

Sun Bowl

continued from page 1B

freshman receiver Keenan Howry for a sliding 10-yard touchdown grab in the right end zone that, coupled with senior placekicker Nathan Villegas' extra point, gave the Ducks the final margin with one minute, 32 seconds remaining.

But the drama was not yet complete.

Minnesota, led by quarterback Billy Cockerham, who would be named the game's MVP, drove to the Oregon 39-yard line. It was then that senior linebacker Dietrich Moore, he of the big plays and little credit, made perhaps the biggest play of his Oregon career.

Moore rushed in from the left side and drilled Cockerham as he cocked back to throw, causing a fumble that junior defensive end Saul Patu pounced on with 41 seconds left to all but ensure a Ducks' victory.

"It was a play designed for me and Matt Smith to come off the edge," said Moore, who recorded two sacks among his six tackles. "They didn't have enough guys to block us all."

A few moments later, green-and-yellow jubilation covered the field, as Oregon players and fans converged to revel in the glory of the fifth bowl win in school history.

In addition to guaranteeing the Ducks a spot in the final top-25 rankings to be released this week, the victory gave Oregon (9-3 overall) a school-record tying win total and the best overall mark in the Pacific-10 Conference this season.

"This is a great feeling to end this way," said senior linebacker Peter Sirmon, whose 16 Sun Bowl tackles were surpassed only by Gopher All-American strong safety Tyrone Carter's 18.

Head coach Mike Bellotti praised his defense's performance and his team's heart.

"The defense kept us in the game, and the offense came through when it had to," said a victory-shower drenched and smiling Bellotti after Oregon's fifth win of the season by five points or less. "Our kids have a sense of belief that allows us to win these games."

The win also saved the conference from being shut out in post-season play, as the other four Pac-10 teams in bowl games all lost.

"I hope it brings some respect to the Pac-10," Harrington said.

If nothing else, the Ducks assured Minnesota's and the Big Ten Conference's respect.

"It was a heckuva college football game," Gopher head coach Glen Mason said. "One of the best, if not the best, I've seen this year."

Neither team led by more than six points in a game that gave 48,757 Sun Bowl Stadium fans and a national television audience on CBS all they could ask for.

The first half was dominated by the defenses as Oregon proved itself capable of containing Minnesota's vaunted ground attack, and the Golden Gophers flexed their pass defense muscle against the Ducks' potent passing game.

Oregon punted twice and Minnesota once before the Ducks got the first break of the afternoon when senior rover Michael Fletcher intercepted a Cockerham pass at the Gopher 43 midway through the first quarter.

The Oregon offense, however, was unable to pick up a first

down, and Villegas came on for a 52-yard field-goal attempt. But Minnesota rose to the occasion and blocked Villegas' kick to keep the game scoreless and earn possession at its own 38.

Taking advantage of the change in momentum and a 36-yard reception by wide receiver Luke Levenson, the Gophers then took the lead on Cockerham's one-yard scoring toss to wideout Ron Johnson. Dan Nystrom's extra point gave Minnesota a 7-0 lead.

On the ensuing drive, a 16-yard scamper by senior tailback Reuben Droughns was stopped only with a touchdown-saving tackle by Carter, which put the Ducks at their own 49. But the

drive stalled after a 13-yard sack by defensive tackle Dyron Russ, who would be named the game's outstanding lineman.

After a Minnesota punt was returned 15 yards by Fletcher to the Gopher 48, Oregon finally appeared poised to get its offense in gear early in the second quarter. On the next play, Droughns took a handoff and exploded through the left side of the line before cutting back to the right. Searching for an open alley to the end zone, Droughns slowed inside the 20 with a few downfield blockers in front of him. But all-Big Ten defensive end Karon Riley made Droughns pay for his indecisiveness, jarring the ball loose from behind, and cornerback Willie Middlebrooks recovered at the 10.

Minnesota advanced to the Ducks' 46 before punting, then got the ball right back as Oregon went three and out.

Despite excellent field position at the Duck 41, the Gophers were unable to make Oregon's sturdy, Sirmon-led defense budge. Sirmon teamed with fellow senior linebacker Nathan Naggi to drop Minnesota tailback Thomas Hamner for a loss of two on third down and force yet another punt.

Alas, but the punting was not done. Oregon junior Kurtis Doerr was called upon for his fifth punt of the first half six plays later, as was Minnesota's Ryan Rindels for his sixth three plays after that.

Then, finally, the Ducks got something going.

On first down from his own 34, Harrington found Hartley, who hung on for a 37-yard gain to the Gopher 29 despite a big hit. An 11-yard completion to tight end Enyi Nwamuo and a pair of Droughns' rushes for 13 yards later, Harrington went five yards for Oregon's first points with 1:11 left in the half. Villegas' extra point made it 7-7, which would be the halftime score.

After combining for 11 punts and just 14 first downs in the first half, the offenses came to life early in the third quarter.

First, Minnesota surprised the Ducks by featuring the pass on an eight-play, 80-yard drive that was capped by Cockerham's 38-yard touchdown connection with receiver Arland Bruce. Nystrom, however, missed the extra point to keep the score at 13-7.

