

Ducks' tenacious defense stymies Buffs' attack

■ Colorado nets just 49 rushing-yards in Oregon's 38-16 Fiesta Bowl victory

By Adam Jude
Oregon Daily Emerald

TEMPE, Ariz. — One word: respect.

In the week leading up to the Fiesta Bowl, the Ducks could not get away from the Colorado running game — it's all they heard about.

But when it mattered most, the Colorado tailbacks could not get away from the Ducks.

"I'm going to be honest with you — with all the talk, we had a score to settle, and we had a chip on our shoulders coming into this game," Oregon sophomore line-backer Kevin Mitchell said after Oregon's 38-16 rout of Colorado on New Year's Day. "We had an attitude that we were going to stop the run."

It showed. Against a rushing offense that averaged nearly 230 yards per game — and tallied 380 yards on the ground against then-No. 1 Nebraska on Nov. 23 — Oregon's speedy defense held the highly touted Buffalo rushers to a season-low 49 total yards.

"It was one of the top efforts I've ever been around," Oregon defensive coordinator Nick Aliotti said. "If you can control the run and

make a team one dimension, you have a good chance of winning. And — God, I don't like to sound like I'm bragging — but we certainly did that tonight."

Fullback Brandon Drumm gave the Buffs a 7-0 lead midway through the first quarter, but there would be few highlights on the ground for Colorado after that.

On consecutive series in the second quarter, Oregon was able to hold the Buffaloes on key third-and-one plays. Redshirt freshman tackle Igor Olshansky was involved in both tackles.

"I feel that we're the best in the country. We dominated this game," Olshansky said. "I don't think anyone in the country can run on us. We may not be the biggest or the fastest defense in the country, but we're going to play hard."

Quarterback Joey Harrington and the Oregon offense scored 38 unanswered points to give the Ducks a 38-7 lead at the 9:38 mark of the fourth quarter, and, by then, Colorado had to rely almost entirely on its passing game.

"They didn't even try to run the ball in the end," Aliotti said.

With seniors Steve Smith and Rashad Bauman patrolling the air, Colorado senior quarterback Bobby Pesavento could not establish a rhythm and was replaced by sophomore Craig Ochs.

"They just wanted it more," Pesavento said.

Ochs was not greeted warmly either, with his first pass attempt turning into one of Smith's three interceptions — a Fiesta Bowl record.

"Steve Smith has a knack for the ball, and he's a play-maker," Aliotti said. "Throughout his career ... Steve has just a knack for making the big plays."

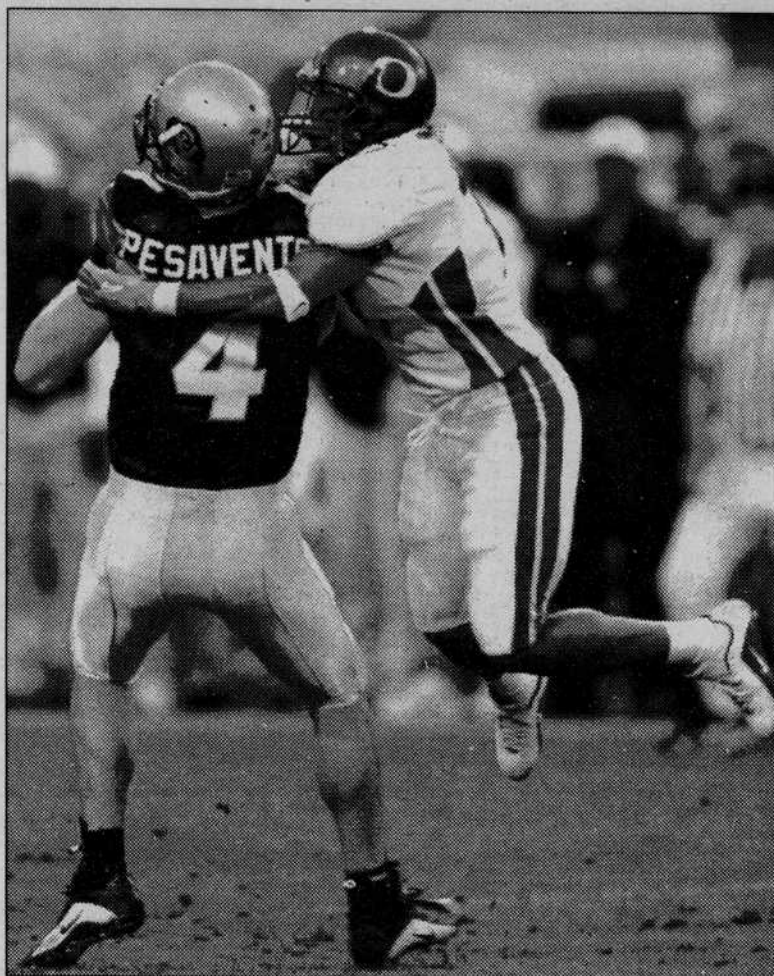
Pesavento finished 11-of-27 with two interceptions, and Ochs came in to give the Buffs 279 total passing yards, most of which came when the game was out of reach.

