

Claiborne

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 was receiving dozens of recruiting letters in the mail each day. College coaches were calling him at home. Sports Illustrated put him in its "Faces in the Crowd" segment which highlights exceptional amateur athletes.

The experience brought Claiborne closer to his family.

"My mom has always supported me in what I've done," Claiborne says. "My parents would give me words of wisdom and pep talks to get me through it. My dad would just tell me to prepare myself and all things will happen in time."

And sometimes things happen quicker than expected.

Claiborne's 251 career tackles already ranks in the top 15 on the Trojans' all-time list. This season he ranks sixth in the Pac-10 in tackles with 59 and has started all seven games for USC.

People continue to talk. "I think Claiborne is the best of the bunch [including Seau and McGinest]," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti says. "I don't want to say anything bad about Junior Seau, but Claiborne is as good as any we've seen or played against. He combines such great speed with great size and strength."

"He makes some plays instinctively that you have to coach people a long time to do, and he gets there with an attitude."

Although a lot of it is natural ability, Claiborne credits his coaches for helping him refine his game.

"I've been lucky in my career to have had great coaching," Claiborne says. "[Linebackers coach Shawn Slocum] has allowed me to be a better defensive player. He let's me be a free hitter and let's me hit the gap."

As with those who wore No. 55 before him, Claiborne eventually expects to land in the NFL.

"It's always been a dream of mine," he says. "I'll just have to play hard and do my job and it should take care of itself."

Which means old No. 55 will soon be looking for another body to possess.

Claiborne File



■ **FROM:** Riverside, California
 ■ **SIZE:** 6' 3", 230 lbs
 ■ **STATS:** Ranks sixth in the

Pac-10 this season with 59 tackles nominated for Butkus Award this season first-team all-Pac-10 in 1997 and Football News all-American honorable mention started nine games as true freshman in 1996

Sports

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Here is a look at a few club sports that will be undergoing this fall:

Rugby

Expectations are high for Oregon rugby after an 18-3 campaign last season that yielded a No. 2 national ranking in Division II. The team's best season since the early 1980s resulted in the team being bumped up to Division I this season. Oregon's biggest test this fall will come on Halloween weekend, when it travels to Washington to take on the Huskies and Western Washington.

Men's Soccer

After losing a heartbreaker in a shootout with North Carolina at nationals last fall, the men's soccer team looks to step it up to the next level this season. Oregon will have its chance during the weekend preceding Thanksgiving when it travels to Georgia to play in a national tournament.

Water Polo

The men's and women's water polo teams have their eye on a first place finish in the Northwest Conference Tournament, held at the end of fall term. Both teams will have plenty of preparation for the tournament, with matches against rivals Washington, Washington State and Oregon State.

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