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Oregon State adjusting slowly to new offense

Improvement on offense will be an emphasis for the Beavers in the future, Mike Riley says

By Joel Hood
 Sports Reporter

Few seasons in Beaver lore have been as highly anticipated as this season — a new head coach, new players, new uniforms and a new pass-first philosophy on offense.

Moreover, Oregon State had an experienced quarterback to lead the team to its first winning season since 1970 and (gasp) a possible bowl game at the end of the season.

So what happened?

The story of Oregon State's season can be told in the trenches. In games when the Beavers have been able to control the line of scrimmage and run the ball, they are successful — by Beaver standards.

Witness Oregon State's season-opening 37-7 route of North Texas. The Beavers (3-7 overall, 0-7 Pacific-10 Conference) were able to control the tempo of the game and maintain momentum. They rushed for a season-high 197 yards in 40 carries and put the game well out of reach in the first half.

Led by multi-purpose quarterback Tim Alexander, who ranks sixth in the Pac-10 in total offense, Oregon State ran for more than 100 yards in each of its three victories this season.

"I think we have done a good job this season adjusting to a new offensive system," head coach Mike Riley said. "That is a process that is never really completed, you just hope the team continues to improve. As far as productivity, we don't always show it."

But when the ground attack goes, so go the Beavers.

Oregon State was not able to run the ball in six of its seven conference games this season. It rushed for only 20 yards against Arizona State, 32 against UCLA, 48 against Washington, 42 against Arizona and 29 last week against Southern California. Not surprisingly, those were five lopsided conference losses for Oregon State.

However, the Beavers may get a reprieve Saturday when their offense lines up against Oregon and the Pac-10's worst run defense.

"We haven't been able to run the ball the way we would have liked," Riley said. "But we've never been a real good running team. That's going to be a major

Oregon State

■ 1997 SEASON: 3-7, 0-7	
vs. North Texas (W)	33-7
vs. Stanford (L)	27-24
vs. Arizona State (L)	13-10
vs. San Jose State (W)	26-12
vs. Utah State (W)	24-16
at UCLA (L)	34-10
vs. Washington (L)	45-17
at California (L)	33-14
at Arizona (L)	27-7
vs. USC (L)	23-0

■ Has lost 15 straight road games

■ Has lost 11 straight Pac-10 games

■ The Beavers have been held under 100 yards rushing the past five games

■ Has gone 60-232-6 since last winning season in 1970

emphasis for us in the future.

"There is no question that we need to improve on the offensive side of the ball. We need to improve the running game and find ways to make the offense more balanced."

Oregon State has a defense as solid as any in the Pac-10, but quarterback sacks have been hard to come by since the team entered its conference schedule. The defense produced a total of 23 sacks in its first five games this season. Since that time, the Beavers have only recorded five sacks and were shutout by both Arizona and USC.

But there have been major signs of improvement, Riley said.

Inoke Breckterfield has dominated the defensive line for the Beavers this season. Despite constant double-teaming, the 5-foot-11, 243-pound junior leads Oregon State with six sacks, ranks second in the conference in tackles for a loss and is regarded as the team's best run stopper.

The undersized, but speedy defensive line has recorded 21 of the Beavers' 26 sacks and has been able to contain many of the Pac-10's best offenses, including UCLA and USC, which Oregon State held to just over 100 yards on the ground.

"We have done some good things on defense this season," Riley said. "We played real well against Arizona State and Stanford, and I think we hung in there against Washington. Our defensive front has definitely shown improvement."

Then there is the Oregon State

Turn to OSU, Page 9B

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Frank: Valley Football Center will draw more recruits to OSU

■ Continued from Page 2B
 bowl games, it was the first couple of recruiting classes following the completion of the Casanova Center.

Along with the new facilities, new head coach Mike Riley has breathed new life into the Beaver program by ridding it of the option and bringing in the passing game.

The improvement can already be seen.

Three-point losses to the now-dominating Arizona State Sun

Devils and Stanford, a game the Beavers were within minutes of pulling out, are not flukes. This program is finally on the way up.

It is now just a matter of playing well on a consistent basis and for an extended period of time, as displayed by their 20-point loss to Arizona.

The complete turnaround will come, but it won't be quickly.

Ryan Frank is the sports editor for the Emerald.

ODE CLASSIFIEDS... worth looking into!