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PAC-10 Predictions: DUCKS #1?

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Life in pre-season college football prediction magazines is tough, especially for a team like the Oregon Ducks.

Away from the glitz and glamour of Los Angeles, or the large television markets of Seattle and Phoenix, Oregon is often shuffled to the second division of the Pacific-10 Conference without a hard look even with a team that will contend, and yes, maybe even win the conference title.

Most have picked the Ducks to finish fifth or sixth, saying that they are talented, but (sigh), they are still the Ducks.

Are these predictions really that important? To many football fans they are, and since large metropolitan areas have the most football fans per capita, the schools in those cities will usually get higher rankings.

Predictions are also important to a high school football recruit still trying to decide which school to attend. He might see those magazines and promptly scratch the Ducks right off his list of prospective schools.

So in response to the oversights of these sports writers, here is our set of non-biased (well, maybe a little bit of bias) predictions for the Pac-10. Some of the choices might be surprising, but then again, anything can happen during a football season.

#1 OREGON

Believe it or not, we are picking Oregon to finish first in the Pac-10. The time is ripe for these Ducks, and with the leadership of Senior Bill Musgrave, an experienced receiving core, and a large pool of defensive talent to draw on Oregon will come out on top in 1990. Besides that, why not the Ducks? They have as good a chance as anybody.

Brash prediction? Maybe. In the realm of possibility? You bet. Musgrave is hovering over every quarterback record established in Oregon history. Last year he set one-season marks for touchdowns (22) and yardage (3,081), as he led the Ducks to the Independence Bowl. He already holds the record for career touchdowns with 43, and if he can stay healthy, Oregon may be spending a lot of time in the end zone.

Musgrave should benefit from returning receivers Joe Reitzug and Tony Hargain, who will both make major contributions to the Oregon offense this year.

Center Scot Boatright will be the anchor for another fine offensive line, which includes talented tackles David Collinsworth, Todd Kaanapu, and im-

proved guard Andy Sunia. The offensive line should be able to thwart any defense.

The defensive line is deep with quality athletes such as Matt LaBounty and Marcus Woods. The linebackers will be led by Peter Brantly, a possible all-Pac-10 selection.

The secondary is inexperienced but there is a large group of fine athletes contending for positions. The safety position is a strong point for the Ducks, with Eric Castle and Rory Dairy prowling the backfield. In all the defense is ready to move up in the rankings from a second place finish a year ago.

Add to all of that a favorable schedule with seven home games and the excellent coaching abilities of Rich Brooks, and the Ducks might be smelling the roses this year.

#2 WASHINGTON

The Huskies should be the only team that could contend with the Ducks this year, so look for the October 13 meeting between the two teams in Seattle.

Washington's defense is talented. The front seven is two or three deep with quality players. The front seven is the toughest in the Pac-10. The Husky secondary is very inexperienced and should be a worry for head coach Don James in this pass-happy conference.

The offensive line has strong experienced players at every position, and a new one-back offensive look - the same one that allowed tailback Greg Lewis to run for 1,100 yards last year - should once again unleash the formidable running attack. Look for Lewis to once again eclipse 1,000 yards. The Huskies are always strong in the backfield. It seems like Washington running backs have been there for a decade because they all look alike - big, strong, and fast. Maybe it's the uniforms.

Top returning passer Mark Brunell is inexperienced and will be challenged by Billy Joe Hobert, but both were inconsistent during the spring. Put a big question mark at quarterback.

Another big point for the Huskies (and for the Ducks as well) is that they will meet Purdue, Colorado, and Arizona State on the road, and USC at home in the four weeks before Oregon comes to Seattle. They might be a little weary with that schedule, a main reason they did not finish in our top spot.

#3 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Why does everybody think the Trojans will win the Pac-10? We think it's because Los Angeles is a major media market. USC is just too big to fall through the cracks, but it certainly does not deserve the first place finish most magazines have predicted.

