

One of the best

■ Former Oregon coach Len Casanova reflects on his Civil War battles with Oregon State

By George Beres
For the Emerald

During the last 25 years of the 20th century, Oregon dominated the series against its archrivals, the Beavers, from just up the road in Corvallis.

It wasn't always that way, and nobody knows that better than the legendary coach of Oregon football, Len Casanova.

At 96, Cas is the patriarch among all major college coaches of the nation. More than extended age, it is his reputation as one of the game's sharpest football minds, plus the father image he gave his players, that places him high in the respect and affection of fellow coaches. His name will be forever etched in stone in Oregon lore, and he is the namesake of the Casanova Center.

This Casanova recollection is excerpted from the 1995 book, "The Year of the Duck," which is now on sale at the University Bookstore. The book, filled with color photos and features from Oregon's '95 Rose Bowl game against Penn State, also has a section with black and white shots from 1958, the last time before '95 that the Ducks made it to the granddaddy of all bowl games. Cas' team was a heavy underdog to Coach Woody Hayes' Ohio State team, but it forced the Buckeyes to resort to a 4th-quarter field goal to pull out a hard-fought, 10-7 victory.

Cas remembers in "The Year of The Duck"

If anyone knows from experience how tough it can be for the Ducks in their traditional season-ending

game against Oregon State, it is Casanova. For a man whose professional life was highlighted by many gridiron victories, Cas doesn't look back too happily on game encounters he had with his most familiar foe, the Beavers.

"In my 16 years coaching Oregon, we were beaten by Oregon State more than we won," recalled Cas as the Ducks prepared for the most crucial Civil War Game they've ever played, this Saturday in Corvallis. "It always was a dogfight, always a battle."

The kind of series this has been between the Willamette Valley neighbors is reflected by the fact

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Len Casanova
former Oregon head coach

that even though the record in Casanova's day was 10-4-2 in favor of the Beavers, Oregon had a 38-point edge in total points scored during that span.

That's because the four victories under Cas were by 28, 20, 29 and 17 points. Of Oregon's 10 losses, none was by more than eight points; six were by five points or fewer.

Some of those losses still bring a shake of the head and shrug of the shoulders from Cas, even though he doesn't go through the agony that always followed heartbreaking losses in his coaching days.

"Only four times in my coaching career did I feel an official's call decided the game," said Cas. "Wouldn't you know that two of them could have been against Oregon State?"

Cas quickly learned about the special dimension of this intrastate rivalry when he came to Eugene in 1951.

"That first year," he said, "I had a speaking engagement in Astoria, and I drove through Corvallis on my way there. I was late, and the fellow in charge asked me which route I had taken. When he heard I had gone through Corvallis, he got a shocked look on his face and asked, 'How could an Oregon coach do a thing like that?'"

The entire state, not just Oregon and Oregon State grads, got involved in the game, as Cas remembers.

"It is something like the World Series in baseball," said Cas, who coached baseball in his high school coaching days, when the son of the great Ty Cobb was one of his players. "People who don't follow all that closely the rest of the time suddenly become fans."

Win or lose, Casanova's positive image throughout the state was always there. His one-time rival as coach and athletics director, Dee Andros of Oregon State, made that point once while Dee still was at the Beavers helm.

"I would get on the Ducks more, but then I mellowed a lot," said Andros. "I just was trying to get people to think about me the way they think of Len Casanova."

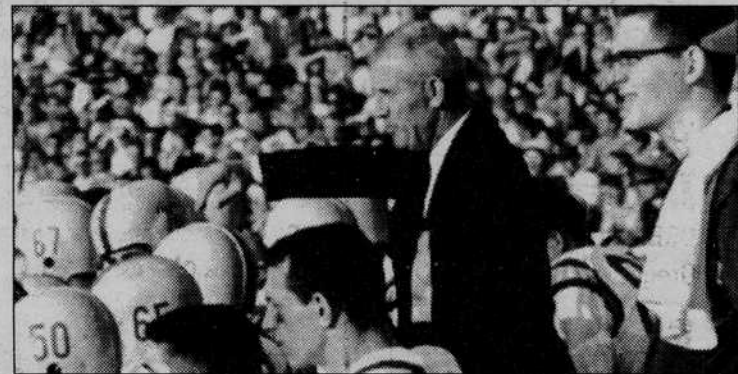
As for Cas, he gladly would have sacrificed a bit of "mellowness" in exchange for some tight victories against the Beavers. As he said when the Ducks' '95 Rose Bowl coach, Rich Brooks, dominated the Beavers without ever losing:

"Brooks helped make up a lot for those narrow losses to the Beavers we had in my day."



courtesy of George Beres

Oregon head coach Len Casanova (left) and his famed assistant, Johnny McKay, celebrate in the mud after a 28-0 victory against Oregon State in 1955.



courtesy of George Beres

Coach Len Casanova instructs his Ducks on the sidelines in the 1958 Rose Bowl against Ohio, where Oregon missed pulling off one of the great upsets in bowl history.

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