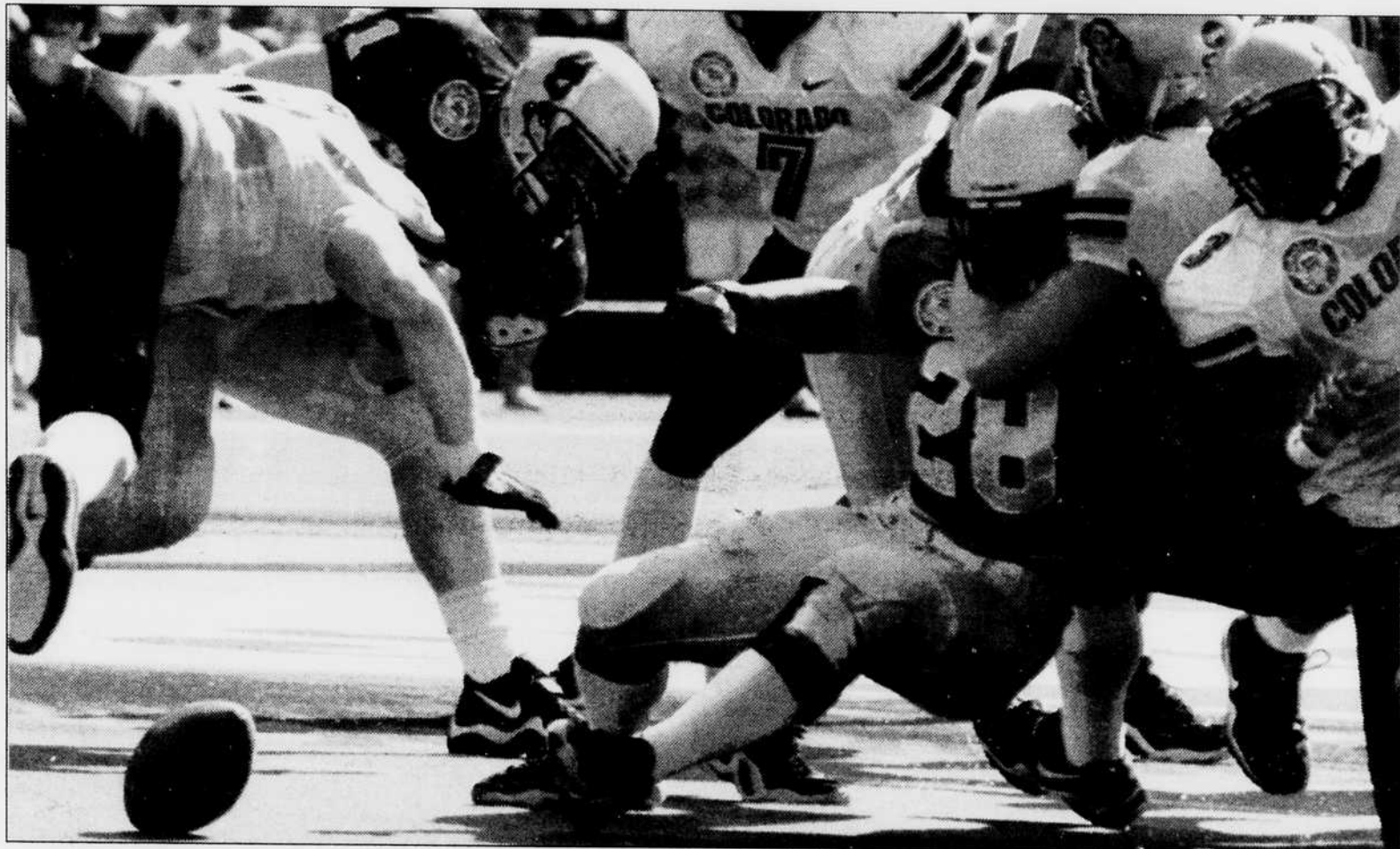


ALOHA BOWL

PARADISE LOST



Tailback Herman Ho-Ching lost two first-quarter fumbles, and the Ducks committed six overall, leading to 23 Colorado points and an embarrassing 51-43 loss in the Aloha Bowl on Christmas Day. *Ryan Yamashiro for the Emerald*

By Rob Moseley
Oregon Daily Emerald

HONOLULU — As Colorado fiddled with the Ducks' Christmas wishes, Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti burned.

With the Ducks in Hawaii for the Dec. 25 Aloha Bowl, Colorado ruined the trip to paradise with a 51-43 win over then-No. 21 Oregon in front of an estimated Aloha Stadium crowd of 35,000 that saw the second-highest point total in college bowl history.

The combination of six Oregon turnovers leading to 23 Colorado points and what Bellotti felt was the Buffaloes' constant holding of Duck receivers had the head coach seething after the game.

"I believe we're a better team than Colorado, just not today because of the turnovers," said Bellotti, who also fumed after Oregon's 38-6 loss to Colorado in the 1996 Cotton Bowl. "We made way too many mistakes early. We dug ourselves a very deep hole, and I'm very proud of my football team for

Colorado 51, Oregon 43

coming back."

After Damon Wheeler's 52-yard interception return for a touchdown gave

Colorado a 44-14 lead early in the second half, Oregon outscored the Buffaloes 29-7 and got the ball back on its own 43-yard line for a chance to tie the score with three minutes, 11 seconds remaining.

Pacific-10 Conference co-offensive player of the year Akili Smith completed 24 of 46 passes for 456 yards, two scores and two interceptions on his way to being named Oregon's game MVP, but he couldn't recapitulate the late-season heroics he had demonstrated so many times this season.

After throwing an incomplete pass on first and second downs, Smith was sacked by Colorado's Hannibal Navies before his fourth-down pass attempt fell between two receivers, thus ending not just the drive but Oregon's chances at a miraculous comeback, as well as Smith's short but storied two-year career in Eugene.

Turn to **LOSS**, Page 2B