

Oregon Daily Emerald

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Robinson hopes USC can climb out of slump

The Trojans lack continuity at two main positions, head coach John Robinson says

By John Nadel
The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Southern California has skill-position players who are usually among the best in the Pacific-10 Conference, and often in the country as well. That's clearly not the case this year.

Never was that more evident than last Saturday in Seattle, where the Trojans lost to No. 6 Washington 27-0. It was the first shutout for a USC team since 1990; the first in John Robinson's 12 years in two stints as head coach, and only the fourth time the Trojans have been blanked since 1967.

Just to show how difficult things are, Robinson was unable to identify his starters at quarterback and tailback on Tuesday for Saturday's game against Stanford at the Los Angeles Coliseum.

When asked if it was tough for him to deal with the difficulties he's had to deal with at those positions this season, Robinson smiled and replied, "I think that's a good word for it, yeah. We've struggled offensively with that and those are two critical positions. It just doesn't add up to a successful offensive team when your two main positions don't have continuity."

Sophomore John Fox has taken most of the snaps at quarterback, but freshman Mike Van Raaphorst started the game at Washington, with Fox relieving him in the second half. Neither was successful, although Van Raaphorst was victimized by several drops.

USC is averaging just 117.8 yards rushing per game. Leading rusher Delon Washington has been bothered by an arthritic knee; second-leading rusher Malaefou MacKenzie, a freshman, has been hampered by a sprained shoulder, and one-time starter LaVale Woods is sidelined with a sprained ankle.

Robinson said he doesn't expect MacKenzie to play against Stanford; Woods might see some action; and free safety Chad Morton

was being moved to tailback for the time being and will get some playing time against the Cardinal.

"I don't think he'll start, but he'll play," Robinson said when asked about Morton's status. Morton, a 5-foot-8, 180-pound sophomore, gained 171 yards on 26 carries last season.

When asked who will start at quarterback, Robinson said, "We'll make a decision in the next couple of days."

Robinson also said fullback Ted Lacenda is probably sidelined for the rest of the year because of an injured shoulder. Lacenda, used as a lead blocker, didn't make the trip to Washington, and USC rushed for only 71 yards against the Huskies.

"There aren't a lot of [offensive players] making plays," Robinson said. "Our receivers didn't make the plays last week. On offense, when you're unable to execute the things you want to do, you're stymied."

About Fox and Van Raaphorst, Robinson said, "They're just two young guys trying to get better. I don't think there are any negatives. Unfortunately, they're suffering the residue of other problems offensively. In the skill position, there just haven't been as many plays as we had hoped."

Even with all the problems, USC (4-4, 2-3 Pac-10) can still qualify for a bowl game by winning two of its final three games.

That's not a stretch, since the Trojans are slight favorites over Stanford (4-4, 2-3), and figure to be favored at Oregon State on Nov. 15. Then comes USC's annual battle with 10th-ranked UCLA at the Coliseum on Nov. 22.

Robinson said last month — after USC was creamed 35-7 by Arizona State — that he would step down at the end of the season if the Trojans didn't show significant improvement. They responded by beating Notre Dame and Oregon before losing to Washington.

Rider faces \$1,000 fine after missing practice

Coach Mike Dunleavy says the problem with Isaiah Rider is minor

The Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Problem-plagued Isaiah Rider has been fined \$1,000 by the Portland Trail Blazers for missing a practice following a two-game suspension.

Coach Mike Dunleavy said there was no excuse for Rider failing to check on a change of site for a Sunday practice that was rescheduled.

"It's not good for our team," Dunleavy said, adding that he considered it a minor problem.

"I'm not going to make anything more out of it than it is, as far as it being a slap in the face or something personal."

Rider was scheduled to start in his first game of the season Tuesday night against Minnesota after NBA commissioner David Stern had suspended him for two games for a marijuana conviction and a

no-contest plea on illegal possession of cellular phones.

P.J. Carlesimo, Portland's coach last season, generally made players who missed a practice or a game-day shootaround sit out the first quarter of the next game. On that basis, Carlesimo kept Rider out of the starting lineup four times last season.

But once, after Rider had walked out of a practice, Carlesimo suspended him for a game.

"You don't suspend guys for missing practice — I've never heard of that," Dunleavy said. "Multiple offenses, maybe."

George Glymph, director of player development for the Blazers, said Rider was eager to get back into action after working out Saturday.

"He worked hard and was so positive," Glymph said. "He was chomping at the bit to get back, and he was talking about the [Minnesota] game."

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