



Promised land

Trevor Kearney
Oregon Daily Emerald

The ideal way for any college football coach to end the season is with a bowl game, and it is no different for Oregon coach Rich Brooks.

"I think that, probably to me, the biggest high is bringing Oregon football to that level where it's anticipated that we will be in a bowl game," Brooks said earlier in the season.

Brooks has been to three bowl games, all of which have come in the last five years. He is one of five Oregon coaches to take his team to a bowl game, and became one of only three Oregon coaches to win one when the Ducks beat Tulsa in the 1989 Independence Bowl.

But this season Brooks earned the ultimate season-ending honor when the Ducks clinched a long-awaited Rose Bowl berth.

"I've been at Oregon for 18 years and felt that we could get to the Rose Bowl when I got there, but never thought it would take 18 years to accomplish it," Brooks said.

It didn't look any more optimistic at the beginning of this season, when the Ducks were picked by some to finish last in the Pac-10, and never really considered to be bowl contenders, not to mention in the running for the Rose Bowl bid.

An 18-year tenure, though, has made Brooks all too familiar with the preseason criticisms that he and his team received this season.

"I'm a firm believer in if you let criticism or praise infiltrate your mind, you are not going to continue to improve as a person or as a team," Brooks said.

All criticism aside, Brooks managed to guide the Ducks to the Pac-10 title and the Rose Bowl berth that goes along with it. The Ducks 9-3 record

is Brooks' best record since taking over the coaching helm in 1977.

"We are pleased that we were able to get through the Pac-10 conference and represent our conference in the Rose Bowl," Brooks said. "We have a young football team, and the young players acted like veterans in their attitude and focus."

"I'm very proud of my players and the coaching staff. We have five players on the All-Pac-10 team and I'm real proud of that."

But after showing critics and fans alike that the Ducks were no pushover, and after earning the Rose Bowl berth outright, Brooks and his team face all new criticisms. Second ranked Penn State, the Ducks' Rose Bowl opponent, has been labeled a 17-point favorite over Oregon, and some would say that margin is being generous to the Ducks.

Brooks praised Penn State and its powerful offense, noting that he was impressed with the Nittany Lions' win over the Michigan State Spartans.

"I think it's a challenge to be playing an undefeated football team," Brooks said. "We obviously have our hands full. I kind of got an upset stomach watching (Penn State coach Joe Paterno's) offense go up and down the field against Michigan State."

But Brooks dismissed any ideas that the large point spread and facing the second-ranked team in the nation would change his plans for the game.

"We can't do anything about what people say... we can only play," Brooks said. "We're a good team, and you don't get here by not having a good team."

"We're not coming down (to Pasadena) to be sacrificial lambs, we're coming down to win a football game."



FILE PHOTO
Oregon head coach Rich Brooks will finally enjoy his first Rose Bowl with the Ducks after 18 years at the helm of the yellow and green.

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