

Kevin Parker (24) celebrates with Pat Johnson after Johnson returned a punt for a touchdown against Arizona. Even though the score was called back due to a penalty, the special teams had a great overall game.

Punting, returns key to victory

■ **SPECIAL TEAMS:** *The Ducks commit to stepping up their play to win games*

By **Andrea De Young**
Assistant Sports Editor

What's so special about special teams? Not much unless you consider what happened last week against Arizona.

Oregon punter Josh Bidwell only punted three times, but averaged 48.3 yards per punt. In kickoff returns, Pat Johnson, Kevin Parker and other members of the special team combined for 124 yards on six returns.

All of this was significant for the Ducks, who had been on a five-game losing streak, in accomplishing their first Pacific-10 Conference win. Field position was key for both the Oregon defense, which has struggled at times to keep opponents out of the end zone, and the Oregon offense, which has had problems moving the ball down the field and into scoring position.

On its first six possessions against the Wildcats, Oregon started no farther back than its own 27-yard line and twice began a scoring drive in Arizona territory. It's no coincidence that four of these drives ended in touchdowns, and the other two had the potential to, but resulted in turnovers.

Parker said the Ducks may have taken a while to get warm, but the game against Arizona proved what the special teams can really do.

"We started off real slow, but we made a commitment to ourselves that special teams needs to step-up, especially in the Pac-10 [games]," Parker said. "Last week's game we needed to get the ball past the 50 [yard line] every time because they had a good defense, and we wanted good field position. We stuttered at times, but I think now everybody knows what we need to do to get it done."

Parker began the game for Oregon's offense with a 36-yard return, which gave the Ducks a starting position at the Arizona 49-yard line. He followed that with returns of nine and 11 yards.

Parker's partner in special teams crime, Johnson, took the second Arizona kickoff and ran until he was brought down 43 yards later at the Wildcats' 42-yard line. After a 14-yard return in the second quarter, Johnson didn't get a kick again until the end of the fourth quarter. When Matt Peyton punted the ball to Johnson, who was standing at the Arizona 48-yard line, the track star/football player took the ball and ran and dodged his way into the end zone. Although the score was brought back because of an Oregon penalty, Johnson showed Oregon fans once again just how explosive he can be.

"[It was frustrating] in a way because I would have had another touchdown," Johnson said. "But I know I can do it again whenever. I just need to get the opportunity because now hardly

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— **Kevin Parker**
UO kick returner

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anybody wants to kick it to me. In a way it's frustrating because I very seldom get a lot of chances because they always kick the ball away from me. It just so happens that somebody clipped on it, but it's alright."

On the other side of the special teams is Bidwell. The former reserve receiver spent time over the summer working with a professional kicker and has steadily improved throughout the season. But the Arizona game was one of the best of his kicking career, even though his foot only touched the ball three times.

Bidwell's longest punt this year was 57 yards. Against Arizona his first punt was for 55 yards, pinning the Wildcat offense at its own three-yard line. The second was for 50 yards and the third for 40 yards, which put the Wildcats at their own eight-yard line.

For this team with so many new players on its defense, field position can be key.

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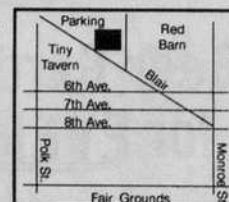
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