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be very interesting because they're going to get a chance to lay their claim on a position."

"We don't have the established players that we've had at wide receiver, but I don't see that as a problem." Brooks said. "We'll be fine there."

Unlike the many vacancies left on the offense. Oregon's defense, which returns nine players that started at different positions last season, may again be giving headaches in the same way last season's defense did.

"I think we return nine ... it's just ridiculous. You just can't beat it," said Joe Farwell, one of the Ducks' returners at inside linebacker. "We still have to apply ourselves and go out there and get better every day, but we definitely have the potential to be the best defense in the Pac-10 next year."

But defensive coordinator Denny Schuler says that "nothing is in cement" as far as next fall's starters.

"Just because they started a year ago doesn't necessarily mean it's given," Schuler said. "With that thought in mind, there's going to be some good competition, and we'll expect there to be some pressure from some of the younger guys on some of the more established players." Established players Matt

LaBounty and Marcus Woods. members of last season's all-Pac-10 second team, bolster a tough defensive line which also features Jeff Cummins, a starter at defensive end nine times last season.

But Schuler has reason to be skeptical about starters, as defensive ends Romeo Bandison. a starter at end three times last year, D.J. Cabrera and Pat DeLeon will vie for a spot on the line.

"Any time you build a defense, you like to build it from the front back," Schuler said.

And right behind the three linemen are the linebackers, another well-built muscle in the Duck defense. Gone is firstteam all-conference selection Peter Brantley, but returning are inside linebackers James Bautista and Farwell, an honorable mention all-conference player, and outside linebacker Andy Conner.

"It's hard to imagine someone beating out Andy Conner, he's such a talented performer. He lived in Peter Brantley's shadow last year, but Andy Conner, when he's healthy, is every bit as good as any outside linebacker on the coast." Schuler said.

Doug Douglass, a starter for the injured Brantley in the Freedom Bowl, Ernest Jones and Terrell Edwards will contend for an outside position, and David Massey and John Taumoepeau are contenders for the inside spot.

The defensive backfield will sorely miss graduated strong safety Rory Dairy and cornerback Daryl Singleton, but three players who started a year ago return to the backfield.

Eric Castle, a second team all-Pac-10 player at free safety last season, Daryle Smith, an honorable mention all-conference cornerback last year, and cornerback Muhammad Oliver, who started in place of Singleton four times, return.

'Experience overall on our

defense is a strength, but what I'm hoping is that we can make a marked improvement in our performance based on our experience,'' Brooks said.

Paul Rodriguez. Chris Cook and Chad Cota go into spring practice as possible players to fill in for Dairy.

Special teams, a plus for the Ducks last season, again looks strong. Punter Tommy Thompson and kicker Gregg McCallum, both part of the all-Pac-10 second team, are "pretty well intact" at the kicking positions, Brooks said.

Burwell may return kickoffs and Brown is a likely punt returner for Oregon, roles the two occupied last year.

Spring practice will last three weeks, from April 15 to May 4, with 10 of the those 15 practices being full contact.



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