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Scout team one reason for success

■ **PRACTICE:** Members of the scout team are considered to be the Duck's unsung heroes

By Mark McTyre
Assistant Sports Editor

Every Saturday in fall there are football teams across the nation doing battle on the gridiron to earn honor and pride for their school. Thousands of fans attend these games to watch the players execute designed offensive and defensive plays to perfection — or sometimes not so perfect.

As those in attendance cheer or boo for the teams' performances, they really don't understand what goes into getting ready for each contest.

Most fans know that the team's practice every week-day, but who they practice against is unknown. This is where the unsung heroes of a team come into play.

For the Oregon football team, a group of approximately 40 players makes up the scout team — the heroes missing in action. These athletes range from incoming freshmen who are getting prepared for their first season to players who have been in the program for a year or more, trying to fight their way to the second or first team. No matter what their background is, each player has one thing in common — the love of the game.

While the athletes on Saturdays have the mission of winning their games, the scout team has the assignment of making sure that its starting colleagues are prepared for the opponents' game plan. Each week the scout team must execute the plays its coaches — Mark Johnson and Collin

Hall — think the upcoming opponent will try to use against the Ducks on Saturday. The team must look, act and play as if it was the foe.

"We are very businesslike and very workmanlike in the way we go about things," Johnson said. "We want to grab our lunch pail and hardhat and we've got a job to do. Nobody wants to do it, but we have to do it. Because all those guys in front of them had to do it, so it's now their time."

After the regular squad has had time to heal its wounds, Wednesday and Thursday becomes the scout team's game days. The players try their hardest to win, but first and foremost they must make the starters realize what action they'll be seeing come Saturday.

"The main purpose of the scout team is to prepare the team for the next opponent," Johnson said. "We simulate the next opponent the best we can. We have a day or two to prepare our guys for the job they have."

At the beginning of the season, it took some time for the scout players to get into the pattern of their job because of its nature — to beat their own teammates.

"It took us a few weeks to get to know each other and what was expected," Johnson said. "Early in the season we had some times where we lollygagged but it finally came together. The players didn't want to upset the starters because of seniority, but finally we'd execute a play and build from that."

As the season continued and the scout team gained more confidence, its importance to the overall program grew. When it came time for the Ducks to prepare for the annual Civil War game, the coaching staff found out just how helpful these unrecognized players were to the team.

"They've been great all year," defensive coordinator Charlie Waters said after the Ducks' 12-10 victory over the Beavers on Nov. 18. "They helped us against Washington. Those unsung heroes have kicked our ass on several occasions and made us play better in practice."

Waters had never coached against an option style offense before the triumphant Civil War, and he welcomed any help that

was offered to him.

"It was gut-wrenching," Waters said. "The attack is so unconventional. You don't train your players all year to defend things like that. You train them to defend against the Californias and UCLAs and its very challenging. It's a credit to our players for being able to change gears after 10 games and go into this mode of stopping the option. I was impressed with them."

The Ducks were able to change gears on both sides of the ball because of the performance by their scouts during mid-week. They not only learned how to look and act like an option offense in less than a week but also how to give the resemblance of a nationally ranked defense to the starting squad.

"It was pretty tough especially the way the coaches asked us to do things," Johnson said. "We had to have one of our cornerbacks come over and play quarterback for us — he did a fantastic job. There are so many things a team can run from the option. It took us two or three days just to figure it out."

After the players and coaches were able to define the option they had to find a way to run it at full speed without injuring anyone from the starting defense.

"It was hard to do because we had to go as fast as we could without cutting the players, otherwise they wouldn't get a look," Johnson said of the preparation for the game. "If we didn't go full speed they would've made every single play but it wouldn't have been realistic."

The effort the scouts put in that week obviously paid its dividends, as it has all season long. The players have stuck with the program, improving themselves and their teammates toward one of the team's major goals — a Jan. 1 bowl appearance. Johnson is proud of his squad and believes that each of them will be a top athlete at Oregon in the years to come.

"I was blessed this year because I had great kids to work with," Johnson said. "They're all super people and competitors. Watch out in the years to come because these guys are all going to be fine, fine players and fine people to be around."



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