

DUCK FOOTBALL

Ducks in the middle of cloudy bowl race

By Dave Charbonneau
Oregon Daily Emerald

It's time for Pacific-10 Conference teams to once again start thinking bowl bids. And, for the fourth time in five years, Oregon finds itself right in the thick of the hunt.

Going into Saturday's games, it looks as if UCLA and Arizona, barring a severe tumble, will be the locks at Nos. 1 and 2 in the conference, earning them spots in the Rose Bowl and a coalition bowl (likely the Fiesta Bowl).

USC is currently tied with the Bruins and the Wildcats for first place in the conference, but UCLA and Arizona hold Rose Bowl tie-breaker rights over the Trojans.

But what everyone wants to know, at least in these parts, is exactly how do the Ducks figure in?

First of all, Oregon needs to win its final two games, against Stanford Saturday and Oregon State next weekend. Both games are at home for the Ducks, and they have the easiest schedule remaining of the teams still in the hunt for the No. 4 position in the conference.

Finishing third in the Pac-10 earns a team an invitation to the Freedom Bowl, and the fourth place team goes to the Alamo Bowl.

With that in mind, here are the possibilities for Oregon to get to a bowl game. Again, this assumes the Ducks win their remaining two games, finishing 4-4 in the conference.

Freedom Bowl: This is a stretch for Oregon. First of all, if USC wins or ties one of its remaining two games against Washington and UCLA, the Ducks have no chance. However, if the Trojans lose both, they will be ineligible for postseason play because they will finish 6-6 overall. The NCAA rules state that Division I teams must have six victories over Division I opponents and a winning record.

If USC loses its remaining two games against Washington and UCLA — not an outlandish possibility — Oregon then needs further help from Arizona State, California and the Freedom Bowl selection committee.

Now, assume USC loses its last two games and continue.

The Sun Devils are 3-3 in the conference, so if they win their final two games at UCLA and at home against Arizona, they would go to the Freedom Bowl. But defeating the two top teams in the Pac-10 in consecutive weeks is not likely. If they win one game, then they would be tied with Oregon for third. Even though the Ducks defeated Arizona State earlier this season, it's still up to the Freedom Bowl selection committee to decide who gets the invitation.

California could also tie for third by winning its remaining games. The Golden Bears (2-4) have two conference games remaining at home against Arizona and at Stanford.

So the third-place spot could be a three-way tie. Again, the decision lies in the hands of the Freedom Bowl.

If Oregon manages to gain a tie for third, it could have an upper hand because of the Ducks' 1990 appearance in the bowl when they brought along 15,000 fans to Anaheim.

Alamo Bowl: If USC wins or ties one of its remaining games, Arizona State, California and Oregon have a chance at the Alamo Bowl.

If the Sun Devils win their remaining two games, they would go automatically with a 5-3 record. The best the Ducks and Golden Bears can finish is 4-4. Therefore, the three teams have to count on Arizona State losing at least one to either the Bruins or the Wildcats, a good possibility.

If that happens, and California and Oregon win their remaining two conference games (California plays Hawaii in its final week), it would be a three-way tie for fourth.

Oregon has the advantage here because Cal has to play at Arizona Saturday before a home game with Stanford. If the Bears upset the Wildcats, things could get interesting.

Independence Bowl: Oregon's home for two of its three recent bowl trips. This bowl has no automatic teams, but instead takes two at-large teams. Thus, if the Ducks win their final two games and are not selected by the Freedom or Alamo Bowl, they could be spending another New Year's Eve in Shreveport, La.

BOWLING

Oregon must win its final two games to qualify for a bowl game. Here is what also must happen for Oregon to play in the following bowls:

• **Freedom Bowl:** Arizona St. must lose one of its final two games and USC must lose both of its remaining games.

• **Alamo Bowl:** Arizona St. must lose one of its remaining games and Alamo Bowl representatives choose between California, Arizona St. and Oregon.

• **Independence Bowl:** Oregon must win its final two games and not be selected for any other bowl.

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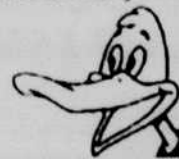
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