

Struggling Ducks plan to keep running despite rash of injuries

Herman Ho-Ching hopes to revitalize the Duck running game Saturday

By Allison Ross
Oregon Daily Emerald

When you have the Pacific-10 Conference's leading rusher as well as its most efficient quarterback, there isn't much you cannot do on offense.

It sure seemed that way early on for Oregon.

But with Reuben Droughns out after sustaining a season-ending leg injury against UCLA on Oct. 17, Herman Ho-Ching thought to be lost for the season after an injury against San Jose State and third-string tailback Kevin Parker also out with an ankle injury, Oregon's once dominant running game has practically run dry.

Oregon began the season with a 48-14 drilling of Michigan State in which Droughns exploited the Spartan defense for 202 yards. He was on his way to a record-breaking season, accumulating 824 total yards in just the first six games of the season.

But Droughns wasn't Oregon's only weapon on the ground. Ho-Ching was the Ducks' second-leading rusher with 177 yards heading into the game against Southern California on Oct. 24 despite having not played since injuring his knee against San Jose State on Sept. 19.

The injuries to Oregon's top two tailbacks meant that junior Derien Latimer would have some pretty big shoes to fill. In his first start

against the Trojans, Latimer seemed to prove all the skeptics right early on, rushing for just eight yards in the first half. However, Oregon kept with him and Latimer rushed for 79 yards on 16 carries in the second half.

Even though they struggled, the Ducks never shunned their running game. They still haven't. "We still run the same plays,"

"[Herman Ho-Ching is] a very talented back who makes a lot of things happen on his own. But you'd like to think that people always have to be honest with the run."

Jeff Tedford
UO offensive coordinator

offensive coordinator Jeff Tedford said. "We pretty much have the same running game every week. The offense is the offense."

With Ho-Ching set to start this week against Arizona State, the plays may be the same, but the outcome may not be. In his first game back last week against Washington, Ho-Ching seemed to spark Oregon's offense even when he wasn't carrying the ball.

As soon as Ho-Ching entered the game mid-way through the first quarter, quarterback Akili Smith promptly baited the Husky

defense with play action and completed a 53-yard bomb to wideout Donald Haynes. Ho-Ching then banged for nine yards on three straight rushes to set up the first points of the game on Nathan Villegas' 27-yard field goal.

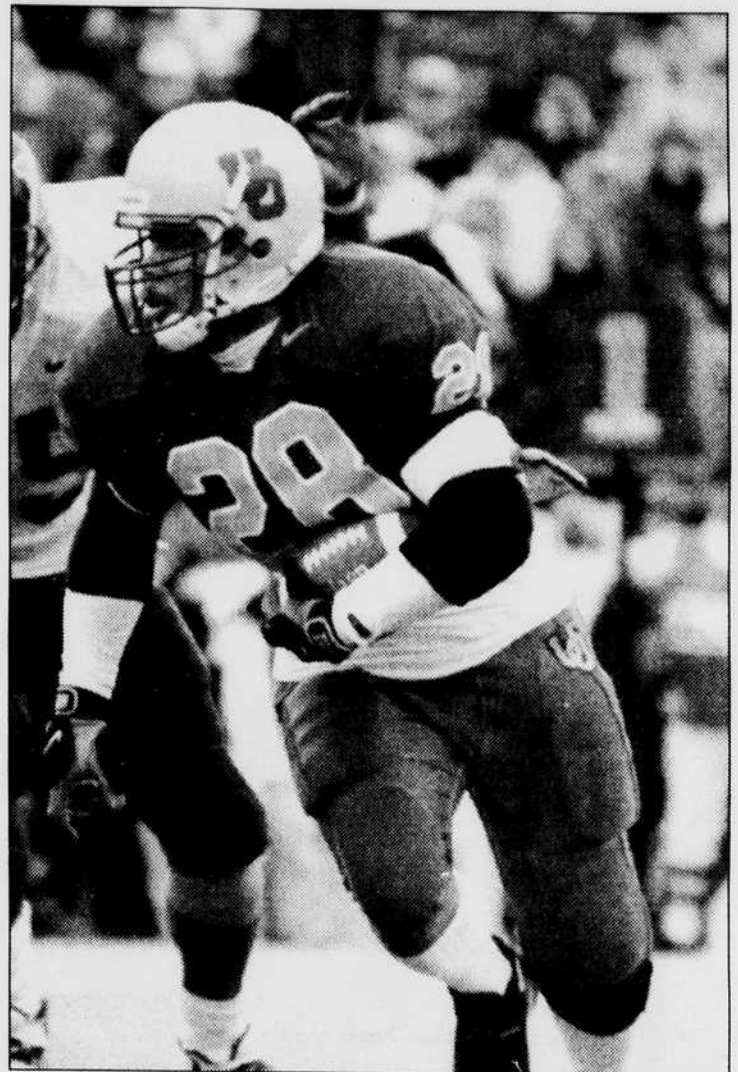
Despite an injured knee that was not completely healed, Ho-Ching finished the game with 47 rushing yards. But it was Ho-Ching's effort — lunging on one leg, with a defender in tow, to pick up extra yards the first time he touched the ball — that awoke Oregon's sleepy running attack.

"It's critical to have a running game," Ho-Ching said. "I can't say that just because I'm in the game we're more balanced, but I try to prove myself every time."

The Ducks hope to control the ball and clock with Ho-Ching anchoring a revitalized running game against Arizona State. The Sun Devils embarrassed Oregon with their own running prowess for 405 rushing yards last season.

Tedford said Oregon will attack this game just as they have attacked the past three opponents — by attempting to establish the running game.

"[Ho-Ching is] a very talented back who makes a lot of things happen on his own," he said. "But you'd like to think that people always have to be honest with the run. Maybe they respect it a little more with him in there, but you hope that every time you run a play-action pass that they respect the runner whomever it is." Ducks' postseason hopes may depend on it.



Freshman tailback Herman Ho-Ching returned from a knee injury to run for 47 yards on 17 carries last week in the win over Washington at Autzen Stadium last Saturday.

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