

Pac-10 contenders, pretenders mix it up

■ Everything is on the line for Oregon State and Arizona in this crucial game

By Robbie McCallum
Oregon Daily Emerald

Oregon's in-state rival has delivered, and now only one thing stands in the way of a much-anticipated Civil War battle that could decide the Pacific-10 Conference champion — the Arizona Wildcats. Oregon State travels to Tucson, Ariz., for a key game with fourth-place Arizona.

The Beavers have emerged from mediocrity this season to find themselves in one of the tightest

conference races in Pac-10 history. It has been a record-breaking year for head coach Dennis Erickson and his Beavers.

Oregon State is in the Associated Press top-10 for the first time since 1964 at No. 10. Junior tailback Ken Simonton has rushed his way into the school and Pac-10 record books as the nation's No. 6 rusher.

Arizona would like to spoil the Beavers' plans by upsetting them on its home turf. At 5-4 overall and 3-3 in the conference, the Wildcats are hurting as far as a bowl game is concerned.

But history favors Arizona in this battle, as Oregon State has never won in Tucson. The Wildcats lead the overall series by a dominating 19-3-1 record.

This season, the Wildcats have

struggled offensively and in the red zone.

"If you look at the conference standings, we have scored as many points as Oregon and a few more than Washington," Arizona coach Dick Tomey said. "But we need to get better results. We need to believe in ourselves and not doubt in what we are doing. Finding a way to win is the bottom line in athletics."

Still, Erickson is weary of the upset-minded Wildcats.

"I look at them play and, again, it's like I seem to say every week — anybody can beat anybody," Erickson said. "They're as good as anybody."

A loss would all but eliminate Oregon State's Rose Bowl hopes while a win would potentially set up a Pac-10 showdown next weekend with Oregon.

■ Much will be decided this weekend as Pac-10 teams look to sort out the standings

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The cream of the Pacific-10 Conference has risen to the top, leaving the rest of the pack to duke it out for third place.

While either Oregon, Oregon State or Washington will advance to the Rose Bowl, two other Pac-10 teams could finish as high as third, and two others are still in the hunt for a spot in the top half.

UCLA (6-3 overall, 3-3 Pac-10) at No. 7 Washington (8-1, 5-1)

The Huskies' Rose Bowl hopes are still alive, thanks to a perfect non-conference record and a five-game winning streak. But Washington must take care of business at home this weekend against former Pac-10 contender UCLA.

The Bruins have endured five close games since falling to Oregon Sept. 23. UCLA defeated Arizona, Stanford and Arizona State by a total of 12 points, while falling to Cal and Oregon State by a touchdown each.

Even though momentum may be on the Huskies' side, history favors UCLA. The Bruins have won the last three matchups, including a 36-24 victory in Seattle in 1998, one of Washington's few home losses in the past three years.

Washington relies on senior quarterback Marques Tuiasosopo to power its offense. Tuiasosopo is a finalist for the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award.

Countering for the Bruins are the conference's top receiver, Freddie Mitchell, and fourth-ranked rusher DeShaun Foster, who returned to action after recovering from a broken hand.

A Husky loss would essentially end their Rose Bowl hopes; a UCLA loss would be less damaging to the Bruins.

Arizona State (5-4, 2-4) at Stanford (3-6, 2-4)

Two teams in a tailspin face off this weekend in a battle that will dictate where each team will finish in the standings. Both the Cardinal and Sun Devils come into the matchup with two-game losing streaks.

Stanford is assured of a losing season despite upsets against Texas and Southern California. Arizona State, however, remains in the bowl hunt with 5-4 record but needs another win to become bowl eligible.

Freshman quarterback Jeff Krohn has put up amazing numbers for the Sun Devils in two double-overtime losses, as has tailback Tom Pace and tight end Todd Heap.

Stanford's DeRonnie Pitts leads the conference in receptions per game and should do well against the worst defense in the Pac-10.

The winner of the game could find itself in a tie for fourth place if either UCLA or Arizona loses.

Washington State (3-6, 1-5) at Southern California (4-5, 1-5)

Two disappointing teams will fight to get out of the Pac-10 cellar.

The Trojans halted a five-game losing streak with an overtime victory against Arizona State. Washington State has lost three overtime games this season by a total of 12 points.

The Cougar offense took a major hit with the loss of quarterback Jason Gesser. The sophomore sensation was knocked out of Saturday's game against Oregon with a broken leg and is doubtful for the remainder of the season. Redshirt freshman Matt Kegel will make his first collegiate start for the Cougars.

"[Gesser] is going around in crutches," Cougar head coach Mike Price said. "He will help Matt as much as possible."

Although unlikely, USC could finish the season with a winning record. The Trojans would have to upset UCLA and Notre Dame to finish the season above the .500 mark.



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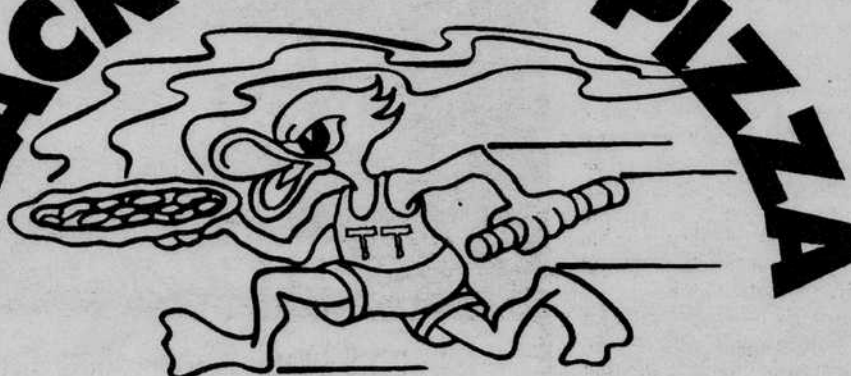
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Tucker becomes a father

The Associated Press

Oregon wide receiver Marshaun Tucker has a lot more on his mind than this Saturday's game against California. He's a new daddy.

Tucker's wife, Daijavon, gave birth Tuesday morning to their first child, a son — also named Marshaun. The baby, born at McKenzie-Willamette Hospital in Springfield, weighed 6 pounds, 4 ounces.

Tucker, a 21-year-old senior, was back at practice Wednesday.

"I do have some concern about him getting some sleep in the next couple days," Oregon coach Mike

Bellotti said.

Despite his new responsibilities, Tucker's presence will be required Saturday at Autzen Stadium. The No. 6 Ducks are in control of the Pac-10 race and are trying to get to the Rose Bowl for the first time since 1995. Tucker is Oregon's leading receiver with 40 catches for 660 yards and six touchdowns.

Tucker has plenty of family men around him. Bellotti and his 10 assistant coaches have 21 children between them.

"They may offer him some bit of advice, as I will," Bellotti said.

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