



Jackson, a junior, has started all nine games at cornerback for Arizona State this season.

The State Press

# Jackson

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bly the best duo in the Pac-10," Jackson says, "but it doesn't hurt them to have the quarterback they do throwing them the ball. Akili [Smith] can make even an average receiver into a great one."

Jackson, a fifth-year junior, is developing into a pretty damn good one himself.

After being named honorable mention all-Pacific-10 Conference for his 1997 efforts, which included starts in all 11 games and one interception, Jackson has stepped up his production this season. He has grabbed three interceptions, broken up eight other passes and made 41 tackles for the Arizona State defense, which ranks No. 4 overall in the Pac-10.

However, the Sun Devils have struggled as a team despite being mentioned among conference — and even national-title — contenders in the preseason. The hard times began with a 42-38 loss to Washington on Sept. 5.

"Our opening-game loss to Washington was heartbreaking for us," says Jackson, who is a scholastic senior majoring in interdisciplinary studies. "It was one of those situations where if we could have won that game like we were supposed to, we probably could have gone on a roll."

But Arizona State has righted the ship enough of late to put itself in position for a possible third-straight bowl bid.

"We all know how much hard work it's going to take to get us to a bowl game," Jackson says. "We've had to work for everything this season. We have four losses, but this is not a four-loss team."

When Jackson was a redshirt freshman, the Sun Devils made the first of those consecutive bowl appearances at the 1997 Rose Bowl, losing 20-17 to Ohio State. Jackson

started two games that season, scoring one touchdown on an 85-yard fumble return against Southern California and recording one interception. He was honored with the Scott Award as the defense's most improved player.

"What was different during that Rose Bowl year was that we never felt like we were out of the game," Jackson says. "No matter what the situation was, it was never a panic situation."

Following a standout prep career in DeSoto, Texas, that included being named a first-team all-region safety by Bluechip Illustrated, Jackson says he almost chose to attend a Big 12 school before deciding on Arizona State.

"The Pac-10 was a big draw because it was so diverse," Jackson says. "In the end, I liked the coaching staff at ASU the best. I've had a good experience with [head coach Bruce] Snyder and his coaching staff so far."

Jackson says he used his redshirt season in 1995 to get adjusted to Division-I college football.

"Each level you play at gets a little faster, and the competition level is raised a little higher," Jackson says. "The systems are more complicated in college. That was the hardest thing for me at first. It wasn't the physical aspect of playing in the Pac-10; it was understanding the different complex systems that offenses run."

There will be nothing complex about Jackson's pivotal role on his island Saturday.

If he can blanket his man play-in and play-out, the Sun Devils just might be the first team to sink the Ducks in Eugene this season.

## Sports brief

Tickets for the Oregon women's basketball team's first-round WNIT game against Nevada went on sale Monday for the general admission price of \$8. Student tickets are also on sale for \$5.

Though regular-season tickets are free, students will have to purchase tickets for each round of the WNIT Preseason Tournament the Ducks host.

If attendance is high for Oregon's first-round game on Friday, and if Oregon beats Nevada it could host the second, third and fourth rounds to be played over the next week. But all of that is contingent on Oregon defeating Nevada in the first round.

## Ohio State coach's November woes continue

John Cooper sees an opportunity slip away against Michigan

By Rusty Miller  
The Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — In 1963, as a 25-year-old only a year out of college, John Cooper applied for an assistant coaching job at Oregon State. While interviewing with coach Tommy Prothro, he was given advice that he would never forget.

"He said, 'John, in coaching there are a lot of peaks and valleys. The longer you're in it, the peaks don't get any higher, and the valleys get deeper,'" Cooper said.

The 61-year-old Ohio State coach added, "I've been through some valleys, but the one this week was particularly deep."

During head coaching stints at

Tulsa, Arizona State and 11 years with the Buckeyes, Cooper has won 176 games and lost only 73. But he may be remembered more for some losses than for winning two Rose Bowls and twice leading teams to No. 2 in the final Associated Press poll.

The latest defeat was as painful as any for Buckeyes fans, and that's saying something.

After all, four times in the past six seasons Cooper's teams have been unbeaten in November. Each time, they lost to a school from Michigan.

Ohio State — ranked No. 1 all season — was a 28-point favorite Saturday against Michigan State. Ahead 17-3 after one quarter and 24-9 midway through the third period, the Buckeyes squandered the lead, depressing fans hoping for the school's first national championship in 30 years.

Cooper has become accus-

tomed to the after-shocks following unexpected defeats.

"When you lose, you can't sleep," he said. "So I got up early and went to work a little earlier than usual, around 7:30 in the morning. And some of the coaches were already there."

The Buckeyes practiced Sunday while still in a state of shock. Cooper said he didn't belittle his players and didn't have to point out mistakes.

"The worst thing you can do when you lose like that is to go out and yell and scream and berate them," he said. "They feel as bad as you do."

If he read the local newspaper, he would have seen the article criticizing his play-calling on Ohio State's final two series. Those calling in to radio shows this week have continually ripped Cooper and his staff for running on 12 straight plays on

the next-to-last series, then passing all six downs on the Buckeyes' last chance. Neither produced points.

Cooper was asked about his play selection after the game.

"That's some real good second-guessing," he said.

He declined to say it was the most disappointing loss of his career. Given the opportunity during his weekly news conference to blame his quarterback, Joe Germaine, he defended him instead.

"It's a team game," he said.

He got angry when told that some TV analysts had singled out a freshman fullback for missing a block that halted the Buckeyes' next-to-last drive. Cooper said the player did his job and there were breakdowns elsewhere.

"That's ridiculous," Cooper said.

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