



Adam Amato Emerald

Rashad Bauman (17) and Wesly Mallard (18) have begun to revive the Oregon pass defense after four sub-par performances to start the season. The Ducks' defense will have its hands full against a speedy Stanford offense.

UO secondary second to none

■ Minus an injured Keith Lewis, the Ducks' secondary looks to improve on a defense ranked ninth in the Pac-10

By Hank Hager
Oregon Daily Emerald

When Rashad Bauman takes the field, it's best to stop and pay attention. When Bauman speaks, it's best to stop and listen. And when he speaks about Stanford, it's best to stop and believe him.

"Cover your man, don't let him catch the ball and it will be a good test," the senior defensive back said about the keys for the secondary this weekend. "They don't do anything we haven't seen. It's just going to be who's better, and we just have to make sure we're the best team out there."

Bauman is unquestionably the leader of the Ducks' secondary, a group that has consistently gotten better in the past couple of weeks against Arizona and California. While the group is still ranked ninth in the Pacific-10 Conference in pass defense — allowing 290.2 yards per game — it is a squad that has a lot of talent. They are good enough to be declared 10th best in the nation by The Sporting News before the season.

"We've been doing the exact same schemes," Bauman said about the team's resurgence. "Nothing has changed. We've pretty much been

better in not giving up the big plays and haven't blown any of our assignments."

Senior cornerback Steve Smith has four interceptions this season, including three in the Ducks' 24-22 win over USC earlier this season. His picks are enough to rank him first in the Pac-10 and tied for seventh in the nation.

Smith is not the only Duck to be ranked high in the conference. Sophomore free safety Keith Lewis has 51 tackles this season, enough for third place in the conference. He is doubtful for the Homecoming game against the Cardinal, though, after suffering a severe ankle sprain against California last week.

Lewis' absence creates a hole in the secondary that will have to be filled by senior Gary McGraw. McGraw, a converted cornerback, will have to step up and fill a void left by one of the team's most consistent performers. He is the man this week, but don't tell him that.

"I wouldn't say I'm the man," McGraw said. "I'm just stepping-in in place of another player. I'm going to try to contribute as much as I can."

Junior safety Rasuli Webster said: "We have a lot of confidence in Gary. He steps on the field like Keith steps on the field every day and goes over the same plays. We're confident in what Gary can do."

Enter unranked Stanford, a squad that features a virtually unknown — yet dangerous — quarter-

back in senior Randy Fasani. The Cardinal are essentially a dark horse this season, having beaten Boston College, Arizona State and USC before losing to a tough Washington State squad last week. They are 2-1 in conference play and are looking to extend their record.

"(Stanford is) a really good team," Webster said. "They bring it to every play and we just have to bring it back to them, and it's going to be a physical game."

Junior Luke Powell leads the receiving corps for the Cardinal, a group that is marked by speed and intensity. Powell is seventh in the Pac-10 in receiving yards per game with 72.5, but is even more dangerous on special teams. However, he has enough talent to explode on offense as well.

For that reason alone, this week's grudge match will provide a test for the Oregon secondary. After falling through the cracks in the first four games, the Ducks' secondary has a chance to right the wrongs that have plagued them early in the season and prove their early season ranking correct.

But that will be a tough task for a team that has lost its leading tackler, and a piece of its heart and soul.

"When you lose your leading tackler, that's going to make a difference to everybody," head coach Mike Bellotti said. "I think that we have to have every single player on defense step up and be willing to play a little harder, a little better."

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