

Bellotti, Schuler bring success

Oregon's defense, offense improve under coaches

By Jake Berg
Emerald Sports Editor

When Mike Bellotti and Denny Schuler came to Oregon's football program, so did success.

Offensive coordinator Bellotti and defensive coordinator Schuler are the technicians behind coach Rich Brooks' operation. Bellotti, now in his third year at Oregon, and Schuler, now in his sixth season with the Ducks, are two big reasons for Oregon's rise to the upper echelon of the Pacific-10 Conference the last two seasons.

"Obviously, they've done great jobs," Brooks said. "The last two years is the first time we've been strong on both sides of the ball."

It's also the first time in school history that Oregon teams have made consecutive postseason appearances, playing in both the 1989 Independence Bowl and the 1990 Freedom Bowl.

Two bowls in two years with Bellotti at the head of the offense has the coach batting 1.000 so far. He was the new man in Eugene in 1989 after his best friend, Oregon outside linebackers coach Nick Allioti, had told him about the job.

Bellotti had, at that time, what he called a "lifetime job" as the head coach at Chico State, but it did not take him long to decide on a move up to Oregon.

"It took about a day," smiled Bellotti, who also coaches the quarterbacks at Oregon.

Schuler, on the other hand, came to Oregon originally as a wide receiver. The coach, a native of Snohomish, Wash., started on the 1967-68 Duck squads and will go down in the books for having caught the first touchdown pass ever at Autzen Stadium.

"I like to tell my players I caught 11 passes that day," Schuler said. "Ten during the warmups, and the 11th one counted."

Schuler, who also coaches Oregon defensive backs, has not done too shabby of a job, considering his offensive background. In fact, it may have even helped, and certainly hasn't hurt, Schuler's abilities as a defensive coordinator.

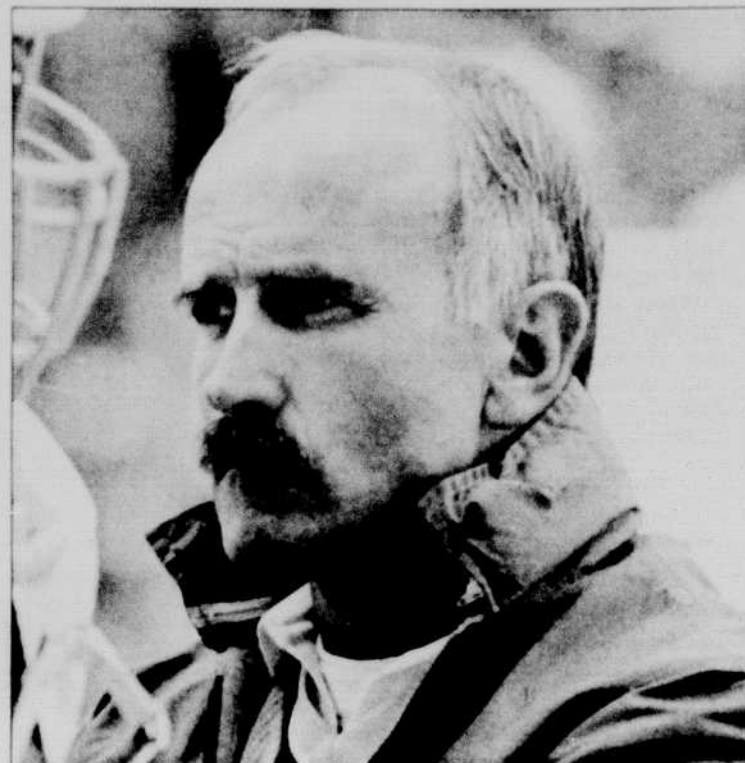


Photo by Jeff Paslay

Oregon defensive coordinator Denny Schuler revitalized a basement-dwelling Duck defense, taking it as high as second overall in the Pac-10 in 1989.

"A good football coach is a good football coach," Brooks said of Schuler.

The same kind be said of Bellotti. He took the Oregon offense from ninth in the Pac-10's total offense category to second in 1989, his first season.

