



Dan Brunell Emerald

Junior Zack Freiter (54) will fill in for the injured Jason Nikolao (98) at defensive end for at least two games. Freiter has 13 tackles, two sacks and a forced fumble in the five games he's played this season.

# Ducks survive injuries, look to bounce back

■ A rash of injuries has the Pac-10's top-ranked defense down but far from out

By Robbie McCallum  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Flu season is upon us, but the Oregon football team just got hit by a different sort of bug — the injury bug.

After skating by for most of the season without any major injuries, luck caught up with the Ducks. Oregon marched into Arizona State with only eight injuries to report. Following their epic 56-55

win against the Sun Devils, the Ducks limped out of Tempe with a ballooning injury list.

The Ducks will be well-rested but not 100 percent when they travel to Pullman, Wash., for a 2 p.m. matchup with Washington State.

"Everybody is day-to-day," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "It's mostly bumps and bruises, nothing that at this point would rule anybody out for [the Washington State] game."

"We've spent a lot of time in the treatment center this week," junior

cornerback Rashad Bauman said. "We just have to make sure we're healthy and get things done against Wazzu."

The defense took the biggest hit in the game. The most serious injury occurred when senior defensive end Jason Nikolao tore the medial collateral ligament in his right knee early in the first quarter. The injury is expected to sideline Nikolao for two to six weeks. Nikolao is one of Oregon's best defenders when it comes to the run.

Filling in for Nikolao is junior Zack Freiter, who has 13 tackles,

two sacks and a forced fumble in five games this season.

"The loss of [Nikolao's] presence hurts," defensive tackle Saul Patu said. "Obviously he's been a good player for us, but I think Freiter will do a good job. I don't think we'll fall off too much."

"[Freiter] has been playing more and more each game and doing a good job," Bellotti said. "His game shape is improving dramatically."

Patu also got banged up last week. The four-year starter strained his right knee and is probable for Saturday's game.

"I might not be full strength or be able to play a complete game but I'll be able to contribute and put in 100 percent," Patu said.

A battered Duck secondary will have its hands full with the conference's No. 1 quarterback in Jason Gesser. Bauman dislocated his shoulder checking wide receiver Richard Williams in the fourth quarter against Arizona State. Bellotti expects Bauman to be ready to play at Washington State.

Fellow cornerback Jermaine Handspard survived the game injury-free until the final play of the game, when he took a helmet to the leg. The senior is questionable for Saturday's game.

In response to high casualty list, head coach Mike Bellotti held a light, 40 minute practice on Monday.

Other defensive injuries include safety Ryan Mitchell (sore ankle) and linebacker Garret Sabol (swelling in his calf and right knee).

"I think despite the defensive injuries we'll be able to come back all right," Patu said. "We're deep... Guys will have to step it up, but our depth helps out a lot."

Oregon's second string filled in

nicely for injured Ducks against Arizona State. Sophomore tailback Allan Amundson gained 41 yards and the winning touchdown while substituting for injured Maurice Morris. Freiter also made key defensive plays in the second half, including a sack of Arizona State's Jeff Krohn in the fourth quarter.

Although the Oregon defense has been roughed up, the offense remained mostly unscathed. Duck fans did get a big scare when stand-out Morris had to sit out the second half of the Arizona State game with

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Oregon head coach

bruised ribs. Morris is expected to play Saturday.

Morris' injury is similar to the one suffered by Oregon star Reuben Droughns last season, but Droughns also had torn cartilage. Droughns missed two games and had to wear a padded vest when he did come back.

"It can be tough, and we don't know the extent of this one," Bellotti said. "It's a different spot than before. It can be difficult for a running back, no question."

If there were any good time for a rash of injuries to hit the Ducks, now is that time. With two games against conference cellar-dwellers Washington State and California and two weeks before the regular season finale against Oregon State, the Ducks have plenty of time to prepare and heal.

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