Oh sure, the Trojans could win it, but the first four games with Syracuse, Penn State, Washington, and Ohio State will probably do a lot of damage to their young defense.

The defense is inexperienced and is not as strong as USC defenses have been in the past, but is still better than most in the league. The inexperience of the defense should be supplemented by all of the favorable press that they get.

Quarterback Todd Marinovich will be the key for the Trojans in those first four games if he can come through, and the speed of his receivers should allow him to throw more than the usual five yard passes he was known for last year. Look for Marinovich to dive into the NFL draft next year, he's a million dollar baby. Tailback Ricky Ervins will step up and smile big for the cameras all year long, and has been tabbed for possible All-American notice.

It's time to forget pride and tradition, Trojan fans. Be happy with third.

#4 (tie) UCLA

The Bruins are blessed with a never ending flow of excellent athletes, an infinite supply of showtime players who find the bright lights of L.A. enticing. Sorry folks, but the bulb has fizzled out. Of course, like their neighbors the Bruins have the advantage of a large press backing to help their cause, but it won't help them build off of last year's 3-7-1 record.

The quarterback situation is shaky with the departure of Bret Johnson, but the job falls to Jimmy Bonds.

Senior Eric Turner and junior Matt Darby will make up one of the top safety tandems in the nation, but two men do not a defense make.

Team speed is a weakness, and a tough Pac-10 schedule should keep the Bruins honest for another year. (Oh, by the way - the Bruins will lose to the Beavers for the second straight year, 24-23, when a UCLA extra point attempt in the final minute is blocked and Oregon State returns it for a two point conversion.)

#4 (tie) ARIZONA

The Wildcats start with running backs and they just don't stop. The Arizona backfield just keeps getting deeper and better. The list goes on: Art Greathouse, Mario Hampton, Reggie McGill, Michael Bates, Lamont Lovett, and Eroll Sapp. Arizona coaches might as well flip a coin each week to determine who will play, because they are all very capable backs.

Ronald Veal and George Malaulu will continue to battle for the quarterback spot. Tight end Richard Griffith could develop into one of the best in the country, and center Paul Tofflemire should be the key for a huge group of linemen. But there is not

enough offensive diversity.

The defense is strong as usual, but you can count Arizona out of the Pac-10 because of a grueling schedule with USC, Washington, and UCLA on the road.

#6 ARIZONA STATE

Arizona State's real power is Paul Justin, who has the potential to be the top quarterback in the nation if he improves.

The offensive line is big but inexperienced, with only two returnees that started last year.

#7 WASHINGTON STATE

The Cougars have possibly two of the top quarterbacks in the nation in Brad Gossen and Aaron Garcia, and will be spending a lot of time near the opponents' goal post. They are going to have problems in the defensive line, because they return no one who has playing experience. The secondary is strong but will not be enough to carry the whole defense.

One thing is for sure, the football team will outscore the Cougar basketball team.

#8 STANFORD

Stanford has ten starters returning on offense this year, but it shouldn't help them considering they weren't really that good last year anyway.

These guys just need some time to develop, but watch out for the occasional upset.

#9 (TIE) CALIFORNIA

The only thing we can say about Cal is they will probably finish ahead of the Beavers...alphabetically.

#9 (TIE) OREGON STATE

The Beavers will still be playing in Corvallis this season, after the failed attempt by a Philomath businessman to lure the team away. Negotiations between OSU Athletic Director Dutch Baughman and Philomath city officials broke down in early September. It looks like Corvallis will be suffering again this year.

On a more serious note, nothing more could be said about the Beavers that has not already been said in Eugene. OSU touts the best defensive lineman in the country with Esera Tuauilo. Tuauilo is the Beavers, but expect Brent Huff and Brian Beck to play contributing roles as well.

OSU also has another left-handed quarterback, which seems to be a pattern that works for the Beavers. The southpaw Matt Booher has improved but has no one to throw to...that is, anyone who can catch consistently.

Head Coach Dave Kragthorpe is doing an admirable job, and with any luck he will be getting another one soon.

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