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PAC-10 FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Oregon should remain a Pac-10 force

By Jake Berg
Emerald Sports Editor

Oregon is still looking for a home in everyone's pre-season predictions.

Traditionally, prognosticators have found it hard to correctly pick where the Ducks will land by season's end in the Pacific-10 Conference, and this season is no exception.

The Ducks finished second two years ago and third last year, but few football experts expected Oregon to finish as high as they did.

"It's a real problem for the prognosticators to decide where in the hell to put us," Oregon Coach Rich Brooks said.

"What do you do with UCLA? What do you do with Stanford and Cal? What do you do with Arizona State? What do you do with SC? Most people don't want to put us ahead of those guys, so we end up in the middle of the pack. A few of them get bold and pick as high as fourth."

I will get even bolder and say Oregon will finish third, behind Washington and UCLA. But then again, who knows? Realistically, the Ducks have a shot at the Rose Bowl this season, but sixth or seventh place could come just as easily.

So here are my picks for the 1991 Pac-10 football campaign:

1. WASHINGTON — The Pac-10 championship is Washington's to lose this season.

The Huskies will likely be seeing roses for the second straight season because of solid returners on both offense and defense. Washington brings back seven returners on offense and seven on defense from last year's conference champs.

What could really hurt is the loss of junior quarterback Mark Brunell. After guiding the Huskies to a Rose Bowl win last season, Brunell was injured in spring practice and is probably lost for the season.

Defense will be the catch phrase around Seattle this year. Washington, anchored by Pac-10 co-defensive Player of the Year Steve Emtman, has maybe the toughest defense in the nation, enough to make up for the loss of Brunell.

2. UCLA — Sophomores usually aren't expected to be the team, but quarterbacks always seem to be the exception.

The Bruins season will all depend on the arm of sophomore signalcaller Tommy Maddox, who earned all-American honors last year as a freshman. Maddox is being touted as a Heisman candidate already, and UCLA is hoping he plays up to that billing.

Should Maddox become injured or be sidelined for any other reason, the Bruins' season could turn out like last year's 5-6 nightmare for coach Terry Donahue.

Like Washington, the Bruins have seven returners on both offense and defense, and although UCLA lost two first-team all-conference player from the defense, the Bruins' defensive backfield and linebackers look strong.

3. OREGON — Few teams will miss any player more than Oregon will miss all-conference quarterback Bill Musgrave, but the Ducks will repeat last year's third-place finish this season.

The question marks abound at many offensive positions, but the Ducks' defense will take up the slack. Eight starters return to make one of the best defensive units in the country, but it may be only second best to Washington in the Pac-10.

The Ducks do have to play at California, Washington and UCLA, and wins in two of those games could even secure a second-place finish for Oregon.

4. SOUTHERN CAL — USC has been picked by

Turn to PAC-10, Page 20

DEFENSE

Continued from Page 17

vid Collinsworth, and guards Bud Bowie and John Tattersall.

"Our offensive line has a lot to prove," Bowie said. "There's a lot of new question marks in there."

When receiver Terry Obee

graduated two seasons ago, Oregon fans wondered who would take up the reins as a deep target for Musgrave. Little-known senior Michael McClellan stepped in last season to fill the role left by Obee and injured Tony Hargain, and now fans are wondering who will take up the slack left by McClellan.

Anthony Jones, a starter at flanker four times last season, and Brian Brown look to take up those reins, and junior transfer Derrick Deadwiler and senior Ronnie Harris look to fill the split end position left by Joe Reitzug.

Offensive team captain Jeff Thomason, part of the Pac-10's second team last year, is a solid returner at tight end for Oregon.

No question marks arise when it comes to special teams. The Ducks return a strong unit that is one of the best in the conference.

Punter Tommy Thompson and kicker Gregg McCallum, both second-team all-conference selections a year ago, will kick for Oregon this season.

Brown was the Ducks' main punt returner last year and will likely fill that position again this fall. Burwell was used often on kick returns last year and may return in that spot this year.

The consensus of pre-season analysts seems to be that Oregon will finish in the middle of the Pac-10, but the Ducks, even in the last two seasons, traditionally don't receive much attention during the pre-season.

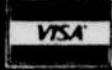
"It's a real problem for prognosticators to decide where in the hell to put us," Brooks said. "Most people don't want to put us ahead of those guys, so we end up in the middle of the pack. A few of them get bold and pick us as high as fourth."

"It doesn't bother me where they pick us. It'd bother me if we finished fifth because I think we should be better than that."

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