

Pac-10 Picks



Katie Nesse
tries to keep
the lead.
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Arizona Wildcats vs. Oregon Ducks

Game Day



7:15 p.m.
Saturday
Arizona Stadium

Ducks in need of road victory

■ With seven straight road losses as unwanted baggage, Oregon travels to Arizona

By Mirjam Swanson
Oregon Daily Emerald

Five games left, and Oregon is thinking Rose Bowl.

Who cares that the Ducks are 1-2 in Pacific-10 Conference play? So what if they're tied for sixth place with Southern California and Washington State?

This is the Pac-10, and all things are possible.

That is, as long as Oregon wins.

For the Ducks to make a run at the Pac-10 title, a win against Arizona (2-1, 5-2) on Saturday night is a must.

"I don't think two losses count anybody out," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "But certainly, more than two losses pushes you back so far behind that you can't catch up. For us it's a five-game span. We're starting over, and we have a chance to climb right back into this race.

"We're capable of making that step."

His players agree.

"We still feel like we're in this race," senior rover Michael Fletcher said. "If we get the win this weekend, we'll be fine."

The Ducks used last week's

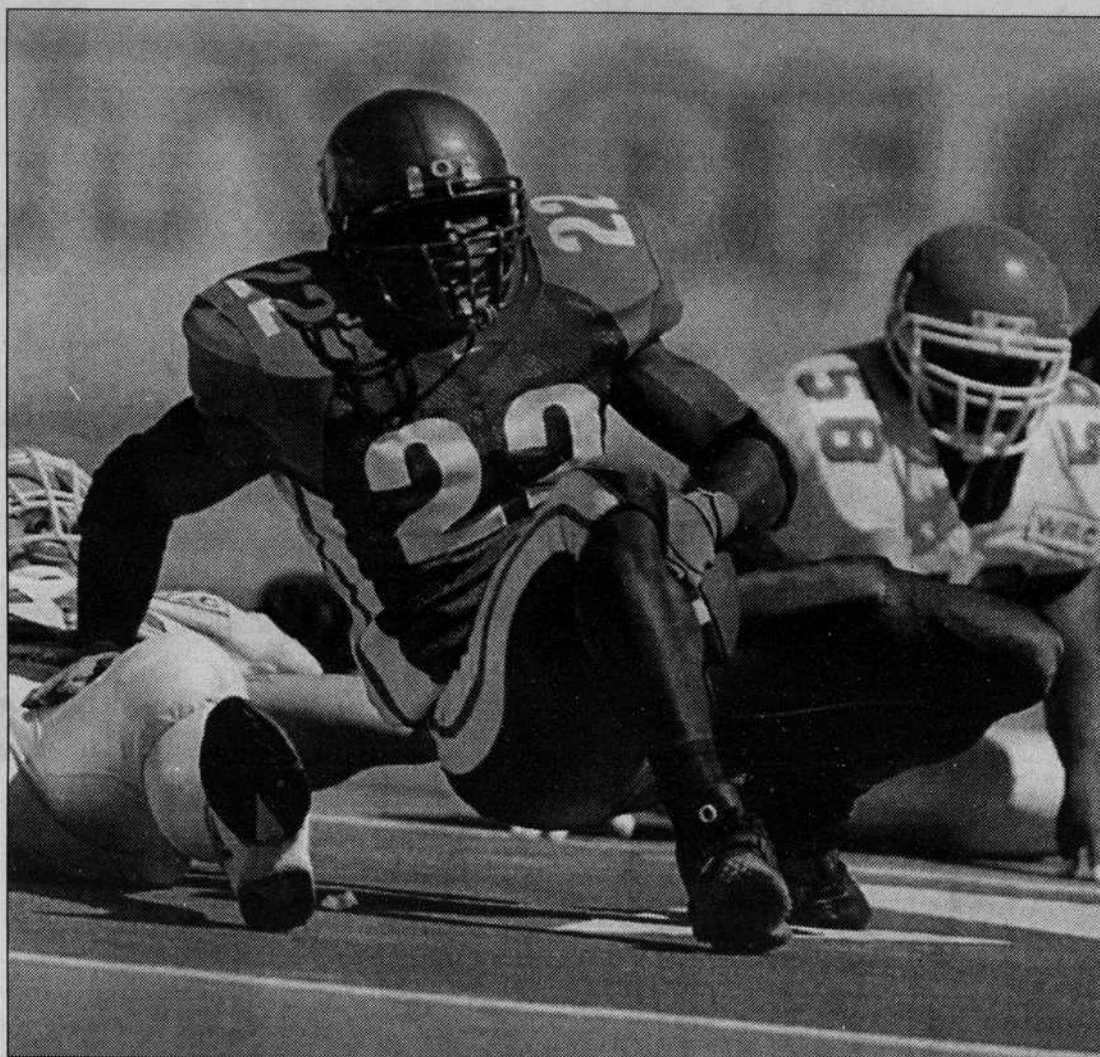
bye to nurse themselves back from six straight weeks of action, ending with painful road losses against arch-rival Washington and growing-nemesis UCLA.

"We were a little banged up," defensive tackle Caleb Smith said. "The bye week was helpful for the whole team. A lot of guys had bumps and bruises and things that just tear your body down, so it was nice to get a little rest and have your body recuperate."

