

Ducks' defense looks strong in spring training

□ The Oregon football team suits up for the season with seven quarterback sacks in the first contact practice

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Photo by Michael Shindler
Although head coach Rich Brooks was impressed with the Ducks' defense by the third day of spring practice, he says they still have a long way to go offensively.

With the NCAA busy with the men's and women's Final Four basketball championships and the national swimming championships over the weekend, and not to mention baseball, what more could be expected from the college ranks?

Football. That's right, football. The Oregon football team put the pads on Saturday and held its first contact scrimmage of the spring at Autzen Stadium. In their third of the NCAA-allotted 15 spring meetings, the Ducks suited up and took their first shots at each other since the 1991 season ended in November.

Head coach Rich Brooks got what he expected from his two squads on the first day of contact drills, a disoriented offense and a defensive effort dominated by "enthusiasm."

The defense did not allow the first offensive squad a first down until its 11th possession. Much of this had to do with the lack of practice time, but the offense was challenged by a couple of new looks on defense, unusual for this time of year.

"We are further ahead on defense than we usually are by the third day (of practice)," Brooks said. "We gave the first unit (offense) a lot of different looks, some of them new."

"I was impressed with the way we were flying around on defense. I was pleased with the effort — the hitting of the D, running to the ball, the overall enthusiasm of our defense," Brooks said.

The defense finished the day with seven quarterback sacks. It became evident early on that the Duck offensive unit needs more time to work together.

"Our defense is further ahead than our offense is at this point," Brooks said. "We did not block well, and we have a long way to go offensively, which is to be expected at this point."

Quarterback Danny O'Neil, listed first on the depth chart, was bothered by a sore thumb, and completed one pass for 10 yards in his 15 attempts.

After being sacked by his senior safety Eric Castle, O'Neil was not allowed to be hit and the whistle was blown when he was touched. The quick whistle accounted for four of the seven quarterback sacks.

While second-string junior quarterback Doug Musgrave was busy taking medical school entrance exams, third-string sophomore Kyle Crowston made the most of the opportunity and shown as the brightest spot for the otherwise flat offense.

Despite missing on his first eight attempts, Crowston finished the scrimmage strong by connecting on seven

of his last eight passes for 103 yards. Crowston hit flanker James Jessie for 10 yards and the first first down and later on a pass down to the five-yard line, setting up the first Duck score.

"I really thought Crowston took advantage of the extra reps he got today because of Musgrave's absence," Brooks said.

Crowston connected with wide receiver Kory Murphy on four passes, including a 23-yard touchdown. Murphy, a redshirt freshman out of Portland's Benson High School, displayed quick moves and some wiry footwork on sprint for the goal line.

Crowston also led drives capitalized by five-yard scoring runs by tailback Donovan Moore and newcomer Greg Fogle, a freshman fullback out of Roseburg. Junior Sean Burwell, Oregon's top tailback, broke free for the longest run of the day of 18 yards.

Redshirt freshman quarterback Clayton Millis got his first chance at repetitions in the offense and connected

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on three of seven short passes for a total of 29 yards.

But generally, it was the quick-reacting defense that made the most of the offensive line's lack of fluency.

"It was only the first day in full pads, so we need to work together more in order to get in sync with each other," senior tackle David Collinsworth said.

The Ducks will stretch their allotted 15 days of spring practice over three weeks, culminating on April 27 with the annual Green-White spring game.

Oregon returns six starters on both defense and offense from last year's team that finished 3-8. A total of 30 Ducks return from last year.

Among those missing from the list of returning lettermen is senior quarterback Brett Salisbury, who announced last Wednesday that he was not happy at Oregon and is looking to transfer to a Division II school. Salisbury may be able to play this fall for his new school, pending an NCAA ruling.

Outside linebacker Tony Koker, a sophomore from Lebanon, Ore., underwent successful back surgery on Wednesday, and the team is hopeful he will be ready for fall drills.

Other wounded Ducks include defensive lineman Gary Williams (knee) and outside linebackers Jacob Johnson (back) and Ernest Jones (knee). Their roles have been limited to non-contact drills this spring.

Not taking part in spring drills are sophomore tailback Kealii Clifford and junior linebacker David Massey, who have been suspended indefinitely for disciplinary reasons, and senior fullback Brandon Jumper, suspended for academic reasons.

In addition, linebacker Victor Myles is at Los Angeles Southwest College working on necessary academic work before being able to join the team for fall drills.

The 1992 Oregon season will kick-off at Autzen Stadium on the fifth straight year, as the Ducks host Hawaii on Sept. 5. This year's schedule features seven home games, including Washington (Oct. 17) for the first time in four years.

Oregon will also host Texas Tech, UNLV, Arizona State, California and UCLA. The Ducks will travel to play Stanford, USC, Washington State and Oregon State.

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