



T.J. Tomlin beats Michael Fletcher to the ball in a defensive drill Monday at the practice fields near the Casanova Center.

Nick Medley/Emerald

## Football

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that I like that I brought with me. So we're not really keeping the same system, but a similar system."

Just one week into spring practice, Oregon's defense has already shown signs that Aliotti's ideas could produce positive dividends next season.

"I'm pleased with our defense," head coach Mike Bellotti said. "The strongest part of our defense is our linebackers and our secondary. They run well and they hustle, and they have great energy."

The Ducks' defense displayed that energy during an intrasquad game Saturday. Despite getting inside the defense's 15-yard line on three different occasions, Oregon's offense could muster just three field goals.

The defense also caused three turnovers, while bullying Oregon's quarterbacks into a combined nine-

for-23 passing performance.

"[The defense] is usually ahead early on in the scrimmages for whatever reason," Bellotti said. "But they definitely were in this scrimmage."

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the defense's impressive scrimmage performance was the fact that several of the Ducks' top defenders were out of the lineup with injuries.

Linebackers Dietrich Moore and Peter Sirmon are being held out of contact this spring, while a third starting senior, Aaron Chevront, was held out Saturday. Also unavailable for the scrimmage were linebacker Tim Shear and defensive tackle Zack Freiter, who underwent surgery to on his left knee Monday and will be sidelined for the rest of the spring.

"We're a little bit injured right now," Aliotti said, "but the second

group has stepped up. It will make us better in the long run, because everybody is taking more reps."

Aliotti, Oregon's fourth defensive coordinator in five years, said he is encouraged by his defensive players efforts thus far.

"I like how hard they play," Aliotti said. "They play hard, and they play aggressive. That's what you want out of a defense."

Even though Aliotti has never coached any of the players on this team, his methods shouldn't be too unfamiliar to them.

Last season, Bob Foster — Aliotti's college football coach at Cal-Davis — was Oregon's defensive coordinator. Foster is still a part of the Ducks staff, as are all of last season's assistants.

"[The players] feel very comfortable about those guys, and that makes the transition easier," Aliotti said.

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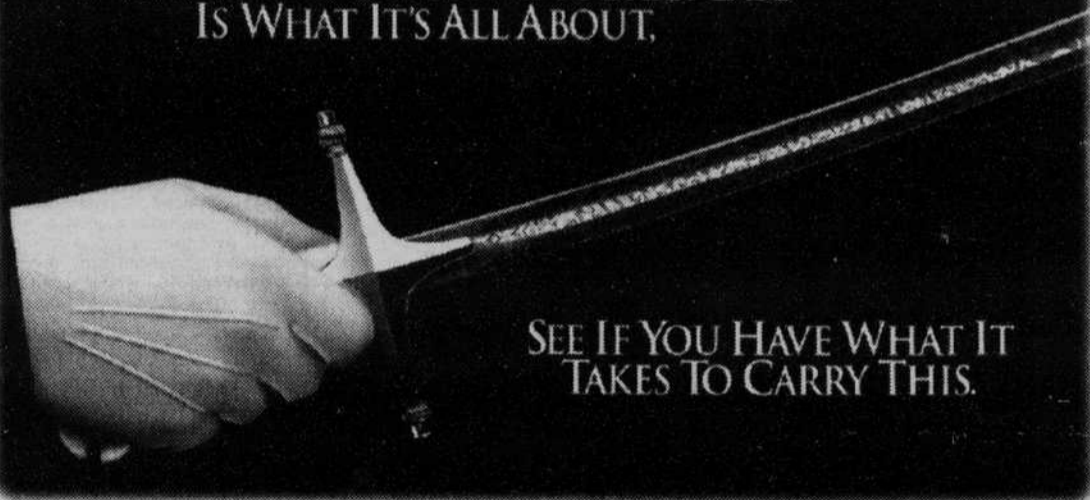
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