

Harris the little man making big plays for Oregon

By Erick Studenicka
Emerald Sports Reporter

Few people on campus would deny that, at one time or another, they had lived vicariously through Duck football and track star Ronnie Harris.

Who hasn't pictured themselves making a long punt return, as Harris did against UNLV this season, or anchoring a relay team to an upset victory, as Harris did against Washington State last spring?

Everyone would love to do what Harris has done, but it must take an outstanding physical specimen, someone at least 6-foot-4 and 230 pounds, to be able to accomplish what Harris has done, right?

Wrong. Weighing only 170 pounds and standing 5-10, Harris' physical stature is surprisingly "ordinary." If he is the star of a football league, you would swear it must be the coed intramurals rather than the Pacific-10 Conference.

"If I'm standing among my football teammates, people will mistake me for the kicker," said Harris, a flanker who leads the team with his 16.7 yards per reception average.

Although Harris has attracted most of his recognition from his football exploits, he has also been one of the track team's top sprinters the past two seasons, recording a 46.68 time in the 400 meters last spring. He will long be

remembered by track fans as the runner who overtook Washington State's Michael Joubert in the homestretch after Joubert had taunted the Oregon crowd while running.

"That race was definitely a track highlight; the response from everyone afterwards was great," a smiling Harris said. "Months later, people are still coming up to congratulate me on that run."

It is his blinding speed which separates Harris from the other 5-10, 170-pound "wanna-be" collegiate athletes.

"I was playing high school soccer when the football coach happened to time my 40-yard dash time," Harris said. "He talked me in to coming out to run some patterns; otherwise, I still might be playing soccer."

Harris went to Valley Christian High School, a small, private school in San Jose, Calif. Being such a small team, Harris was asked to do it all. His senior year, he played wide receiver and tailback on offense, cornerback on defense, and was the team's punter and placekicker.

Despite scoring 12 touchdowns on 29 receptions his senior season, Harris wasn't recruited by the Ducks until the Oregon coaches noticed him while watching game film of another recruit.

"The Oregon coaches were watching film of a player on Menlo Prep, the prep school for Stanford, and ended up recruiting

me," Harris explained.

Although a track star in high school, Harris' Oregon track career began nearly as quirky as his football recruitment.

"A sprinter on the track team became injured, and my football teammate (and track decathlete) Mohammad Oliver told the coach I was pretty fast and might make a good replacement," Harris said. "I went to practice for three days and found myself on the relay team against Nebraska the next weekend."

Harris said that he has no "favorite" sport.

"Track is my 'individual' sport, and football is my 'team' sport. When I made the run back against UNLV, it might seem like it was an individual effort, but there were 10 guys blocking for me," Harris said. "Football is serious while track has been my fun sport, just because I had no high hopes or expectations when I began."

Harris had a chance to compete in the Olympic Trials last summer, but he decided to shorten his track season in order to do something more important — get married. He was married to his wife, Kris, June 13, and he said he doesn't miss the "nights out with the boys."

"If anything, getting married has changed me for the better," Harris said. "Being married hasn't hindered me in any way; it's

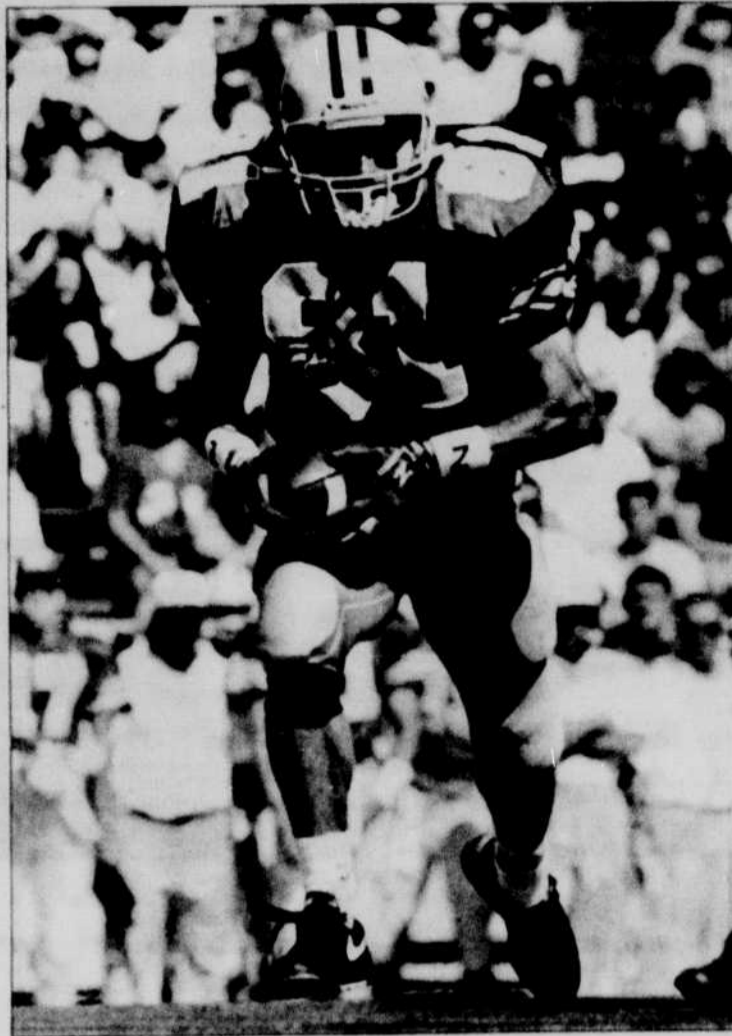


Photo by Jeff Paslay

Ronnie Harris' speed and quickness have made the 5-foot-10, 170-pound receiver an essential part of the Duck football team.

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RIVALRY

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Washington fans know how big this game is for Oregon, but many approach it as just another game.

Walker Leiser is a member of the Huskies' cheer squad, and he is used to seeing teams get riled up for games against his school.

"Anybody who we play are saying, 'We have got to beat Washington,'" he said. "I suspect there may be a little more interest in this game for Oregon fans than for Washington fans."

Another Washington student, Jennifer Meyers, said the close proximity of the two schools makes for more of a friendly rivalry than anything else.

"I don't think we look at Oregon as a big rivalry," she said. "We have other rivalries that are bigger because we're playing tougher teams. Most out-of-state students here are from Oregon, so it's more of a friendship connection."

Chris Dykstra, a junior at Oregon, said he isn't expecting the Ducks to win and thinks Wash-

ington isn't expecting anything different.

"If we win, I'll crap my pants," he said. "I'm sure Washington has got to be thinking this is just going to be a walk in the park."

A walk in the park may be a little extreme to describe how Washington fans and players feel

when they travel to Autzen Stadium, but the fact remains that whenever these two teams meet, it always seems that Oregon has a lot more riding on a victory than do the Huskies.

Oregon sophomore Mark Sconyers thinks Saturday's game is a prime example of that fact.



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Big crowd expected

Oregon's game Saturday against Washington is a complete sellout. The final tickets, in the form of standing room admission, were sold Tuesday.

A crowd of 47,000-plus is expected for the Ducks' showdown with the No. 1-ranked Huskies, making it the largest crowd in Autzen Stadium history.

Oregon officials said the parking lot at Autzen Stadium will open at 10:30 a.m., one hour earlier than normal, to accommodate the spectators.

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