

Spring means back to the gridiron for Ducks

□ Coach Rich Brooks hopes to revive a sluggish offense for the 1992 season

By Dave Charbonneau
Emerald Sports Reporter

The Oregon football team will return to the field as spring practice kicks off today at the Autzen Stadium practice field.

Head coach Rich Brooks hopes more than anything his Ducks can regain the confidence they once had.

"Last season we were not a

productive offensive football team," Brooks said. "We were not the strong offensive football team that we were the previous seven or eight years. I'm hoping we can get that production and confidence back."

Last season saw Oregon follow two straight bowl appearances with a painful display of ineptness. After two convincing victories to start the season, the Ducks' offense flew south, as Oregon lost eight of its next nine games, including the final six games of the season.

The Ducks finished the season at 3-8 overall and 1-7 in the Pacific-10 Conference, includ-

ing a humiliating loss to Oregon State in the season finale.

A big reason for the collapse of the Ducks' season was the unbelievable number of injuries the team suffered. Going into spring practice, there are pros and cons to last season's injuries.

On the positive side, many players received playing time who wouldn't have if not for the injuries.

However, many of the players affected by injuries were young players who lost valuable experience — namely quarterbacks Danny O'Neil and Doug Musgrave.

O'Neil was lost for the season in the fifth game with a broken thumb, and Musgrave was lost two games later with a broken hand.

As a result of the injuries, the question that gave Brooks nightmares last year still looms: Who will be the Ducks' starting quarterback?

But he seems to have a better idea who will be "the man" than he did at this time last year.

"O'Neil and Musgrave did a better job than the other two (Kyle Crowston and Brett Salisbury) last year," Brooks said. "They have the edge going into spring."

Here's a look at what Brooks will have to work with position by position:

At tailback, Oregon has a host of candidates to be running the ball come fall. The obvious choice seems to be Sean Burwell, who has started at the position for the past two years when healthy.

But Burwell is not a shoe-in at the position by any means. Brooks said the position is "wide open," with redshirt freshmen Jeremy Fogle and Ricky Whittle and senior Donovan Moore all having a realistic shot at earning the starting role.

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Oregon football coach

Brooks did not seem as confident about the fullback position. Oregon used a handful of players at the position last year but had little success from any of them.

Juan Shedrick, Dwayne Jones, and Brandon Jumper shared time at the position last season. Jumper will not participate in spring practice because of academic problems.

The Ducks return virtually all of a talented receiving crew. Brian Brown, Ronnie Harris, Anthony Jones and James Jessie all saw considerable playing time last year.

A big concern of Brooks is the offensive line. "It's a little bit of a question mark," he said. "I was not pleased with their performance last year."

Brooks said the key is finding a center to replace the graduated Greg Phillips and Joe Baguio. Tom Curran is the only returning letterman at center.

To try and help matters at center, Brooks brought in junior college transfer Mike DiFonzo. Sophomore Heath Howington may also move from guard to center.

The rest of the line seems up in the air. Among the players Brooks mentioned as possible starters on the line are Steve Hardin, David Collinsworth,

Matt Martin and Dave Cuttrel. Finding a replacement for tight end Jeff Thomason could be tough for Oregon. Going into practice, it looks as if Vince Ferry is the leading candidate to replace Thomason.

The defensive backfield could be the strongest aspect of the team.

Oregon returns three proven talents at the safety positions with all-Pac-10 safety Eric Castle, Chad Cota and Paul Rodriguez. At the corners the Ducks are solid with sophomore Herman O'Berry, Eugene Jackson and Devon Hosey.

Brooks also spoke highly of redshirt freshmen Isaac Walker and Alex Molden.

At inside linebacker, the Ducks seem to be in good shape. "I see this as an area where young players will be able to push up," Brooks said.

Redshirt freshmen Jeremy Asher and Rich Ruhl will challenge senior Joe Farwell and junior John Taumoepeau for a starting position.

At outside linebacker, the Ducks are not in as good of shape as one might expect. Ernest Jones and Terrell Edwards played well last year, but injuries will keep them from practicing at full speed.

Brooks expects good competition at the defensive line position.

Gary Williams, who played well last year, is suffering from a knee injury and will not participate in contact drills. With Williams on the mend, Brooks will get a chance to look at a talented group of defensive ends that includes Jeff Cummins, who is returning from a season-long injury, Romeo Bandison, and Mark Slymen.

Silila Malepeai will likely be the starter at nose guard.

Oregon will practice 15 days running through Apr. 25. The spring game will be Apr. 27.

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COACH

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has experience in dealing with them. I wanted an outstanding basketball coach and person, someone who could recruit student-athletes and relate to them as well. I wanted someone who was a good judge of talent.

"After I had been with Jerry Green for five minutes, I knew he was the basketball coach for the University of Oregon and the person for us."

Green said that despite being anxious to get started at Oregon, it wasn't easy leaving a program he had helped accomplish so much.

"The most difficult part about accepting the job at Oregon is leaving Roy Williams," Green said. "He has been like a brother to me. It's also difficult to leave the players and the staff at Kansas."

Anyone expecting to see a similar system to what Oregon used under Monson is likely to be surprised, if Green's comments are to be believed.

"We would like to average 100 points a game," he said. "We want to entertain and score points. We want to recruit players who can run up and down the court."

"It's not just running. It's running within a system. Nobody wants to play a 40-point game."

Green said he has seen only two films of this year's team, and that he saw "strengths and weaknesses" among the players. He said he looks forward to trying to rejuvenate an ailing Oregon team that finished 6-21 this year, its worst record since 1957.

"I would rather come to a place where you go in and the 25 or 27 wins have not been there and you've got something that hasn't been done for a while, but that can be done," Green said.

Green said recruiting would be a main focus for his staff, which he is in the process of putting together.

"On a scale of one to 10 in recruiting effort, my effort would be 186," Green said. "The University



Photo by Jake Berg

Jerry Green was named the new Oregon men's basketball head coach Tuesday.

of Oregon, in my opinion, has contributed enough money to recruit nationally. You can't have a narrow recruiting list."

Green was himself an excellent college basketball player. He was named Spartanburg (S.C.) Methodist College's most valuable player and captain two straight years.

Green received a degree in physical education from Appalachian State in 1968 and finished his master's degree in education at East Tennessee State in 1971 after a two-year stint in the Army.

Green coached three high schools in North and South Carolina before taking the assistant position at UNC-Asheville.