

# Ducks and Pac-10 in position to win



**PEZ SEZ**

**SCOTT PESZNECKER**

You win some, you lose some. For most of the 2000 season, all the Oregon football team did was win.

Sometimes, those wins were pretty. Oregon's dominating wins against UCLA and Washington will be long remembered by Duck fans who were there.

On the other hand, some of those wins were down-right ugly. The Ducks came back from the dead to beat Arizona State in double overtime before scraping by Washington State in overtime.

But most college football fans would look at a 7-1 record and almost assume it belonged to a conference champion.

Well, it does.

Those fans may also assume that such a successful team would be headed to the biggest bowl in its conference. Normally, those fans would be right.

However, only a perfect team could clinch the Rose Bowl outright in this Pacific-10 Conference season.

Oregon wasn't perfect. It won many spectacular games, but it lost the Civil War, the one that counted most. The Ducks never put together a complete game all season, and it cost them in Corvallis.

Washington wasn't perfect either, as senior quarterback Marques Tuiasosopo couldn't carry his team back from a hefty fourth-quarter deficit against Oregon. And Oregon State couldn't rally from behind to beat the Huskies.

It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out how damaging the Civil War loss was to the Ducks' morale. Days earlier, they joked about dancing in Reser Stadium with roses in their mouths, and they conveyed their boyhood dreams to reporters about playing in the granddaddy of all bowl games.

Oregon practiced for the first time Friday since losing to the Beavers. Players talked about how the loss still hurt, how they could still set a school-record 10 wins and how, no matter if they went to San Diego or Hawaii, they'd make the most out of their situation.

Again, it doesn't take rocket science to figure out what a trip to Hawaii would have felt like.

Oregon, on the verge of its best season ever, would have had the honor of taking on perennial powerhouse Boston College, instead of Purdue in Pasadena.

You win some, you lose some. The Ducks definitely lost something.

But they won something back on Sunday.

No doubt, the Rose Bowl would have been better. It's just that Hawaii would have had zero impact on building Oregon as a program.

The Holiday Bowl is different. That big stadium down there seats more than 70,000 fans, plenty of room for potential recruits to watch a fired-up Duck squad take out its frustrations on Texas.

Imagine how huge of an impact a Holiday Bowl win would have if Oregon did it in traditional Oregon fashion. It's almost predictable.

Longhorns up by two touchdowns — no, make that three — with three minutes left. The Ducks return the punt or kick for a touchdown, cutting the deficit to 14. Then senior linebacker Matt Smith gets a quick interception, and after the ensuing touchdown pass from Joey Harrington, Texas' lead is just seven with about two minutes left.

The defense gets three stops, returning the ball to Oregon with about 20 seconds or so left, but tight end Justin Peelle is stopped on the 1-yard line with about five seconds left and Texas recovers. And then — ah, heck with it — somehow Oregon produces eight points in five seconds to win.

Typical Duck game, right? So imagine that hotbed of recruits, watching in wonder as the Ducks do their thing while cheers from the droves of traveling fans bounce off the stadium walls.

Even more importantly, think about next season.

The start of this season seemed too good to be true, with the Pac-10 gaining instant respect by beating the likes of Miami, Penn State, Alabama, Michigan and Texas.

Suddenly, a few Pac-10 teams were ranked in the top-15 nationally. The strength of schedule in conference play soared to new heights.

Had the Ducks, Beavers or Huskies won out, they'd have been playing for the national championship, all thanks to that wonderful strength of schedule.

And here's the best part: If the Ducks, Beavers and Huskies can take care of business in the postseason — and all three teams should — then the Pac-10 is going to be stacked before next season even begins, and perhaps that national championship window will stay open just a short while longer.

So, you win some, you lose some. Oregon lost the battle in Corvallis, but the war is far from over. The Holiday Bowl may not be the Rose Bowl, but it is a great bowl, and it could have a very positive impact on the Ducks' recruiting future.

The Pac-10 can take a huge step toward producing a national champ.

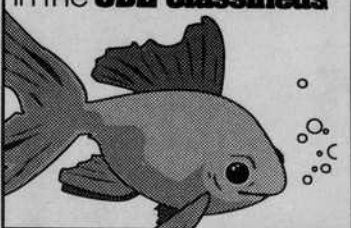
And, of course, the Civil War may never be boring again.

But first, three teams must win.

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**HOLIDAY BOWL TICKETS ON SALE**

People may not be camping out for them, but tickets for the Holiday Bowl went on sale today to season ticket holders, Duck Athletic Fund donors and current Oregon students, faculty and staff.

The remaining tickets will go on sale Thursday to the general public.

Students will be able to purchase tickets for \$15 with a valid Oregon ID, and they will only be allowed to purchase one ticket each. The majority of the tickets will sell for \$40 to donors and faculty.

Tickets can be purchased at the Casanova Center Ticket Office — which is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. — by mail or by phone at 346-4461 or 1-800-WEBFOOT. The tickets will not be available at the EMU ticket office.

The UO Alumni Association also plans to run a variety of Holiday Bowl packages, with most including airfare and lodging in San Diego. Call the University's Holiday Bowl Hotline at 541-346-8636 or visit the Alumni Office Website at <http://alumni.uoregon.edu> for more information about the packages offered.

The Holiday Bowl kicks off at 5:30 p.m. Dec. 29 in San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium.