

Football

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18. Had the Ducks won either of those two games they would have been headed to Pasadena instead of the Washington Huskies.

But what characterized this team more than anything was its ability to put the past behind it and always look ahead.

Obviously, the loss to Oregon State was deflating and propelled the Beavers to a Fiesta Bowl blowout win against Notre Dame. The Ducks, though, knew they couldn't turn back the clock and chose to dedicate themselves throughout the month of December for their Holiday Bowl showdown with Texas.

"After that Oregon State game, it hurt losing, but you always knew you'd have another game," senior linebacker Garrett Sabol said.

It was that type of attitude that helped the Ducks win so many memorable games this season. For example, down by 14 with 3:30 to go in regulation at Arizona State. Impossible? Not for the 2000 Ducks. Oregon proceeded to score twice and win in overtime with a ridiculous final score of 56-55.

Time and time again, the Ducks did what they had to do to get the win. Oregon gave Washington its only defeat, sent USC lower than it already was and provided an early knockout blow to Arizona. The Ducks also took care of Washington State and California while having huge bulls-eye marks on their chests as the league front-runner.

Now, the challenge is to continue to look forward and try to build on this success, despite losing 22 valuable seniors.

"Well, we have the luxury of having a lot of our offensive people come back," head coach Mike Bellotti said. "Defensively, we have some holes to fill. We were able to reload very effectively from last year, and hopefully, we can do that again."

The appetite for those associated with the Oregon football team is continually swelling.

There once was a time in which an above-.500 record was seen as a success, but the 1994 Rose Bowl season ruined that.

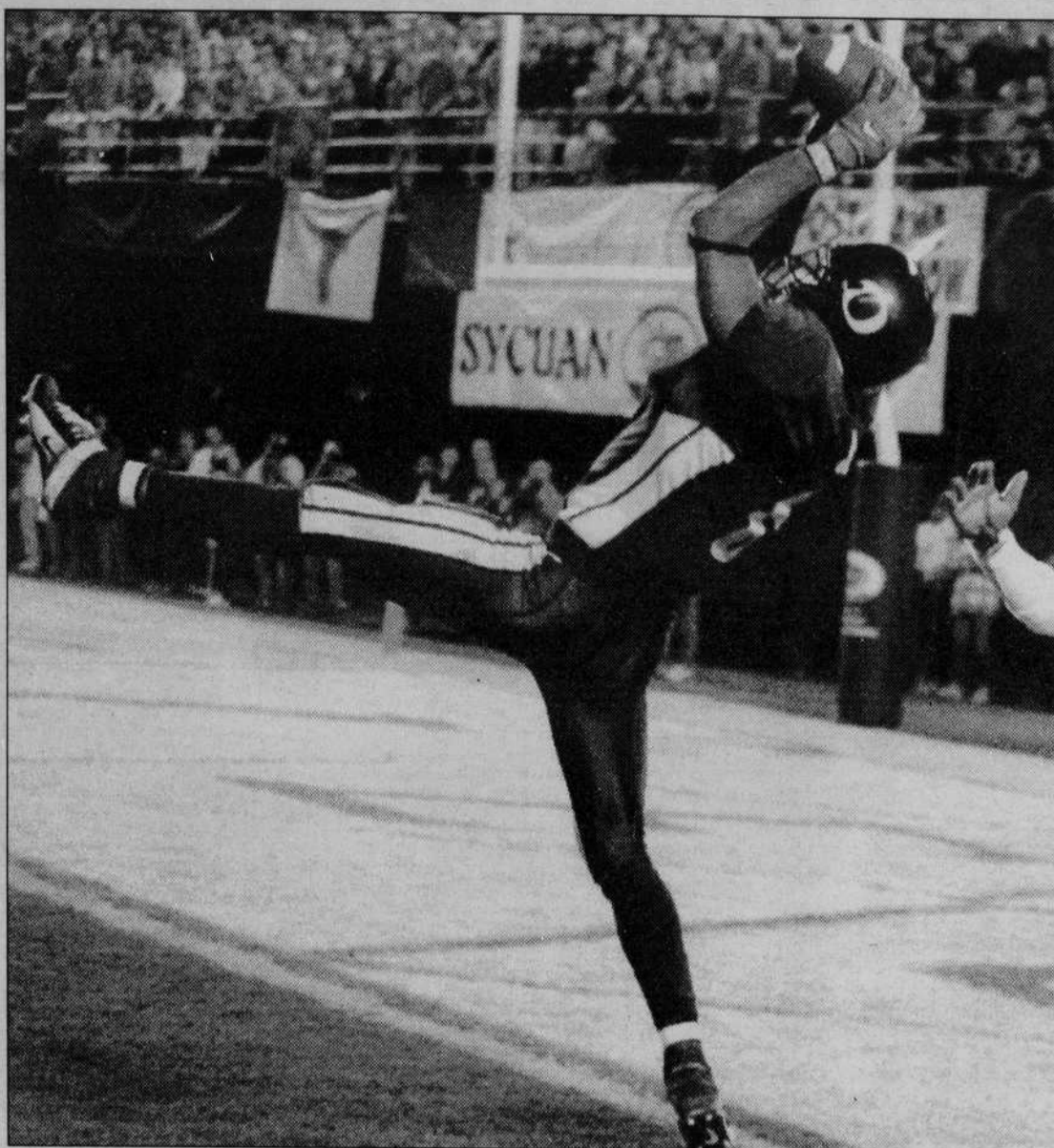
Then, there was a time in which simply reaching a bowl game was viewed as a significant accomplishment, but victories in the Las Vegas, Sun and Holiday bowls have diminished that concept.

