

FILE PHOTO

The OSU defense has held Oregon to an average of just over four points a game in the last four contests between the two.

LET THE BATTLE BEGIN

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Oregon Daily Emerald

It's finally here. The Civil War to end all Civil Wars takes center stage Saturday as the 12th-ranked Oregon Ducks hook up with the Oregon State Beavers for the 98th edition of the classic battle for state supremacy.

The Beavers (2-5 conference, 4-6 overall) are looking to spoil Oregon's first trip to a Rose Bowl since the 1957 season when the Ducks (6-1, 8-3) invade Parker Stadium in Corvallis for both team's Pac-10 finales.

Strangely enough, the road team has won the last four games in the series and the classic battle has swayed from its high-scoring contests in the 1970s and 1980s to an annual defensive scrap, usually coming down to the play of the special teams.

Oregon State head coach Jerry Pettibone had some concerns coming into the final week of practice about his special teams' play and pinpointed some problem areas for the Beavers.

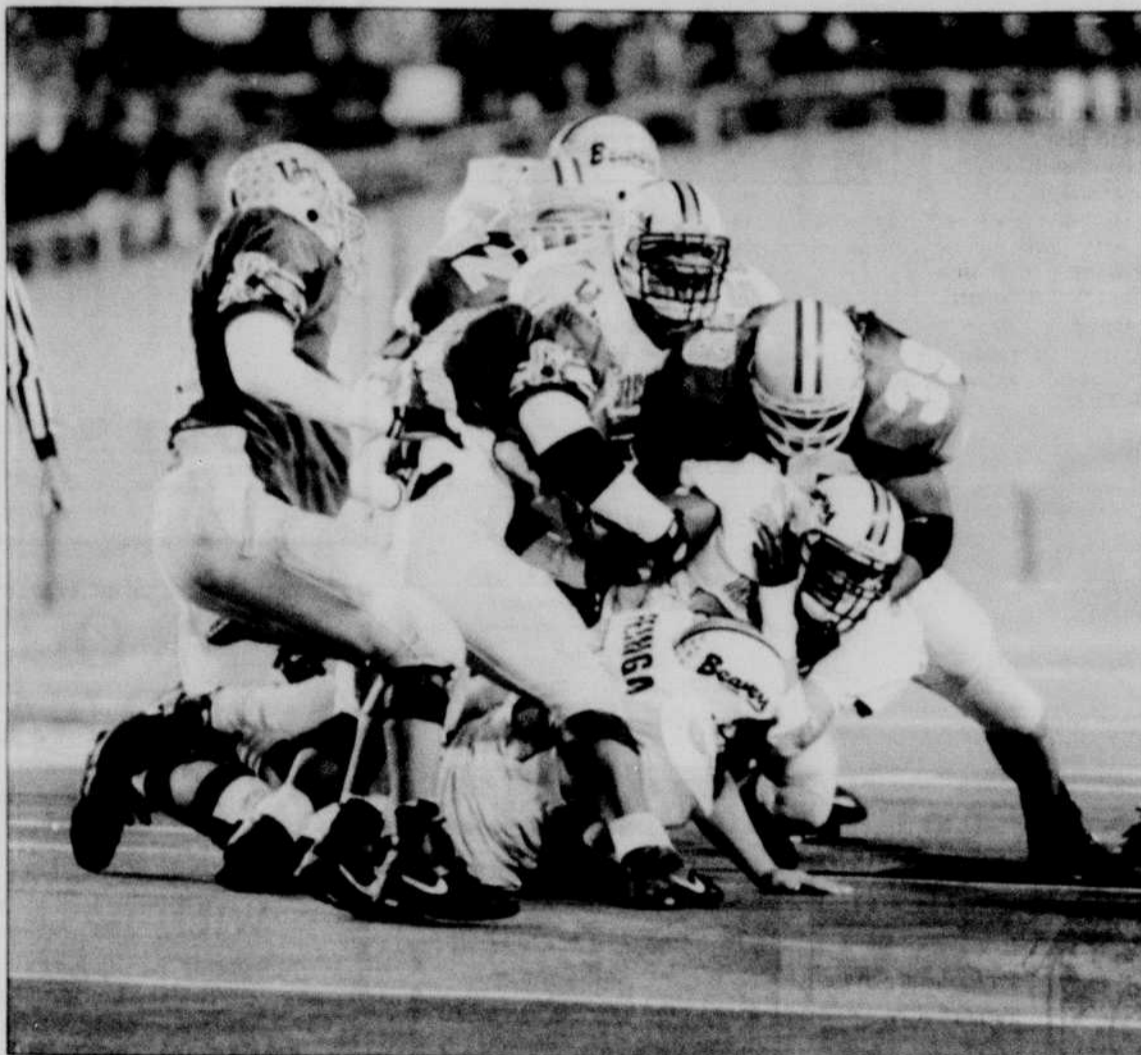
"We have to be a lot more consistent with our snaps on punts, field goals and PATs," Pettibone said. "We must do a better job with our holds on extra points and field goals."

