



Oregon cornerback Muhammad Oliver has stopped five kicks and provided some spectacular highlights for the Ducks. Photo by Jeff Paslay

Oliver's play shines in dismal season

By Jake Berg
Emerald Sports Editor

Oregon cornerback Muhammad Oliver is best described by example rather than words.

In the Ducks' 24-21 loss at Arizona State two weeks ago, the senior's blocked punt and ensuing touchdown highlighted the game for Oregon. After shaking his blocker on the line's end, Oliver sent himself flying and practically caught the Sun Devil punt with his gut.

He and the ball both came down but were soon paired together in touchdown bliss when Oliver hopped to his feet and grabbed the spinning ball with one hand, and made a 21-yard dash to the end zone.

Oregon coach Rich Brooks later called the play "one of the best individual athletic efforts I've ever seen."

"At the time when I did it, it didn't really seem like that great of a play," said Oliver,

who also returns kicks for Oregon. "But when I saw it on TV, it was a lot better."

And Oliver himself has only gotten better this season. The 5-foot-11, 170-pound athlete was responsible for stopping another punt last week at UCLA and also another at Arizona State where he batted down a field goal.

"He just comes up with big play after big play," Brooks said. "He's made some of the most incredible athletic plays I've ever seen on a football field."

The game before that, Oregon's home loss to Stanford, Oliver recorded what was probably one of the very few highlights in a game that was otherwise an ugly Duck performance.

Cardinal quarterback Steve Stenstrom tried to hit receiver Chris Walsh with a long pass, but Oliver intervened, sending himself airborne and parallel to the ground for the inter-

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Woods ready to reach potential against Beavs Hopes an NFL career lies ahead

By Jayson Jacoby
Emerald Sports Reporter

Oregon senior nose tackle Marcus Woods has a lot of reasons to look forward to finishing his career Saturday when the Ducks face winless Oregon State at 1 p.m. in Autzen Stadium.

After all, the team that Woods was supposed to anchor defensively lost its hopes for a third straight bowl appearance early on, and at 3-7 the Ducks are guaranteed of their worst season since 1983, regardless of Saturday's outcome.

Woods is just one of several Ducks who missed considerable action and played hurt during this season's rash of injuries that can best be described as incredible.

And the 6-foot-2, 300-pounder should have a shot at playing in the NFL next fall.

But Woods isn't concerned about all that. He just wants to win the Civil War game Saturday.

"It's going to mean a lot this year," Woods said. "We don't have anything to lose. This will make our season if we win. I think we're hungrier than they are."

Despite Woods' determination to beat the Beavers, it wouldn't have been surprising to see the Corvallis native lining up on the other side of the football Saturday.

"Oregon State just never was good when I lived there," Woods said. "So I wanted to play for Corvallis High more than OSU because they were winning all the time."

So after excelling for Corvallis and playing in the Shrine Game following his senior season, Woods became a Duck.

He was named a second-team All-Pacific-10 Conference selection last year, totaling eight quarterback sacks and 17 tackles for losses.

But hampered by injuries this season, Woods — and the Ducks — have faltered.

Woods said the team's lack of success has been more frustrating than his own personal struggles.

"I can get over injuries," he said. "But team things — you can't get that back. Team things last forever; you share something with 90 other guys."

"I wish it would have been better," Woods said of his senior season. "I've had a lot of good times at Oregon. I've been to two straight bowl games. I can look back in 40 years and say I was part of the team to do things that had never been done at Oregon."

This year's Oregon squad was expected to contend for another bowl bid, but the Ducks have gone 1-7 after two impressive season-opening wins.

Woods' performance has likewise been hindered by a variety of injuries to his foot, arm, knee and thigh. He recovered quickly from knee surgery after the California game, but his game still hasn't been at the level Woods wants.

"I haven't been able to make all the plays I want to make," he said. "It (the injured hand) was like playing with one hand tied behind my back. They've just been nagging injuries."

Woods' teammates on the defensive line, seniors Matt LaBounty and Jeff Cummins, have also suffered from the injury plague. Cummins was lost for the season after the second

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