

1998 Oregon Football



LAURA GOSS/Emerald

Justin Wilcox holds Spartan tailback Lloyd Clemons to a short gain in the third quarter.

New coach rebuilds defense

Bob Foster hopes to restore the confidence of a shaken defensive unit

By Rob Moseley
Associate Editor

A final score of 48-14. Rushing totals of 339 yards — 202 by the starting tailback — for the winning team. Just 329 total yards for the losers.

All of the above are statistics from Oregon's Sept. 5 season opener against then-No. 23 Michigan State, which last season had a defense ranked in the top 10 nationally, and this season features All-America candidate Sedrick Irvin at tailback.

The Ducks were coming off a season in which they finished 10th in the Pacific-10 Conference in rushing and total defense and ninth in scoring defense. Reuben Droughns, a junior college transfer and one of six tailbacks competing for the Oregon job, got the start.

And yet it was the Ducks who stymied the Spartans on the ground and in the air, holding

Irvin to just 66 yards rushing before he left in the third quarter with a bruised knee.

"What can I say?" asked new defensive coordinator Bob Foster. "I sat up there at the end of the first half pinching myself. There's only one thing that I did know — I felt confident that our players would play as hard as they could play. As far as being totally dominant, I didn't have a clue."

Foster inherits a defense that at times last year seemed as though it didn't have a clue. The Ducks allowed 238 yards rushing to Stanford, 265, 239 and 218 yards on the ground in consecutive games to UCLA, Utah and Southern California. They then watched as Arizona State ran wild for 405 yards and five touchdowns.

Which makes Oregon's defensive goals entering the new season quite simple.

"First and foremost, we have

to stop teams from running," junior linebacker Dietrich Moore said before the season. "We allowed almost 200 yards per game rushing last year, and that didn't help us win. We need to bring that average down."

The Ducks went a long way toward attaining that goal against the Spartans, as Michigan State tallied just 69 yards on the ground in the first half, then tacked on the bulk of its yardage against Oregon's reserves.

Taking over the coordinator position from the departed Rich Stubler is Foster, who has coached defense in 24 of his 28 years in the collegiate ranks. After helping Willamette's defense lead the nation (NAIA) in scoring and total defense, as well as third against the run, Foster brings his distinct philosophy to Eugene.

"I'm a positive reinforcement type of guy," Foster said. "I really believe in the anxiety-performance curve in athletic competition, which means that if you have too much stress and anxiety, it tends to

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