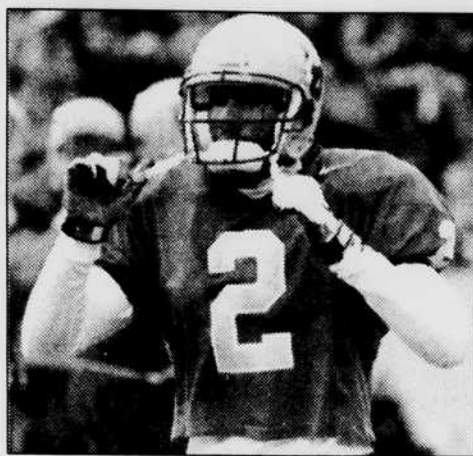


# The Play Maker

OREGON FEATURE

Oregon junior Tony Hartley has quietly become the Ducks' leading receiver



This season, Hartley ranks fourth in the Pac-10 in receiving yards with a 95.3 yards per game. Nick Medley/Emerald

By Rob Moseley  
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Playmaker has 41 receptions for 858 yards and seven touchdowns in nine games this season. He is fourth in his league in receiving yards per game and second in touchdowns.

And we're not talking about Michael "The Play Maker" Irvin of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys.

The Playmaker is Oregon's newest star, a 6-foot, 190-pound receiver named Tony Hartley who has quietly become the Ducks' leading receiver.

"That seems to be my new nickname around here," says Hartley, a Los Alamitos, Calif., native. "When they're thinking there's nothing there, I surprise them and come up with something."

Hartley's latest heroics came against Washington last week, when the junior burned the Husky secondary for a school-record 242 yards on just nine catches, two for touchdowns.

Which has also helped perpetuate another Hartley moniker: Touchdown Tony.

While Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti has begun to use that nickname lately, Hartley has a different version of its origin.

"I don't think they knew about it, but in high school they used to call me that, too," Hartley says. "The announcer for our games used to call me that. I just have a knack for scoring touchdowns. It's contagious — once you get in the endzone, you've just got to keep getting in there or you go crazy."

But it has been opposing defenses that have been going crazy this season as they have struggled to contain the Oregon aerial assault. The Ducks have led the Pacific-10 Conference in total offense for the entirety of this season due in large part to a multifaceted passing attack that begins with quarterback Akili Smith and usually ends with a touchdown for Oregon.

The middle men in that equation are receivers Damon Griffin and Hartley, among others, with Griffin, a senior, earning the lion's share of the receptions earlier this season.

"I kind of learned back in high school that it's almost like you've got to wait your turn," Hartley says. "I'm still going through that, but I can't let it affect me. I've just got to do what I can do, and when my chance comes, I've got to make the best of it."

That chance has come in each of the Ducks' last three games, in which Hartley has led the team in catches as defenses key on Griffin.

