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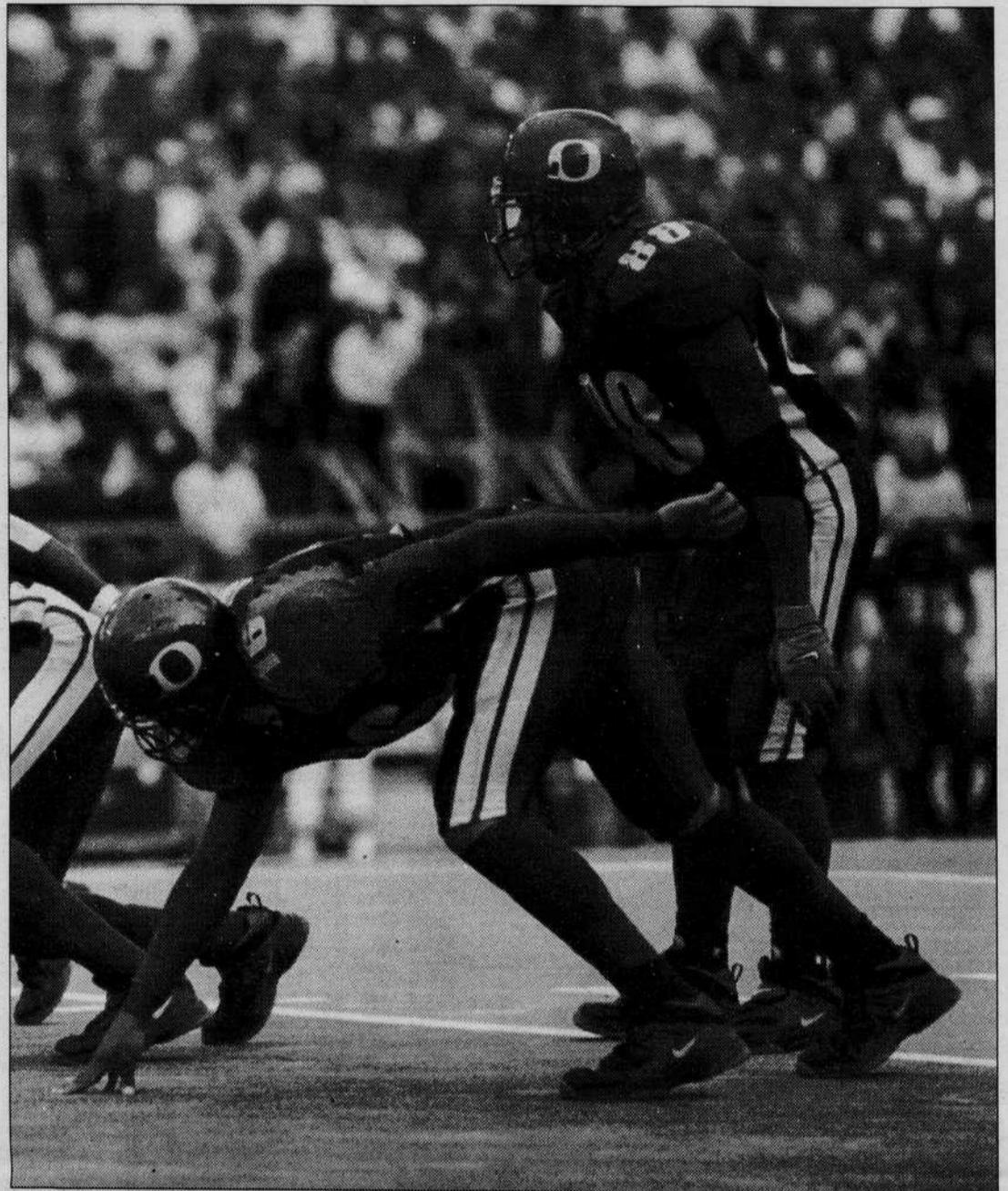
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Azle Malinao-Alvarez Emerald

The Ducks dug in and stood up to the No. 5 team in the country, Wisconsin, but couldn't make it two wins in a row.

Ducks toss Nevada, but can't overcome Wisconsin's might

■ Oregon puts up a valiant effort against the No. 5 Badgers, but falls in the fourth quarter to the Rose Bowl champions

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

MADISON, Wisc. — When the 2000 non-conference schedule was released for the Ducks, many eyes were drawn to one particular game.

Nevada at home? Nah, that's just a nice home-opener for the crowd. Idaho at home? Nope, although it's not a bad team to play against in your final tune-up for the Pacific-10 Conference season.

But playing back-to-back Rose Bowl champion Wisconsin on the road? Now we're talking. It doesn't get much bigger than that.

It was the game that all the players were secretly talking about, but couldn't do so in public in respect to Nevada. But right after Oregon dispatched the Wolfpack 36-7 on Sept. 2, the hype for the Wisconsin game exploded.

"We are ready to go out there and do our thing, man," sophomore

wide receiver Keenan Howry said after the Nevada win. "It's going to be pretty awesome."

"Wisconsin's a great football team and so are we," senior defensive end Jason Nikolao said. "May the best team win."

"This is our chance to prove to the nation that we are an elite team," senior wide receiver Marshaun Tucker said.

While the tough 27-23 loss handed to the Ducks by the fifth-ranked Badgers on Sept. 9 may not get the attention of the nation, it did prove to the Ducks and the rest of the Pac-10, that Oregon is no push-over.

"I would hope that this game would give us respect," senior line-backer Matt Smith said following the Wisconsin game. "I think we have a great team and we came in here and played the fifth-ranked team in the nation step for step. We weren't intimidated."

The Ducks certainly answered any of the critics who questioned if some of their fight would be gone with the departure of emotional leaders such as Michael Fletcher, Brandon McLemore, Rueben Droughns and Peter Sirmon.

Against Wisconsin, Oregon never quit.

When they were down 20-9, and the 78,521 fans packed in at Camp Randall Stadium yelled at them with all of their might, all the Ducks did was perform a fast and furious 91-yard touchdown drive in 53 seconds that was capped by a Joey Harrington strike to tight end LaCorey Collins in the end zone.

And then when Wisconsin reclaimed its final lead of the game at 27-23, it would have been easy for the Ducks to fold. But they kept at it.

With only 1:09 to play in the fourth quarter, Oregon faced a near impossible fourth-and-13 from its own 17-yard line. Harrington dropped back, and completed the clutch pass to Howry for the 30-yard pickup.

Turn to Football, page 9E

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