

Schedule: Ducks face Huskies in Seattle

Continued from Page 7
stances each produced wins, the seasons differed dramatically after the openers.

In 1991, Oregon began the season with a 40-14 drubbing of Washington State at Autzen Stadium, but struggled to a 3-8 overall record and 1-7 in the Pac-10.

In 1989, however, the Ducks defeated California 35-19 to open the season on its way to an 8-4 overall record, 5-3 in the Pac-10 and a berth in the Independence Bowl, its first postseason appearance in 26 years.

While winning a conference game to begin a season may or may not mean success later in the season, last season's opener between Washington and Arizona State was a perfect example of the winner getting ahead of the pack while the loser never caught up.

The Sun Devils defeated the Huskies 45-42 in Tempe, Ariz., and then went undefeated in the conference and earned a Rose Bowl berth.

The Huskies, meanwhile, finished second in the Pac-10 with just the season-opening blemish on its conference record.

This season's Rose-Arizona game may not have Rose Bowl implications, but it is tremendously important for each team in order to get early momentum in the conference and also to gauge the off-season improvement.

While Bellotti may be a bit skeptical about starting the season with a conference game, several players are excited about the opportunity.

"I'm glad we play Arizona first because we've got to come out and play the first game," split end Pat Johnson said. "We can't just play 70 percent and win."

Last season, the Ducks started with three non-conference wins by doing just enough to get by in each game, then lost their first five Pac-10 games.

Johnson said that by playing an early conference game, the Ducks will know what to expect when conference play heats up.

Quarterback Jason Maas, who is battling Akili Smith for the starting spot, said he too is excited about opening the season with a conference game.

"To start out with Arizona is a great feeling," Maas said. "And for me personally, being from Arizona, there's not another team I'd rather play to start the season. If you can't get up for that, then you're about dead."

"Everything's on the line that first game. It's just great to go through fall camp intense like that."

As a result of the early conference game, the Ducks' schedule has an entirely different look to it than in the past few seasons.

After the Arizona game, they play non-conference games at Nevada and at home against Fresno State before diving back into the Pac-10 schedule for three games starting at Stanford Sept. 27.

They will enjoy a break from the conference race with a non-conference game against Utah on Oct. 18 in their homecoming game at Autzen Stadium.

The Ducks then go out on the road for three straight games, including a Nov. 8 match-up against rival and Pac-10 title favorite Washington.

Oregon closes the season Nov. 22 with the Civil War game at home against Oregon State.

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