



Harrington invaluable in Holiday Bowl win

Oregon's Joey Harrington leaves the Civil War behind in leading Oregon to the bowl win

By Scott Pesznecker
Oregon Daily Emerald

SAN DIEGO — Joey Harrington has played from behind many times since taking the reins of Oregon's offense midway through the 1999 season.

There was that last-second pass to receiver Marshaun Tucker that beat Arizona State last season, followed by the dramatic rematch, a double-overtime thriller at Sun Devil Stadium this season.

The junior quarterback also led the Ducks to an overtime win against Washington State in the frozen Palouse, not to mention fourth-quarter comebacks against Southern California and California.

But through all the close games of the last two seasons, Harrington's greatest comeback happened at the Culligan Holiday Bowl Dec. 29 in San Diego.

Down 21-14 heading into the second half after surrendering 21 unanswered points to Texas, Oregon passed, darted and dashed its way back into the lead. The Duck defense held up in the final minutes, and Oregon walked away a winner.

It was Harrington's energy that sparked the offense, which, in a nationally televised ESPN game, seemed one step ahead of the Longhorns for most of the night.

It was Harrington who caught a pass from receiver Keenan Howry, then fell into the end zone for the touchdown. In the fourth quarter, it was Harrington who ran nine yards for the touchdown to give the Ducks a 28-21 lead. In all, he completed 19 of 30 passes for 273 yards and two touchdowns.

"Joey stepped it up big. He made some great throws, great catches, great runs — he did it all for us today," Howry said. "I said he had the hat trick after he ran in the touchdown. He did it all for us."

And when the clock ran out, and Oregon players celebrated on the field as they never have before, it was Harrington who accepted the honor of offensive player of the game.

“Joey stepped it up big. He made some great throws, great catches, great runs — he did it all for us today.”

Keenan Howry
Oregon receiver

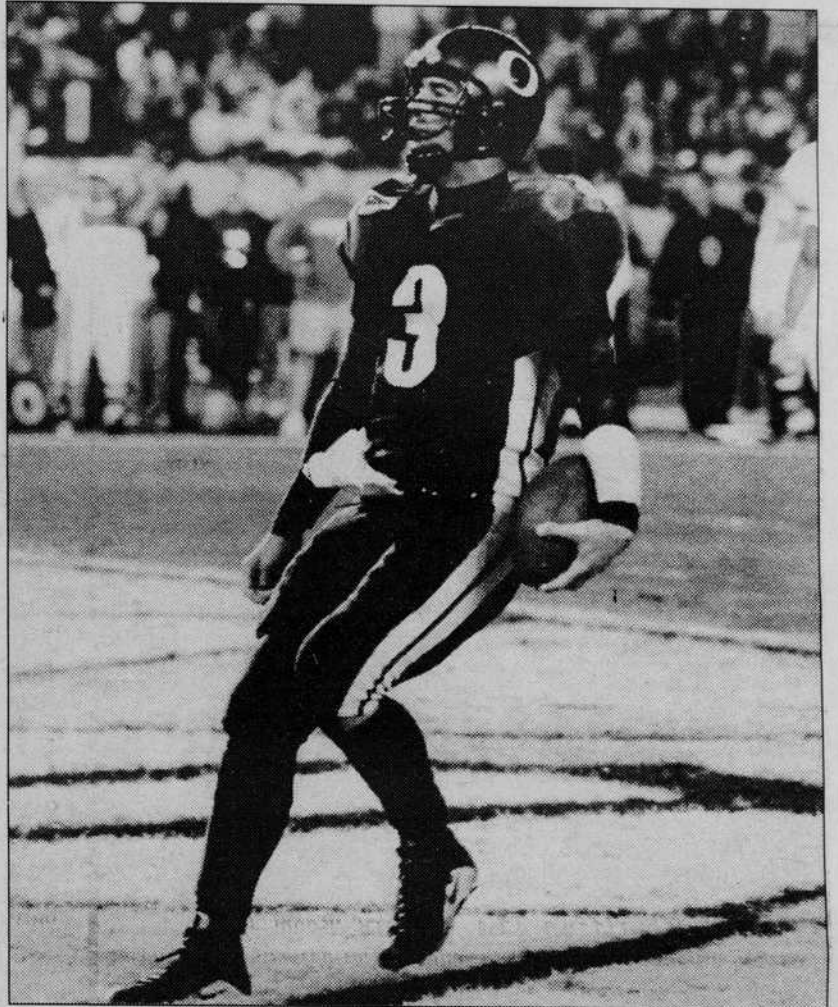


Harrington — who threw five interceptions and gave up a fumble in a crushing loss to Oregon State at the end of the season — came back, improving his starting record to 14-2.

Unlike when he shouldered the blame for the Civil War loss, Harrington was quick to spread credit for beating traditionally powerful Texas.

"It shows the character of this team," he said after the game, standing on the field as fireworks exploded above Qualcomm Stadium. "Week in and week out, we were behind, we were struggling, we were hurting and then we came back and we came up with wins. That's the sign of great character on our team."

