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## Ducks, Bears overcome labels



STEVE MIMS

The 1993 Pacific-10 Conference football season has barely begun, but one thing is already evident: The preseason prognosticators, or so-called "experts," are once again wrong.

Every Pac-10 team has played either three or four games so far this year and the only ones still unbeaten are Arizona, California and Oregon. Of these three teams only the Wildcats were expected to be where they are.

This week's Oregon-California game will be a fight between two teams battling to keep their "surprising" undefeated records intact. Neither of these teams was given much chance to compete for a bowl game, much less the Rose Bowl, when the season began, but both teams have ignored the predictions and played the games anyway.

A quick scan of eight preseason media polls shows that Oregon (3-0) and California (4-0) were expected finish seventh and ninth, respectively.

The main reasons the Ducks and Bears have started so much better than many expected them to has been a combination of easy schedules and simply being underrated to start with.

Many people figured that Cal would finish near its 4-7 mark of a year ago because of the loss of its two best offensive players, wide receiver Sean Dawkins and running back Russell White.

What people did not realize was the depth this squad had behind those two, as well as having one of the most stable quarterbacks in the conference in Dave Barr.

Lindsey Chapman has filled in nicely for White, rushing for 386 yards in four games, but that should surprise few since he ran for over 1000 yards the past two years backing up White.

Mike Caldwell, Dawkins' replacement, leads the Bears with 16 catches and 320 yards receiving. This too should not be a shock, as Caldwell caught 76 balls during his three previous years at Berkeley.

The fact is Cal was underrated because most experts looked solely at the losses they suffered and not at the depth behind those players. It has become routine for preseason magazines to base their picks on the number of returning starters a team has and ignore players returning after playing significant roles off of the bench.

Another reason why the Bears have been successful is that they have beaten inferior non-conference foes San Jose State and Temple, and they beat UCLA when they were without top linebacker Jamir Miller, who was out due to a suspension. However, California's 44 points per game scoring average is impressive no matter who they played.

As for the Ducks, they are in the same boat as the Bears, taking advantage of a light schedule and low expectations. Oregon was picked no higher than fifth by most magazines and as low ninth in the conference by a couple of them. These picks showed an obvious lack of respect and research about a team that returned 14 starters from a bowl team one year ago.

It has become almost a tradition for the national media to pick the Ducks to finish behind traditional Pac-10 contenders like Stanford, UCLA and USC even though the Ducks have finished ahead of at least one of those teams in every year but one since 1986. Oregon head coach Rich Brooks addressed this issue before the season.

"Although UCLA has been to one bowl game in four years and we have been to three, almost

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everybody in the county will pick UCLA to finish ahead of Oregon," Brooks said. "Even though that hasn't been true in recent years."

Oregon has also taken advantage of a kind schedule that has seen it play overmatched Colorado State and Montana. Illinois is the only team of its caliber it has faced. But give the Ducks a lot of credit for winning on the road against a Big 10 opponent that had been to five consecutive bowl games.

Nobody could have expected the explosive start of junior quarterback Danny O'Neil, but this team hardly needed pity from the media. Oregon returned seven starters from one of the league's top defensive squads, an experienced offensive backfield and a special teams unit that could hold its own against anyone.

Oregon is still seen as the perennial loser it was in the 1970s and mid-1980s, even though they have recently built a competitive program in what is arguably the best conference in the country.

California has overcome the early lack of respect and is now rated 17th in the country. It has been installed as a 12-point favorite over the Ducks by the oddsmakers.

As for the Ducks, they will have to take the field and once again do as their coach knew they would before the season began.

"We just take our preseason picks, show up at practice, go out and play, and see if we can show some of the so-called experts wrong," Brooks said.

Steve Mims is the sports editor of the Emerald.

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