

Smith was a Heisman Trophy contender and led the nation in passing efficiency earlier this season by combining a cool demeanor in the pocket with arm strength and quickness rarely seen before in an Oregon quarterback

Nick Medley/Emerald

*“That’s what it is — a revolution. African-Americans are now being sought after at quarterback because of their athletic ability.”*

**Akili Smith**  
UO quarterback

## Akili Smith reflects on his career, future

*The Ducks’ senior quarterback sat down recently to discuss his collegiate experience at Oregon and what lies ahead*

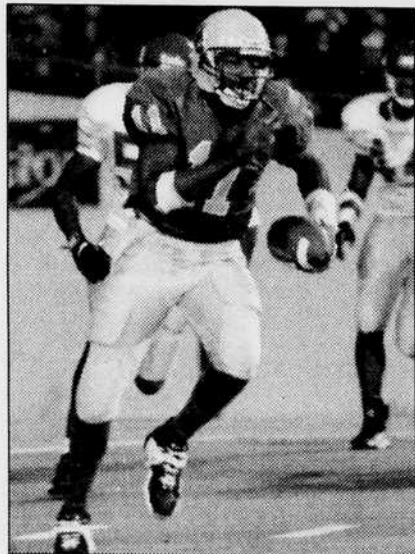
**By Joel Hood**  
Oregon Daily Emerald

From his tumultuous first season on and off the football field to his remarkable assault on the Heisman Trophy race and the Oregon record books this season, quarterback Akili Smith has had his share of media attention.

Few athletes in Oregon’s rich history have had quite the impact that Smith has in less than two full seasons. On the eve of the Ducks’ most heated rivalry, Smith reflects on his time here at Oregon, the unique pressures of being a black quarterback and how he has been treated by the media, the fans and his teammates.

**Tell me about the decision process to come to Oregon.**

It was a combination of the coaches presenting themselves real well. There wasn’t a lot of B.S. The recruiters came to my house and met with me and my dad



Nick Medley/Emerald

Smith’s scrambling ability has helped him become a double threat at quarterback.

and told us about the success the school has had. Oregon has won more Pac-10 games than anyone over the last five or six years. That made a big difference.

The tradition at quarterback was a huge factor, as well as the opportunity to play with Saladin McCullough, Pat Johnson and those guys.

**You played minor league baseball with the Pittsburgh Pirates’ organization out of high school. How close were you to pursuing a career in pro baseball?**

Every time I would do poorly in baseball I would think about football. Football has always been my first love. I always talked to my dad about playing football, about making it to the NFL. I would sit at home on Sundays.

**What did you learn from that experience that you can apply at Oregon?**

Just being on your own and making all the decisions you need to at a young age. I was away from home at 17 years old across the country. It really helps you mature quickly. You have to learn to take care of yourself. I had a lot of money, but I was surrounded by a lot of people I didn’t know very well, so it was hard.

**Why is quarterback such a difficult position to play?**

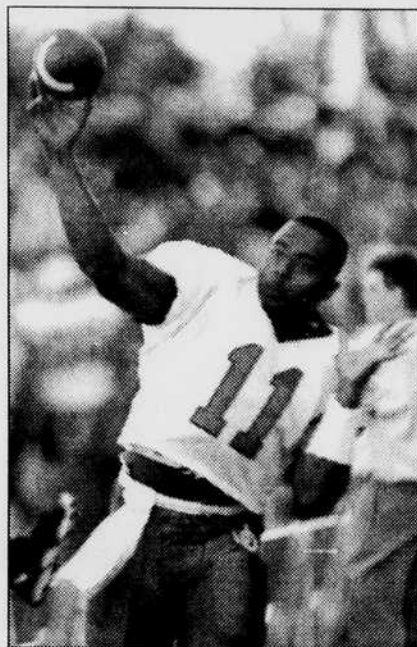
The object is to slow the quarterback down. Every way you look at it, if the other teams can slow the quarterback down, they have an excellent chance of winning. Being a quarterback and just preparing is so hard. When you’re a quarterback you have to know exactly what everyone on the offense is doing.

