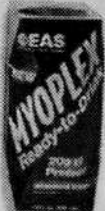
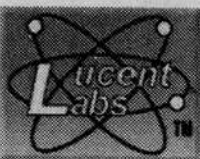


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# Oregon's history repeats itself



**HAKUNA MATATA**

**JEFF SMITH**

“All conference eyes will be on Eugene Saturday as the fight for the Pacific-10 title and Rose Bowl bid heats up on the Omni-Turf of Autzen Stadium.”

So it said in the Oct. 28, 1994, edition of the Emerald.

Let me continue.

“The Arizona Wildcats and Oregon Ducks hook up [and] more than just pride is at stake as the game represents a crucial step in deciding this year's conference title.”

Sound familiar?

The lead, written by former Emerald writer Chris Metz, would work just as well in this year's edition.

Also, as you may have noticed, this week's Game Day cover is teasing our story about the surprisingly strong Oregon defense. Well, back in '94, the defense also earned a spot on the cover next to the headline of “Gang Green.”

But missing from both covers is the quarterback.

Back in '94, the Ducks were coming off of a sensational victory over Washington that was clinched when true freshman Kenny Wheaton took an interception 97 yards for the touchdown — a moment in Oregon athletics lore that is hailed as “The Pick.” But what most people forget about that Washington game is that Oregon's

quarterback finally came to life.

The Ducks began that year winning games, but quarterback Danny O'Neil could never quite get it going. He missed a few games because of injury and was frustrated that he could not help his team the way he knew he could.

Then, against the Huskies, he put it together on one special series that would have been forever remembered as “The Drive” had it not been for “The Pick.” O'Neil and the offense started the drive at their own two-yard line at the 7:40 mark of the fourth quarter with the Ducks trailing, 20-17.

He started out by drilling wide receiver Dameron Ricketts for 36 yards. After some failed running attempts, he hit receiver Pat Johnson for 10 yards and then Ricketts for 21 more. O'Neil got the Ducks down to the Husky 12-yard line, but was faced with a critical third down. He audibled at the line and ran an option play to fullback Dwayne Jones, who rumbled in for the go-ahead score.

It would be the 98-yard drive that would bring O'Neil's confidence back and help lead his team to the Rose Bowl that year.

“I finally got it,” said O'Neil of his game-winning drive. “It was a big achievement for me personally.”

Sound familiar?

Here's what present Oregon quarterback Joey Harrington said after last week's 28-17 win over USC: “This was a big game for myself because I finally got over that hump. I felt very good out there.”

While last week's win over USC didn't have a nail-biting fourth quarter drive like O'Neil's, it did have one drive that was similar. But instead of taking place in the final

moments of the game, it took place on Oregon's first offensive drive.

Harrington had been admittedly “off” for the first five games of the year. But against the Trojans, he was “on.” He connected on his first pass to tight end Justin Peelle and threw for 14 yards to receiver Marshaun Tucker. He then zipped a 17-yard dart to receiver Keenan Howry, followed by a 13-yard completion to Tucker and 13 more in a pass to Howry.

It was the Harrington of last year. He was clicking.

Finally, on a third down from the Trojan eight-yard line, Harrington threw a shovel pass to tailback Maurice Morris, who scampered in for the touchdown.

Like O'Neil before, it was Harrington's own personal “drive.”

Flashback to that Arizona game in '94. The eighth-ranked Wildcats entered Autzen with roses on their minds. Arizona took a 9-0 lead into the fourth quarter, but O'Neil went at it again. He drove his team for a field goal, then capped a later drive with a 15-yard game-winning touchdown pass to tight end Josh Wilcox that would put the Ducks atop the Pac-10 for good.

Just over two months after that game, a fully confident O'Neil exploded in Oregon's Rose Bowl game versus Penn State and threw for 456 yards — 55 yards more than any other quarterback had ever thrown in the Rose Bowl. It would be just one of the six Rose Bowl records that O'Neil would set that day.

Sound familiar?

Of course it doesn't now, but check back with me on Jan. 1.

Jeff Smith is the sports editor of the Emerald. He can be reached at [Smittside@aol.com](mailto:Smittside@aol.com).



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