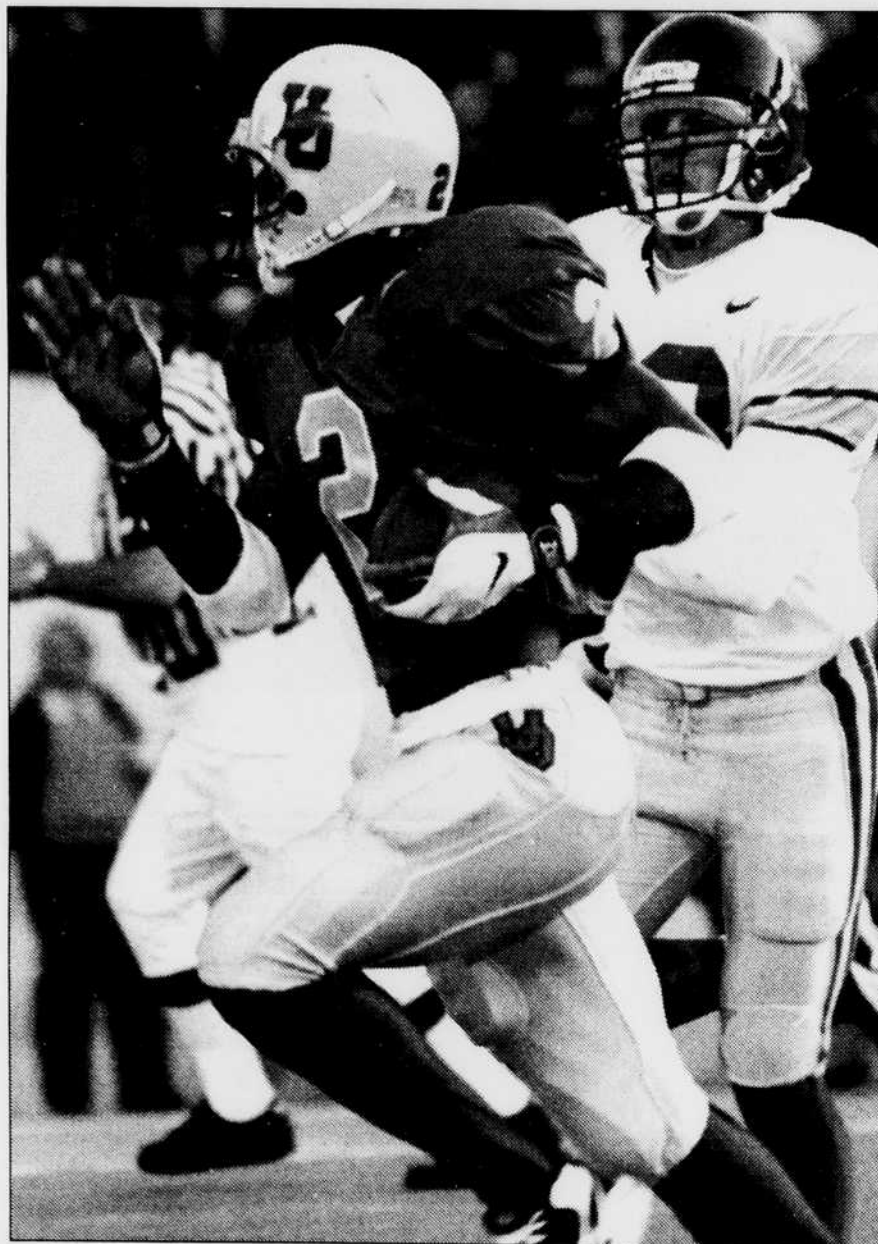
The last coach to make that mistake was Washington's Jim Lambright, who watched from the sidelines as Hartley enjoyed his record-setting day.

"We put a little more attention [on Griffin], just knowing what they'd done in the past in trying to commit a game plan to picking out the primary threats," Lambright says.

And his plan worked, as a combination of hot defense and cold hands led to just two receptions by Griffin.

Unfortunately for Lambright and the Huskies, that left Hartley free to run wild in the secondary. And oh, how he made them pay.

"He's been a go-to type guy with those



Hartley runs by Southern California's Grant Pearsall for a first down in the Ducks' 17-13 victory on Oct. 24. Nick Medley/Emerald

numbers for their program, and you could see that the potential was there," Lambright says. "We just didn't give him enough attention, obviously. We gave him way too much opportunity to create big plays, and the athletic ability sure jumped out."

That athletic ability Lambright refers to is actually something that Hartley's teammates joke about. His lack of acceleration has led to what might be construed as a third nickname: One Speed.

"We kind of clown him about that, that he plays at one speed," Smith says. "But his one speed is fast, and that's all you really need. If you play at one speed and you're consistently at that one speed, it'll be hard to defend you."

Combining that one speed with precision execution of his routes has certainly led to success for Hartley this season.

"For a long time, people have been telling me I'm not fast enough. I need another step," Hartley says. "Which is true. But I'm not slow. They're comparing me to other people who are blazing fast, but yet they can't do what I can do, so why are they comparing me to him?"