And now, after the first 10-win season in Oregon history, those connected with the Ducks are speaking of much loftier goals. They speak of not only capturing sole possession of the Pac-10 but also of playing for the national championship.

"Our goal will be to play for it all next year," junior cornerback Steve Smith said. "We'll shoot for it and see what happens. It's going to be exciting to see if we can do better than we did this year."

Oregon had six wins in '96, seven in '97, eight in '98, nine in '99, and, for the first time, 10 in 2000. For the Ducks to continue their corresponding improvement and capture a special 11th win, a lot must happen between now and Sept. 1, the day Wisconsin visits Eugene to open the season.

But, as many have learned from watching Oregon during the past two seasons, no climb is insurmountable.



Oregon junior cornerback Steve Smith leaps backward and makes an athletic and crucial interception on the one-yard line off a pass from Texas quarterback Chris Simms. Smith is a key returnee on defense and is excited and confident toward next season. *Craig Mitchell-Dyer for the Emerald*

2000 Football Season

Sept. 2 Oregon-36 Nevada-7

The Oregon defense only gives up 103 yards, the least amount since 1962.

Sept. 9 Oregon-23 Wisconsin-27

Missed chances plague the Ducks, as they fall on the road to the then-No. 5 Badgers.

Sept. 16 Oregon-42 Idaho-13

Joey Harrington throws four TD's, as Oregon tunes up for the Pac-10.

Sept. 23 Oregon-29 UCLA-10

Oregon's defense holds UCLA to minus-nine rushing yards, and upsets the then-sixth-ranked Bruins.

Sept. 30 Oregon-23 Washington-16

Maurice Morris rushes for 152 yards to help give the Ducks the early edge in the race for the roses.

Oct. 14 Oregon-28 USC-17

Oregon proves it can win on the road as Harrington throws for a career-high 382 yards and four TD's.

Oct. 21 Oregon-14 Arizona-10

The Ducks take sole-possession of first-place with a defensive-oriented Homecoming victory.

Oct. 28 Oregon-56 Arizona State-55

20T
In the most absurd and incredible game of the year, Oregon rallies from behind to upend the Sun Devils in a classic desert duel.

Nov. 4 Oregon-27 Washington State-24

OT
Josh Frankel nails an overtime field goal and Jed Boice blocks the Cougars' attempt to win a nailbiter in the Palouse.

Nov. 11 Oregon-25 California-17

Harrington leads Oregon again, as he throws for a TD and runs in for two more to set the stage for the Civil War.

Nov. 18 Oregon-13 Oregon State-23

In the 104th and most significant Civil War, the Ducks give up six turnovers to end their Rose Bowl dreams.

Dec. 29 Oregon-35 Texas-30

The Ducks finish the season strong in the Holiday Bowl with their 10th win in arguably the most entertaining bowl game of the season.

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