

Kaanapu paves way for productive Duck attack

By Paul Morgan
Emerald Sports Reporter

Senior tackle's easy-going nature deceptive on gridiron

Offensive tackle Todd Kaanapu is an easy-going character. He's quick to give an opinion and expresses his feelings with an easy smile.

If it weren't for his 6-foot-3, 271-pound body, it would be hard to imagine Kaanapu opening a hole in the Stanford defense by plowing over one defender, then watching tailback Sean Burwell run 75 yards for a touchdown while pinning down a second one on the same play. But he did just that last weekend.

Kaanapu has seen a considerable amount of playing time as a starter for the Ducks this year, and has been a factor in an offensive line that's been a spearhead for the Oregon offense. With four experienced players graduating from the offensive line after last year, many saw this year's line crew as a weak link in the Oregon offense.

But Kaanapu and his mates have proved they are a force that defenses must reckon with.

The Oregon offense has pounded out 1,297 yards on the ground this season, the fifth-ranked rushing offense in the Pacific-10 Conference.

The line has also allowed only 17 sacks this year while helping Oregon hold the second best passing offense in the conference, and only one of those sacks has been attributed directly to Kaanapu.

"Since I came here I've noticed how the level of play has changed," Kaanapu said. "We play better because we believe we should, and we do it in a business-like fashion. Each year the big focus is on the offensive line: Are we going to produce? But it has to do with our own confidence, and not what people say."

Of the 12 players on the offensive line depth chart,



Offensive tackle Todd Kaanapu has paved the way for tailback Sean Burwell this season as well as the rest of the Oregon attack.

Photo by Andre Ranieri

Kaanapu, Scot Boatright, Andy Sunia, and Collin Hall are seniors. Kaanapu and Boatright are the only senior starters on this year's line, and last spring the coaches called upon them to take leadership roles.

Kaanapu, in his fifth year as a Duck, takes the responsibility seriously.

"I have tried to lead by example," he said. "A lot of peo-

ple talk a lot about what they are going to do on the field, but unless they do it it means nothing. I try to go out and dominate in a quiet manner."

Steve Greatwood, Oregon's tackles/tight ends coach, said Kaanapu's leadership will be felt in the years to come.

"His leadership has been invaluable," he said. "Last spring I wanted him to assert

himself more with the younger players, and he has set good examples."

At left tackle, Kaanapu is assigned to protect quarterback Bill Musgrave's blind side. Many times the defense pits its best lineman against Kaanapu in an attempt to get at Musgrave from behind.

"He is an excellent pass blocker on the left side,"

Greatwood said. "It's nice not to have to worry about that side of the line. He has performed day in and day out, even with all of the little injuries players have to deal with this time of year."

"But there is always room for improvement," he said. "He realizes what we need to do and remains focused."

Kaanapu agreed that there is room for improvement.

"We have confidence in all aspects of our game," he said. "We have the potential, but we have yet to play a full 60 minutes. I want to be as dominant in fourth quarter as we are in the first."

Consistency is the greatest measure of a lineman, and Kaanapu has performed consistently well this season.

The Oregon coaches use a system to rate a lineman's performance for every game, with a .750 percentage being an average outing. Kaanapu has graded over .800 four times this season, including the last two games, and only has one game under the .750 mark.

For all of his intensity, Kaanapu is seen as somewhat of a joker by his teammates and coaches.

"I like to joke around a lot but I know when to be serious," Kaanapu said. "I like to have a good time, smile, and laugh."

Kaanapu will bid farewell to Autzen Stadium when the Ducks play their last home game of the season against UCLA Saturday. He said he will miss the intense atmosphere he has seen develop there over the last few years.

"The first game I ever saw there was against Colorado, and we beat them in the last three seconds (32-30 in 1986)," he said. "And since then I've seen the team grow into one of the dominant teams in the Pac-10. Autzen has really changed our view of how we play."

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