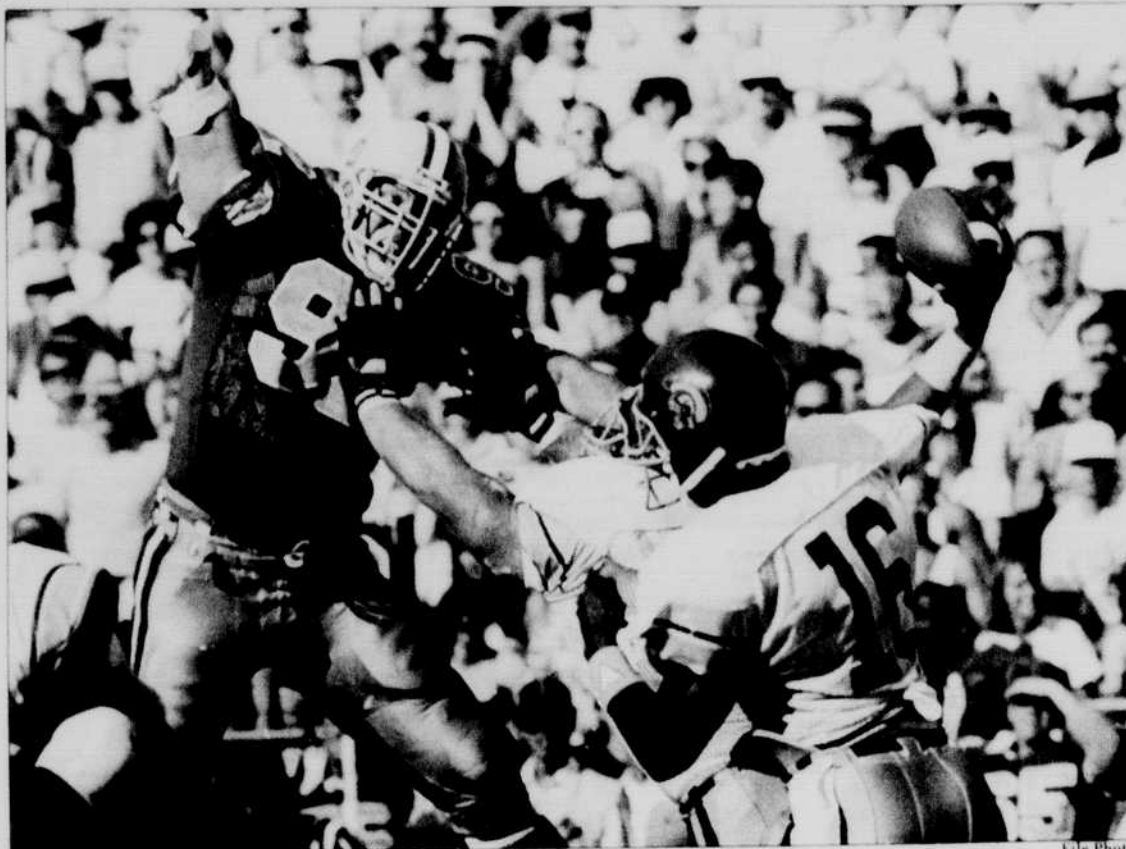
"Now, I know that if I make only one tackle but keep the opposing lineman busy for the entire game, then I've done my job," said Brock, who credits his discipline to Oregon defensive line coach Joe Schaffeld. "It kind of takes away from your stardom but that's what the professionals are looking for."

"I don't think I'll ever be a major flash like I was at Oregon," Brock laughs.

Cinderella stories about rookies who take the NFL by storm in their first year are usually the feverish creations of overworked sportswriters seeking media darlings.

"Your name for the first year is 'Rook,'" Brock warns incoming college seniors. "You gopher this, gopher that. Carry the veterans' helmets, go fetch their drinks. All in fun, of course. Every night we sang for our supper. I sang so bad the first time they never asked me to sing again."

Because most NFL teams begin training camp with inflated rosters, many players face the prospect of dismissal before the



Matt Brock (92) and former Oregon teammate Scott Kozak survived their first year in the National Football League and were put on the protected list by their respective teams for next season.

summer is over. This process, called the "cut", is the source around which morbid myths of fantasy and terror have been woven.

"We had 'Jesse the Body Snatcher' at Green Bay," Brock said. "If he knocked on your door during lights out, you were gone the next day."

Kozak alluded only briefly to the Oilers' traditions of initiation. "We were required to shave our heads," he said.

Brock and Kozak each survived the "cut" only to find that this passage was but the first of many obstacles on a long road toward a job in the starting line-up.

Kozak's position is outside linebacker, a spot currently held in Houston by Johnny Meads, a veteran of seven NFL seasons.

"It's hard to match experience," Kozak says. "He

(Meads) is much better at taking on the tight ends than I am."

"I'm learning to take on pulling guards and tackles," says Kozak, "but sometimes while you're concentrating on these guys the tight end will come up behind you and cut you down."

"Unless you have a lot of experience it's hard to pick it up," Kozak confesses.

Brock did not start in his first regular season game until November, when the Packers hosted the Chicago Bears.

"I'm playing against (Chicago tackle Keith) Van Horn," Brock recalled. "A wily veteran who's been around eleven years. They call a sweep around my end and that's where I make my first mistake in the NFL. I get suckered into the flow and Van Horn hooks me."

"But I fight him off and

knock down the pulling guard and kind of stumble into the ball carrier and start a big pile," he said. "After the play is over I realize 'Hey, I made something happen!'"

"That's what the coaches are looking for," said Brock, who broke his hand in practice after the Chicago game and spent the rest of the season on the sidelines.

Both Brock and Kozak were placed on the protected lists of their respective teams in February, which means that they will return to the summer training camps in Wisconsin and Texas in a few weeks to compete with veterans and rookies and once again face the "cut."

Although job security is a long way off, the former Oregon stars have passed the critical hurdle of the first year and are now themselves becoming NFL veterans.

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