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SPORTS

Underdog Ducks to tackle Huskies

By Jake Berg
 Emerald Sports Editor

Oregon football coach Rich Brooks can't remember a Pacific-10 Conference team that has played better than Washington has this year.

And he also can't remember ever being on the downside of a 30-point spread, but the Ducks, 1-2 in the conference and 3-3 overall, will go up against both on Saturday at 12:30 p.m. in Seattle's Husky Stadium.

"I don't think I've ever been that kind of an underdog, to tell you the truth," Brooks said.

Not to say that Brooks can't see why the third-ranked Huskies, 3-0 in the Pac-10 and 6-0 overall, are so heavily favored. Both teams are coming off games at California, but the difference is Oregon's 45-7 embarrassment two weeks ago compared to the Huskies' 24-17 triumph over the Golden Bears last weekend.

Washington's win, played during a bye week for Oregon, impressed Brooks enough to call the Huskies the best Pac-10 team the conference has ever had.

"I think this is the best team I've ever seen in the Pac-10," Brooks said. "This team has more weapons than any other team I've seen in the conference since I've coached or played."

Husky Coach Don James, now in his 17th season at Washington, is not finding it hard to be humble.

"That's a nice compliment," James said Thursday of Brooks' remark. "People ask me to com-

pare teams, but I say wait 'til the season's over."

In the minds of many Oregon fans, the Ducks' season is already over. Oregon has been all but written off by many, and playing perhaps the best team in the country, and certainly the best outside the state of Florida, does not help.

What also doesn't help is that sophomore Doug Musgrave will make his first collegiate start and become the third starting quarterback in the last three games after injuries have sidelined previous starters Danny O'Neil and Brett Salisbury.

Oregon offensive coordinator Mike Bellotti said Musgrave will be as ready as anybody ever is for the Huskies.

"I don't know if you're ever ready for a team like Washington," Bellotti said.

But Washington is ready for Musgrave.

"He may not have as much experience as his brother (Bill Musgrave)," James said, "(but) we don't look at that as a weakness."

Oregon may be forced to rely on Doug's arm to move the offense because Washington, as always, does not give ground.

The Huskies lead the nation in rushing defense, allowing only 56.3 yards a game, and are easily the conference leaders in overall defense, giving up a mere 238.3 yards of total offense a game. Those numbers can be attributed to the Washington defense's eight-man front Bellotti called "arguably" the best in the country.

Oregon's rushing attack faces another obstacle in the ankle

injury that has either limited or sidelined tailback Sean Burwell for much of the season. Bellotti said Burwell is "still sort of gimpy. He's still not at full speed."

Also running without half its original parts will be Oregon's defense, which has sustained a phenomenal amount of injuries this season. The Ducks will start three sophomores on the defensive line in place of the season's original starting three, who are now injured.

The linebacking corps, too, has been slowed by injuries. Schuler said that starting outside linebacker Andy Conner, the last healthy player of the Ducks' front seven, sat out of practice Wednesday because of an injury, and his playing status is unknown for Saturday.

Ernest Jones, the Ducks' other starting outside linebacker, will miss the Washington game because of an injury. Starting inside linebackers James Bautista and Joe Farwell are also hampered by injuries, and injured reserve linebackers David Massey and James Taumoepeau are questionable for Saturday, Schuler said.

GAME NOTES — Oregon's last win in Seattle was a 34-10 victory in 1980 ... The Huskies are first in the nation in the turnover margin category at +2.5 a game, and in Oregon's three losses, the Ducks have turned the ball over 13 times and have zero takeaways ... Since the start of the 1990 season, Washington has outscored its Pac-10 opponents by an average of 42 to 11.5 points a game.

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