

Young and Hungry

Chris Metz
Oregon Daily Emerald

At the beginning of the season, you would have had to search long and hard to even find Patrick Johnson's name on the Oregon offensive depth chart. Dameron Ricketts' name is easy enough to find, but the thought of him being one of the go-to guys in the Oregon offense probably wouldn't be the first thought to cross your mind.

But as the Ducks march into their most important trio of games in the last two decades, youthful players like Ricketts and Johnson will be depended on to do the job regardless of their age or experience level.

But that's the way this combination likes it.

"I don't have time to think about it," Johnson said about the pressure of playing with the stakes increasing each week. "I didn't even think I was going to end up playing. I didn't have a clue."

Johnson is a true freshman and had only one year of previous football experience coming into this season. But with a career-ending injury to Kory Murphy in the Hawaii game and Cristin McLemore's absence due to injury, Johnson has moved into the starting role at the flanker position.

While having made typical freshman mistakes, he has been instrumental in the Ducks' come-from-behind victories over Washington and Arizona — converting quarterback Danny O'Neil's clutch passes, especially on third down.

"When he does make a mistake, he just bounces back," Oregon head coach Rich Brooks said.

Pressure doesn't really matter if you have enough motivation to go out and do it. It's not as hard as I thought it was going to be.

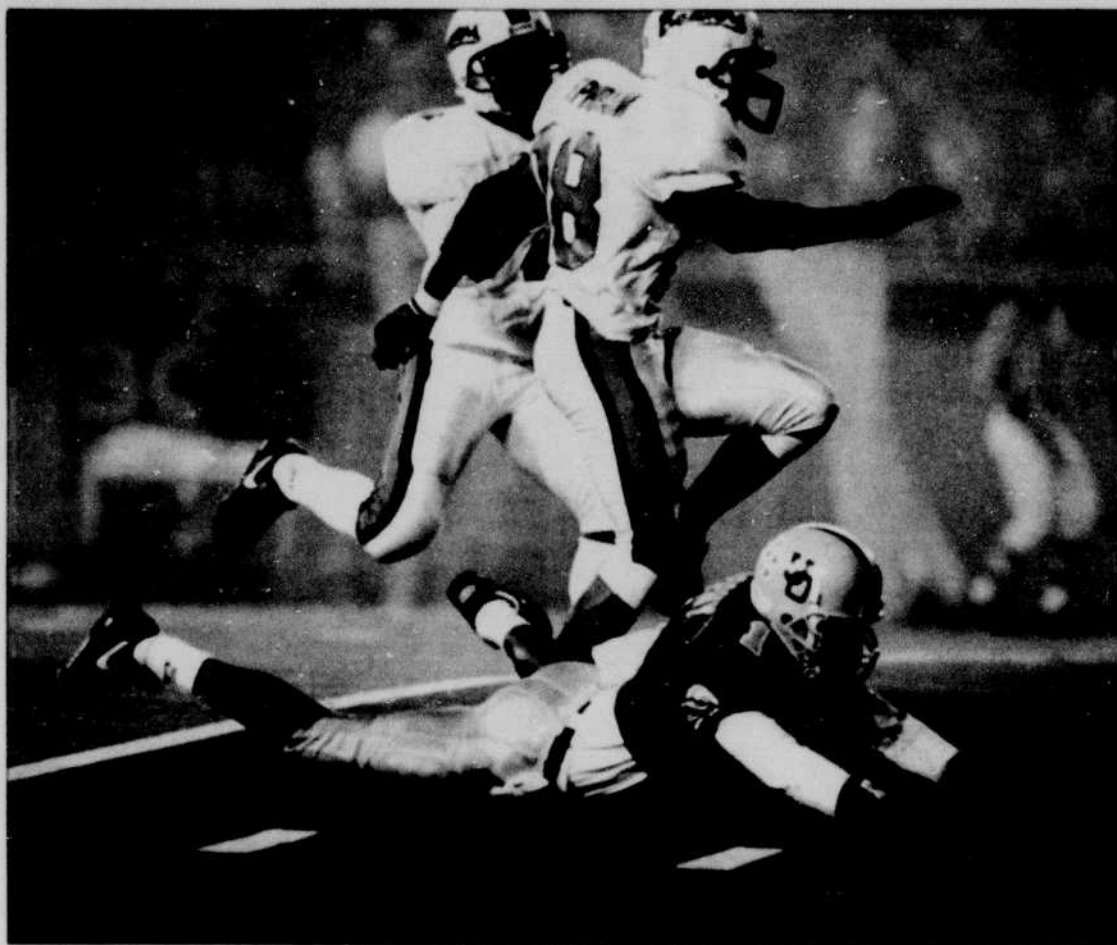
— Patrick Johnson
Freshman flanker

Johnson's greatest asset is his speed. In high school, he led the nation last spring in the 100-meter (:10.39) and the 200-meter (:20.7) events in track. His appeal to college football programs was intensified by his all-around athleticism, being named to the *Tacoma News-Tribune's* list of the Western 100 senior prospects as an all-around athlete.

Johnson laughs at the situation that he is in at Oregon. His drive to keep improving his game and winning football games makes what could be a pressure-cooker of a situation for the young man that just turned 18 years old into nothing more than a logical extension of his desire to succeed.

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Much like Johnson, Ricketts, a sophomore from Culver City, Calif., saw playing time as a red-shirt freshman, converting on two touchdowns in last season's win over Arizona State. His role



MICHAEL SHINDLER/Emerald

Freshman receiver Pat Johnson has unexpectedly emerged as a vital part of the Oregon offense.

as a main target for O'Neil is not as surprising as that of Johnson, but considering the fact that he wasn't a starter at the beginning of the season, his team-leading 28 receptions is shocking.

