

The Jones philosophy: 'I just want to hit people'

By Jake Berg
Emerald Sports Editor

USC quarterback Reggie Perry took the hike, turned to search for a receiver, and met Oregon linebacker Ernest Jones. The introduction was not by a handshake, of course, but by a sack.

Jones rose from the ground to the ear-splitting roar of 45,000-plus fans and felt his big smile widen from ear to ear. He jumped in the air countless times, pumped his fist in excitement, and ... fell down.

You might say he got a little excited.

"I think I just slipped," Jones laughed.

The sophomore has celebrated more than just once in his first season as a starter. His four sacks currently tie him for the Pacific-10 Conference lead, and he is also tied for second in the conference in tackles for losses with five.

Jones credits his success to his emotion, which is visibly obvious most of the time.

"I feel so energetic," he said. "Football has always been like that ... just get so pumped up, so worked up into the game, and having so much fun I just want to hit people and hit people and hit people."

And hit people and hit people and hit people. Jones is second on the team in total tackles with 30, and outside linebackers coach Nick Aliotti said many of the things Jones does so well can't even be taught.

"One thing that Ernest has that you don't coach is he has a high motor," Aliotti said. "He

runs to the ball like a buzz saw."

Jones makes a point of that. "It's all in the heart," Jones said. "I love to get to the ball, and wherever the ball is, I want to get there."

Someone who was very good at "getting there" was Peter Brantley, Jones' predecessor and former mentor. Jones said Brantley helped him tremendously with certain techniques, like preparing for a game.

Oregon defensive coordinator Denny Schuler said his defense hasn't lost much with the switch of Jones and Brantley, who was an all-conference selection as a senior last year.

"I don't think we've missed a beat overall," Schuler said. "He's probably more of a big play guy than Peter."

And that probably earned Jones the starting job in fall camp. Senior Doug Douglass and sophomore Terrell Edwards both had experience last year, but it was Jones' ability to make the big play with his exceptional speed that earned him the job, Schuler said.

"(Jones starting) was with full knowledge that he could make the big plays," Oregon head Coach Rich Brooks said. "He's certainly excitable."

The kind of emotion Jones was showing after his prep career in Utica, N.Y., though, was far from excitement. He felt he had worked hard enough at the high school level to earn a scholarship to a good football program, but Maine was the lone school that had made an offer to the linebacker.

He lived only 45 minutes

from Syracuse University, but then again, his high school team won only four games in his four years.

That was when he sent a highlight tape to Oregon.

"Oregon called back the next day and offered me a scholarship," said Jones, a sociology major. "I was pretty excited about that."

"I said 'I'm gonna go out West and show everybody back East how big of a mistake they made.'"

Jones has certainly proven his point so far, and Brooks said the point may be long standing.

"Ernest Jones, if he stays healthy, will be one of the best linebackers ever to play at the University of Oregon," Brooks said.

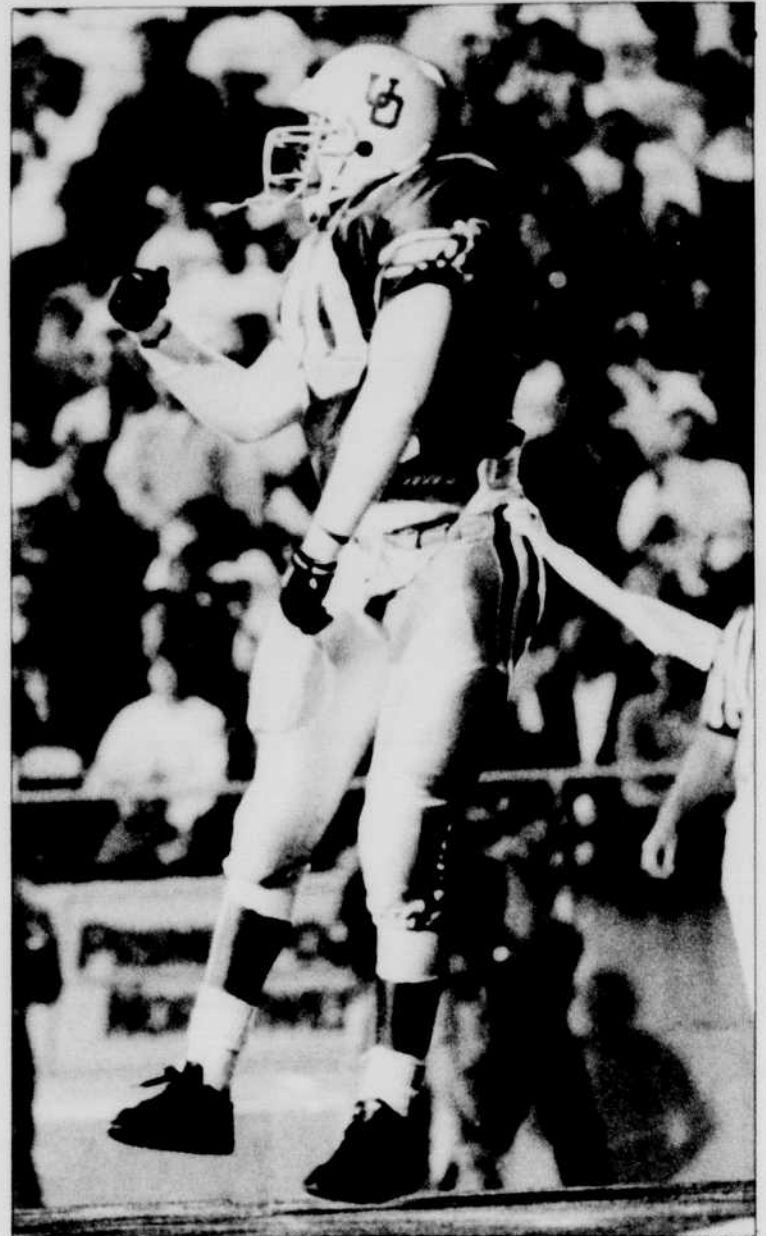
He hopes to go farther than Oregon and feels confident that he can play at the professional level.

"As long as my heart continues to be in football," Jones said, "I know I'll be in football for a long time."

Jones' mother and aunt traveled to Eugene last Saturday to watch their first college football game, the Ducks' loss to USC. Jones said his mother worried about her 6-foot-2, 230-pound son being outmatched on the field.

"She gets a little concerned," Jones said. "You know these guys look so much bigger than her son."

Dear Mom: Don't worry. Ernest is doing just fine.



File photo Ernest Jones, seen here celebrating against USC, is one of the most exciting and enthusiastic players on Oregon's football team.

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