

Ducks start tough stretch with Cal

■ **FOOTBALL:** Done with its non-conference schedule, Oregon faces six Pacific-10 Conference foes in the second half of its season

By Trevor Kearney
Sports Editor

After playing three non-conference teams in its first five games, the Oregon football team starts the second half of its season — the tougher part of its season — Saturday at Berkeley against California.

The Ducks (4-1 overall, 1-1 Pac-10) face six-straight games against Pacific-10 Conference opponents starting with the Golden Bears, a team that has given the Ducks some trouble in the past.

"I really look at it as a second season for us beginning this week, because we play six consecutive league games now, three at home and three on the road," head coach Mike Bellotti said. "I think that there is a pretty good resolve and understanding of what we need to do, of respecting your opponent and of understanding that the Pac-10 is the Pac-10."

"And that means automatically, every game that there is no lead that is big enough and you are never out of a game. But the second season begins Saturday."

The Ducks know very well the unpredictability of Pac-10 play, with one of the biggest lessons they have learned coming when they visited the Bears two years ago and blew a 30-point lead.

California leads the series 34-23-2, but according to Bellotti, the past is the past and the Ducks are focused on the present.

"I don't think you can take away the feeling, the frustration

involved in that game from those players that were involved in that game," Bellotti said. "But that is the past. We can't change it, the only thing we can do is learn from it and make sure it doesn't happen again."

And comparisons to two years ago, Bellotti pointed out, aren't really valid because of the makeup of this year's team.

"Probably two-thirds of our players were not involved in it, don't know anything about it," Bellotti said, adding that the memory of the loss could be used as motivation. "If anything else it probably just ought to make them mad and make them want to pay back that situation."

Oregon has suffered several injuries that could play major roles in the Ducks' performance on Saturday. Sophomore kicker Matt Belden is still out with an injury to his right leg, and sophomore fullback A. J. Jelks is still unavailable because of a fractured left foot. Senior defensive end Troy Bailey is also sidelined with a bruised left knee.

In addition, the Ducks had three key players who were suffering from nagging injuries that kept them out of practice earlier this week in senior tailback Ricky Whittle, senior cornerback Alex Molden and junior cornerback LaMont Woods.

"I don't think our health is great," Bellotti said, adding that Whittle, Molden and Woods would play against California. "We still have an extensive injured list that is longer than I would like it. We are down about eight to 10 players that we need, but I think a handful of those guys should all be back."

Sophomore split end Damon Griffin is listed as doubtful with a shoulder injury, but the

team will have junior flanker Dameron Ricketts back in the lineup after he sat out last weekend to make up for a suspension he earned at the end of last season.

The injury to Jelks poses the Ducks with a particularly difficult question they must address this week, as junior reserve fullback Pulou Malepeai has to sit out due to a suspension. That leaves the Ducks with unproven sophomore Eric Winn, who scored a touchdown against Pacific but is still the team's No. 3 fullback.

But, Bellotti said, the Ducks do have a few other solutions to the fullback problem that they can counter with.

"If, for some reason, Winn should go down, we will probably shift to a different mode," Bellotti said. "Instead of throwing someone in there, we will probably change the attack. We will probably shift to three wide receivers, or two tight ends."

Coming off of a 45-7 win over Pacific, the Ducks do have some momentum going into the game, but Bellotti was quick to point out that the team's big win last weekend will not necessarily be repeated this weekend.

"It pumps everybody up to get to play and feel like they have contributed something," Bellotti said. "I think everybody felt that they contributed to that win and that is an important thing for team unity. And I think in that regard, that was very positive."

"I think it will be a very close game. Cal is a much, much better football team than UOP. We haven't won down there the last three times we have played at Berkeley, and obviously that is something that we want to get off of our back."

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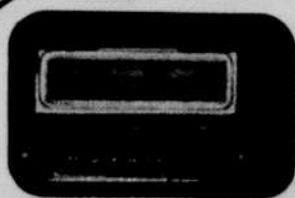
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