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Offense: Keeping WSU offense off the field UO's key

■ Continued from Page 1B

Washington State quarterback Ryan Leaf averages 328 all-purpose yards per game, ranking him first in the conference and fourth in the nation. Running back Michael Black averages 104 rushing yards and the Cougar offense as a whole averages 498 yards.

Match that against a defense that is giving up 307 yards a game in the air and 135 on the ground, and you get what could be a long day for the Oregon defense.

"Numbers don't mean much to me," said Oregon cornerback Rashad Bauman. "We can play with anybody you put in front of us. We know what we have to do to beat Washington State. We need to be physical and play a more solid mental game than we did against Stanford."

But talk, just like numbers, don't mean anything if performance doesn't follow.

The key to success for the Ducks has to be whether or not they can stop Leaf and prevent the big plays that hurt them against Stanford.

The question is, How will Oregon do that?

"The only way I know how to stop Ryan Leaf," Bellotti said. "Is to keep him off the field. To do that, we have to run the ball a lot. The best way to stop a good offense is to not let them get on the field."

But when the Cougar offense is on the field, Leaf will most likely be facing a reinforced Oregon secondary.

"We've been working on more alignments and sticking to our assignments," said Oregon defensive back Brandon McLemore.

"We need to do a better job against our own man and not worry about the next guy's man. Their formations and the different types of offenses they will run will dictate what we use on the field. But I expect we will be playing in the nickel and dime defense a lot."

Washington State isn't going to have it easy on defense either. The Oregon offense has progressively improved in each of its four games, capping it off with a 49-point, seven-touchdown performance in the loss to Stanford.

Quarterbacks Jason Maas and Akili Smith are combining for 255.5 yards passing a game, while tailback Saladin McCullough is rushing for 104.8. McCullough is also averaging 200.7 all-purpose yards, eighth best in the country.

But then again, the Cougars aren't struggling on defense the way the Ducks are, giving up an average of 298.5 yards.

"I'm not hoping for a shootout, but I'm thinking there just might be one," Leaf said. "I want us to go out there and play a solid, error-free game. The way our defense is playing now, hopefully they can shut down Oregon's offense. But that's easier said than done considering the way they played against Stanford."

Lost in all the numbers, said Washington State head coach Mike Price, is the rivalry that has developed between these two teams over the years.

"There is a natural rivalry because of our borders," Price said. "We've crossed over in recruiting with a numbers of players. We've competed with them a number of times. It means a lot to the fans to win, to some it is more than the Apple Cup."

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