

Oregon football mirrors basketball in drama



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Now, I know there is a whole new game this weekend to discuss and dissect, and a whole new set of challenges that await the Ducks up in the Palouse.

But my thoughts still drift back to Saturday's "I-can't-believe-what-I-just-saw" game.

Seriously, it was the type of college football game that dumb-founds you when you think of how Oregon came up on the winning end.

In fact, it made you think of another thrilling Duck win in which you thought for sure Oregon was going to lose.

But this game didn't take place on the gridiron. It took place in McArthur Court.

And it was also against the Arizona State Sun Devils.

You remember, don't you?

March 2, 2000: The Oregon men's basketball team miraculously drains two three-pointers in the final 2.8 seconds to win by two. It was a remarkable finish.

As was Saturday's. Man, those Sun Devils must hate the Ducks.

Look at both games in a comparison:

In football, Oregon trails by 14 with 3:30 left in the game. The game is basically clinched. The Sun Devil fans in attendance begin screaming the overused chant, "Ov-er-rated." (Which, by the way, still doesn't make sense to me because wouldn't you want the team that you are beating to be considered a good team?)

Anyway, as Arizona State nears a presumable big victory, some Duck fans in attendance at Sun Devil Stadium begin to stroll out. All throughout Eugene, televisions begin to get clicked off in frustration. Game's over, these people say.

It was going to take a miracle to pull this one out.

Hmm. Sounds familiar to what happened in the hoops game.

Sun Devil sharpshooter Eddie House drills two free throws to up the lead to four with six ticks on the clock. The Sun Devils then call a time-out. At that point, every aisle in Mac Court has at least a few people head for the exits with sunken heads. A few Eugene drivers are switching from radio play-by-play man Jerry Allen's voice to their favorite radio station to help ease the pain of a difficult defeat.

It was going to take a miracle to pull this one out.

And wouldn't you know, in both cases, a miracle is what they got.

Too strong a word, you think? I don't believe so. The word miracle is defined in the American Heritage College Dictionary as, "an event that appears inexplicable by the laws of nature."

Well, consider these "inexplicable" events.

The Duck football team scores a touchdown to cut the lead to seven. It then gets the ball back, but falls one yard short of the end zone on a fourth-and-seven to turn possession back to the Sun Devils with only 1:22 remaining.

All Arizona State must do is run out the clock and then take a knee and this one's in the books. Sun Devil tailback Mike Williams goes casually up the middle. The game appears done as he crosses the first-down line to clinch the win and ... he fumbles. Huh?

Oregon recovers with 33 seconds left and on its first play, quarterback Joey Harrington finds tight end Justin Peelle for a 17-yard touchdown to tie the game at 49 and send it to overtime. We know what happened from there on out: 56-55, Ducks.

Similarly, the Oregon hoops team faced the improbable task of in-bounding the basketball from the opposite end of the hoop with a four-point deficit and less than six seconds to play. Guard Ben Lindquist heaved the ball downcourt, and somehow, it landed in the hands of Alex Scales, who promptly banged home a trey to cut the lead down to 74-73.

Then Arizona State's Kyle Dodd's ensuing inbound pass bounced off House's fingertips and out of bounds in Oregon's favor. Lindquist proceeded to heave it downcourt again, and again it bounced off House's hands. Ore-

gon's Darius Wright scooped it up, launched it and watched it swish through at the buzzer to give Oregon the improbable 76-74 win.

It is these types of games that happen to teams during their magical seasons. Last season's basketball team recorded its first 20-win season since 1945.

This year's Oregon football team is off to its best start since 1959, and is only three games away from becoming the first team in Duck history to have a 10-win season.

Now, given the crazy circumstances in both ASU games, and the special seasons they were a part of, it makes you think of a different definition in the dictionary:

