

Oregon to meet Rams in Freedom Bowl

Ducks should be healthy for game against WAC foe

By Ashley Conklin
Emerald Sports Editor

When Oregon meets Colorado State in the Dec. 29 Freedom Bowl game in Anaheim, Calif., Oregon Coach Rich Brooks will have a luxury he hasn't had for much of the season.

He will have an almost perfectly healthy football team to put on the field.

Injuries, mainly on the offensive side, have plagued the Ducks all season, particularly in the last half of the season.

When Oregon played Oregon State in the annual Civil War game, the Ducks were without their top three wide receivers they started the year with, without their starting tight end, missing their starting fullback and tailback and starting quarterback Bill Musgrave.

But when the Freedom Bowl rolls around, Musgrave, wide receivers Michael McClellan and Joe Reitzug and tailback Sean Burwell should all be close to 100 percent.

Wide receiver Tony Hargain, tight end Jeff Thomason and fullback Brandon Jumper won't be able to go in the Freedom Bowl, but Brooks is glad to have some of his top skill players back.

WAC Football		
Team	Conf	Overall
	W-L-T	W-L-T
Brigham Young	7-1-0	10-2-0
Colorado St.	6-1-0	8-4-0
San Diego St.	6-2-0	6-4-0
Wyoming	5-3-0	9-3-0
Hawaii	4-4-0	7-5-0
Air Force	3-4-0	6-5-0
Utah	2-6-0	4-7-0
New Mexico	1-5-0	2-9-0
UTEP	1-7-0	3-8-0

Pac-10 Football		
Team	Conf	Overall
	W-L-T	W-L-T
Washington	7-1-0	9-2-0
USC	5-2-1	8-3-1
Oregon	4-3-0	8-3-0
California	4-3-1	6-4-1
Arizona	5-4-0	7-4-0
Stanford	4-4-0	5-6-0
UCLA	4-4-0	5-6-0
Arizona St.	2-5-0	4-7-0
Washington St.	2-6-0	3-8-0
Oregon St.	1-6-0	1-10-0

"It should really help offensively because most of our injuries have been on the offensive side," Brooks said.

With Musgrave, Burwell and company healthy, the Ducks were one of the nation's highest-scoring offenses in the season's first nine games when they bolted to a 7-2 record.

But when the injuries hit, or worsened, the Ducks combined to score nine points in their final two games against California (a 28-3 loss) and Oregon State (a 6-3 win).

When looking back at the 8-3 season, Brooks said it was a satisfying one after beating Oregon State to finish 8-3, but he said there were disappointments as well.

"The Arizona game, we should have won, and in the Washington game we faced an unreal opponent that we would have had to play a much more perfect game than we did to win," he said.

The California loss, which came after the Ducks had accepted an unofficial invitation to the Freedom Bowl, was another hard loss for Brooks.

"We go and lay an egg at Berkeley," he said. "That was extremely disappointing."

The Ducks were run over in the first quarter in the Cal game, falling behind 21-3, and when they face Colorado State from the Western Athletic Conference (6-1 in the WAC, 8-4 overall), Oregon could be seeing a team much like California.

"I think they run the ball in a very comparable way to California," he said.

The Ram running game is powered by a trio of talented backs.

Senior Todd Yert (6-foot-1, 223 pounds) and junior Brian Copeland (5-9, 195 pounds) are

the starters at fullback and tailback, respectively. Backup tailback Tony Alford (5-11, 198-pound senior) is also a solid runner.

Copeland led the team with 896 yards on the ground and a 5.3-yard per carry average. Alford added 647 yards off the bench, and Yert was the workhorse, rushing for 589 yards and 16 touchdowns.

As a team, the Rams averaged 219.3 yards per game and set a new school record with 2,631 rushing yards for the season.

Brooks said that the Ram running backs might not be as good as Cal's Anthony Wallace and Russell White, a pair of 1,000-yard rushers, but he is still very impressed with Colorado State's backs.

"They might not be as good as Wallace and White, but they're very good," he said.

Colorado State's ability to run the ball, or Oregon's ability to stuff the Ram rush, will likely be one of the game's key matchups.

The Ducks finished second in the Pacific-10 Conference in rushing defense and were also 12th nationally, giving up only 106.2 yards per outing. Oregon also held opponents to less than 100 yards rushing on five occasions.

When Oregon has the ball, the Ducks will be up against a three-man front line that averages only 241 pounds, but it's a group that's very active.

Senior tackles Robert Chirico (6-4, 255 pounds) and Paul Hanks (6-5, 237 pounds) combined for 14 sacks. Senior nose tackle Eric Schaller (6-4, 231 pounds) also had six sacks and 68 tackles.

Senior inside linebacker Eric Tippecconnic (6-1, 226 pounds)

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