During my first year I was never really comfortable. It really took working with [offensive coordinator Jeff] Tedford over the summer and being with the program over the summer for me to feel comfortable.

**What drives you crazy on the football field?**

When I make a mistake. And I get upset when my teammates make a mistake that I know they’re capable of doing. I remember seeing you bark at Derien Latimer last week against Arizona after he missed a blocking assignment on a blitz.

Those are the things we should take care of. If you get physically beat on a play, hey, that’s a given, but if you make



Emerald

Smith has gone from tossing a baseball in the minors to rifling footballs at Oregon.

a mental mistake, that hurts more.

**You’re the first black quarterback to play for Oregon. There isn’t a large African-American contingent on this campus. Did you think about that when you chose to come here?**

It never really entered my mind. I was just so grateful that the coaches were giving me an opportunity to play.

**I always hear rumors about there being a lot of African-American athletes at Oregon State who feel there are a lot of racist undertones at that university. Is it fair to say that’s a statewide problem?**

To be quite honest, Oregon is more of a predominately white area, but it’s a great place. I’ve just come out here and tried to lay low and stay focused on what I have to do. Even though you’re an athlete and a racial minority, they’ll treat you fine. This is a peaceful town and they got a lot of rules to punish you if you make a bad decision. If you make the right decisions, you’ll have fun out here.

Turn to SMITH, Page 5B

## Ducks-Huskies rivalry among best in college

Hugh McElhenny, Napoleon Kaufman, Corey Dillon, Rashaan Shehee... Braxton Cleman?

It’s no secret why Washington has fallen off this season. Entering Saturday’s Northwest grudge match with Oregon, the Huskies rank seventh in the Pacific-10 Conference in rushing with just more than 100 yards per game. That total is less than half the number Washington ran for when it dominated the conference in the early 1990s.

But the Ducks don’t want to hear any sob stories.

Since Oregon lost tailback Reuben Droughns for the remainder of the season after its UCLA loss, the Ducks’ ground attack has been nonexistent. Derien Latimer rushed for just 87 yards two weeks ago against Southern California and only 47 yards last week against Arizona.

The team who runs the ball more effectively Saturday will win the game, pure and simple.

Speaking of runs — this series seems to have been nothing but. The Ducks have won three of their last four games against Washington, including a 31-28 victory in Seattle last season. But before that stretch, the Huskies had a streak of five in a row and three streaks of six in a row.

But that’s not what fans think about first when they talk about this series. Fans talk about the hatred, respect, intimidation and all the rest when Washington is next on the Ducks’ schedule.

In his weekly teleconference, Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said Washington was not the Ducks’ No. 1 rival, but that, of course, it was still Oregon State.

Not even close. The Oregon-Washington rivalry in the 1990s is not only the best rivalry in the Pac-10, but one of the top five in the entire country. Regardless of what the Ducks do the remainder of the year, this season will be a failure in the eyes of the players, the fans and the media if Oregon cannot extend its win streak against the Huskies.

Interestingly, Oregon’s last home victory against Washington ended with Kenny Wheaton sailing down the sideline for the game-clinching touchdown. While “the pick” is certainly the most memorable moment from Oregon’s Rose Bowl season in 1994, it’s probably not the single most dramatic play in this series’ history. Last season, Oregon wide receiver Pat Johnson caught the game-winning touchdown with less than a minute to play and sent the then-No. 6 Huskies into a three-game tailspin to end the regular season.

While the players themselves downplay the importance of this particular game at this particular point in this particular season, don’t look for the magnitude of Saturday’s game to be lost on Oregon’s fans. Duck fans hate Husky fans for the same reason that siblings fight at the dinner table — elbow room.

The Northwest just simply isn’t big enough for two national powerhouses.

Joel Hood is sports editor of the Emerald. He can be reached via e-mail at hood@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

### Opinion



Joel Hood

*“Duck fans hate Husky fans for the same reason that siblings fight at the dinner table — elbow room. The Northwest just simply isn’t big enough for two national powerhouses.”*