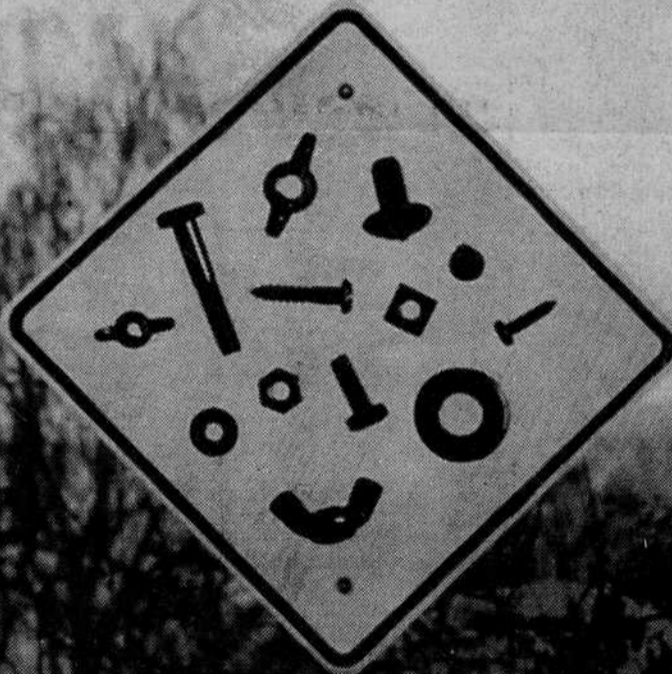
"The fate to which a particular person or thing is destined."

"Destiny" may have led the men's hoops team to its second NCAA Tournament appearance since 1961.

And with the month of November upon us, it should be fun to see where it takes the football team.

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Game preview

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Hours before Oregon State drubbed Washington State, 38-9, in Corvallis last Saturday, Oregon ran itself ragged in an offensive shooting match with Arizona State.

"I'm tired. I'll admit it, I'm tired," Oregon quarterback Joey Harrington said. "It took a lot out of us; it was a very draining game. But we have a lot of time to rest this week and get some good work in, and we'll be ready to go by Saturday."

Several Oregon players were injured while battling the Sun Devils. On the D-line, defensive tackle Zack Freiter will replace Jason Nikolao, who injured his right knee in the first quarter of the Arizona State game.

Everyone else, despite bumps and bruises, should be able to play Saturday.

"The loss of [Nikolao's] presence hurts a lot," defensive end Saul Patu said. "Obviously he's been a good player for us. Seth and Niko, Boice and me have been able to defend well. Just knowing that Niko is on that side of the line builds confidence. I felt confident that I could defend my side of the field."

Gesser and the Washington State passing attack have made the Cougars a force to be reckoned with. The Cougs played five straight games, winning two and losing three, which were decided by seven points or fewer.

Only the Beavers have been able to find a way to stop Washington State's high-flying offense. Most opponents have found themselves guessing how to contain Gesser.

Judging by the quarterback's stats, many opponents have guessed wrong.

Gesser's 241.5 passing yards per game leads the conference in aerial offense. His quarterback rating, 136.9, leads the Pac-10 and is good for No. 23 nationally.

But more recent statistics indicate that Gesser may be stopping himself. Before throwing a fourth-quarter interception against the Wildcats Oct. 14, Gesser's quarterback rating was 153.76, a mark that was top in the conference and sixth in the nation. Since the pick, he has completed just 29 of 70 passes.

Regardless of which Gesser shows up Saturday, Oregon's defense seems ready to take his best shot.

"He likes to scramble," cornerback Rashad Bauman said. "He's a good scrambler; that's where he does best. We just have to make sure to control the pocket and we'll have a good chance."

Washington State also poses a potentially potent ground attack in tailbacks Deon Burnett and Dave Minnich. Burnett, a sophomore, has rushed for 1,313 career yards and is 426 yards short of a spot on Washington State's top-10 list. Minnich, a former Marine, has rushed for 445 yards and two scores in eight games this season.

Burnett and Minnich may seem like small potatoes when compared with a Ken Simonton or a DeShaun

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Obviously he's been a good player for us.

Saul Patu
Oregon defensive end

Foster. Last Saturday, Arizona State walk-on tailback Tom Pace also seemed like small potatoes - until he rushed for 158 yards and two touchdowns.

Oregon defensive line coach Steve Greatwood isn't sure why the Ducks' rushing defense broke down at Sun Devil Stadium, but said he doesn't think it will happen again.

"For whatever reason, we just didn't play with the same tempo that we played in previous games last Saturday," Greatwood said. "Assignments were okay and things like that, but we just didn't play with the same fire and emotion. We have to realize that we're going to get everyone's best shot from here on out."

In the event that Oregon's defense has another bad day, statistics indicate that the offense should once again flourish. Washington State has the seventh-best pass defense in the Pac-10 and is last in rushing defense, allowing 174.5 yards per game on the ground.