

Latimer emerges as potent weapon

The redshirt freshman tailback did not play in the first two games, but has been climbing the depth chart in recent weeks

By Andrea DeYoung
Assistant Sports Editor

Derien Latimer. Remember that name.

At any one time, Oregon boasts at least five players on the depth chart at tailback. But four games into the season, four players have gone down with injuries. Through all this, the one still standing is Latimer.

The redshirt freshman from Colorado Springs, Colo., spent the first two games pacing the sidelines, waiting for his chance to play. He got in for a couple of plays against Colorado State, but didn't make a significant impact.

"It was real difficult the first two or three games," Latimer said. "Like in the Fresno State game when I was just walking up and down the sidelines wondering if I was going to get in, it was real difficult. But it's something that you have to deal with. It's a part of college football. Everyone can't play. However long it was going to take I was willing to wait."

But Latimer didn't have to wait long. In the second half of the Washington State game, he was called in as the Ducks attempted to make a comeback. On six carries, Latimer amassed 64 yards and scored two touchdowns, helping bring Oregon within striking distance of the Cougars. Although the Ducks ultimately lost the game, Latimer was able to show off his talents.

"I was just happy to get in because in the Colorado State game I just got in two or three plays, so I was real hungry to get in," he said. "I was glad I took the most of the opportunity because coach is always talking about somebody stepping up and that's what I did."

Head coach Mike Bellotti liked what he saw in Latimer against the Cougars.

"Derien took advantage of the opportunity and responded very well," Bellotti said. "He ran with good vision, good power and he kept his legs moving. He answered some of the questions we had about him as a running back. I was very impressed and I liked what I saw."

It is still unclear how much playing time Latimer will get this season. Although more players get the ball under the "back-by-committee" scheme, the redshirt freshmen aren't always on the top of the depth chart. But Latimer understands that he has to wait his turn.

"I just came in one game as a back up and I just happened to do good," he said. "Just because I led the team this game doesn't mean I should start. I'm hoping that I proved a little bit that I can play this game."

The Oregon coaches already knew Latimer could play the game. He was one of the all-time leading rushers in the history of high school football. In his senior season he rushed for 300 yards in six different games and twice scored six touchdowns. He racked up a senior season total of 3,150 yards and ended his high school career with

5,284 yards on 568 carries and 63 touchdowns.

Although Oregon wanted Latimer, the program was unfamiliar to him.

"When I first came on my recruiting trip I didn't know anything about this program," Latimer said. "I didn't even know who the head coach was."

"When I came here, I pretty much fell in love with this place. There was a good group of guys here who seemed to be interested in a lot of things. I thought that was the kind of people I wanted to be around."

Although he spent last year adjusting to the collegiate program, Latimer admits that he is still discovering what his talents are and what he contributes to the Ducks.

"I really don't know what I bring to the table because I really just played my first game," he said. "I haven't really found myself yet."

But Latimer already knows what it's going to take to get things done.

"I can't try to do anything that's not within myself," he said. "Running the ball is either something that you have or you don't. There are a lot of other things that come around that you have to deal with like blocking and catching."

