

Ducks, Devils look to end losing streaks

By Steve Mims
Oregon Daily Emerald

Oregon and Arizona State will meet on Saturday night, with each team looking to break a two-game losing streak in Saturday's 6:00 game in Tempe, Ariz.

Arizona State was ranked number 23 in the country one month ago, but has since lost three of four games by an average of almost 18 points per game. The Ducks opened the season at 3-0 before losing their first two conference games to California and USC.

"This game is of enormous importance for both teams," Oregon head coach Rich Brooks said this week. "We are playing on the road in a game that we have to win. The overriding concern is the importance of this game to both teams."

Arizona State is expected to

switch quarterbacks this week in an attempt to change things around. That means that sophomore Grady Benton, who set an NCAA record last year for completion percentage by a freshman, will give way to true freshman Jake Plummer, who has completed only 21 of 40 passes for 407 yards and two touchdowns in three games this year.

Brooks is quite familiar with Plummer, a *Parade* magazine and *SuperPrep* All-American at Capital High School in Boise, Idaho, last year. Oregon tried to recruit Plummer last year, but was unsuccessful.

"Both of their quarterbacks have similar abilities," Brooks said. "They throw the ball and can run with it as well. I was impressed with Plummer against Washington State last weekend."

Oregon's secondary is beaten

up with injuries to Alex Molden and Eugene Jackson, along with the season-ending injury to Herman O'Berry earlier this year. As a result, the Ducks have given up five touchdown passes of more than 20 yards in losses to Cal and USC. Brooks said he expects the Sun Devils to try to do the same thing this weekend.

"I would be surprised if they don't go at our secondary," Brooks said. "That has been our achilles heel. Our strength on offense is throwing the ball, so I guess the ball will be in the air a lot."

No matter who is playing quarterback, the Ducks will have to focus on stopping Arizona State's running game, which features the talented two-back combination of George Montgomery and Mario Bates. Bates was on his way to an All-American season last year when he suffered a severe knee injury in the Sun Devils' third game.

Bates has not run as well this year as he did before the injury, but is still averaging 78.8 yards per game on the ground. Montgomery, who also suffered a knee injury last year, is averaging only 30 yards rushing per game.

Arizona State's defense has struggled at times this year, but is anchored by one of the conference's best players, defensive

end Shante Carver. Carver has eight tackles, including five quarterback sacks, giving him a school record of 36 sacks.

"Shante Carver is one of the premier pass rushers in the nation," Brooks said. "We must be aware of his presence at all times. Hopefully, we can come close to what we did against (USC linebacker) Willie McGinest last week."

Oregon's offense this year has been a tale of two halves. The Ducks have outscored opponents 90-46 in the first half this year, including an incredible 51-0 in the first quarter. However, the Ducks have been beaten up by a combined score of 45-11 in the second half during the last two weeks.

Injuries hit the Ducks hard again last weekend when Molden was hurt on the first play of last week's game, leaving him questionable for Saturday's game, in addition to center Tom Curran, linebacker David Massey and center Tim DeGroot. Wide receiver Derrick Deadwiler is not expected to play this weekend, but Kory Murphy should return after missing most of the last three games. Defensive end Romeo Bandison and left guard Eric Barnes missed some practice because of injuries this week, but both are expected to be ready for Saturday.



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