

Time to administer a whuppin'



PEZ SEZ

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For the past couple weeks, the nation has been exposed to a side of Oregon football that only the Pacific-10 Conference knew existed.

Two overtime games. In both games, the team in green trailed in the fourth quarter. In both games, achieving victory seemed like a brief trot up Mt. Everest.

Behold: Two wins. A collective margin of four points.

Those no-quit Ducks.

The last two games continued Oregon's saga of games that last an eternity, right up there with last season's triple-overtime win against Southern California, one-yard loss to UCLA, final-pass win against Arizona State and down-to-the-wire finish against Arizona — all capped by a late, fourth-quarter comeback to win the 2000 Sun Bowl.

These games are fun for the fans and draining on the coaches — but bad for gaining respect when they happen too often.

Take a look at the Bowl Championship Series rankings. Does anyone else find it odd that a team Oregon beat — handily, at that — could jump past the Ducks in the polls? Well, Washington did, because the Ducks appeared vulnerable when they won.

Check out Oregon State. With an easy schedule compared to Oregon and Washington (the Beavers almost lost to a team that wasn't even in Division I-A), how did they break their way into the top-10 polls?

Here's how.

The Ducks started off hot, crushing UCLA and Washington in ways the scoreboard couldn't show. Oregon edged USC on the road, then withstood four Wildcat touchdown attempts to beat Arizona before playing the recent overtime games.

Now, check out the Oregon State scores: 31-21, Beavers defeat USC; 33-30, loss at Husky Stadium; 38-6 victory against Stanford; 44-38, a come-from-behind win at UCLA; a 38-9 beating of Washington State; and finally, a close 38-32 win at California.

Two of those scores stand out.

Blowouts aren't as fun to watch as overtime games, and they don't happen often. It is also tough to rout an opponent if it brings its "A" game.

Don't get me wrong, there is much to be said for close wins. Oregon must be a great team, otherwise it wouldn't be 5-3 in overtime matchups.

However, it seems as if something may be wrong if a team goes into overtime and at the end of the game, and you wonder, "What if the other team hadn't fumbled the ball on an easy first down?" or "What if the opposing offense hadn't been penalized 16 yards for careless mistakes?"

Yes, it takes skill to win in overtime. But it also takes luck.

The Ducks played well late in the game against Arizona State, but they received a gift from the football gods when the Sun Devils fumbled with the game in hand. Neither the defense nor the offense played exceptionally against Washington State, even in the overtime period. That is where luck saved Oregon's national ranking.

Sure, blowouts take some luck too, such as Oregon State's 38-9 win against the Jason Gesser-powered Cougar offense.

But still, when a team dominates another team in such a brutal way, a statement is made.

The loser cannot make excuses when the point spread sits at 30 points. Nobody can say "what if this play had been stopped," or "what if that penalty hadn't been called."

Blowouts mean dominance. Right now, the Ducks aren't dominating.

They were though, at the start of the season. They dominated UCLA so thoroughly that a smiling Lee Corso, who once clowned Eugene, was raving in the press box afterwards about how awesome the home crowd was.

There was so much hype around that UCLA game. The Bruins came to Autzen boasting a No. 6 ranking and national-championship potential.

Yet the betting lines from Las Vegas favored unranked Oregon.

The Ducks weren't favored because of how they played — they were favored because of where they played. Oregon hasn't played at home in two weeks. In that time, the offense and defense — instead of getting better — seems to have declined.

But now they get to come back and play in front of their fans — those loyal Duck followers, 5,000 of whom followed them to the cold, snowy Martin Stadium to cheer the Ducks on against the Cougars.

Entering the California matchup, the Ducks are favored by 13.5 points. For them to have a great shot of beating Oregon State next week, they need a shot in the arm. A momentum boost. Topping the Golden Bears by 13.5 points may or may not do the trick.

A 20-point win would be better. At Autzen Stadium, it's possible.

Oregon hasn't had a good ol' fashioned blowout in awhile. If the Ducks are going to reestablish their Pac-10 dominance and maybe, just maybe, strike a hint of fear into the hearts of their in-state rivals, now is the time.

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