

Autzen magic again prevails in the clutch

You left the game early, didn't you? Maybe you were thinking the same thing the L.A. Daily News was when it sent out its first edition Sunday morning with the headline, "USC ends Ducks' streak."

Maybe you were on the USC bench, celebrating after your

team blocked a field goal with 1:20 to play.

Maybe you've never been to Autzen Stadium.

That's the beauty of the Autzen magic: It picks you up, shakes you around,

makes you scream, makes you cry, makes you sweat, then hits you with the unthinkable.

Now repeat 23 times. Coinciding with the last three meetings between the two teams, Oregon and USC battled until the very end Saturday, with the Ducks prevailing thanks to a last-minute, come-from-behind drive in the hands of Joey "Heisman" Harrington.

Despite some un-Joey-like numbers until the final minute, Harrington came up big when his team — and 45,765 adoring fans — needed him the most.

"Joey, for the most part, played very, very well, although his stats may not show that," head coach Mike Bellotti said. "But his leadership down the stretch is phenomenal and it's part of the magic that is Autzen stadium."

Down 22-21, Harrington took the Ducks 61 yards on 5-of-6 passing, setting up a game-winning field goal by true freshman Jared Siegel.

"You can't get used to stuff like this," said defensive back Steve Smith, who had three interceptions. "I was a little nervous, but in the back of my mind, I knew the Autzen magic would show."

Saturday's gut-wrenching win was much like the Ducks' 33-30 victory Sept. 27, 1999 against USC at Autzen, when third-string placekicker Josh Frankel put the ball through the uprights in the third overtime.

Anything can happen at Autzen. Don't say I didn't tell you so.

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Adam Jude
Out in left field

Smith

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moment that you had to because the plot twists could come when least expected.

Such as Oregon's first score of the game, a picture perfect 35-yard touchdown pass from *Onterio Smith* to Justin Peelle.

Or how about the Steve Smith story? The senior cornerback who has had a rollercoaster of a month after a poor outing against Wisconsin, comes up huge with three interceptions off Carson Palmer, including a 33-yard return for a touchdown.

Tack on another Oregon score, and suddenly, the writers make you believe that the 21-6 Ducks lead will hold for good and that Oregon will finally be able to put a quality team away.

But this is where it gets good, of course. And this is where those raucous 45,765 spectators begin to form sweaty palms as the sputtering Oregon offense fails to produce for the next 27 minutes and 44 seconds.

Like a thrilling movie that picks and chooses its time for the surprise attack, the flowing contest is suddenly jolted by a 75-yard touchdown run by USC's Sultan McCullough. Then a 93-yard scoring pass from Palmer to Kareem Kelly. Then a 40-yard field goal to give USC a 22-21 fourth quarter lead.

Suddenly, we're witnessing not just a close game, but perhaps the end to the fabled Autzen win streak and the end to the Ducks' national title hopes.

But a great character or two is needed in times like this to pull the story to its conclusion.

First, there's the obvious choice: veteran Joey Harrington, reprising his role as the reincarnation of



Thomas Patterson Emerald

Steve Smith celebrates his interception returned 33 yards for a touchdown in the second quarter of Oregon's 24-22 victory over Southern California on Saturday.

John Elway and suddenly completing 5-of-6 crisp passes and driving 61 yards down the field to attempt his eighth career fourth-quarter comeback.

Then there's freshman Jared Siegel, the newcomer. Recall that 38-yard field goal that Siegel missed in the second quarter and then add that to the fact that he was replaced for two extra points and a separate field goal attempt later on.

And then watch.

Watch as Harrington catches the snap and sets it down, and as Siegel boots it with his right foot, and as USC defenders leap to try to block another kick, and as the silence that grips the stadium for a moment is replaced by pure pandemonium as the ball sails through the posts, and has Siegel runs around like the youngster that he is, and as the final seconds tick

away with the Ducks storming the field with helmets raised in triumph, and as Harrington twirls around in circles in the air not caring how he looks like but just caring that he won, and then watch as Onterio Smith and Bauman rub their hands over the end zone grass together and scream, "Our house! This is our house!"

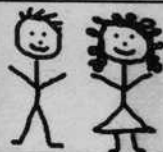
And watch as the players leave the field and the fans jump around, and watch as the screen slowly fades to black, and watch as the credits begin to scroll every so gently.

And finally, listen.

Listen to these words, "Stay tuned for scenes from the next episode of Oregon football."

You'll regret it if you don't.

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