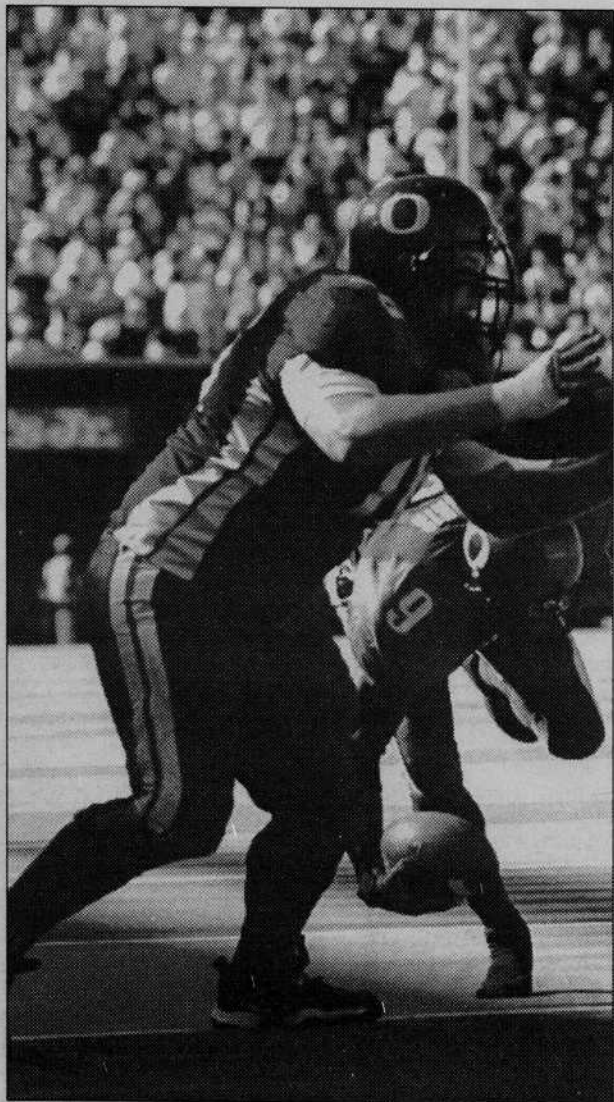
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Oregon quarterback Joey Harrington runs into the end zone for a Holiday Bowl touchdown. Craig Mitchell/yer for the Emerald



Special senior class ends its career on a high note



Oregon offensive tackle Lee Gundy battled the flu as well as Texas. Emerald



HAKUNA MATATA

JEFF SMITH

SAN DIEGO — The Oregon seniors on the field during the Holiday Bowl had no time to prepare themselves for the end.

The hard-working group of 22 seniors had to stay focused right down to the precious final seconds of its battle with Texas Dec. 29.

So when Texas quarterback Chris Simms' desperation heave fell incomplete in the end zone, the clock finally showed 0:00 and the scoreboard read 35-30 in Oregon's favor, it all came out.

The emotion. The smiles. The hugs. The yells. And, of course, the tears.

"I'm loving all my teammates right now!" senior defensive end Jason Nikolao exclaimed as television-camera lights competed with the sky's display of the fireworks after the game.

The end of the game marked an end of an era. Head coach Mike Bellotti has always mentioned how special a class this was to him, and with good reason.

This senior group boasts the best four-year record in Oregon history at 34-14, which is the most wins by any Pacific-10 Conference school in that time.

Of the 22 seniors, there are 11 players who have been active for the school's four straight bowl appearances (Las Vegas, Aloha, Sun and Holiday.)

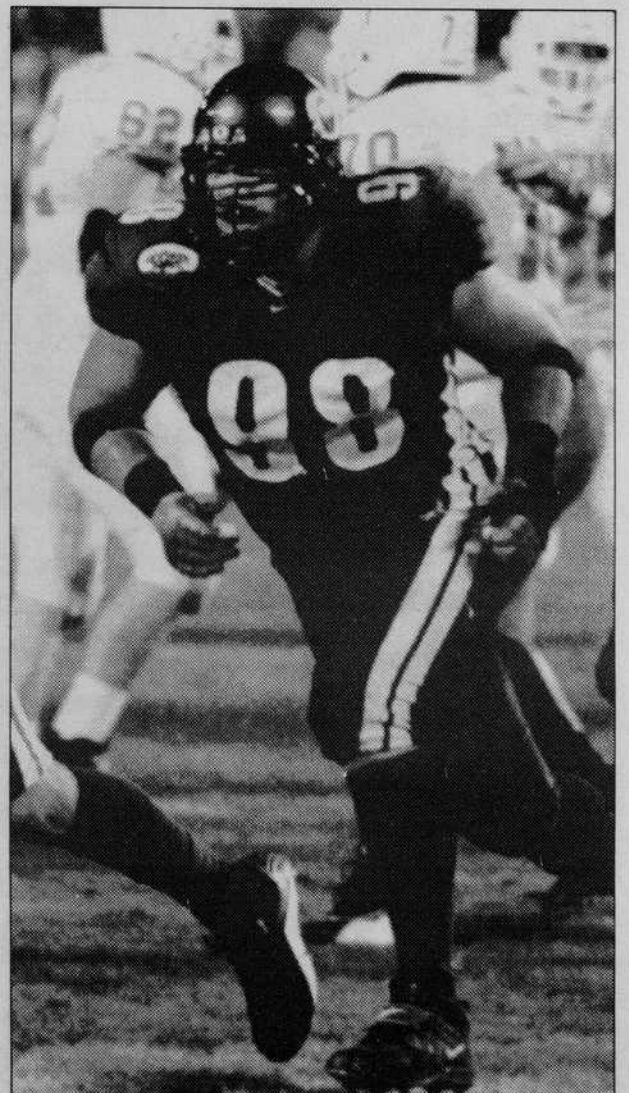
Among them are defensive stalwarts Saul Patu and Nikolao, who have seen action in all four bowls.

The two have been the Batman and Robin of the Oregon defense this season.

They command your attention both on and off the field, and when they speak, you listen. That's just the way it is.

"I'm extremely proud of everyone who played on this team, from the scout team on up," Patu said. "And especially all of the guys on defense. We're like a body. If one person

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Oregon defensive end Jason Nikolao had plenty to recall after the game. Craig Mitchell/yer for the Emerald