



Catherine Kendall Emerald

Oregon's Matt Smith (49), Kevin Mitchell (39) and Ryan Mitchell (24) bring down Arizona receiver Brad Brennan in last week's Duck win. The surging Oregon defense will be looked upon to shut down the Sun Devil offense.

Preview

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In 1988, the Ducks also stormed out to a 6-1 start that had fans drooling over the possibility of playing in their first bowl game since the 1963 Sun Bowl team.

Then the day of Oct. 29, 1988, changed everything. Oregon took on Arizona State and barely lost, 21-20. What followed were four more consecutive defeats, giving the Ducks a meager 6-6 record and no bowl game.

Sure, times have certainly changed, but the concept is there. Each week is indeed "the only game to think about," as wide receiver Marshaun Tucker said.

"We can't look forward to Cal or Oregon State," said Tucker, forgetting to mention Washington State. "It's Arizona State, and they're a great team. They really are. They're like 13 points away from having a perfect season, so we know we're going to have to go out this weekend and play some real ball."

The Sun Devils' two losses this year came at the hands of UCLA (38-31) and Washington (21-15). While those were narrow defeats, the Devils also have been the beneficiaries of some tight games, such as San Diego State (10-7), Colorado State (13-10) and just last weekend, to Washington State (23-20 in OT).

The close scores don't bother Arizona State head coach Bruce Snyder, as he thinks they help in-grain mental toughness in his team.

"I would think the fact that you go into overtime and win it has to do something to your psyche," Snyder said. "I believe we are a stronger team now. This is a team with great toughness."

It is also a team that has the Ducks worried. The Sun Devils are an emotional and bonded group — especially after surviving last week's plane ride home from Pullman, Wash., in which the aircraft was hit twice by lightning.

The Sun Devils start redshirt freshman Jeff Krohn at quarterback

and walk-on Tom Pace at tailback, both of whom have done solid jobs in place of the injured Ryan Kealy and Delvon Flowers. "They're very scary because despite all of the setbacks, they're playing good football and giving them a chance to win," Bellotti said. "They've exceeded expectations. Plus, we have to go down there, where they play very hard."

The game will be Oregon's third road game of the year, which could be a good thing for quarterback Joey Harrington, who has done much better away from Autzen Stadium.

"We're going to play against a very underrated team," Harrington said. "I've heard some things about that stadium as far as the fans and the atmosphere so I'm looking forward to it. We're in for a tough game."

One particular match-up to watch will be the Oregon receivers versus the Arizona State secondary. UCLA's passing game lit up the Sun Devils en route to a 38-point effort. No doubt, Harrington and the Ducks will be looking to do the same thing Saturday.

Harrington has been clicking with Tucker lately; the two connected on two touchdown scores in last week's 14-10 win against Arizona.

The Sun Devils certainly haven't forgotten the two players after what they did a season ago. Last year, the Sun Devils lost at Autzen Stadium 20-17, after Harrington connected with Tucker on a gutsy 29-yard game-winning touchdown pass with only nine ticks of the clock left.

"Man, that game last year was crazy," said Tucker, who originally planned to attend Arizona State out of junior college before coming to Oregon. "But that was last year. This year is a whole new game, and we just have to go one week at a time and go from there. If you start thinking forward, you're going to slip."

There they go again. Yadda. Yadda. Yadda.

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