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## BROOKS

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among receivers.

"I think the younger receivers are ready," Deadwiler said. "They have been ready for a while. They just didn't really have the opportunity to play much last year."

Brown missed last season after suffering a knee injury in the season-opening loss to Hawaii, but he reported to camp in top shape and said he is ready for a big senior year.

"I feel better than I have since I came to school here," Brown said. "I am 10 pounds lighter, trimmed up and in a lot better shape."

Murphy and fellow sophomore Cristin McLemore will vie for playing time after gaining experience last season. McLemore caught six passes for 107 yards and a touchdown in 1992. Newcomers who are expected to join the competition include redshirt freshman Dameron Ricketts and true freshman Jamaal Wallace.

Junior Willy Tate should help stabilize the passing game from his tight end position. Tate established himself as one of O'Neil's favorite targets a year ago when he caught 20 passes, including two for touchdowns.

Oregon returns three starters on the offensive line, with junior college transfers expected to fill the other two spots. Guard Mike DiFonzo and center Tom Curran each started all 12 games in 1992, and tackle Steve Hardin started the final seven games a year ago.

Heath Howington and junior college transfer Eric Barnes will split time at left guard, and Justin Starck returns at right tackle after starting four games in 1993. Brooks said redshirt freshmen Tasi Malepeai, Paul Wiggins and Willy Rife should also see time on the line.

The Ducks' most potent offensive weapon should once again be punter/kicker Tommy Thompson, who is coming off of a breakthrough season in 1992. Thompson scored 85 points last year when he connected on 21 of 34 field goals and 22 extra points, while maintaining a 41.4-yard punting average.

"I believe that Tommy Thompson is the best kicker in the country," Brooks said. "He is the best guy I have coached at any level. He's the kind of player that can change the complexion of a game, which he did several times last year."

New defensive coordinator Nick Aliotti takes over for Denny Schuler, who took the offensive coordinator position at California, and Aliotti inherits a defense that ranked 14th in the nation a year ago. The Oregon defense returns seven starters from last year's unit.

The secondary should be both a strength and a question mark for the Ducks. Junior Chad Cota is

the leader of the secondary, and he will begin the year at strong safety, but he could move to free safety if necessary. JC transfer Dante Lewis will begin the season at free safety, but Jeff Sherman, Michael Allison and Brian Collins will also see time at different safety slots.

"We are counting on Chad Cota to be one of the

'I really believe this team has an opportunity to be better than last year's group.'

> — Rich Brooks, Oregon football coach

Cota to be one of the leaders on our defensive team," Brooks said. "We need his leadership in the secondary; I am looking for him to emerge this year as a bonafide all-Pac-10 player."

Herman O'Berry returns at cornerback after intercepting seven passes a

year ago. He is joined by sophomore Alex Molden, who is still shaking off the effects of a knee injury suffered last year. Sophomore Isaac Walker and junior Eugene Jackson should also see playing time at the corners.

The linebacking corps will be paced by defensive captain Ernest Jones, whose 11 sacks ranked third in the conference a year ago. Jones, a senior from Utica, N.Y., will man one outside linebacker position, but the other side is still a question.

Terrell Edwards started 10 games last year, but he was dismissed for personal reasons. Tony Koker looked like Edwards' replacement, but he was forced to give up football for medical reasons.

Senior John Taumoepeau played inside linebacker last year but will move outside this season. David Massey and Jeremy Asher will begin the season at inside linebacker, with Rich Ruhl and Byron Rockwell adding depth to the position.

"I expect us to be a lot more aggressive under coach Aliotti," Jones said. "He is more of a smashmouth type of football coach who will really want to go after people and hit them."

The defensive line will be built around senior Romeo Bandison, a second-team all-Pac-10 selection in 1992. Bandison played nose tackle last year but will return to right end with the return of Silila Malepeai. Gary Williams is back at the left end after starting 10 games a year ago.

Brooks has made it clear that although Oregon advanced to the postseason for the third time in four years last season, he is no longer satisfied with being a .500 team. Brooks said he would like to see his team emerge as a top 20 squad and make a run for the Ducks' first Rose Bowl in 35 years.

"I don't think it is unrealistic to think we can make a bid for the conference championship," Brooks said.

