

# Man in the corner

■ Cornerback Steve Smith makes a name for himself in what Mike Bellotti calls Oregon's "no-name" defense

By Scott Pesznecker  
Oregon Daily Emerald

When the name "Steve Smith" appears in conversation, most sports fans throughout the state conjure up images of a certain 6-foot-8 basketball player.

That is, unless those fans pay close attention to the Oregon football team.

The Ducks have their own Steve Smith. He may not be as storied as the Portland Trailblazers' All-Star shooting guard, but Oregon's Smith is one of several players who make the Ducks' defense No. 1 in the Pacific-10 Conference.

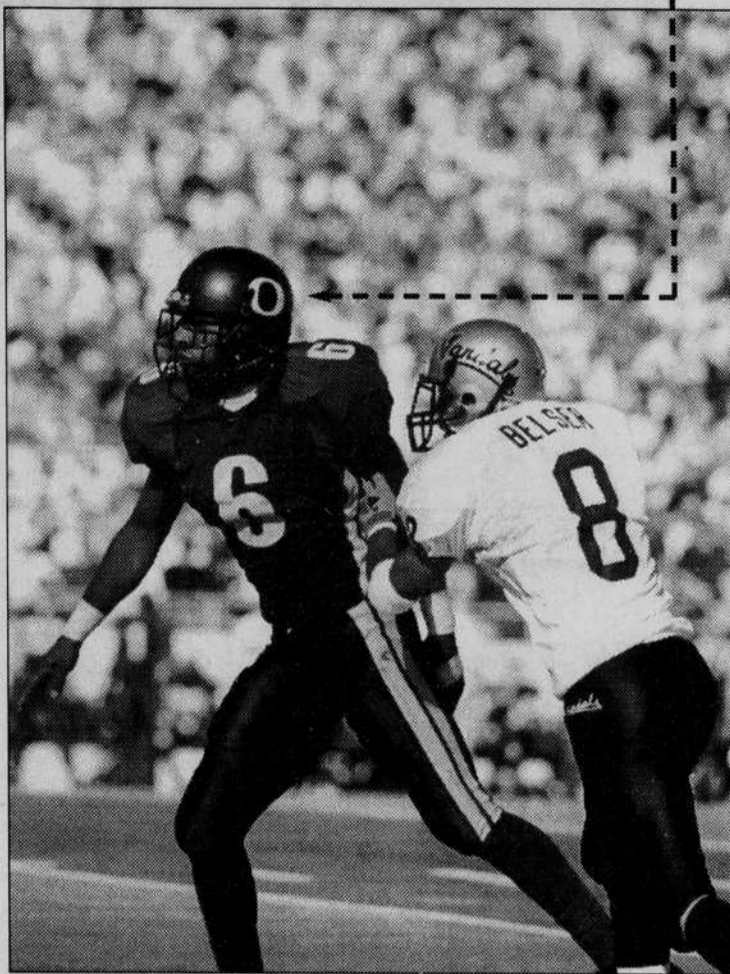
Had things worked out a little bit differently, perhaps the pass-blocking Smith would have been more like his sharp-shooting counterpart.

"I planned on it," said Smith, lounging on a couch in the lobby of the Len Casanova Center. "I planned on going to college as a basketball player. I chose Oregon because it was the biggest school for me at the time, and I just wanted to go somewhere big."

The Ducks should be glad that Smith decided to play football. Smith entered the starting lineup Sept. 23 against UCLA as the right cornerback, shifting over from the rover position. He has recorded 20 tackles — 16 unassisted — this season.

"A guy like Steve Smith — if you have the opportunity to watch our practices, he goes hard every day, as hard as he can go and as fast as he can go at each snap," defensive coordinator Nick Aliotti said. "He's very coachable, he's working his trade and it showed on Saturday."

Smith, a native of Long Beach, Calif., was raised by his mother and



Azle Malinao-Alvarez Emerald

Steve Smith (6) is tied with Rashad Bauman for third in the Pac-10 in knock-downs.

five of 12 uncles. Three of those five uncles played basketball overseas, while another — Dennis Johnson — played 12 years in the NBA before retiring as a Boston Celtic. Johnson is now an assistant coach for the Los Angeles Clippers (who, ironically, beat the Trailblazers and the "other" Steve Smith Tuesday night).

Nobody in Smith's family had ever played football beyond high school,

but that didn't mean Smith wasn't exposed to the gridiron at a young age. He watched several Southern California games from the stands of the Memorial Coliseum as a child, then joined his high school football team at the start of his sophomore year.

As the 6-foot-1 multi-sport athlete neared the end of his high-school

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