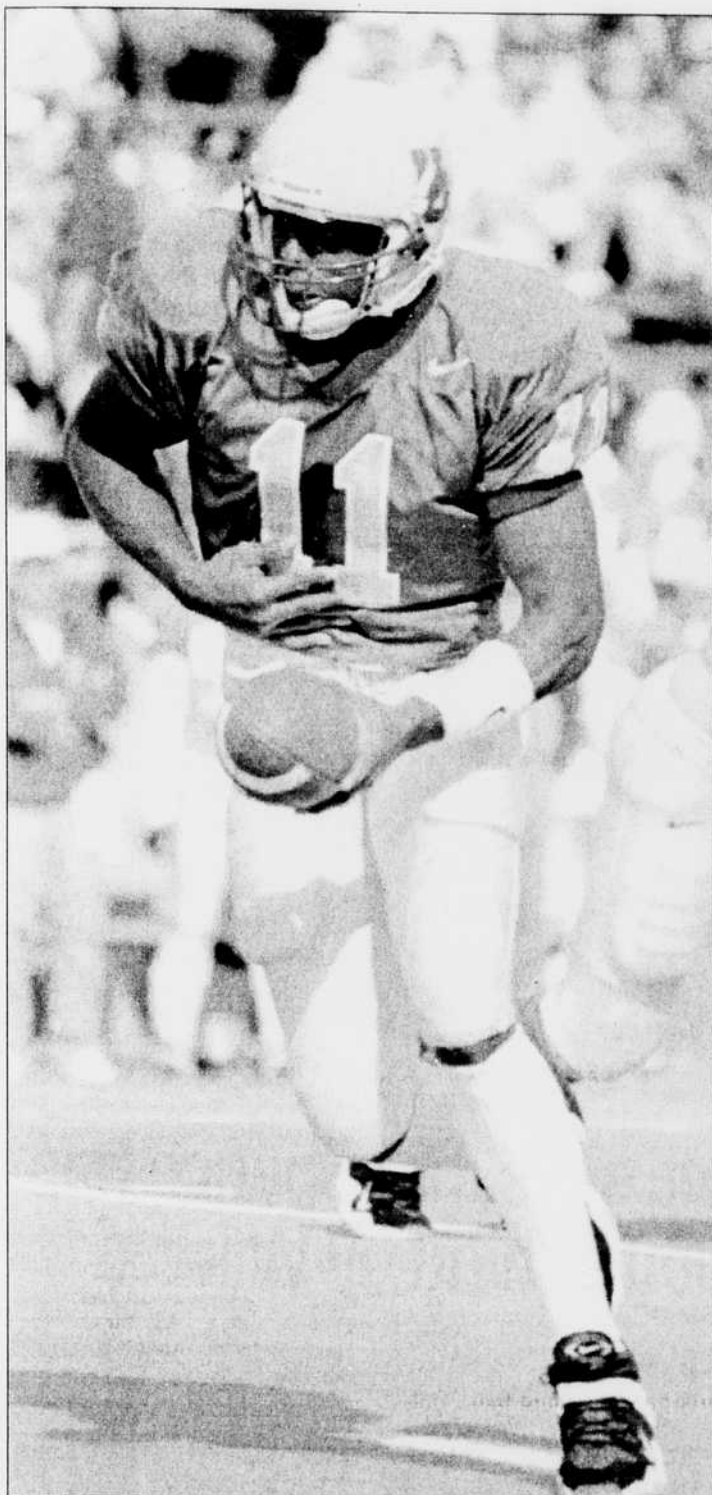




CHAD PATTESON/Emerald

Quarterback Akili Smith injured his shoulder against UCLA and did not practice until Wednesday. However, he is expected to play.

Ducks: Utah offers chance for improvement

Continued from Page 1B

points on the board. Quarterback Akili Smith looked sharp in the first half of last week's loss to UCLA, leading the offense to 17 points. But a sore right shoulder and some defensive adjustments limited Smith and the offense to only one second-half touchdown.

Although Smith's shoulder is still sore, he will play on Saturday. As usual, the decision on who is going to start at quarterback for the Ducks won't be made until Friday.

Either way, the offense could be in for a surprise against a Utah defense that ranks 32nd in the nation, allowing an average of 314 yards and 18.3 points a game. Match that against Oregon's offense that averages 400.3 and 29.3.

But then again, the Utes haven't faced an offense as quick and deep as Oregon's.

"They looked very athletic on film, a big defensive front," Bellotti said.

The Utah offense, on the other hand, is struggling mightily.

"Offensively, I'm in a quandary right now," summed up Utah head coach Ron McBride. "We've got no push up front at all. We don't knock anyone off the line, our wide receivers don't catch balls that they should and the quarterbacks don't execute."

If the Utes offense is only half as bad as McBride claims — and it may be if 268-pound runningback Chris Fuamatu Ma'afala sits out with a bad ankle — the Ducks should have a chance to work out some problems on defense.

"We have to get better," said Bellotti of his 97th ranked defense. "It is a matter of shedding blocks and tackling. It is difficult because in the last two games we would play well for a series and go three and out" but then give up a long drive or a big play.

Playing with emotion is what keys the Oregon defense and it is something that has been missing during the fourth quarter of the last two games when the Ducks gave up crucial scoring drives.

"The hard part is understanding how to keep the pressure and intensity up," Bellotti said. "I think a great deal of that is experience and a lack of focus, and I think our ability to maintain excellence is a matter of experience."

It is also a matter of playing error-free football, something both teams have been unable to do in recent weeks and something that Bellotti predicted would play a role in the game's outcome.

"The team that stops making mistakes is going to walk away from Autzen Stadium with a win," he said.



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