

# Football: Return of WR Griffin from wrist injury may ease loss of Johnson

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The game was initially the season-opener for the Spartans as well, but Michigan State secured a date against Colorado State on Aug. 29.

"The most improvement in a football team comes from game one to game two," Bellotti said. "There's no question in my mind that it's a tremendous advantage to play a game. Us being able to see, and being able to do it, are two different things. If they could trade with me, I would in a heartbeat. There's a lot of things that we're going to find out in a first game, when you finally play an opponent, that you don't find out playing against yourself. So I'd like to play a game."

That extra week of playing against themselves will give the Ducks more time to resolve several position battles, especially tailback but including the second annual quarterback competition between seniors Jason Maas and Akili Smith.

Smith started the first two games of 1997; Maas took over for the next three; Smith returned to start the sixth game; Maas got the call for two more; and Smith finished the season with a streak of four-straight starts. All of that switching was confusing for fans and foes alike but not, Bellotti said, for the team.

"Both of those men want to play, deserve to play and have proven they can win, not just at the Pac-10 level but beyond," Bellotti said. "We wouldn't have done what we did last year, and I'm not just talking about rotating them but their accomplishments in breaking

three all-time school records, if they wouldn't have been able to support each other, which they did, if they wouldn't have been able to handle it emotionally, which they did, and if it had been any type of a divisive thing for the team, which it wasn't."

The duo of Maas and Smith combined to throw for 3,016 yards and 31 touchdowns on 212 of 387 passing with 15 interceptions. The pair led the team to school records in total offense with 5,049 yards, scoring with 380 points and touchdowns with 51.

Maas said he would be content should the situation continue, as long as the Ducks are winning.

"It's not a problem if that's the way it happens," he said. "Both of us worked really hard in the spring and the summer so that one of us could actually play more than the other, but if it does happen to work out that way, then I'm all for it, as long as it's working."

Maas and Smith were two of what Bellotti estimated at 65 players who stayed in Eugene this summer to practice, work and work out.

"Obviously it should help our team unity a lot, and that's basically what it comes down to; you can hold everyone accountable," Maas said. "Last year we had 15 people stay and we still did pretty good, and Rose Bowl year we didn't have that many people stay. So it's not to say that everyone works that much harder when they're here, it just unifies everyone."

Another fierce position battle is being waged at tailback, where no less than six Ducks are vying for

the starting nod against Michigan State. Joining Droughns and freshman Herman Ho-Ching as candidates for the job are veterans Kevin Parker, Derien Latimer, Jason Cooper and Jerry Brown.

Although Parker is listed at the top of the depth chart entering fall practice, the senior tallied just 18 yards on eight carries last season. Latimer is the top returning running back with 115 yards on 29 carries last season, while Cooper spent most of 1997 on special teams. Brown sat out last season after severely injuring a hamstring in fall camp.

Parker hopes to retain the starting tailback job after alternating between the backfield and wide receiver last season.

"I'll be getting a lot of work at tailback [this fall]," Parker said. "That's my job title. Hopefully I can be the No. 1 guy. It's going to be tailback by committee, but hopefully I'll be the chairman of that committee."

There is added pressure on whoever wins the competition after the graduation of Saladin McCullough, who in 1997 set an Oregon single-season rushing record in winning the Pac-10 rushing title with 1,343 yards on 267 carries.

"He was the Pac-10's leading rusher, so there is pressure," Droughns said. "All of us have got to work together to get the job done. That's the only way we're going to do it. I'm sure all of us would like to rotate in, but it's not going to happen like that, and we all know that."

Also graduated is wide receiver Pat Johnson, who was taken in the

## 1998 Oregon Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time	Place
Sept. 5	Michigan St.	12:30 p.m.	Autzen
Sept. 12	UTEP	5:30 p.m.	El Paso, Tex.
Sept. 19	San Jose St.	2 p.m.	Autzen
Sept. 26	Stanford	1 p.m.	Autzen
Oct. 10	Was. St.	2 p.m.	Pullman, Wash.
Oct. 17	UCLA	12:30 p.m.	Los Angeles, Calif.
Oct. 24	USC	1 p.m.	Autzen
Oct. 31	Arizona	1 p.m.	Tucson, Ariz.
Nov. 7	Washington	1 p.m.	Autzen
Nov. 14	Arizona St.	1 p.m.	Autzen
Nov. 21	Oregon St.	1 p.m.	Corvallis, Ore.

second round of the NFL draft by the Baltimore Ravens after accumulating 1,072 yards and eight touchdowns on 55 catches last season.

Helping to ease the burden of replacing the All-American will be senior Damon Griffin, who returns to the Ducks after missing all of last season with a thumb injury incurred in fall camp.

The ligament damage prevented Griffin from following up on a 1996 season in which he was second in the Pac-10 in catches with 43 and racked up 711 yards and seven scores.

"I think the appreciation for what he had and missed is important for all of us to see and pass on to our other players," Bellotti said. "He's tremendously excited to be here. If you saw our spring game, he was a dominant player. I think he can do that every game and be an all-league-type receiver."

Griffin tallied 188 yards and three touchdowns on 12 catches in the Oregon spring game May 2, the Ducks' last real game prior to

their showdown with Michigan State.

**Notes:** Freshmen offensive lineman Mike Belisle and tight end Danny Pulido will each miss several weeks of action due to injuries suffered in the first week of practice. Belisle, a Parade All-American from Marshfield in Coos Bay, will be sidelined indefinitely with a sprained left ankle. Pulido could miss as many as four weeks with a broken bone in his left hand ... Redshirt freshman quarterback Joey Harrington, expected to battle junior A.J. Feeley and true freshman Adam Kennybrew for the third-string role, had hernia surgery earlier in the summer and, according to Bellotti, is just getting back into shape ... Ruben Vaughan, who missed his initial campaign at Oregon last season with a preexisting knee injury, is still sidelined after undergoing surgery in November ... Former Duck tight end A.J. Jelks was cut by the Philadelphia Eagles of the NFL on Monday.



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