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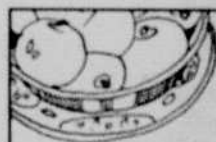
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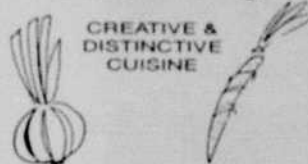


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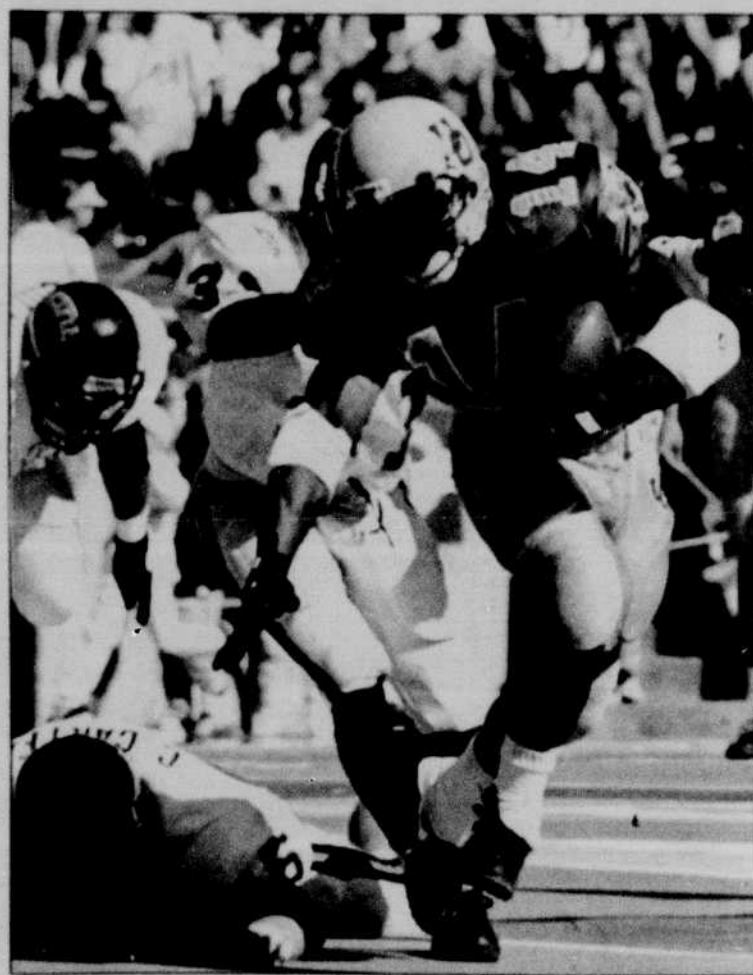
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FOOTBALL

OREGON VS WASHINGTON STATE



Few teams have gotten in tailback Ricky Whittle's way, as he eclipsed the 2,000-yard rushing mark earlier this season.

Weapon: Cornhuskers couldn't woo Whittle

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then played in 12 games in his first full year and 11 games in his sophomore year. His split-time role earlier in his career — particularly last year — doesn't bother him, especially now that he is the Ducks go-to guy.

"Different situations call for different tactics," Whittle said. "I'm not one to cry about things. I can deal with the fact that Dino was the best man for the job on a particular week.

"I'm just happy to be the one to get so many carries, returns and catches now."

That role has already paid off for Whittle this season. He eclipsed the 2,000-yard rushing mark against Pacific, and, providing he stays healthy, stands to up his 2,206 career rushing yards to pass Don Reynolds and Ahmad Rashad before the year is over. That would make Whittle Oregon's third all-time leader in rushing yards behind Sean Burwell, who is second with 2,940 yards and is one of the reasons that Whittle chose Oregon over an up-and-coming Nebraska team.

"I felt he very much wanted me to come here," Whittle said. But the deciding factor for Whittle was the promise he saw in the Oregon program and its environment. "The bottom line is that I wanted to play for the No. 1 conference in the nation and go to the Rose Bowl."

"I could have gone to Nebraska," Whittle said, adding that the coaches at Nebraska sat him down on a recruiting visit and told him that within the next four years, the Cornhuskers would be in contention for a national title. "When I chose Oregon, a lot of people laughed, but I would like to see those people laughing now."

Being a highly recruited foot-

ball player out of high school, Whittle said, was a necessary step in the development of his college career.

"It is not that I turned down a lot of schools, but that I got them interested in me," Whittle said. "If they weren't, if they did not buy into me, that would be an insult to me.

Whittle will be the first to attribute much of his success this season to his coaches and his linemen.

