

Home field advantage is key

■ The Ducks will have a 16-game Autzen Stadium winning streak tested by No. 6 UCLA on Saturday

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

Perhaps it's the crowd noise. Maybe it's the huge fighting ducks painted around the rim of the stadium, or it could be the cheerleaders. Whatever the reasons are, Oregon has found a way to win at Autzen Stadium for the past three years.

The Ducks carry a 16-game home win streak — the fifth-longest in the nation and the longest of any Pac-10 Conference team — into Saturday's clash with No. 6 UCLA. The last opponents to win at Autzen were the Bruins in 1997. The streak is the longest in Oregon history. The Ducks broke the old record of 14 straight wins, set by the 1932-36 team, with a win over Nevada earlier this season.

Autzen Stadium has gained a reputation as being one of the most formidable places in the nation to play college football. UCLA head coach Bob Toledo knows that as well as anybody.

"This is going to be a very tough, hostile, loud and just a very difficult environment," Toledo said. "They have some great fans, they have a great little stadium and they have a heck of a football team."

"This is a rabid, hostile environment. It's easy to come unglued."

Oregon senior wideout Marshaun Tucker agrees with Toledo.

"They haven't played in Autzen in a while, and Autzen's a whole different atmosphere," Tucker said.

"Hey, we do well at home, and that's something UCLA should think about."

The Autzen reputation means the unranked Ducks will be favored in their matchup with the sixth-ranked Bruins on Saturday. UCLA did not win a road game last year, and hasn't won on the road since November 14, 1998.

The Ducks have drawn record crowds to Autzen over the 16-game run. Last year, the third-largest home crowd in Oregon history saw the Ducks handle the Oregon State Beavers, while a game against Washington in 1998 drew only 84 fewer people than that Civil War matchup. The Ducks averaged 44,195 fans per game in 1995, but 1998 and 1999 were the second and third-highest average crowd sizes, respectively, in the team's history.

"The crowd here is amazing," senior linebacker Matt Smith said before practice Tuesday. "When you've got those people behind you, that gets you going. We try to get up for every game, but being at Autzen just kind of helps a little bit."

The streak has included huge blowouts and nail-biters alike. There was the 29-yard bomb from Joey Harrington to Tucker that beat Arizona State in the closing seconds, and the triple-overtime marathon against Southern California last year. There were the drubbings of Michigan State and Stanford two seasons ago.

"Every time we come out here we're protecting our home," said Harrington, an expert on Autzen magic. "Someone's invading our house and that's something we take a lot of pride in."

It would be almost poetic if the Bruins were to end the streak.

As it did in 1997, UCLA comes in nationally ranked with the Ducks unranked. In '97, UCLA had Skip Hicks, who ran for 90 yards, and Jermaine Lewis, who had runs of 21 and 26 yards against the Ducks. This season, the Bruins still have Lewis, and they have added DeShaun Foster, who is averaging 140.7 yards per game. Hicks averaged 106.8 yards per game in '97.

On top of that, the Bruins have owned the Ducks in the 90's. The teams have played each other eight times since 1990, and UCLA has won six of those matchups, including the last four meetings. The Ducks almost beat the Bruins at the Rose Bowl last season, but fell one yard short of a win and possibly a Pac-10 crown.

Smith says the history won't affect how the Ducks play.

"We've got a great tradition here," Smith said. "Once you've got a streak like that going you don't want it to end. We're going to give it all we've got to keep the streak going and get the win."

Oregon's domination at home has coincided with the team's emergence as a national power. The Ducks have a 45-16 home record in the 90's, 33-7 since their 1994 Rose Bowl season. Since Mike Belotti took over as head coach in 1995, the Ducks have gone 25-6 at home.

Smith described his team's attitude towards the streak — and the Bruins — perfectly on Tuesday.

"We've got them right where we want them," the linebacker said. "At Autzen Stadium."

Sixteen straight victories at home would seem to say Smith is right.



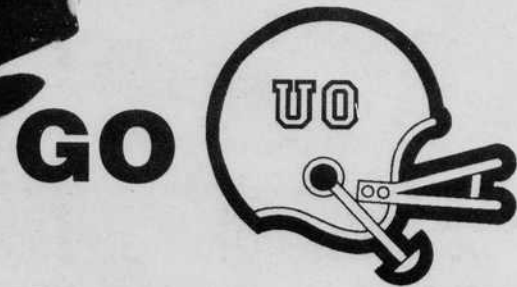
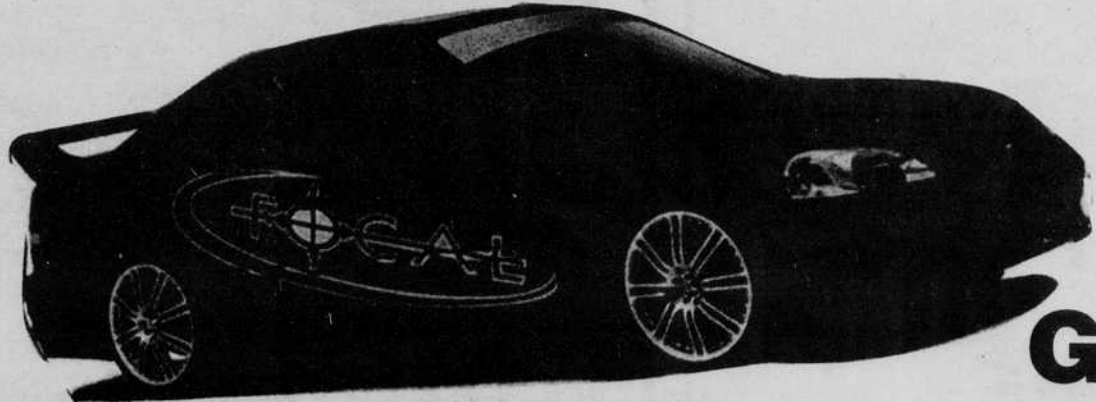
Emerald archives

Enthusiastic Oregon football fans storm the field after last season's dramatic win over Arizona State and make Autzen Stadium one of the nation's most feared venues.

Shocks • Alignment • Tires • Brakes • Custom Wheels • Batteries • Shocks • Alignment • Tires • Brakes • Custom Wheels • Batteries • Shocks

Tires LES SCHWAB

18th & OAK



485-2822

LES SCHWAB TIRE CENTER

Oak

U of O

18th Ave.

Open Monday-Friday 7:30-6:00pm, Saturday 7:30-5:00

Shocks • Alignment • Tires • Brakes • Custom Wheels • Batteries • Shocks • Alignment • Tires • Brakes • Custom Wheels • Batteries • Shocks

Alignment • Tires • Brakes • Custom Wheels • Batteries • Shocks • Alignment • Tires • Brakes • Custom Wheels

Alignment • Tires • Brakes • Custom Wheels • Batteries • Shocks • Alignment • Tires • Brakes • Custom Wheels