

COTTON BOWL

OREGON VS COLORADO

Ducks look to weave a victory at the Cotton Bowl

■ **GAME PREVIEW:** The Ducks and Buffaloes meet in a bowl game for the first time ever

By Andrea DeYoung

Sports Reporter

When Oregon plays Colorado on New Year's Day, the Ducks are out to win and they mean business.

Last year was Oregon's Cinderella season. Despite losing to Penn State in the Rose Bowl, the loss was overshadowed by what the team had accomplished during the season. But this year, the Ducks don't want to lose in the Cotton Bowl.

Oregon finished the season with a 9-2 overall record and 6-2 in the Pacific-10 Conference. The year may not have seemed like a fairy tale, especially with losses at home against Stanford and Arizona State, but the Ducks are the highest nationally-ranked team in the conference and are playing in a second straight Jan. 1 bowl game.

The seventh-ranked Buffaloes went 9-2 on the year, including a 5-2 Big Eight Conference record. They lost to Kansas and No. 1 Nebraska, but beat Kansas State in the last week of the season to earn a Cotton Bowl invitation.

Colorado beat Fresno State 41-30 at the Aloha Bowl in 1993, and downed Notre Dame 41-24 at the Fiesta Bowl last year.

The Ducks and the Buffaloes played every year between 1984 and 1987, and the Ducks won three of the four games. The two teams have not, however, played each other since.

The Buffaloes had seven players named to the All-Big Eight first team, including offensive guard Heath Irwin and center Bryan Stoltenberg, both of who were also given All-American honors. Cornerback T.J. Cunningham, also a first-team All-Big Eight member, set a school record with 19 pass deflections this past season — his first year at the cornerback position.

Oregon had three players named to the All-Pac-10 first team. Senior linebacker Jeremy Asher and senior cornerback Alex Molden received honors for their defensive duties while senior running back Ricky Whittle was honored for his play on both offense and special teams. Molden was the only Duck to be named to the All-America team.

Junior quarterback Tony Graziani finished the year ranked eighth in total offense in the nation with 272.9 yards per game and Whittle was ranked 12th in all-purpose yards with 164 per game. Freshman kicker Josh Smith came in ninth in the nation in field goals with 14 in 10 games. Senior flanker Cristin McLemore not only broke several school records, but also ranked 17th in receiving yardage with 91.8 yards per game.

Gang Green ended the year ranked 12th in total defense, allowing only 292.2 yards per game. Asher led the team with 107 total tackles and senior inside linebacker Rich Ruhl had 84. Sophomore cornerback Kenny Wheaton caught four interceptions and returned them for 107 yards.

For the twelve seniors, this will mark their final game in an Oregon uniform. After the Civil War game, Molden said it was important to him personally to go to a third bowl game.

"I feel really good about going to three bowl games," Molden said. "The Independence Bowl, the grand daddy, and now we're going to another Jan. 1 bowl game. I feel really good about this team and especially about this senior class."

According to Whittle, the players graduating this year had a lot to do with making the Ducks into a team that goes to major bowl games.

"I can look back," Whittle said, "and say that the class of '91, the class I came in with, helped establish Oregon as a contending team."

Last year's experience in

COTTON BOWL

No. 12 Oregon Ducks vs. No. 7 Colorado Buffaloes

■ Date: January 1st, 1995

■ Time: 10:30 am

■ Television: CBS

Pasadena left the team with a bitter taste in its mouth. Despite a strong game, the Ducks were overpowered by the Nittany Lions. Many players acknowledge the fact that the team was a bit awestruck by what was going

on at the Rose Bowl, but they also believe that experience will help them to take care of business this year.

"We're going to respond more than we did last year," sophomore offensive tackle David Weber said. "We're used to these big bowl games. We're looking at this as a business trip. I don't think that our team will get caught up in the hoopla this year."

There are a few players who did not get to experience the Rose Bowl last year. But freshman kicker Josh Smith says that

the older players will help keep the younger players' feet on the ground.

"There's going to be a huge part of me saying 'Oh my God, where am I at?' and that sort of thing," Smith said. "But the attitude on the team is we go down and we do our job and we execute and we'll be fine. There's a confidence on the team of each other that we're going to pull it through for each other."

The Ducks and the Buffaloes will face off on New Year's Day at 10:30 a.m. PST in the 60th annual Cotton Bowl Classic.



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