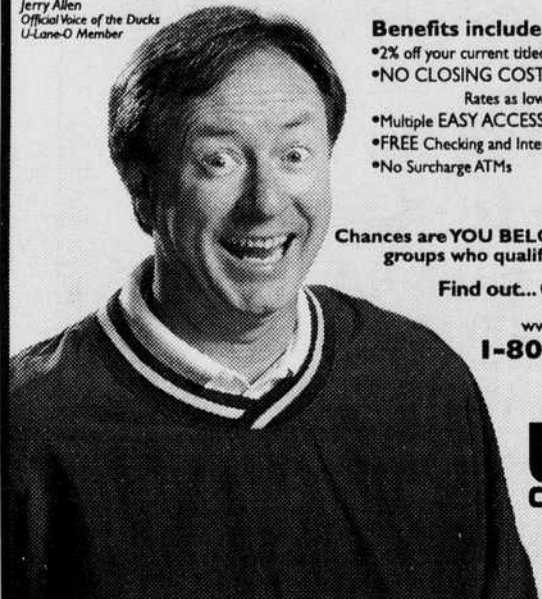


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## Football: Akili Smith had a career game in the first half against Michigan State

Continued from Page 1E

Hoping to erase the memory of 1997 Pacific-10 Conference rushing champion Saladin McCullough, JC-transfer Reuben Droughns and true freshman Herman Ho-Ching have each led the Ducks to victory in their first seasons of Division-I A football.

Droughns started with a bang in the 48-14 thrashing of Michigan State by running for 202 yards on 17 carries and scoring three touchdowns against the vaunted Spartan defense.

"I told Reuben earlier this week that he would be the best back on the field," Bellotti said after the opening-game win. "Nobody knew it but he and I. I think he lived up to that."

Also having a career day for the Ducks was Akili Smith, who threw for a career-high 266 yards and four touchdowns to beat the Spartans after beating out fellow-senior Jason Maas in fall camp for the starting quarterback job.

Five of Smith's 15 completions that day were to senior receiver Damon Griffin, who missed all of last season with a thumb injury after being named second-team

All-Pac-10 following his junior campaign.

"It was real fun just getting back out there and being part of the team. You love to have a second chance, and I'm very blessed and happy about that," Griffin said before turning to the team's performance. "We came out and had something to prove, letting people know we're for real. We came to play, and we're going to keep doing the same thing week in and week out."



GRIFFIN

Griffin and the Ducks almost failed to live up to that maxim the following week in El Paso, Texas.

Oregon trailed 19-12 entering the fourth quarter against the Miners before Ho-Ching, replacing the injured Droughns, scored three touchdowns, two on the ground, to lead Oregon to victory.

What proved during the final quarter to be the Ducks' strength, running the ball, was also what

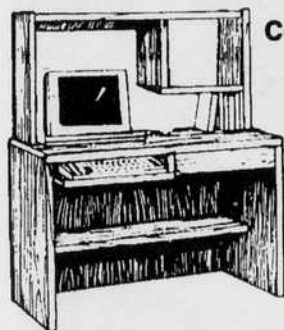
allowed UTEP to take the early lead. The Miners ran for 244 yards, 177 in the first three quarters, against a porous Oregon defense that was a grim reminder of last season, when the Ducks finished last in the Pac-10 in rushing and total defense.

On the flip side, rushing defense proved to be one of the Ducks' strengths against the Spartans, as Oregon held Michigan State and vaunted tailback Sedrick Irvin to 201 yards rushing, including just 98 through three quarters.

Another bright spot for the Ducks thus far in 1998 has been the kicking game.

After being plagued by inconsistency last year, the place-kicker position is being filled by transfer Nathan Villegas. After starting the season with two field goals, including one from 44 yards, against Michigan State, Villegas entered the San Jose State contest a perfect 6-6 in field goals and 9 of 9 on extra points. Villegas' total of four field goals against the Miners, including one from 49 yards out, was one shy of the school's single-game record.

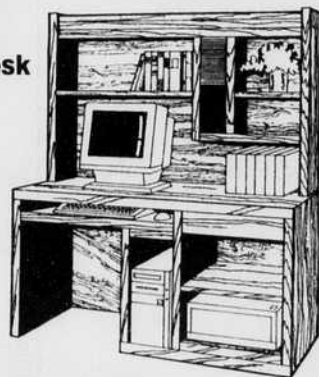
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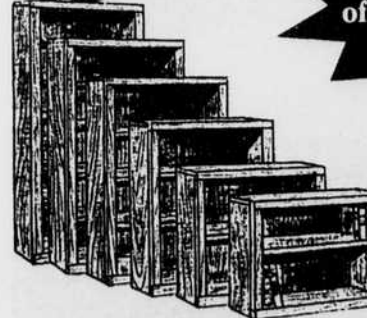


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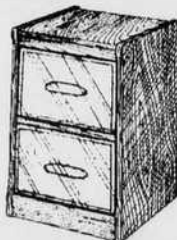
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