

Accomplished seniors hungry for one more

■ Oregon's seniors have led the Ducks to their best four-year mark in school history

By Adam Jude
Oregon Daily Emerald

For Oregon's 23 seniors, Dec. 29's Holiday Bowl is a much anticipated, yet emotional waiting game.

"I just want to get back on the field," senior defensive tackle Jason Nikolao said. "After we stunk up the field at Oregon State, I just want to show everybody that this is still a good football team."

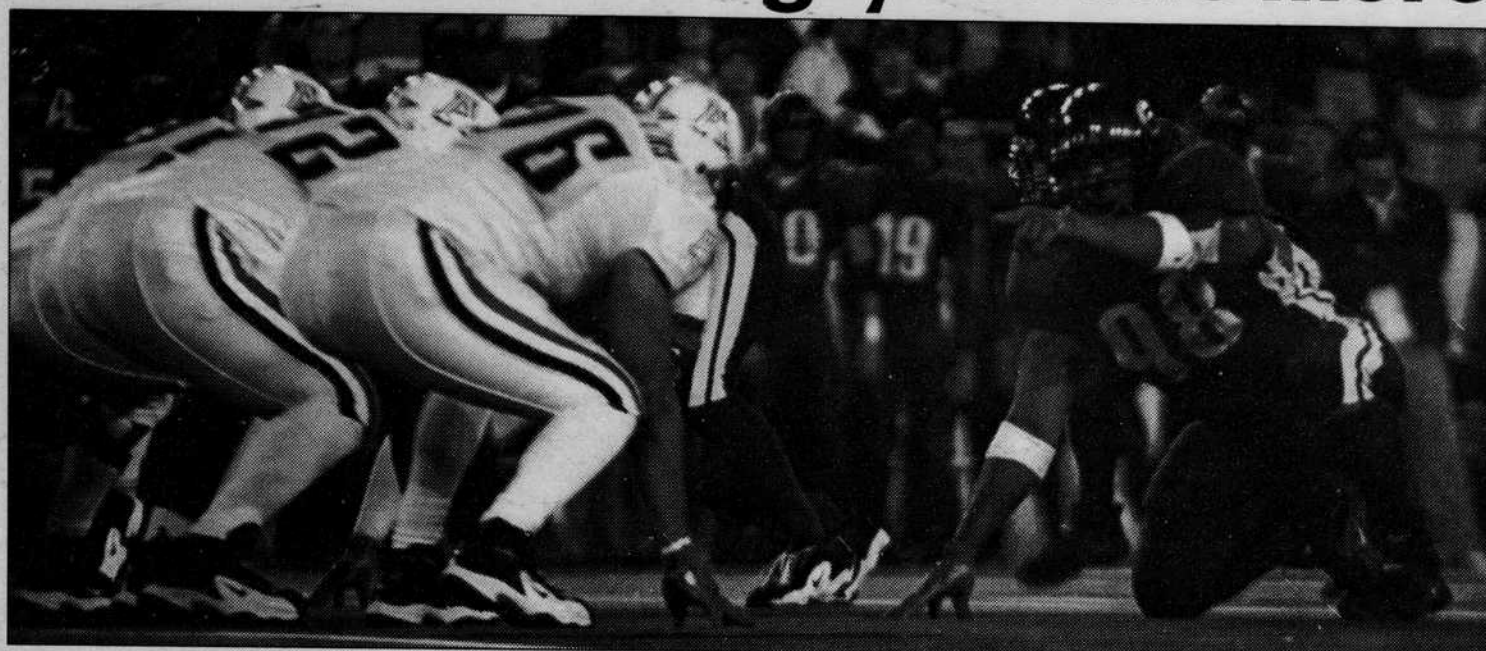
Oregon took a two-week break from practice following a 23-13 loss in Corvallis that eliminated the Ducks' dreams of reaching the Rose Bowl for the first time in five years. And now, with about three weeks to prepare for the Culligan Holiday Bowl and the No. 12 Texas Longhorns, the Oregon seniors are psyched to get back on the field for the final time.

"We're ready to battle and hungry for a win," said Nikolao, who, along with senior Saul Patu, was named the team's most inspirational player. "That loss left an awful taste in our mouths, and we're ready to get it out. I just don't want it to end like that — on a bad note."

"I'm just excited to get back on the field and get one back. I want to win one before it's all said and done."

Those who are graduating from the school of football this season have much to be proud of. In the current senior class' era, the Ducks have tallied a 33-14 record, the best four-year mark in school history.

The résumé also includes four consecutive bowl appearances, and, of course, this season's share of the Pac-10 crown. The culmination of such feats by the senior class under head



Catharine Kendall Emerald

Senior defensive tackle Jason Nikolao (98) will put on a Ducks uniform for the last time in the Holiday Bowl. Twenty-two of Nikolao's teammates will also play their final game.

coach Mike Bellotti has brought Oregon great respect around the country. Despite such accomplishments, though, many of the seniors are not satisfied.

“Everything we’ve done this season and the past four years boils down to this bowl game.”

Jason Nikolao
senior defensive tackle

"We didn't reach all of our goals," said Patu, who is second on the

Ducks' all-time sacks list with 26.5. "We just fell short of getting to the Rose Bowl."

Senior offensive tackle Lee Gundy, a starter since he was a freshman, said not accomplishing the team's major goal of reaching the Rose Bowl is tough to accept at the end of his career.

"It's definitely disappointing," said the 6-foot-6 inch, 325-pound Gundy. "At the beginning of each year, you set certain goals as a team, and when you don't accomplish them, it's frustrating."

But a win over No. 12 Texas in the Holiday Bowl would give the Ducks their first 10-win season in school history, and the seniors something to be proud of when they look back

on their playing careers.

"Everything we've done this season and the past four years boils down to this bowl game," Nikolao said.

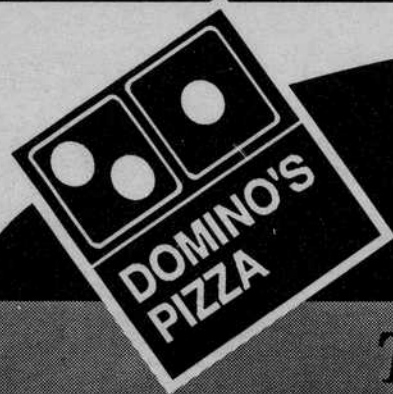
Of the graduates, 10 are in the Ducks' starting lineup.

Defensively, all three starting linebackers will have to be replaced next year. Middle linebacker Matt Smith led the team with 85 tackles, three fumbles recoveries and shared the lead in interceptions with four. Garrett Sabol is a four-year letterman who appeared in 43 of 45 possible games in his career. He was third on the team this season with 56 tackles, and also recorded three sacks. Senior Michael

Callier is petitioning the NCAA for another year of eligibility after appearing in just two games in 1997.

Cornerback Jermaine Hanspard, a first-team all-conference selection this season, as well as rover Ryan Mitchell and cornerback Brian Johnson will graduate. Center Jeff Austin and defensive tackle Jed Boice, who blocked the potential game-tying kick at Washington State, are also graduating. Both were named the team's most improved players.

Marshaun Tucker, Oregon's leading receiver this year, is a senior, and kickers Josh Frankel and Dan Katz, along with punter Kurtis Dorr will be playing in their final game at the Holiday Bowl.



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