Schuler's hand worked the same kind of miracles with the Oregon defense soon after his arrival. He took a unit that was 10th in the conference before he arrived and moved it up to fourth in 1987, third in 1988, second in 1989 and third last season.

Allioti, who now works under Schuler but used to be offensive coordinator under Bellotti at Chico State, is not surprised at the success of the two.

"(Bellotti) understands that it's a game, but that it is still important," Allioti said. "He was super to work for."

"Denny is a student of the game. His hobby is football. He really studies the game of football."

Schuler has had plenty of opportunities to study football as he has coached with several teams. Idaho State, Washington, Weber State, Utah State, California and the Los Angeles Rams have all been a byway of Schuler's at one time or another.

Bellotti, too, has seen his share of the circuit. Coaching stints have landed him at his

alma mater California-Davis, Cal-State Hayward and Chico State.

But both are happy where they are at right now despite the freak rash of injuries that has both sides of the Oregon football team weaker than they were the last two seasons. Both pass it off as being just part of the game, but the frustration shows.

"I've never been in this situation in my 20 years of coaching," Bellotti said.

"I've never experienced anything quite like it," Schuler said.

The resulting losses and Oregon's 3-4 overall mark have made Brooks a target of many people's criticism this season, but Bellotti, too, feels that heat.

"I don't feel shielded," Bellotti said. "If there is criticism pointed at the program, I feel it."

Schuler felt it while he was the defensive coordinator under head coach Joe Kapp at California. Schuler said personality conflicts and Kapp's "unorthodox" style of coaching created tension between he and Schuler, and Schuler was fired, a fear that every coach must live with.

"It happens all the time — it's part of the game," Schuler said.

And fortunately for the Ducks, Schuler and Bellotti are part of Oregon football.

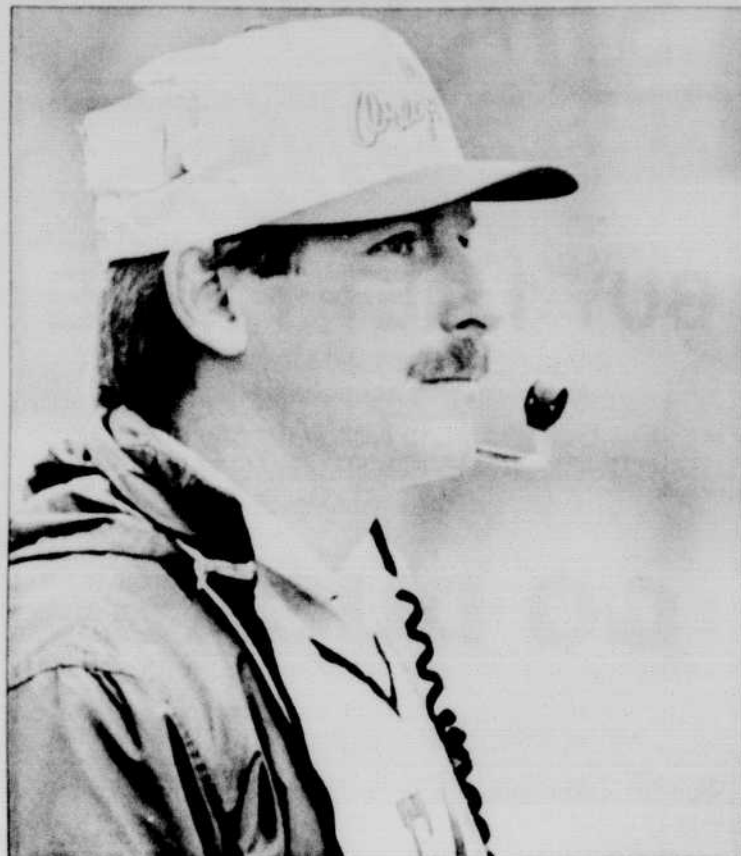


Photo by Jeff Paslay

In Mike Bellotti's first two years as Oregon's offensive coordinator, the Ducks played in consecutive bowl games for the first time in school history.

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