



Oregon State's wishbone offense gives the quarterback (middle) the option of running the ball or dishing it to the pitch man (left).

OSU wishbone attack producing big results

By Steve Mims
Oregon Daily Emerald

When Oregon State went looking for a new football coach three years ago, it went for something different. But, after two decades of losing, who can blame them?

Following a 1-10 1990 season, Oregon State football coach Dave Kragthorpe was fired, and with it came the end of "Air Express" in Corvallis. In came a tough midwesterner named Jerry Pettibone, bringing something that hadn't been seen in the Pacific-10 Conference for while: the wishbone.

Pettibone had studied the wishbone long enough to get a master's degree if possible, under the tutelage of Barry Switzer at Oklahoma and Tom Osborne at Nebraska. Those two programs, along with Colorado and a few others, thrived during the decade of the 1980s by running the ball all over its opponents.

However, in recent years Oklahoma and Colorado have added a passing attack to its offense, leaving the wishbone pretty much a dinosaur in college football. Pettibone proved it could work during his final three seasons at Northern Illinois, which compiled a .667 winning percentage during those years.

The purpose of the wishbone is relatively easy to explain, but difficult to enact or defend. The offense lines up one fullback and two halfbacks behind the quarterback, giving the signal caller three options.

1. He can give the ball to the fullback up the middle if it looks like there is room to run across the line of scrimmage.
2. He can fake the hand off to the fullback, run right or left and keep the ball himself.
3. After running either right or left, the quarterback can pitch the ball to one running back while the other throws a block.

"I think it is the most positive yardage offense ever invented," Pettibone said. "I would run it wherever I was, regardless of talent."

A strong offensive line and talented running backs are very important to the system, but the quarterback is most essential. The quarterback must not only have speed so the defense can't overlook him, but he must also be able to think quickly and make the right reads.

The Beavers had Mark Olford and Ian Shields take control of the offense the last few years, but neither were able to move the team consistently. This season Pettibone has found that he has two quarterbacks able to run the team effectively, Don Shanklin and Raheem Muhammad.

Shanklin, a junior from Texas, ran for 117 yards in Oregon State's 30-14 win over bowl-bound Arizona State earlier this year, before getting hurt. However, redshirt freshman Muhammad stepped in and has run for more than 100 yards in two Beaver games this year.

"Raheem Muhammad came out of nowhere to lead the team over the last three or four weeks," Oregon State offensive coordinator Mike Summers said. "It has been a tremendous road for us this year with the marked improvement we have made."

Now that Pettibone has found a quarterback capable of moving the ball, he is proving that the

OSU RUSHING

OPPONENT	CARRIES/RUSHING
Wyoming	61-316
Fresno St.	69-352
Washington St.	42-76
Arizona	47-50
Arizona St.	75-419
Pacific	80-667
USC	56-223
UCLA	58-338
Stanford	65-338
Washington	58-258

Emerald

system has many advantages. "One advantage is that not many teams do it," Pettibone said. "So it takes drastic changes on defense to prepare for it. Defenses must take on linemen down field and be ready for blocks from running backs. They must play assignment-oriented defense and be sure somebody is covering the fullback, quarterback and pitch man."

Another advantage is the possibility of trickery by the offense. There are a lot of fakes and quick handoffs, making it difficult for the defense to be aware of where the ball is.

"Option football is very elusive," Pettibone said. "The defense is not sure who has the ball and that helps you move the ball. If you do it right, you don't even have to block everybody."

Oregon head football coach Rich Brooks has seen enough of the option over the past three years. Oregon lost to the Beavers in 1991, Hawaii in 1992 and Arizona this year when facing some form of the option. After allowing nearly 400 yards in a 31-10 loss at Arizona two weeks ago, his defense must face Oregon State, currently second in the nation in rushing, this weekend.

"Usually you don't have a lot of time to prepare for the option," said Brooks Wednesday, repeating one of the advantages Pettibone spoke about. "We didn't defend Hawaii well last year, we did defend Oregon State well but the (rain) played a part in that. We didn't defend the Arizona option well, but we didn't prepare for it all week. We haven't played as confident on defense lately."

Unlike Arizona, who subbed running back Chuck Levy into the game at quarterback in place of Dan White at gametime, Oregon knows what it will be facing this Saturday. Oregon linebacker Ernest Jones talked about one defensive option to try to stop Oregon State.

"We may have four down linemen and bring the safeties and cornerbacks up to the line," Jones said. "Some of the big things we will be looking at are the Arizona films and the films of Oregon State last year."

Oregon safety Chad Cota talked about the discipline needed to face an option offense.

"You have to play disciplined defense," Cota said. "If everybody play their gaps and plays their responsibilities, if you have the quarterback, you must take the quarterback. If you have the pitch man, you must take the pitch man. They like to try and run it right down your throat, so

Turn to **WISHBONE**, Page 8B

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