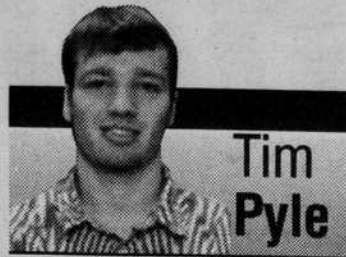


Mike Bellotti has the Ducks poised for their school-record third straight bowl game. Scott Barnett Emerald

The unlikely is likely for UO



Tim Pyle

The Ducks are right where they wanted to be. Just don't ask them how they got there.

Heading into the final three games of the regular season, Oregon is in the thick of a Pacific-10 Conference race that may be the most convoluted, nonconventional ever.

The spectrum of possibilities for the final Pac-10 standings still seem endless heading into the final three weeks — plus one if you count Arizona and Arizona State's Nov. 27 clash — of the conference season.

Washington (5-3 overall, 4-1 Pac-10) holds the edge with just one league loss and a victory over Stanford (5-3, 5-1). But the Huskies trav-

el to Tucson, Ariz., to face the explosive Wildcats (6-3, 3-2) on Saturday, and the Dawgs could easily suffer their second loss there.

In fact, I'm betting — though not literally, of course — that Arizona will get revenge for Washington's last-second win at Arizona Stadium last season.

That would push the Huskies back to the rest of the two-loss pack. Arizona, Oregon (5-3, 3-2), Arizona State (4-4, 3-2) and California (4-4, 3-2) can all stay afloat with wins Saturday.

The Cardinal, meanwhile, have a bye week and would gain the inside track to the conference crown once again with a Washington loss. But Stanford does have to play at Sun Devil Stadium on Nov. 13 and should lose there, especially if Arizona State tailback J.R. Redmond has bounced back from his marital difficulties.

Assuming all of the above works out, the Ducks could essentially be playing for a Rose Bowl berth after they dispose of pitiful Washington State on Saturday.

Who would have believed that when Oregon came up a foot short at UCLA on Oct. 9?

The game next Saturday in Berkeley, Calif., against the Golden Bears will have drastic effects on conference positioning. But does anybody really think the Ducks would allow Cal to sidetrack their dreams of glory?

The Golden Bears' defense may be the best the Pac-10 has to offer, but their offense is terrible. Oregon will undoubtedly find a way to win in the Bay Area.

That leaves Oregon State between the Ducks and a possible Pac-10 crown. If the Beavers (5-3, 2-3) don't take care of Cal in Corvallis on Saturday or upset the Wildcats — highly unlikely — the following weekend, they will still be seeking that sixth win that has eluded them since 1970.

Should the stakes end up being that high, this season's Civil War could be among the most intense ever. Regardless, Oregon is bound

Turn to **Tim Pyle**, Page 9B

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