Still, Oregon is without several important players. Tailback Herman Ho-Ching remains sidelined with a foot injury that might cost him the rest of the season. Offensive lineman Al Cotton, linebacker Garret Graham, placekicker Nathan Villegas and receiver Ray Brust aren't expected to play either.

The Ducks did have one casualty during the bye week. Cornerback Tamoni Joiner was suspended for the second time this season — this time for at least three games — for violating team rules. The suspension leaves Oregon thin in the secondary and makes defending Arizona's ever-explosive offense more difficult.

"Tamoni's a great player," Smith said. "That's a tough loss not to have him back there, but our defense feels that we have capable backups in guys like Brian Johnson and Ryan Mitchell. They'll be really up for this weekend 'cause [Arizona has] a



Scott Barnett Emerald

great receiver in [Dennis] Northcutt. They're going to fill in just fine and exceed everyone's expectations."

Stopping Northcutt, quite possibly the best athlete in the Pac-10, may be the Ducks' biggest concern. But it's not their only one.

Not by a long shot. Even though only half of the

'Cats quarterback tandem is expected to play, Ortege Jenkins alone is enough to put Bellotti and team on guard.

"Both of their quarterbacks are extremely dangerous because they possess great speed, and they're very, very good athletes," Bellotti said.

And Trung Canidate will be attempting to recreate his per-

formance last season. During then-No. 13 Arizona's 38-3 blowout of then-No. 12 Oregon, Canidate rushed for 180 yards on 17 carries.

Undoubtedly, the Ducks will be thinking about that when they take the field Saturday.

"It definitely gives us something to be motivated about for Turn to Oregon, Page 6B

Reuben Droughns is the healthiest he's been since the Sept. 25 game against USC, according to head coach Mike Bellotti.

Left-for-dead Wildcats still very alive in Pac-10 race

■ Quarterback Keith Smith may be sidelined as Arizona hopes to remain in chase for the Rose Bowl

By Scott Peszner
Oregon Daily Emerald

This isn't the same Arizona team that was the overwhelming preseason favorite to win the Pacific-10 Conference title.

Instead, this is the Wildcat squad that salvaged a disappointing start to its season by clawing its way back to a second-place tie in the conference.

"The guys know every game is a must for everybody," Arizona head coach Dick Tomey said in a released statement. "The league race appears to be wide open, depending on what happens with Stanford, but we can't even think about that. We just have to take it one play at a time against Oregon."

Arizona can stay in the conference race

by beating the Ducks. Considering Oregon hasn't won on the road this season, many teams would take comfort in playing the Ducks at home.

But the Wildcats shouldn't get too comfortable.

Oregon has won four-of-the-last-five outings against Arizona, but the Wildcats are 8-4 against the Ducks at Arizona Stadium. Tomey said his team needs to show improvement from last weekend's 34-21 win over Texas El-Paso.

"We just need to play better," Tomey said. "We have to assume that everyone is getting better, and if we're not getting better, we're not going to be competitive."

After losing to Stanford 50-22 in its Pac-10 opener Sept. 18, Arizona's running game, 17th-best in the nation, led the 'Cats to three straight 500-yard games and three wins.

Pac-10 offensive player of the week Trung Canidate needs just 341 more yards to become the Wildcats all-time leading rusher. The senior running back had 27 carries for 202 yards and one touchdown against UTEP.

Dennis Northcutt's production has made him a Biletnikoff Award and All-American candidate. The star receiver, who has seen time at cornerback this season, is averaging 18 yards per play on 75 touches. Against the Miners, he accumulated 193 all-purpose yards, falling just short of his fourth 200-yard game of the season.

However, the Wildcat's total offense could be even more potent than No. 12 in the nation if the offensive line had more stability. The line has allowed 22 sacks, compared to 21 last season and 25 in 1997.

"We've come a ways, but I don't think we can make any determinations [on the quality of the line] right now," Tomey said. "I don't think we've played against the better

defenses in the league. We have a huge challenge this week."

A rib injury sustained by senior quarterback Keith Smith against the Miners could give Ortege Jenkins his fourth start of the season. Against UTEP, Jenkins completed 10-of-17 passes for 113 yards and one touchdown while carrying the ball 11 times for 83 yards.

Meanwhile, Butkus Award candidate Marcus Bell is Arizona's best linebacker with 60 tackles. Bell and linebacker DaShon Polk, who has 38 tackles, lead the Cat's defense.

Tomey compares Bell to Oregon's Peter Sirmon.

"They are both very intense, and they play hard," Tomey said. "They have both led the league in tackles — Marcus last year and Sirmon the year before.

"But we wouldn't trade Marcus, and I'm sure they wouldn't trade Sirmon."

quick
HITS

Sizzling Stats

Scoring Offense	Scoring Defense
Oregon 36.8	Oregon 27.2
Arizona 27.6	Arizona 30.0

Quotable

"Droughns has made a huge difference in what they've done when he's played. He's a tough guy, he's a warrior, and we just have a lot of respect for him."

— Dick Tomey,
Arizona head coach

"There's more riding on the game this year than there was last year... I think [the players] understand the sense of urgency to [play a full game]."

— Mike Bellotti,
UCLA head coach

Key Player

Reuben Droughns

After a bye week let his sore ribs get some rest, Droughns is primed for a breakthrough that the Ducks sorely need.

