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◀ GRID PROFILE ▶

Thomason excelling in all areas

Becoming all-around player

By Paul Morgan
Emerald Sports Reporter

In the words of Oregon Coach Rich Brooks, tight end Jeff Thomason is "the epitome of what a college football player should be. Just a quality person."

Those words should mean a lot to Thomason. He has worked hard on the field and in the classroom to be one of the best tight ends in the Pacific-10 Conference, and get a good education. Sometimes the combination of football and good grades does not mix, but his hard work is not going unrewarded.

On the field, Thomason has hauled in 18 catches for 247 yards and four touchdowns for the Ducks this year, including a 30-yard reception for a touchdown that helped Oregon seal Brigham Young's fate a week ago.

In the classroom, he has amassed a 2.80 grade point average on his way to what he hopes will be a career as a veterinarian.

His improvements on the field have helped the Ducks immeasurably. Thomason graduated from Corona del Mar High School in Balboa Island, Calif. in 1987 as an all-league football player, yet he was mainly recruited as a swimmer - one of the top 30 in the nation in 50 and 100-yard free-style events.

It was his tall, thin build that kept many football recruiters skeptical. They were unsure if he could handle blocking assignments on the line with his size.

But Thomason had made up his mind: he was going to play football. When he came to Oregon in 1988, Brooks and offensive tackles/tight ends coach Steve Greatwood knew he wouldn't be able to make a contribution on the line, but his receiving skills earned him a start during his freshman season.

"He needed to get more physical as a blocker," Brooks explained, "so he worked on it in the weight room."

While Thomason, now a junior, worked on his strength and blocking skills, his role with the Ducks grew. As a sophomore, he had 12 receptions for 124 yards for two touchdowns in 12 games, and as a result he moved to the starting slot this year after starter Joe Meerten graduated.

"When I first came in," Thomason said, "I just worked on my strength. We had a lot of good tight ends and they were really pushing me."

Thomason's game has finally filled out this season.

He is the Ducks' second leading receiver behind Michael McClellan, and is averaging 13.7 yards every time he touches the ball. But the main improvement has been in the blocking department.

"Blocking has been his biggest limitation," Greatwood explained, "but he has been working on it since midseason and through the spring, and so far he has been an effective blocker."

"Jeff is the type of player coaches love to work with," he said. "He will stay after practice, take coaching, and try to work on it."

"We were able to run the sweep against BYU," he added, "and you can't do that without a tight end. He has added a new dimension to our offense."

"If they need short passes for five to 10 yards or third down short-yardage they can come to me," the 21-year-old general science major said. "Even blocking. If they need someone to block they can come to me."

In person, Thomason's confidence is tempered by his shy demeanor. He talks in soft, unsure tones - so soft sometimes that one must wonder if he is using his vocal cords at all.

"You wouldn't know he's the type of player he is if you talked to him," Greatwood said. "He's a very intense competitor, and just because he's not an arm waiver or a screamer doesn't mean he's

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