Offensive coordinator Al Borges, Whittle said, challenges his team each and every game.

"He just throws stuff at us," Whittle said, adding that the challenges motivate the offense. "Like to not not turn the ball over once against Pacific. We went out and didn't turn the ball over."

That motivation is not the only of its kind on the Oregon football team, however.

Whittle's much-publicized praise for his linemen — in the form of a free lunch to all of them if he rushes for 150 or more yards in a game — has been his way of recognizing and motivating his teammates.

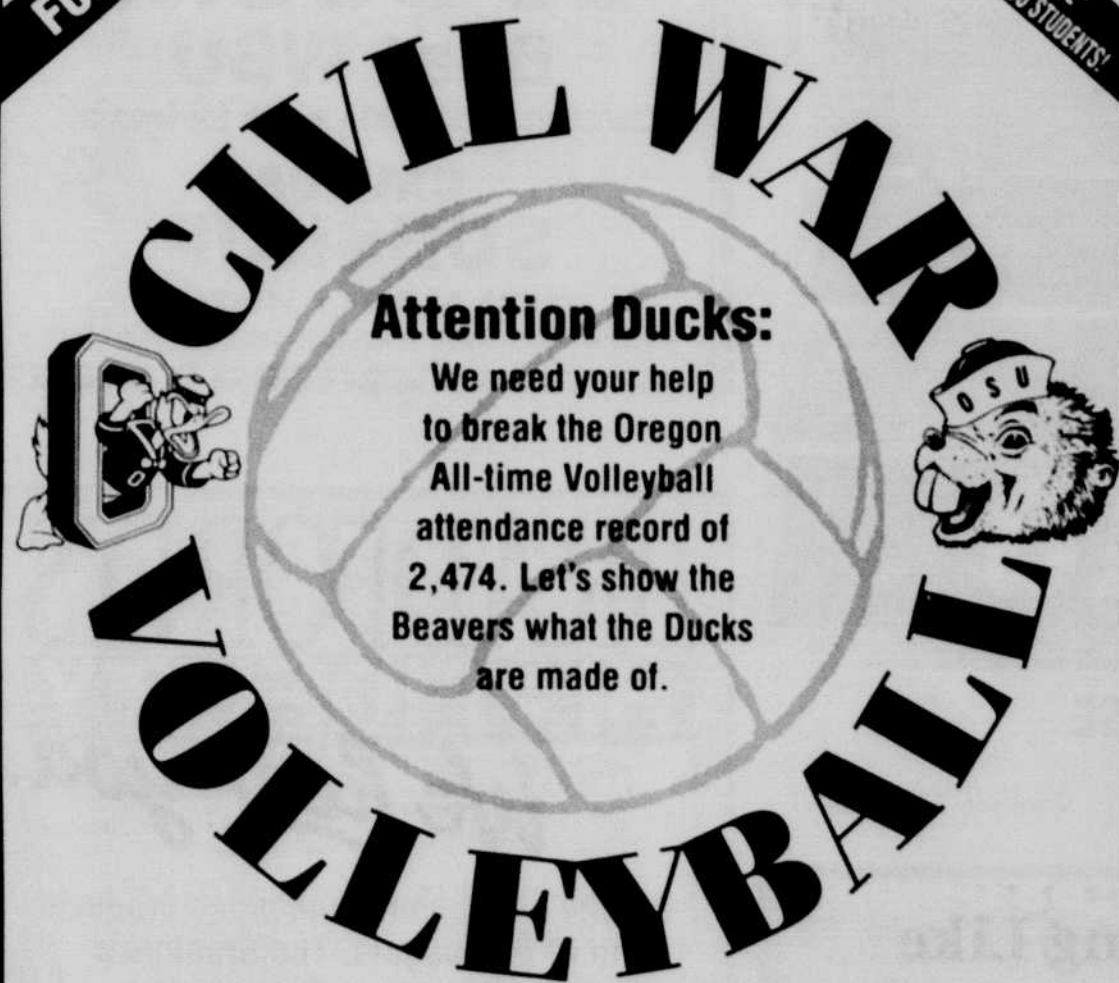
"I just wanted to show my linemen that I appreciate them," Whittle said. "And I guess the best way to a lineman's heart is through his stomach."

All the numbers, records and performances aside, however, Whittle hasn't accomplished everything that he has wanted to at Oregon. Last season against Stanford, Whittle ran a kick back for 92 yards — the fifth longest kick return in Oregon history — but was stopped just short of the touchdown.

"I still want to take one of those kicks back," Whittle said, adding that when and if he does, his kick return team is in for a barbecue.

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