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Football

Continued from Page 11

who began camp fully recovered from the fractured fibula and ligament damage that ended his 1998 season but is not completely in shape yet.

In less than five full games last season, Droughns recorded three 200-yards-plus rushing performances. O.J. Simpson and Marcus Allen are the only other Pacific-10 Conference players to do that in a single season.

"A healthy Reuben Droughns will take a lot of pressure off the offensive line and the young quarterbacks," Bellotti said. "But Reuben Droughns is not a team in himself; other people will have to step up."

The play of the offensive line will, as usual, be crucial to all aspects of the Ducks' scoring. Seniors Deke Moen, Josh Beckett and Scott Fergus are all experienced performers on the line.

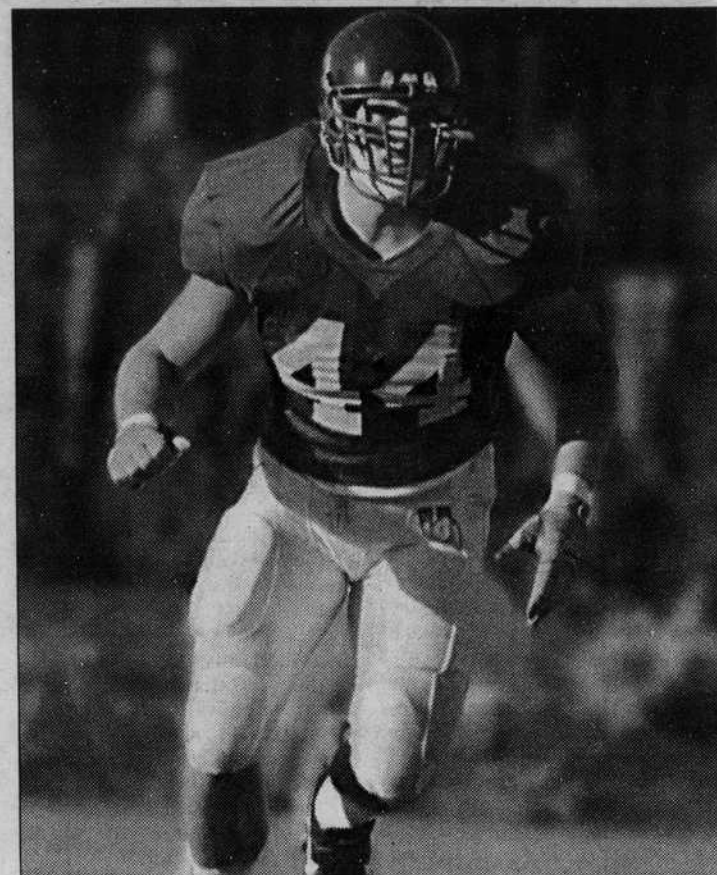
Placekicker Nathan Villegas, a second-team All-American last season after leading the Pacific-10 Conference in scoring, returns optimistic about his senior year.

"I'm just gonna do what I did last year," Villegas said. "It's gonna be a good year."

Oregon has a new look at tight end due to Jed Weaver's graduation. Either Enyi Nwamuo or La-Corey Collins will fill the role. Both are athletically gifted enough to compensate for being inexperienced at the position, Bellotti said.

As the offense develops, Oregon players and coaches concur that the defense will define the team this season.

"You know the offense is gonna come along," said senior defensive back and special-teams standout Michael Fletcher. "So the defense will carry the team the first couple



Scott Barnett/for the Emerald
Peter Sirmon, injured most of 1998, is ready to make an impact on behalf of the Oregon D.

games, get the quarterback broken in, and we'll be ready to roll from there."

Beside Fletcher, the Ducks return six defensive starters. Among them are linemen Caleb Smith, Saul Patu and Terry Miller. James Rose, a 6-foot-4, 300-pound junior-college transfer, adds size and strength inside.

"I'm gonna bring tremendous hitting speed," Rose said. "I plug the middle real good."

Junior Tamoni Joiner and junior transfer Brian Johnson will lead the group of players trying to fill in for Rashad Bauman at cornerback. Bauman tore his anterior cruciate ligament in spring practice

Spartans looking for revenge

Senior quarterback Bill Burke leads Michigan State in a nationally televised rematch Sept. 2

By Tim Pyle
Oregon Daily Emerald

Last season, Michigan State marched into Eugene with a big-name tailback and a No. 23 ranking.

The Spartans limped home with a 48-14 defeat that wasn't as close as the score indicated.

This season, Oregon travels to East Lansing, Mich., with a big-name tailback and... well, no national ranking.

But that doesn't mean Michigan State won't be eager for a shot at revenge.

How could the Spartans not be bitter?

Akili Smith and Reuben Droughns treated Michigan State's defense like silver-and-green confetti in their respective coming-out parties, leading the Ducks to a 48-0 lead before two fourth-quarter, thanks-for-coming touchdowns gave the Spartans... well, some points.

In the Sept. 2 rematch, which will be nationally televised on ESPN, Michigan State debuts an offense devoid of former star running back Sedrick Irvin but still more than capable in the hands of

senior quarterback Bill Burke.

The single-season passing-yardage record is already in Burke's hands, thanks to his 2,595 yards last season. And he has perhaps the Big 10's best pair of wide receivers to look for in sophomore Plaxico Burress and senior Gari Scott, who combined for 123 catches, 1,856 yards and 12 touchdowns last season.

Senior Lloyd Clemons is listed atop the preseason tailback depth chart. Clemons actually outgained Irvin against Oregon last season, recording 95 yards and a touchdown on 12 carries.

"Our skill position players are definitely the strength of this offense," said fifth-year head coach Nick Saban in a released statement.

Defensively, the Spartans' strength lies in the secondary, led by senior safety Aric Morris, who paced the team in tackles in 1998.

Michigan State's struggles up front — the Spartans ranked second-to-last in the Big 10 in rushing defense last season — may have Droughns eyeing a repeat of his 202-yard breakthrough last season. But 6-foot-5, 269-pound senior defensive end Robaire Smith will be among those blocking Droughns' way

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