Oregon responded with an impressive drive of its own, using a 23-yard reception by Hartley and a 26-yard catch by Howry to get

to the Gopher 5. Three plays later, the Ducks faced fourth-and-goal from the Minnesota 1. Bellotti gave the go-ahead, and Harrington rewarded his coach with a touchdown dive to cap the 11-play, 69-yard march.

Villegas' extra point put Oregon on top for the first time, 14-13.

Minnesota then went three and out, and Fletcher returned Rindels' punt 16 yards to the Duck 49 to shift momentum completely in Oregon's favor. But three plays later, momentum was slipping away with a fourth-and-seven looming.

That's when Bellotti implemented one of his season-long tricks — a fake punt utilizing Doerr's athleticism. Instead of an option run between the upback and Doerr, however, this play called for Doerr to showcase his arm.

Impress Doerr did as he fired a spiral down the right side toward junior receiver Sonny Cook. Minnesota's Middlebrooks was flagged for pass interference, and the Ducks had first down at the Gopher 33.

The drive stalled at the 20, and Villegas entered to convert a 37-yard field goal and give Oregon a 17-13 edge late in the third quarter.

Before the fourth quarter would even dawn, Minnesota was well on its way toward responding. Cockerham's passing again paved the way — highlighted by a 34-yard hookup with Levenson — as the Gophers advanced to a third-and-five at the Duck 7 on the first play of the fourth quarter.

There, Cockerham and Johnson combined for their second scoring play on a well-timed and well-placed fade along the right side of the end zone. Nystrom connected this time, and Minnesota had a 20-17 lead.

With Droughns in the locker room with leg cramps, the Ducks turned to sophomore tailback Herman Ho-Ching, who carried four straight times for 26 yards to kick-start Oregon's next drive. When Harrington hit junior tight end LaCorey Collins for a 17-yard gain to the Minnesota 33, the Ducks looked to be in business.

Two incompletions and an eight-yard sack later, Doerr punted yet again.

Sophomore cornerback Steve Smith got Oregon the ball back quickly with a leaping interception along the left sideline at the Gopher 47.

But the Duck offense was stymied by the tough Minnesota defense again, and Doerr punted for the seventh time.

Once again, Oregon answered the Gophers with a defensive stand of its own, and the Ducks regained possession following a Rindels punt at their own 13.

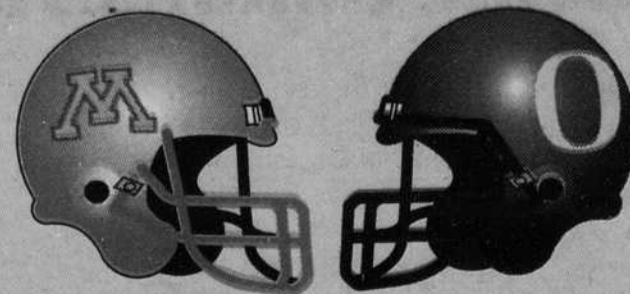
With 7:28 remaining, Harrington and the Oregon offense went to work. Ho-Ching's hard running and two Harrington completions got the Ducks a first down at the Minnesota 43.

From there, Harrington threw incomplete, Droughns — reemerging from the locker room and into the game — gained a yard and Harrington's screen to Droughns was snubbed by Gopher safety Jimmy Henry for a loss of two.

Fourth-and-11. About 3 1/2 minutes to play.

The Ducks went for it. Harrington and Hartley coolly delivered, and the rest, as they say, is history.

"We've done that so many times this year," Harrington said.



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	1	2	3	4	Final
Minnesota	7	0	6	7	20
Oregon	0	7	10	7	24

	Minnesota	Oregon
first downs	19	22
rushing att.	35	39
rushing yards	123	186
passes att.	37	43
passes comp.	19	20
passing yards	257	232
total yards	353	388
penalties	5-58	4-25
possession time	24:35	35:25
third-down con.	9-17	6-19
fourth-down con.	0-0	2-2
kickoff returns	3-67	4-80
interceptions	0-0	2-2
fumble returns	1-0	0-0
punts	7-323	8-325

Rushing

	att	yds	long	avg
Oregon				
Droughns	21	95	31	4.5
Ho-Ching	9	56	11	6.2
Tucker	2	10	7	5.0
Brown	1	4	4	4.0
Harrington	6	-9	5	-1.5
Minnesota				
Hamner	20	64	11	3.2
Cockerham	12	26	14	2.2
Bruce	2	8	10	5.0

Passing

	att-comp-int	yds	long	td
Oregon				
Harrington	43-20-0	232	37	1
Minnesota				
Cockerham	37-19-2	257	38	3

Receiving

	No.	yds	long	td
Oregon				
Hartley	7	113	37	0
Howry	3	54	26	1
Droughns	3	-1	5	0
Chance	2	15	8	0
Collins	1	17	17	0
Cook	1	12	12	0
Nwamuo	1	11	11	0
Ho-Ching	1	7	7	0
Tucker	1	4	4	0
Minnesota				
Johnson	7	54	13	2
Levenson	6	126	36	0
Arland	2	44	38	1
Jones	2	26	18	0
Hamner	2	7	5	0