

1998 OREGON FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Ducks convey optimism at onset of fall camp

Oregon head football coach Mike Bellotti had a decidedly optimistic attitude for the media before heading in to fall camp

By Rob Moseley
 Associate Editor

Oregon head football coach Mike Bellotti and a smattering of players officially met the media for the first time this fall on Friday, the day before returning players joined freshman and transfers on the practice field. As could be expected, the usual assortment of clichés was offered up.

"Obviously, we still are going to take it one day at a time. That was our motto last year and will continue to be," said Bellotti, who said he hopes to improve the team's record from last season, when it finished tied for seventh in the Pacific-10 Conference with a 3-5 record but was 7-5 overall, including a 41-13 thrashing of Air Force in the Las Vegas Bowl. "We don't want to overlook anybody. We work hard daily and try to improve, and that's our biggest focus."

"I just want to participate," said highly touted JC transfer Reuben Droughns, one of six Ducks competing for the starting tailback job. "If I can say I played a series for the Ducks, I will be happy. I could play on the kickoff team. I just want to be on the field. I'll do anything for us to win."



BELLOTTI

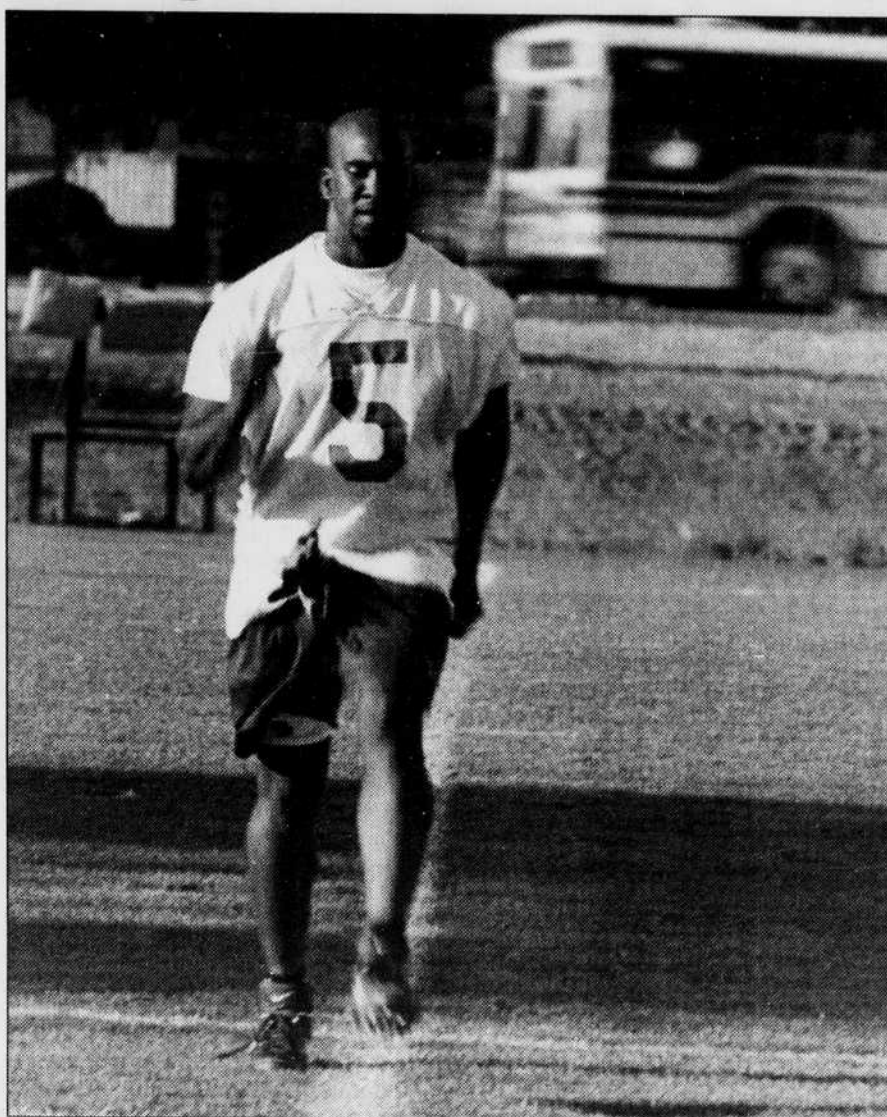
"I'm just going to play within the system and play within myself," junior linebacker Dietrich Moore said, speaking of a system installed by new defensive coordinator Bob Foster.

But besides the overflowing clichéd aphorisms, the Oregon players and coaches also allowed a hint of optimism to gleam through their otherwise reserved nature.

"We have a lot of potential," Moore said. "Everybody's talking about the Pac-10 championship, the Rose Bowl. But we've got our sights set on the national championship. We have every right, as everybody else does. Why can't we set our goals high?"

Why not indeed, Bellotti agreed.

"I think the attitude of this group is different, and I think winning the bowl game — not just being in a bowl game but winning a bowl game in a convincing manner — has these kids looking beyond," the coach said of the Las Vegas Bowl in which the Ducks ran up 583 yards of total offense against the Falcons, scored on each of their first two offensive plays and held the vaunted Air Force rushing attack to just 152 yards on 42



Senior wide receiver Damon Griffin does leg raisers during practice on Tuesday.

