

Out of the shadow

After waiting behind Chad Hutchinson for two seasons, Todd Husak tries to lead the Cardinal

By Allison Ross
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Perhaps Todd Husak and the young Stanford Cardinal team have no idea what they are about to experience. They have posted a 1-2 record thus far, but they have yet to travel outside the comforts of their beloved Stanford Stadium.

Their first stop: Autzen Stadium, a place where Oregon has scored 106 points this year and allowed only 17.

Husak has never been to Oregon and neither have most of his teammates. He is the leader of a team in which just five starters return on offense and a mere three on defense. Husak has only been the starting quarterback since the beginning of this season.

"This will be a good chance for us," Husak said. "I've never been to Oregon, and I know a lot of the young guys have never been either. It will be a good test for us as far as the noise and the whole atmosphere of Oregon."

Husak, who was second string to quarterback Chad Hutchinson for the past two years, doesn't seem to mind leading a young team. Nor does he mind following in the footsteps of someone like Hutchinson, who threw for 365 yards against Oregon in 1996.

"I've learned a lot from playing behind Chad," Husak said. "I never got a chance to play with the older guys that he worked with. I think it's a different team than two years ago and last year. Some of these guys playing never knew Chad and never played with him, so it's helpful in that regard."

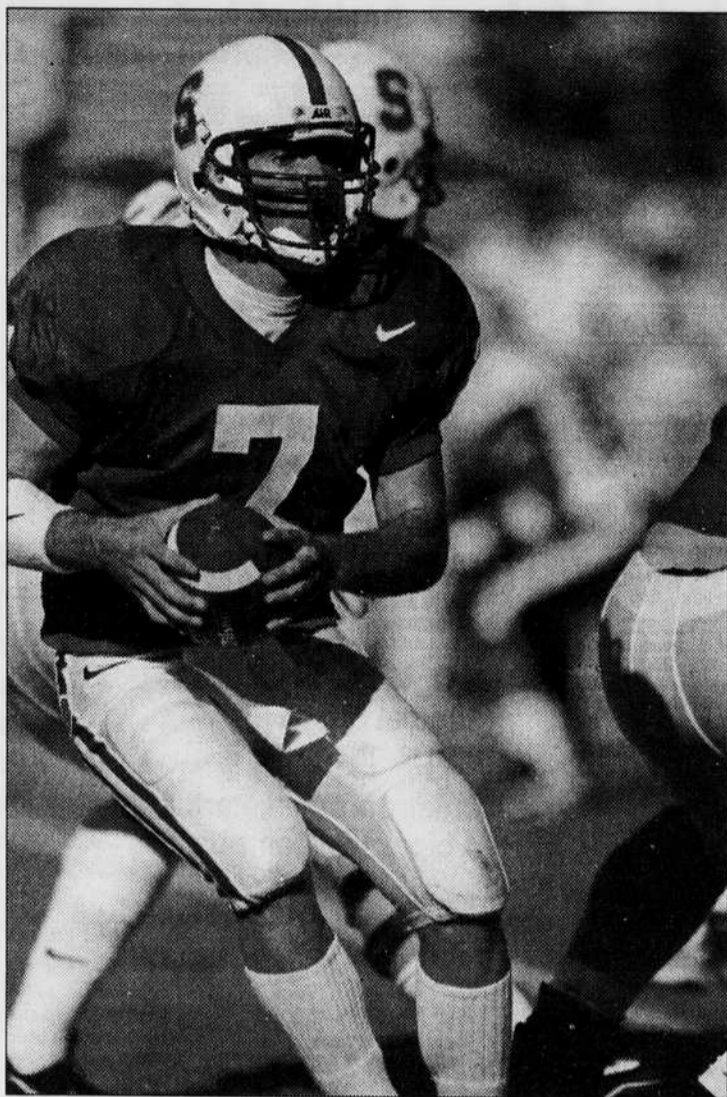
This season Husak is out of the shadows with the help of his players, who aren't comparing him to the past. Rather, they're looking to him to guide them in a Pacific-10 Conference race in which five of the 10 teams are ranked in the top 25.

However, it has not been an easy transformation.

Despite having to wait patiently as Hutchinson led Stanford to a Sun Bowl appearance in 1996 and a 5-6 record in 1997, Husak had to compete for the starting job last spring against sophomore hopefuls Joe Borchard and Randy Fasani. It wasn't until the week before Stanford's season opener with San Jose State that head coach Tyrone Willingham announced Husak as the starter.

"Todd's ability to throw the ball deep we thought was better than our other two quarterbacks," Willingham said. "He does an excellent job with mechanics and running our football team."

Two years of being associated with the Pac-10 and playing behind Hutchinson give Husak an insight that Borchard and Fasani may not have. But if there is one thing he knows, it's that if he does-



COURTESY PHOTO

Todd Husak is finally starting after two seasons on the bench.

n't execute, they will be waiting for the chance.

"In practice I think it's healthy to have a great player behind you—it helps you play better," Husak said. "Looking back, I probably didn't do that as well as I could have in my first year with Chad, as far as pushing him. I know I always push myself harder when I know there's someone in line."

With that in mind, Husak will travel to Eugene, a place that will be swarming with people who have been hungrily waiting for a win against Stanford, which has won six of the last seven bouts between the two teams.

"So far Oregon has done a great job offensively, and last week they did a great job defensively," Husak said. "I think we just need to go in and focus on ourselves and our own game plan and not worry about the noise, but just play football."

Last week, San Jose State came to Oregon and opened the game with two consecutive false start penalties due to the crowd noise, and that wasn't even a conference game. Blocking the noise could be the toughest part of the game for Husak.

If there is one thing Husak and his team have going for them, it's that when Oregon is picked to win with a large spread, it seems to play as if it, rather than its opponent, is underdog. Oregon is

picked to win Saturday by 18 points, which doesn't give Stanford much credit.

Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti doesn't take Husak lightly, and he doesn't think the Ducks have it easy now that Hutchinson is out of the picture.

"Todd Husak has stepped in very well and replaced Chad Hutchinson. In fact, I think he's probably a better quarterback since he's more mobile, accurate and sees the field very well," he said.

Aside from traveling for the first time and adjusting to a leadership role, Husak feels that if his team can focus on the task at hand it can do anything, including beat Oregon.

"In the first two games, we beat ourselves more than the defense caused us to," Husak said. "I think if we can eliminate the penalties and stick to our game plan then we can do anything we want."

This is the beginning of a season that Husak has waited two years for, and he says he is relishing the chance to lead a Pac-10 team.

"It feels good to get the start; it's what I've always wanted," Husak said. "It felt good to have a door open for me to walk into. There's a little more pressure when you're the starter, but I accept that."

I think pressure pushes me to play better."

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