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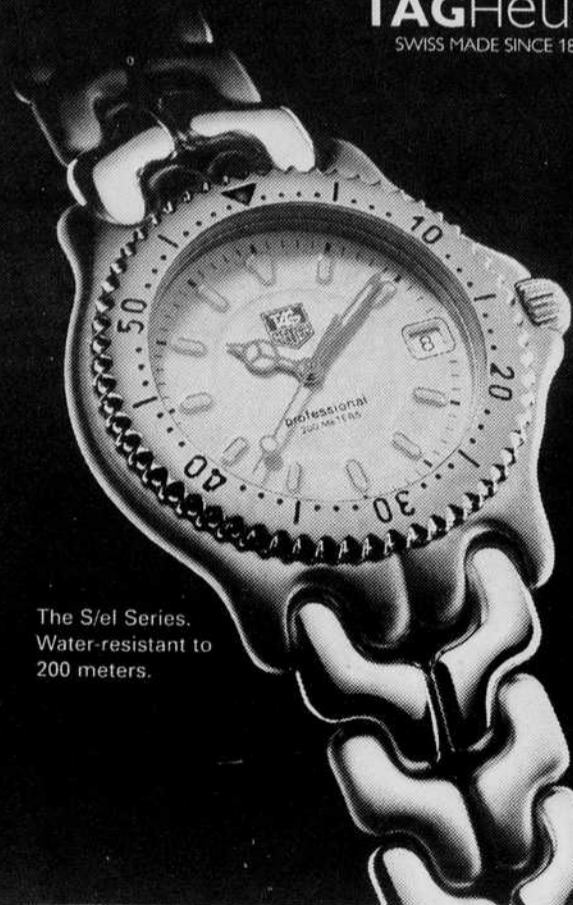
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## 'The Pick' made Wheaton a hero

■ **WHEATON:** The cornerback's last-minute interception has earned its place in history

By Chris Hansen  
Sports Reporter

It can be described as the most important play for Oregon football in the past three seasons. It is the play that is the most enduring to Duck fans young and old. It is the play that served as the catalyst for the Ducks in their 1994 Rose Bowl season.

And it was the play that catapulted a shy, redshirt freshman cornerback into Oregon football superstardom.

The play, of course, was 'The Pick.'

The player, equally as obvious, was Kenny Wheaton.

The fact that it came against the most-hated Washington Huskies was only icing on the cake.

On Oct. 22, 1994, Wheaton stepped in front of Washington quarterback Damon Huard's pass at the Oregon 3-yard line and took off 97 yards down the Oregon sideline and into the end zone, ending the game and sealing the

Ducks' 31-20 victory.

"I still think about," said Wheaton, now in his junior year. "I will always think about it. It was a great play. A big play. It made great things happen."

He couldn't be more right. Not only did great things happen for the Ducks, but great things happened for Wheaton, who is now recognized as the premiere cornerback in the Pacific-10 Conference.

"I think most of the media hype that I received was because the play came against Washington," Wheaton said. "I would have been just as happy if the play came against another team. But the fans around Eugene made such a big deal because it came against the Huskies."

Wheaton was back home in Phoenix last weekend using Oregon's bye week to get some much-needed rest. He spent Saturday afternoon in front of the television watching college football and doing a little self-reflection.

"It hurt me to sit there and watch Pac-10 games and college games," he said. "I was thinking to myself 'Is this what I want to be doing come bowl time?' If there is

a way for us to redeem our bowl chances it is to win the last four games. And you can bet that I'm going to put it all out."

There is no better place for Wheaton to attempt to redeem the season than at the site of his greatest glory: A late October game, at home against the Huskies. That Wheaton is threatening to "put it all out" is something that Washington should be taking very seriously.

"For the fans, it's a big game," Wheaton said. "And that helps us. It would be hard to act as if we didn't notice or listen to the hype because we do."

