

'Cats and Ducks hook up for crucial Pac-10 contest

Chris Metz

Oregon Daily Emerald

All conference eyes will be on Eugene Saturday as the fight for the Pacific-10 title and Rose Bowl bid heats up on the Omni-Turf of Autzen Stadium.

The Arizona Wildcats and Oregon Ducks hook up for the 20th edition of the battle between the two schools. More than just pride is at stake as the game represents a crucial step in deciding this year's conference title.

The 'Cats enter Saturday's contest with a perfect 4-0 conference record and boast a No. 11 rating in this week's AP poll, while the Ducks narrowly missed this week's top 25, coming in at No. 27.

Arizona head coach Dick Tomey is well aware of the urgency of this weekend's game and knows that Oregon head coach Rich Brooks and the Ducks will be plenty ready for the Pac-10 clash.

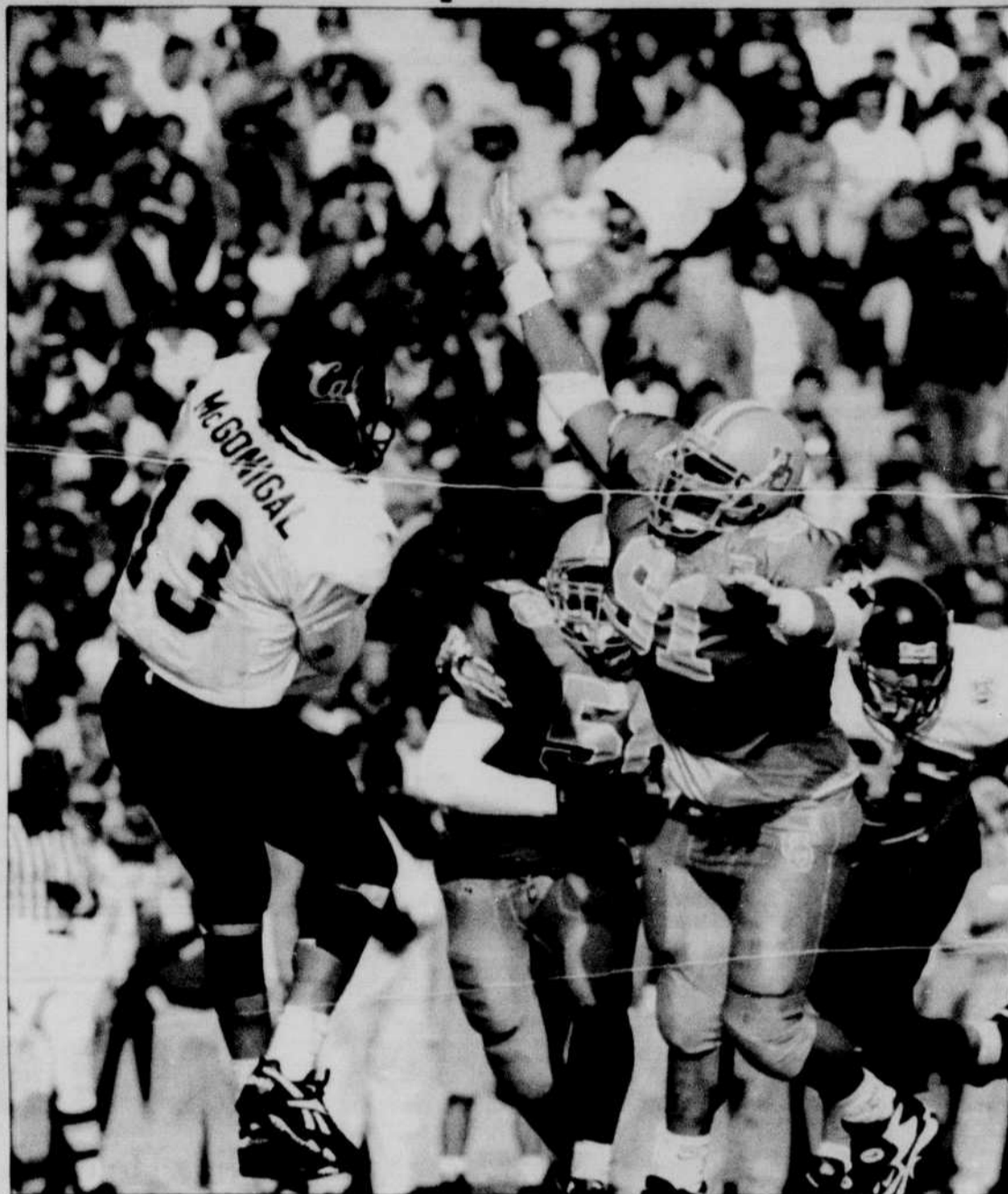
"Oregon has that belief that they are going to win," Tomey said. "We have it, but we're not playing that way."

