

Droughns: Earned No. 1 job early in camp

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on and off the field for two seasons. "Reuben is different. He knows how to sacrifice; he is a true leader.

"Those are the types of guys who make it to the pros." Droughns has one other ingredient necessary to make it in the National Football League — stunning natural ability.

In two seasons at Merced, Droughns rushed for 3,067 yards. Last season he led the nation with an incredible 1,611 yards and 12 touchdowns in just eight games. After the season, PrepStar magazine rated Droughns as the top-rated junior-college tailback in the country.

Still, Droughns' family was never able to share in Reuben's on-field accomplishments. Merced is about a seven-hour car ride from Anaheim, both widening and narrowing the distance between Reuben and his family all at the same time.

"I remember we played one game down near Los Angeles and my family was able to come visit me at halftime," Droughns says. "But that was the only time they even got to see me play."

Which is what made Droughns' first game with the Ducks — a regionally televised game on ABC — that much

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Tony Lewis
Merced head football coach

more special.

"My family was able to watch the game," Droughns says. "I had a smile on my face the whole game because I knew that my family and friends were back home watching it.

"In junior college we were always taught to be a fist — that is, like a family. You have individuals, but you're always connected."

Droughns says that's the best part about having finally reached his goal of playing for Oregon.

"This team is really like a family," Droughns says. "These guys have been working hard and I just want to be a part of it."

So much so that he is taking his time leaving this practice field tonight.

If only everything in life were as easy as catching punts in near total darkness.

Tennis: Wygonowska leads team again

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season, the Pac-10 will again be one of the toughest women's tennis conferences in the nation.

So what does third year head coach Jack Griffin have to be excited about this season?

A lot, he says.

"I think that things are starting to fall into place," Griffin said. "We have great players coming in and some healthy players coming back. We understand what we need to do to get to the NCAA's."

The 1997-98 season was a difficult one for the Ducks. At one point or another almost every one of Griffin's players was injured. While a number of the Ducks struggled through injuries, one player became Oregon's star.

Alina Wygonowska stepped up as the Ducks No. 1 player, becoming the first woman in Oregon history to qualify for the NCAA individual championships last May.

"She had some really good wins," Griffin said. "She beat three players ranked in the top 10 in the country. The good thing is that she knows she can do it now, but sometimes it's easier when not as much is expected from you."

Wygonowska won't be sneaking up on anyone in the Pac-10, which Griffin thinks will have three teams ranked in the preseason top 10. While being part of such a "brutally tough" conference makes winning that much harder, Griffin says there are advantages to it.

"It's very, very helpful that so many people want to play in the Pac-10," Griffin said. "Being able to play with the best teams in the country is going to help us recruiting and in improving our kids' play."

Griffin used the Pac-10's appeal in landing two heralded recruits this season.

"We've got some strong youths coming in," Griffin said. "They've

played in a lot of tournaments and they're really going to be into it."

Adeline Arnaud arrives from France with a ranking equivalent to being in the top 20 in the US, and Janice Nyland is one of the highest ranked American players ever to come to Oregon.

"Adeline was too good to pass up," Griffin said. "Janice has a great attitude and she's really excited about coming here and being a part of the Pac-10. She's a big catch for us."

So Griffin looks forward to next season because his star is returning, because he's adding to promising new recruits and because the rest of his team is returning healthy and stronger after the hardships it experienced last season.

"It think we've grown a lot," junior Jamie Martin said. "We've definitely come together, and we're excited for next season."

SPORTS BRIEFS

Women's basketball ranked No. 21

The Oregon women's basketball team is ranked No. 21 by the Women's Basketball News Service in its preseason Top 25 poll.

The Ducks' return four starters and seven other letter winners from the last season's 17-10 team. Center Jenny Mowe will be back after missing all of last season be-

cause of an injury to help lead head coach Jody Runge's squad to its sixth straight NCAA Tournament appearance.

Ensrud back to Oregon as assistant

Jeremy Ensrud may be done competing for the Oregon wrestling team, but he isn't done contributing to it.

Ensrud, a two-time All-American who compiled a 106-29 career record for the Ducks, will be back with the program as an assistant coach to new head coach Chuck Kearney.

"Jeremy is a product of our program," Kearney said. "He has excelled in everything he's done, and I expect him to continue with that in the coaching field."

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