And what Wheaton also noticed was Husky head coach Jim Lambright's biting comments about the Ducks as he tried to jockey his team into position for a Cotton Bowl berth last season even though Oregon was the victor in Seattle in last season's match-up.

"Comments like that show people up in Seattle don't respect us," Wheaton said. "That is something we can take as a team and use to motivate us."

As if Wheaton and the Ducks need any more motivation when it comes to facing the Huskies.

## Figueras: Junior frustrated by coaches

■ **Continued from page 2B**

But Figueras claims he is ready to play and is baffled when younger guys are continually getting the starting nod ahead of him. Redshirt freshmen such as Brandon McLemore, Michael Fletcher, Chris Young and even Justin Wilcox — who was converted from quarterback to safety during fall two-a-days — have all started ahead of the junior.

"It's frustrating. They obviously feel that everybody on the team is better than me at the position," Figueras said. "The other guys have done great jobs. I'm not going to take anything away from what they have done. I just feel I should be playing," he added.

Even if Figueras was healthy enough to play, defensive coordinator and secondary coach Rich Stubler isn't exactly disappointed with the performance of the other safeties. McLemore and Wilcox were both having a good season until they went down with injuries. Both are expected to play this weekend. Young has started the last two games and has been a stand-out performer.

"Young is playing very well," Stubler said. "He is doing a lot of good things for us."

But Stubler said although Figueras hasn't been

healthy enough to play, he is making progress.

"You can't play defensive back if you can't turn and do things fluidly," Stubler said. "He understands that. But the last two or three weeks he has really turned a corner."

Bellotti has also noticed glimpses of Figueras returning to his past form.

"He made a play in practice on Tuesday that made me think of the Jaiya of last year — when he would be aggressive and make plays," Bellotti said. "It got me excited."

What would make Figueras excited is just being given a shot to play.

"It's hard to stand around and watch because I know I can play, and I know I can do the job," he said. "I guess all I can do is try to improve until I get my time to play."

That time is one that Bellotti is just as anxious for. "Given our [injury] situation at safety," Bellotti said, "I am hopeful that Jaiya can regain the same form he had last year."

It was a form prone to making big plays, one that the Ducks have sorely missed this season, for whatever the reason.

## Huard: Brock responds to added pressure

■ **Continued from page 2B**

be a mediator between the Huskies and the Seattle Seahawks for Football Northwest. The two talk almost every night, Huard said, and that allows Damon to give his younger brother and replacement a little friendly advice from time to time.

"Brock is a great player," Damon said. "Obviously he has made his own name this year and it is definitely fun watching him. I would like to think that in starting for three years I showed him some things."

Huard witnessed both the positive and negative side of seeing his older brother play while he watched from the sidelines, and in the past two seasons there weren't a lot of positive things to see when

Damon went up against the Ducks. Two years ago Damon threw the historic pass that Kenny Wheaton returned for a touchdown, catapulting the Ducks into the Rose Bowl and dumping the Huskies out of the race. He put on a such a lack-luster performance in Seattle last season that he received a chorus of boos from his own fans for it.

"That was really tough," Brock said. "It was one of the hardest years emotionally on me. It was tough having to stand out there and listen to [Damon] get booed."

Even though he's only a freshman, Brock has stepped up under pressure situations this year and showed that he can be a team leader. He has turned 55 percent of third downs into first downs and is two-for-two on fourth-

down attempts.

"[Huard] is a pretty good football player," said Oregon defensive coordinator Rich Stubler. "He has a tremendous arm and has great poise for a freshman."

Huard is also well aware of that one guy who made his brother look bad two seasons ago, and will keep an eye out for him at all times.

"Kenny Wheaton is very talented," Brock said. "He is a guy that can really take your receivers away. He's the heart and soul of the team."

Huard definitely doesn't want to repeat the past, but instead hopes to turn the Huard name into a name that can break the Oregon winning streak against Washington.



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