"Once we got them in air, we knew the game was over," Bauman said. "They're not a throwing team. (Pesavento) isn't used to throwing the ball that many times, and we knew that would be to our advantage."

For a defense that was ranked ninth in the Pacific-10 Conference — allowing 406 yards per game — Oregon surprised, and silenced, many critics.

"I don't think we really went into the game underestimating them," Colorado wide receiver Roman Hollowell said. "They just stepped up to the challenge. They just stopped the run, stopped our whole offense entirely."

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Senior Rashad Bauman blind-sides Colorado quarterback Bobby Pesavento for one of Oregon's four sacks in the Fiesta Bowl win over the Buffaloes.

Fiesta Bowl

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ning game, taking a 7-0 lead on a Brandon Drumm one-yard scoring run at the 6:26 mark of the first quarter.

But that was all it took for the switch to flip in Oregon's mind.

In the Ducks' next series, Harrington zipped a 28-yard strike down the middle to Keenan Howry for a well-timed touchdown pass to even up the score. From there, the floodgates opened and the Ducks tacked on 31 more unanswered points to turn the game into a true fiesta for Oregon and its fans, which were loudly represented among the 74,118 at Sun Devil Stadium.

On defense, most of the Oregon cheers were directed toward defensive back Steve Smith, who snared three interceptions and earned the game's defensive player of the game award. He also had three picks against USC earlier in the season.

"Yeah, it's pretty cool," said Smith, a senior. "You know me, I didn't get a touchdown, but it's a great feeling."

On the other side of the ball, Harrington capped his storybook college football career by completing 28-of-42 passes for 350 yards and four touchdowns. Nine of those Harrington heaves landed in the hands of sophomore receiver Samie Parker, who had a career-high 162 yards receiving. Harrington and Parker hooked up on a 79-yard touchdown pass to give the Ducks their first lead, 14-7, in the opening minutes of the second quarter.

"I knew after I got by him that he wasn't going to catch me because I knew I was faster than him," Parker said of his defender.

Oregon took a 21-7 lead into halftime after a Harrington six-yard shovel pass to Onterio Smith.

With the game still within reach at the opening of the third quarter, the Buffaloes were given a punch to the gut on a play that began innocently enough with Harrington handing it off to Maurice Morris.

But that was when Morris made highlight films everywhere. After running 28 yards, he appeared to be tackled at the 21-yard line, but he rolled over the back of Colorado's Joey Johnson to stay on his

feet. Then, with most of the players thinking the play was over, he ran into the end zone to complete the 49-yard scamper and propel Oregon to a 28-7 lead.

Morris' team-high 89 yards gave him 1,049 for his senior season, which along with Smith, gave the Ducks two 1,000-yard tailbacks for the first time.

"Maurice's run, it changed the complexion of the game," Bellotti said.

"I got to watch it on the replay screen and that was incredible," offensive lineman Ryan Schmid said.

Once the lead was extended to 21 points, Colorado appeared to shut it down and concede the Fiesta Bowl and the possible split national title to the Ducks.

The rest of the Oregon scoring consisted of a Jared Siegel career-long 47-yard field goal and a final scoring pass from Harrington to his good friend Justin Peelle.

Colorado scored nine meaningless points to end the game. The most glaring statistic was Colorado's rushing total of 49 yards against an inspired Ducks defense. "I don't have an explanation,"

Colorado head coach Gary Barnett said. "Oregon did not get our best shot tonight."

As the fourth quarter minutes slowly wound down, many Colorado fans began to file out, leaving the green-and-yellow contingent with plenty of opportunities to celebrate amongst themselves.

With three minutes on the clock, Bellotti was drenched by a cooler filled with ice water.

Seven seconds later, the Oregon fans began the "We're No. 1" chant that lasted through the end of the game.

Of course, with Miami winning two days later, the Ducks settled for No. 2, which left some players wondering what would have happened if the national title pairing was done by humans rather than computers.

"We made a statement that we belonged in the championship game," Onterio Smith said. "It didn't happen, but we wanted to prove to people that we're one of the national powers."

They made their move, and the nation noticed.

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Men's

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treys down the stretch, giving ASU the seven-point victory.

"It came down to the fact that they had more energy than we did," Kent said.

The Oregon players may have been tired after Friday night's win over Arizona. The Ducks toppled the Wildcats 90-80, and the game was not nearly as close as the score indicated.

Oregon led by as many as 22 points and never let Arizona get close at the McKale Center in Tucson. For the Ducks, the win in Tucson was their first since 1985, and completed their first season sweep of the Wildcats since 1982.

"We conquered the road with a big, big win down at Arizona," Kent said Sunday night. "Hey, we're 3-1, and we don't have to play these two teams again, while everyone else still has to go through them."

Oregon returns to McArthur Court on Thursday to face Pac-10 foe California before taking on No. 13 Stanford on Saturday.

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