Ricketts is another Oregon receiver that has had little experience catching the ball. He played quarterback most of his

prep career. Ricketts accounted for 2,491 yards of total offense for his playoff-bound squad his senior year.

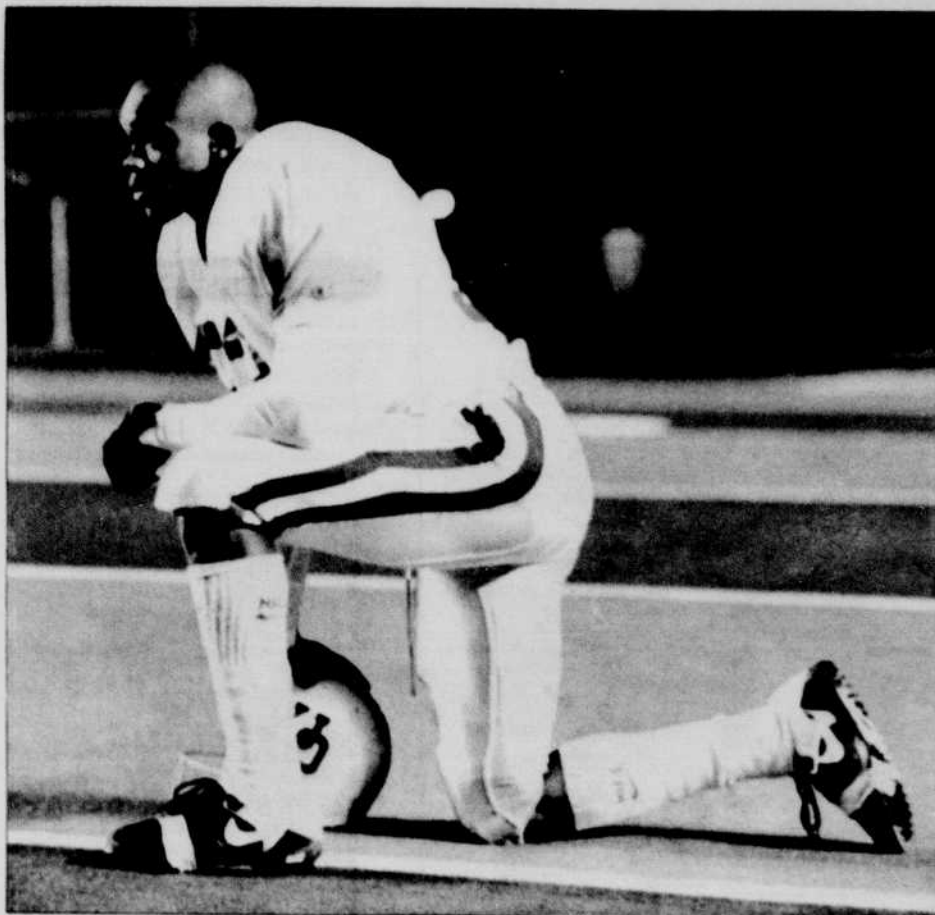
Despite his success in high school, Ricketts is unfamiliar to being on a winning team and sees the opportunity that the Ducks have in front of them this year all the more special.

"I've never been in this position before," Ricketts said. "My whole life I've been on a losing team, so this is a first."

Seeing this smiling duo walking down the street, it's hard to imagine the intensity they produce on the field, but no one

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Life's a whole new ballgame for Murphy



FILE PHOTO

Kory Murphy has begun restructuring his world from football games to the game of life after suffering a career-ending spinal injury.

Trevor Kearney
Oregon Daily Emerald

Junior Kory Murphy sustained a career-ending injury. He will never step onto the field to play football again. But despite losing football, Murphy is far from being out of the game.

Murphy, who has a small opening in his spinal column that was traumatized in the Sept. 10 game against Hawaii, has been forced to take to the sidelines, and, with the absence of football, concentrate more on his academic career.

However, Murphy has had to balance his academics with the pain brought on from losing the opportunity to play the game that he loves.

"Obviously it hurts, but every person in the world has to assume their role," Murphy said. "You have to take that role and do the best you possibly can. Things have happened to me that are unfortunate, but I'm very blessed. I'm willing to take on the role as best I possibly can, whether that role is cheerleading, just being a citizen or helping the young guys out."

"I was really fortunate that I wasn't in that bad of academic trouble that I couldn't fall back (on it). Now I realize that at any time a man's career could go. The only thing that they can't take away from me is what I've already learned. That's probably the most important."

The junior sociology major came into the year with a 3.27 grade point average, and that was when he had to address football and classes at the same time.

"Before, I had to balance (academics and football) because I was here for two reasons. They brought me here to not only succeed academically but to succeed athletically, so I did have two priorities that kind of ranked the same. Now things have changed and I have to put my priorities into perspective."

Murphy has used his spinal condition not only to try to help the team work hard, but also to keep the season, and life, in perspective. He has gained a unique outlook on life that he is trying to use as an example to show people, and himself, how precious life really is.

"I think that the main thing that I wanted to get across to them was to work as hard as you can during every play, whether in practice, whether in games on Saturdays," Murphy said. "That was my main focus. (It) was, okay this happened to me, but that doesn't mean it can't happen to you."

"I wanted them to understand ... that you can't take a down off and you never know when your season is going to end or your career is going to end. But one thing that you can be sure of is that, if it does end, when you look back you can say that you played as hard as you can. And I can truly say that."

Murphy's teammates have been equally helpful in his recovery.

While in Hawaii, quarterback Danny O'Neil's family stayed with Murphy

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