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STILL CHUGGING FORWARD

Despite a frustrating senior season, Ken Simonton can still make history against the Ducks



Courtesy Oregon State Media Services

Ken Simonton has run his way into the Pacific-10 conference record books. The senior tailback ranks second all-time in Pac-10 rushing and wants to reach the 1,000-yard mark.

By Adam Jude
 Oregon Daily Emerald

Day one of 2001 was one for the history books for Ken Simonton. The 330 days since have not been.

Oregon State ended its 2000 campaign with a 41-9 victory over Notre Dame at the New Year's Day Fiesta Bowl.

The Beavers' summer was, much like Oregon's, filled with hype and anticipation of the coming season. One publication in particular announced that Oregon State was the best team in the land, while Simonton was touted as a Heisman Trophy candidate.

Then Sept. 2 rolled around, and with it, a 44-22 loss to Fresno State. From there, everything rolled downhill for Simonton and the Beavers.

"I made some mistakes. I could have run harder on some," Simonton said after the loss. "A lot of things I could have done better, but we all could have, so we've all got to look at ourselves and say, 'I could do this better.'"

A tough five-point win over New Mexico State the following week evened the Beavers' record, but because of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, Oregon State did not play again until Sept. 29.

And UCLA had no mercy in a 38-7 trouncing in Corvallis.

By the end of October, the Beavers were 3-5 and desperately looking to turn around a once-promising season. In particular, Simonton, the school's all-time rushing leader, was searching for answers.

"You just find yourself going in a circle. 'What if this?' and 'Maybe we this' and 'Maybe we should this' — you can't explain it," Simonton said after an Oct. 20 loss to Arizona State. "You've got to just come out and prepare and just kind of laugh and say, 'I'll see you tomorrow.'"

Oregon State lost in overtime, 16-13, to Southern California on Nov. 3, a game in which Simonton rushed for 85 yards, second on the team behind freshman Steven Jackson. But from that point, the Beavers have had little trouble.

Washington entered Corvallis on Nov. 10 as the eighth-ranked team in the country but went home to Seattle with a 49-24 loss, the Beavers' first win over the Huskies since 1985.

Simonton was back in his old form, scoring three touchdowns on 107 yards rushing to move into second place on the Pac-10's all-time rushing chart.

"Ken Simonton is a true winner, a true competitor, a tremendous person," head coach Dennis Erickson said. "He's what athletics should be all about, because he's had to deal with some adversity. He didn't have a lot of places to run at times. What he's done is, he's played as well as he can play, regardless of what it was."

Even with the struggles this season, Simonton still has a shot at becoming just the fifth player in NCAA history to rush for 1,000 yards in all four seasons of eligibility. The Pittsburg, Calif., native needs 113 yards — his exact total in last year's Civil War — to achieve the historic mark.

"That's just kind of a testament to four years of hard work, so it's real important," Simonton told the Corvallis Gazette-Times about the record. "It's my final curtain call."

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