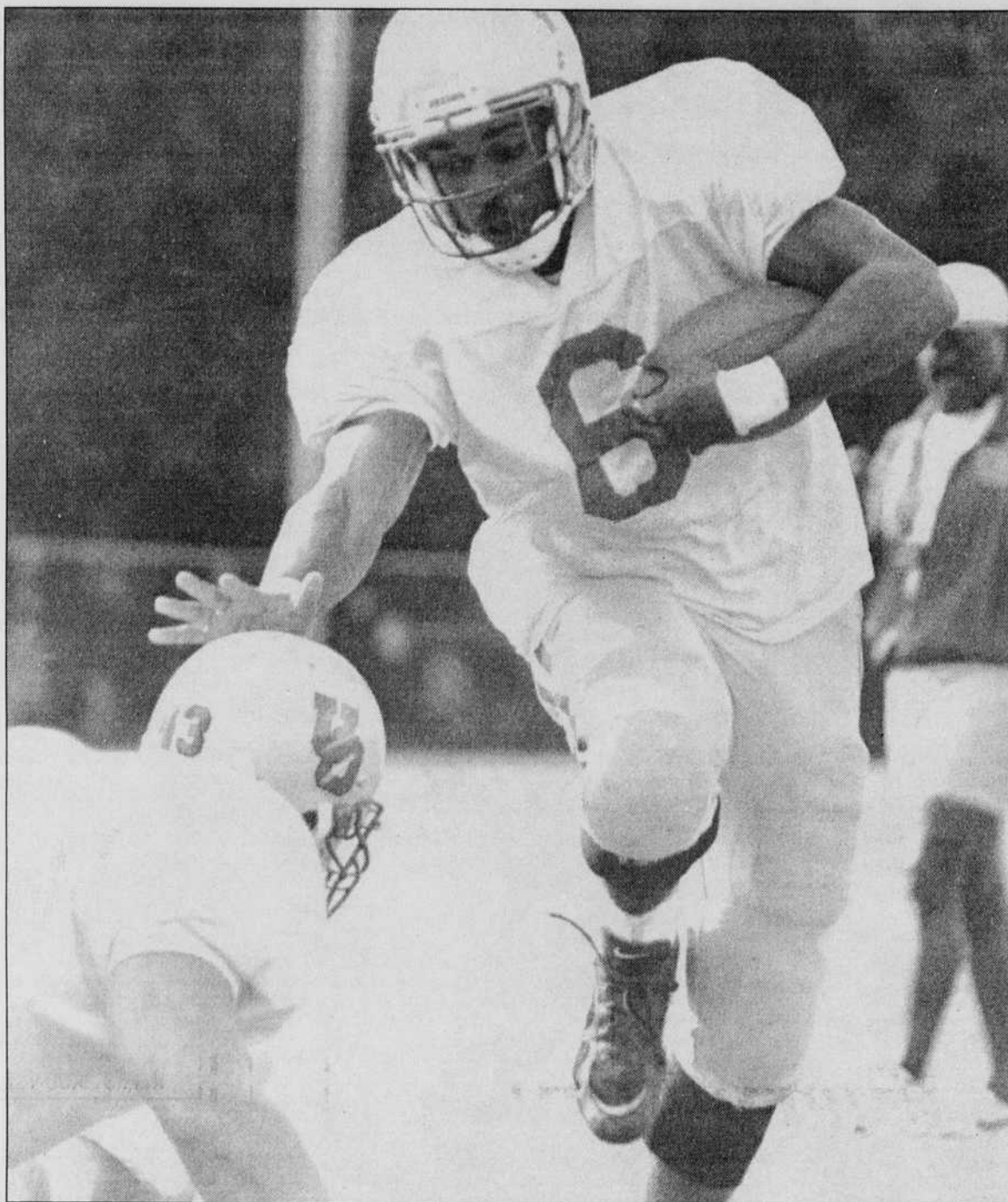
Latimer admits that blocking is still one of his weaknesses, but at 5-11, 207 lbs., his size can only help him tune his skills.

"Supposedly I am supposed to be able to take a beating," he said.

And Latimer can expect to take a beating this weekend if he plays against Arizona State. With David Crump and

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— Derien Latimer
UO Tailback



MARK McTYRE/Emerald

Redshirt freshman Derien Latimer was the Ducks' leading rusher against Washington State and should see playing time against Arizona State.

Defense lifts ASU to top of the Pac-10

■ **SUN DEVILS:** Derrick Rodgers and the hard-hitting Arizona State crew may be trouble for the Ducks

By Ryan Halvorsen
Sports Reporter

Last season, Arizona State's defense was its greatest weakness, but after turning things around this year, defense is its biggest asset.

In 1995, the Sun Devils finished dead last in the Pacific-10 Conference in total defense. In a dramatic turnaround from last season, they are now leading the conference in total defense, second against the run and fifth against the pass.

Arizona State's defensive coordinator, Phil Snow, credits their summer strength and conditioning program and a building sense of confidence among the defensive players for the turnaround.

"Last year, we had eight [defensive] starters that had never played in a Pac-10 football game," Snow said. "This year we have eight returning starters."

The main reason why the Sun Devils have been catapulted into the sixth position on the Associated Press' latest poll is a surprisingly dominant defensive line and an imposing group of

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Gang Green recharges after WSU thumping

■ **DEFENSE:** The Ducks struggle with new players, a lack of communication and the weight of a nickname as they attempt to learn a new defense

By Chris Hansen
Sports Reporter

Is Gang Green dead?

With a defense that surrendered 55 points in last weekend's loss to Washington State and has a national ranking of 102 out of 111 Division I-A schools giving up an average of 447 yards and 35 points per game, the answer to that question might be as obvious as one of the Ducks' 25 missed tackles committed against the Cougars.

Except when the question is posed to the players.

"I've been part of Gang Green for three years and I'm still here, I'm not dead," said senior outside linebacker Reggie Jordan, stating the obvious both literally and figuratively. Jordan has been one of the stand-out performers in the Ducks' first four games recording 23 tackles, including three quarterback sacks.

"Mark Schmidt, BJ (Bryant Jackson), we're all here and we've been doing this defense," said Jordan referring to fellow seniors and Gang Green veterans. "It's early in the season and people have to remember

that. I know the expectation level is high, but this team is young and we're going to be OK."

"When things are going good and we are winning, we're Gang Green," said junior cornerback Kenny Wheaton. "When we lose, or things are not so good, we're not Gang Green. That is just some bandwagon fans and the media's opinion."

But head coach Mike Bellotti said this is just a case of mistaken identity. After all, most of the players that formed the original Gang Green defense are no longer with the team.

"Gang Green was a group of kids that came in together and the majority of those kids are gone," said Bellotti. "Whether this is Gang Green II or it comes up with some other name that fits this group remains to be seen."

But the fact remains, the defensive problems the Ducks are having this year are about more than just a catchy nickname.

Defensive coordinator Rich Stubler's un-

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