A willingness to run routes over the middle and risk beheading by a lurking defensive back is one of the things Hartley has shown that separates him from

other receivers in the Pac-10. While Griffin is more likely to be found streaking up the sideline for a deep ball, Hartley often risks life and limb by fearlessly flying over the middle.

"You can't have fear," Hartley says. "You can be nervous, but you can't be afraid to do something. If I've got to go over the middle to catch the ball and help the team, then I'm going to do it. If I'm going to take a hit, I've got to take a hit ... as long as I get back up."

The determination to blindly go over the middle is one of many attributes Hartley has shown since beginning his playing career in 1995 as a true freshman.

According to Griffin, it is only now that his exploits are truly being exploited and thus recognized.

"Tony's been doing the exact thing he's been doing since the first day he came here from high school," Griffin says. "He's always been proving that he's one of the best receivers out there. I think he always tries to prove that. He came in a very polished receiver, and I think that's helped him out a lot. He just has drive and competitiveness. He always wants to be the best, and that's what has put him over a lot of people

Turn to HARTLEY, Page 10B

## QB Ryan Kealy: the Pacific-10's hidden gem

It's no secret the Pacific-10 Conference is the best quarterback conference in the nation.

What might be a secret, however, is exactly how many pro-style signal callers there are in the Pac-10.

Cade McNown and Akili Smith are the two premier quarterbacks in the conference, if not the country. Washington's Brock Huard was the top Dawg before being riddled with injuries during the past year and a half. Stanford's Todd Husak is currently the Pac-10's No. 1-ranked passer with 296 yards per game. Southern California's Carson Palmer is not mentioned among the elites just yet, but he will be soon enough.

Then there's that other guy down at Tempe — all he did his freshman season was lead Arizona State to a 9-3 record and a Sun Bowl berth — who may just turn out to be the best of the bunch.

As a redshirt freshman in 1997, Ryan Kealy earned Pac-10 player-of-the-week honors twice, once against USC after throwing for 281 yards and three touchdowns and once more against Washington State after a 245-yard, four-touchdown performance. He was the first freshman to win that award twice in a season since USC's Todd Marinovich did it in 1989.

Opinion



Joel Hood

That's pretty select company ... I suppose.

Kealy was also named a first-team freshman all-American by The Sporting News and, not surprisingly, the Sun Devils' freshman of the year.

But for all the awards and all the accolades, Kealy suffers from a problem that many in his profession do — he's been stitched up more times than an extra on "ER."

In the last game of his freshman season, Kealy tore up his knee so badly that he was forced to watch Arizona State's 17-7 Sun Bowl victory against Iowa in street clothes. Kealy has only missed one start this season, against Stanford on Oct. 22, but he has been forced to the sidelines three separate times, including last week in a 55-22 victory over California.

That brings us to this week, and you guessed it: Kealy is questionable for Arizona State's game against the Ducks. The probable Sun Devil starter for Saturday's game is senior Steve Campbell, who has been called on quite heavily this season, as has fellow quarterback Chad Elliot.

Arizona State head coach Bruce Snyder said Tuesday that Kealy's minimum output Saturday would be taking snaps on extra points and field goals, but the best case scenario would have him in the starting lineup. With the Sun Devils likely needing to win their remaining two games to attract bowl attention, it's safe to say if Kealy was even remotely ready to play, he'd be in there.

Make no mistake about it, the Sun Devils need a victory Saturday every bit as much as the Ducks. Tied for fourth in the Pac-10 after an excruciating 42-38 home loss to Washington on opening night, Arizona State was predicted to finish no worse than second in the conference when the season began.

Yet Arizona State has begun to right the ship of late, winning three in a row and climbing back into the bowl picture with a 5-4 record. And it has done it for the most part with its two best offensive players, Kealy and tailback J.R. Redmond, hampered by injuries.

But with so many quality quarterbacks in the Pac-10, few have taken notice. Ryan Kealy's enormous potential might just be the best kept secret in the conference a little while longer.

Joel Hood is sports editor for the Emerald.