The regionally televised game between the two has taken on unexpected importance for both teams as the Ducks (5-3 overall, 3-1 in conference) have positioned themselves in the thick of the Rose Bowl race after upsetting the Washington Huskies last weekend. The win places the Ducks in a third-place tie with Washington State, just one win behind second-place USC, also a victim of the Ducks.

"Oregon has probably the two most important wins in the league this year — over USC and Washington," Tomey said. "Our play has to reflect the circumstances of the game — the urgency of the situation."

The Ducks are flying high after wins over California and the Huskies and have won four of their last five games after a shaky start to the season. They have done so behind a solid defense and timely offensive and special teams play.

The Duck defense has come to life since starting Pac-10 play, allowing only 55 points in four conference games. The Ducks have also been aided by their ability to take the ball away from the opposition, with eight fumble recoveries and a conference-leading 14 interceptions.



Oregon hopes to display its own brand of defense against the highly touted Arizona attack in Saturday's showdown at Autzen Stadium.

But Brooks knows all too well that the turnover game is a two-way street as he has watched the Ducks cough up seven fumbles and deliver 11 interceptions themselves.

Brooks is quite versed on how strong the Arizona defense is as well and believes that the Oregon offense will need to step it up a notch against the 'Cats.

"Washington State's defense has the statistics," Brooks said, "but there are just not very many people able to move the football on Arizona's defense. We're going to have to get more

production than we had against the Huskies."

Arizona ranks second in total defense in the Pac-10 and are especially tough against the run, allowing only 56 yards a game in seven contests so far this season, ranking the 'Cats second nationally against the run. Tomey's defense ranks seventh in the nation in scoring defense, giving up a little over 12 points per game, and ranks ninth in the nation in total defense.

In last season's contest, the Wildcats held the hapless Ducks to 10 yards rushing and registered

six quarterback sacks. The situation looks to be just as ominous as this year's Arizona defense is once again powered by defensive end Tedy Bruschi and inside linebacker and Butkus Award semifinalist Sean Harris.

Bruschi is a semifinalist for the Lombardi Award for the nation's best lineman and is considered as one of the best defenders in the Pac-10. Although Bruschi is a player that needs to be worked around, Brooks is reluctant to design his offense around stopping him.

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— RICH BROOKS
Oregon head coach

special protection against Bruschi," Brooks said, "because if you do, you really have to change a lot of things you do normally."

UCLA center Mike Flanagan knows first-hand how fierce Bruschi is and documented his experience with the defender after last weekend's contest.

"He has that look in his eyes that says, 'I'm crazy,'" Flanagan said.

Arizona has had problems scoring at times this season but has averaged a healthy 27 points per game, just slightly ahead of the Oregon offense. The one thing Arizona has been able to do is run the ball and features the eighth leading rusher in the nation in Ontwaun Carter. His 130 yards a game trails only Napoleon Kaufman for the Pac-10 rushing lead.

Oregon once again will have the thankless task of defending one of the better receivers in the Pac-10 in Richard Dice. Dice was the Pac-10 offensive player after last week's win over UCLA, and his large frame poses a problem for the smaller defensive backs for Oregon.

"We had trouble with (Eric) Bjornson last week at 6-foot-5," Brooks said. "Dice is 6-foot-3. That's always a match up problem for 5-foot-11, 5-foot-10, 6-foot corners."

With a win, Tomey's Wildcats would strengthen their conference lead and, with only a road contest with USC remaining, the 'Cats would be that much closer to attending their first-ever Rose Bowl.

For the Ducks, a win would push them into a first-place tie with the Wildcats, the idle USC and possibly Washington State.

"It looks like a four-team tournament," Tomey said.

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