

Latimer could get his chance

Derien Latimer leads a trio of tailbacks who must replace the injured Reuben Droughns

By Rob Moseley
Oregon Daily Emerald

This Saturday's showdown with Southern California will be the first game for the Ducks in their new season: 1998 A.D.

That's A.D. as in After Droughns.

Oregon was 5-1 with the Pacific-10 Conference's top rushing offense in its six games this season with tailback Reuben Droughns, who averaged 164 of the Ducks' 240 yards on the ground.

But with Droughns out for the rest of the season after sustaining a broken leg and torn ankle ligaments in last week's loss to UCLA, the onus falls on a trio of tailbacks to carry the load.

Junior Derien Latimer, listed as Saturday's starter, joins sophomores Jason Cooper and Jerry Brown as a member of the Ducks' new three-headed rushing attack.

"It's exciting, especially among the running backs who are left healthy," says Latimer, a 5-foot-11, 208-pound native of Colorado Springs, Colo. "We are all realizing that this is an opportunity that we've got to take advantage of. Some of the other guys on the team were saying they noticed a little bit more pep in the running backs' step this week."

It's been a long road for Latimer. This is only the fifth opportunity in his three-year career to start for Oregon. The junior started twice as a redshirt freshman and once in 1997.

The barrier impeding Latimer's



Chad Patterson/Emerald

Junior Derien Latimer will have to carry the load at tailback against USC on Saturday.

rise to the top of the depth chart was an imposing one: junior-college transfer Saladin McCullough. McCullough broke three school records last season on his way to becoming the Ducks' eighth 1,000-yard rusher.

"It wasn't like I was watching someone who I didn't think was good," Latimer says. "I'm watching Saladin and Reuben, some of the best backs who have ever gone through here."

Despite that fact, Latimer admits that his first few years at Oregon have been frustrating, especially considering his historic high school career.

Competing at Air Academy High School in Colorado Springs, home of the U.S. Air Force Academy, Latimer rushed for 5,284 yards and 63 touchdowns on 568 career carries, including 3,150 yards and 38 touchdowns as a se-

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