With the mysterious increasing reliance on the kicking game in Civil War games, players have come to expect close defensive battles that are usually settled by a few points.

But no matter what the final tally is, a Civil War win is a win nonetheless.

"We could win seven to zip like we did two years ago and everybody would be more happy than anything in the world," Oregon tight end Josh Wilcox said. "If we hold them to zero points and we get two points, then we win. We don't care."

The intriguing part of the



FILE PHOTO

Oregon has shown some defense of its own against the Beavers in the past and the Gang Green defense is more lethal than ever in 1994.

Civil War matchup is the diversity of the offenses and defenses of the two teams.

The Ducks feature a pro-set offense with multiple formations while the Beavers are one of the few teams still around that work out of the spread option formation. Consequently, the Beavs rack up rushing yards to the tune of over 285 yards per game and rank third nationally in the category.

The Oregon State defense ranks near the middle of the Pac-10, but poses problems to an Oregon team that has punished two of the worst defenses in the conference in Arizona State and Stanford the last two weeks.

"They have a far better secondary compared to Stanford," Oregon head coach Rich Brooks said. "Assignment-wise, their defensive line is an offensive

lineman's nightmare."

Brooks and the Ducks have had trouble scoring on the OSU defense in the past couple of years, but the Oregon defense has hit its stride in recent weeks.

"You have to hand it to Rich Brooks, his staff and his players for how well they have played," Pettibone said.

Of course the crowd will once again be a festive one as Parker

Stadium has been sold out for over a week and the game will be regionally televised on ABC. A game that would be exciting under normal circumstances is just that much more important with the Ducks' postseason plans riding on the game.

"I expect a lot of booing man," Wilcox said of the OSU fans. "They're going to be on us hard. We've played in hostile environments before but never anything like this I don't think."

"I think it's going to be crazy," Oregon linebacker Jeremy Asher said.

The Oregon players know what they have at stake in this game for state bragging rights, but they also understand very well what a win would mean for the Beavers and their season as well.

"They're going to play like they have the Rose Bowl berth on the line," Oregon quarterback Danny O'Neil said. "That's just how they play."

"It means the world to them," Wilcox added. "If they go 5-6 this year, it's the best they've done since 1971."

"When you get to this game, everything goes out the window. It's a dogfight."

Oregon's Ricky Whittle has no doubt that this game is the biggest game for Oregon in a long time. He believes that the Ducks must be able to adapt to anything that happens in a rivalry where strange things have been known to happen over the years.

"The thing about this rivalry is that you can't really expect anything, you have to expect everything," Whittle said. "It's not what they will do, it's what they won't do."

"It's all about rising to another level, and that's what this team is made of. It's made of a lot of people that want to become champions and understand what it takes to get there."