

OREGON FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Will strong D mean third bowl game?

Questions remain regarding offense

By Jake Berg
Emerald Sports Editor

Threepeat is a word usually heard around Los Angeles or San Francisco.

Threepeat will be heard often in Eugene this fall.

This season, the Duck football squad is looking for an unprecedented third straight bowl appearance, after two consecutive 8-4 finishes and visits to the Independence and Freedom bowls.

Never before have the Ducks visited postseason play three years in a row, but will the two most successful seasons in head coach Rich Brooks' 15-year tenure spoil the Ducks? Complacency, God forbid?

"I hate being complacent," returning nose tackle Marcus Woods said. "That's like my biggest fear. I feel like a fish out of water if I get complacent. As a team, we've got to guard against that."

Woods is the anchor in what may be looked at as the Ducks' biggest strength this season — its defense. The 6-foot-2, 300-pound senior is one of eight returning Ducks who started on defense last season, and the unit promises to be one of Oregon's strongest in years.

At the forefront of the defense rests the line, consisting of Woods and senior ends Matt LaBounty — who was second-team all-conference with Woods last year — and Jeff Cummins. Sophomore end Romeo Bandison, a starter in three games last season, provides excellent depth at the position.

Backing up the line is a strong, hard-hitting corps of linebackers. Defensive captain Joe Farwell, the Ducks' leading tackler last season, and seniors James Bautista and Andy Conner return at linebacker for the Ducks. The three started a total of 35 games last season.

Lost to graduation was outside linebacker Peter Brantley, Oregon's only member of the all-conference defensive squad last season. Candidates for the vacated spot are Doug Douglass, who started twice last year, Ernest Jones and Terrell Edwards.

Oregon's secondary will certainly be another strong point, returning three players with starting experience. Returning will be junior free safety Eric Castle, second-team all-conference last year, cornerback Daryle Smith, a 12-game starter last year, and cornerback Muhammad Oliver, a starter in four games last year.

Questionable is a replacement for Rory Dairy at the strong safety position. Juniors Paul Rodriguez and Kenny Phillips look to be possible starters at the position.

Oregon's defense looks good on paper, but there were times last year when the defense played inconsistently, such as the Ducks' 32-31 loss to Colorado State in the Freedom Bowl.

After the loss of all-conference quarterback Bill Musgrave and other key offensive players, however, the Ducks' offense poses some serious question marks.

Redshirt freshman Danny O'Neil led the list of four quarterbacks after spring practice,

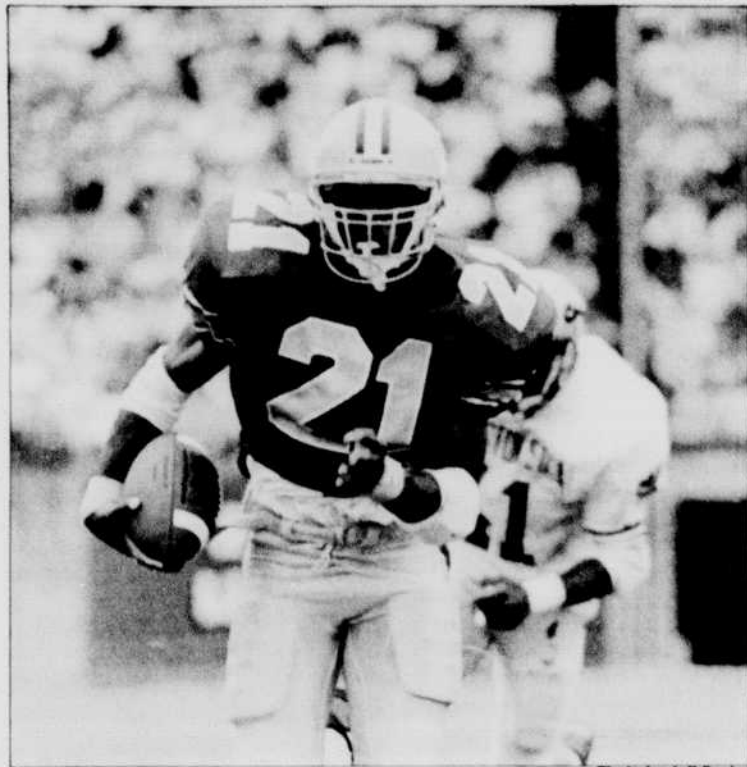


Photo by Jeff Paalav
Sean Burwell, who rushed for 189 yards in the Ducks' opener against Washington State on Sept. 7, will be a cornerstone of Oregon's young offense.

and it looked as though he would start the first few games. Junior transfer Brett Salisbury, who sustained a hernia in practice, had also challenged for the spot.

In at the rest of the backfield slots will be tailback Sean Burwell, who set the freshman rushing record for a single season last year, and fullbacks Juan Shedrick and Brandon Jumper.

The offensive line, though returning many Ducks with playing time from last season, is fairly short on experience.

"Offensive line is a concern to me every single year," Brooks said. "Our offensive line, though lacking in experience, does have talent."

Likely starters on the line will be Greg Phillips at center, tackles Todd Gydesen and Du-

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