LAURA GOSS/Emerald

carries.

That performance by the Oregon defense was easily among the best of the season for the Ducks, who finished last in the Pac-10 in total defense for allowing more than 440 yards per game. Oregon was also last in rushing defense with almost 190 yards allowed per game on the ground and third-down conversion defense, ninth in scoring defense and eighth in passing defense.

This year's defense will feature eight returning starters, including junior middle linebacker Peter Sirmon, who led the Pac-10 in tackles last season with 115, as well as Foster, the Ducks' third defensive coordinator in Bellotti's four-year tenure as

head coach.

"[Our defense] has to be better," Sirmon said. "There's no choice. With our talent and the abilities we have, all the equipment we have and the personnel we have, we have to. If we don't improve, it'll be more than disappointing."

The addition of Foster, along with new offensive coordinator Jeff Tedford, is one of many transitions the Ducks face in preparation for the upcoming season, which begins Sept. 5 at Autzen Stadium against Big-10 Conference power and preseason No. 23 Michigan State.

Turn to FOOTBALL, Page 20

Griffin's post-graduate work: Make UO go

After redshirting last season because of a thumb injury, Damon Griffin looks to star as a fifth-year senior for Oregon

By Tim Pyle
 Freelance Reporter

Coming off a junior season during which he was Oregon's leading receiver and a second-team All-Pacific-10 Conference selection, Damon Griffin was primed for a starring role in 1997.

Fellow senior Pat Johnson would team with Griffin to give the Ducks a devastating tandem at wide receiver. Opposing defenses would have to devise schemes to contend with Johnson and Griffin on the flanks, as well as running back Saladin McCullough and tight end Blake Spence, also seniors, in the middle of the field. Inevitably, defenses would be stretched to the limit and forced to pick their poison.

But, as the Rolling Stones sing, "You can't always get what you want."

About a week before the Ducks would face Arizona to kick off their season, Griffin caught a slant from quarterback A. J. Feeley in practice and straight-armed cornerback Rashad Bauman with his right hand. In the process, Griffin's right thumb "snapped."

"I just felt something was wrong, but I was never really in pain," Griffin says. "I went to the trainers to tell them to tape the thumb, and they said, 'No, we can't tape this. There's something really wrong with it.'"

Within an hour, Griffin underwent surgery and was informed that he would have to take a medical redshirt to save a final season of eligibility.

"The next day I was at practice watching, so it didn't really bother me," Griffin says. "Something like that — that you're going to sit out everything you dreamed about — does not just click in your head."

Griffin was left to wonder what could have been, watching his teammates lose numerous close games in a 7-5 season

Turn to GRIFFIN, Page 8

Volleyball spikes the past

Head coach Nelson has her own recruits and sights set on an NCAA tournament berth

By Allison Ross
 Freelance Reporter

Last year serves as neither motivation nor regret for the 1998 volleyball team. It's a distant memory. This year is a whole new generation for the Oregon volleyball program.

Now, for the first time since taking over the program four years ago, Head Coach Cathy Nelson is leading a team of players that she recruited.

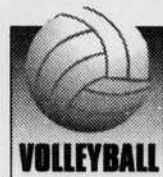
"We've gone from a team that has been primarily players I didn't recruit to primarily players this year that I did recruit," said Nelson, who has not yet finished a

season higher than 9th in the Pacific 10. "As a coach, there is no price tag you can put on how valuable that is."

Nelson isn't the only one to notice the importance on having players who want to play at Oregon because she brought them. Co-captain Madeline Ernst is returning from the brutal season in which her team finished last in the Pac-10 conference.

"Last year we had a lot of baggage," the 6-foot-1 senior said. "We had six seniors, and everybody was experiencing that monotonous feeling. They wanted to get out of the cellar and it just wasn't happening, and I think we just

Turn to VOLLEYBALL, Page 10



VOLLEYBALL

Expectations rise for Oregon

The women's soccer team wants to carve out a spot for itself among the top-20 teams

By Tim Pyle
 Freelance Reporter

With nine of 11 starters returning, a new home field and seven incoming recruits, the Oregon women's soccer team appears ready for a breakthrough in its third season as a varsity program.

After winning just three Pacific-10 Conference games and 10 contests overall in their first two seasons, the Ducks (5-14-1 overall, 2-7 Pac-10 in 1997) are hoping to improve in 1998, according to head coach Bill Steffen.

"Rather than feel it's nice to play these top-20 teams," said Steffen, noting Oregon's schedule includes eight teams that

qualified for the 1997 NCAA tournament. "I think we've got to get to the mindset that we belong with these top-20 teams and set our aspirations that high. Obviously, it's going to be a tremendous challenge, but we want to now be successful rather than just be competitive."

If the Ducks are to win more games this season, they will have to do something they have struggled to do in each of their first two seasons — score goals consistently. Oregon scored 25 goals last season after tallying 21 goals in its 1996 debut.

Midfielder Sierra Marsh, who led the team with 15 points (five goals, six as-

Turn to SOCCER, Page 12



SOCCER