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OSU can't escape losing streak

Six coaches later, the Oregon State Beavers have not had a winning season in 27 years

By Rob Moseley
Sports Reporter

Since 1970, the Nebraska Cornhuskers have won three NCAA Championships in football and have never won less than nine games in a season.

The Florida State Seminoles have won one national championship in that same time span, along with 13 bowl games, and have had just four losing seasons, none since Bobby Bowden became head coach in 1979.

In that same span, the Oregon State Beavers have had zero winning seasons and just one in which they won as many as five games, that coming in 1971.

Through five head coaches, six U.S. presidents and the fall of communism in the free world, the Beavers have managed as many as four wins just four times. In eight different seasons Oregon State has managed just a

single win, not including 1980's glorious 0-11 finish under former head coach-turned-Dallas Cowboys' special teams guru Joe Avezzano.

To be certain, rebuilding a struggling program in the winnow game of college football is not a task for the sleight of heart. Today's coaches are given a short window of opportunity in which to succeed. But when six men have been given the opportunity and five have failed, the question of what to do next is unavoidable.

The Boston University Terriers recently made the decision to axe their program. The school's president used the justification that, if schools like the University of Paris or Oxford have thrived for hundreds of years without a football team, so too can Boston.

No one is confusing Oregon State with Oxford, or even Boston for that matter, but when is enough enough?

"We've had a couple of great opportunities [this season] and we just didn't close it out against Stanford and Arizona State,"

Oregon State head coach Mike Riley said. "That's disappointing, but it's not anything that will frustrate us for long because we can see real improvement and great opportunity."

When asked where that improvement has come specifically, Riley couldn't say.

"Well, that's a good question," Riley said. "I'm not sure that we've steadily improved. I think overall when you look at, umm, probably just the ...," he paused for a few seconds and added, "that's a terrific question. I think we've been pretty steady actually. I'm not sure we've improved where it's noticeable."

So it seems Riley has become the sixth of six coaches since that 6-5 season in 1970 who has tried and failed to bring success to Corvallis. Granted, he is in his first season and has implemented a new offense for players he did not recruit, but the inability for even a team's coach to see marked improvement in the team he is leading speaks volumes about the program itself.

Beaver: QB admits career has been frustrating

Continued from Page 3B

By now, Alexander was to have been in his senior season, hardened by four seasons as the Beavers' main signal caller and right in the middle of the Beavers' resurgence. It was generally figured that with Alexander as the main man, Oregon State would finally be a force to reckon with in the Pacific-10 Conference.

That is the way it was supposed to be for Alexander.

But it just hasn't turned out that way.

Instead, the Beavers have won just 10 games, going 10-43 since Alexander joined the team.

His career got off to an ominous start when a broken collar bone put an end to his freshman season in 1994, which became a redshirt season for him. It couldn't have come at a worse time for Alexander, or the Beavers.

In the first extensive playing time of his career, against Southern California, Alexander rushed for 117 yards in 17 carries and had the Beavers in prime position to pull off the upset.

Until the injury, which occurred at the end of a 31-yard Alexander run that got the Beavers to the Trojans 14-yard line with USC leading just 27-19.

"It was hard," Alexander says. "It was my first game and it was a good experience. It felt good playing against a good team, and things were going good against them."

His fragile, 6-foot-1, 190-pound frame has been hampered by nagging injuries throughout his career, causing him to miss seven games the past two seasons.

The team was mired in turmoil and had lost the faith of even the most faithful Beavers fans as they failed to live up to expectations and went a combined 3-19 in 1995 and 1996.

Then came the coaching change, which saw Pettibone and his staff — with which Alexander was so enamored when he signed with the Beavers — leave, and Mike Riley come in following the 1996 season.

Alexander was forced to change his style from that of an option quarterback to more of a passing style in order to run the more conventional passing of

Alexander file



WHO:
OSU
quarterback
Tim Alexander

SIZE:
6-foot-1,
190 lbs.

STATS:

Has passed for 1,530 yards in 1997, seventh all-time on OSU single-season passing list ...
3,656 yards of total offense for his career ranks 3rd on the OSU all-time list

fense Riley brought to Oregon State.

The Beavers have struggled during the transition, and so has Alexander. He has passed for 1,530 yards, seventh on the Oregon State all-time single season list, but he has thrown 13 interceptions and only four touchdown passes.

"It's been tough," he says. "I think this is kind of a learning year for me and the team. It's been tough adjusting to a whole new system."

The offense has especially sputtered during the current five-game losing streak that has dropped their overall record to 3-7.

As the leader of the offense, Alexander accepts some responsibility for its struggles.

"As the quarterback, I think I have to take the blame when the offense struggles, or doesn't perform like it should," he says. "I don't know if [the blame] is fair or not, but it just comes with the territory."

Because of his mind-boggling athleticism, Alexander remains a threat to make a game-breaking play every time he touches the ball, a fact that has Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti concerned as he prepares his team to face Alexander and the Beavers in the Civil War on Saturday.

"I think Tim Alexander is one of the most dangerous quarterbacks in the conference," Bellotti says. "His development as a passer has been very, very impressive, and they've done a great job

with him in that regard.

"He's always been a great runner. I think he's probably more dangerous now running from the shotgun in pass formations where they spread you out and let him get more one-on-one matchups."

Despite his occasional struggles, the Ducks need to be aware of Alexander's emergence as a double threat.

"When people are dangerous two ways, you've just really got to stay assignment-oriented," Oregon linebacker Peter Sirmon says. "You do your own job, hope everyone does the same and that's the only way we can beat someone who's two dimensional."

The Beavers have put Alexander's overall athleticism to good use, using him at wide receiver and slot back at various times during the season. In fact, they may consider moving Alexander to another position next season, which is something he says he would do if it would help the team win.

Alexander seems to take all the adversity he has faced during his career in stride and sort of chalks it up to one big learning experience. He doesn't dwell on the past, but rather looks forward to next season, which ironically was made possible by the broken collar bone in 1994 — kind of a blessing in disguise, Alexander says.

"It was good in that now I'm older and more mature and hopefully next year we'll have a better season than we're having now."

Alexander admits his career overall has been frustrating, but he does not second guess his decision to play for Oregon State and stresses the fact that his career isn't over yet, that there's still time for good things to come to him and the Beavers.

"It's been tough so far," he says. "Throughout my career there's been a lot of different things going on, but I don't have any regrets. I think I've had a good career here. I've got one more year and I'm going to make the most of it."

There is a hint of frustration in his voice, but also a sense of hope.

It just hasn't been quite what he expected.