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Morris ends UO career in style

■ Tailback Maurice Morris reaches 1,000 yards and helps the Ducks beat the Buffs with an amazing scoring run

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

TEMPE, Ariz. — Moments after Maurice Morris's jaw-dropping, 49-yard touchdown run, he was greeted by fellow tailback Onterio Smith.

Smith ran up to him, hugged his friend and told him of an item he was inspired to purchase.

"I told him that I was going to go buy me a diary right after the game and put him in there: '2002, January 1st. Maurice Morris, 49-yard unbelievable run,'" Smith said, laughing. "I was going to put the unbelievable as big as I could get it.

"Me, being the type of back that I am, I love runs like that!"

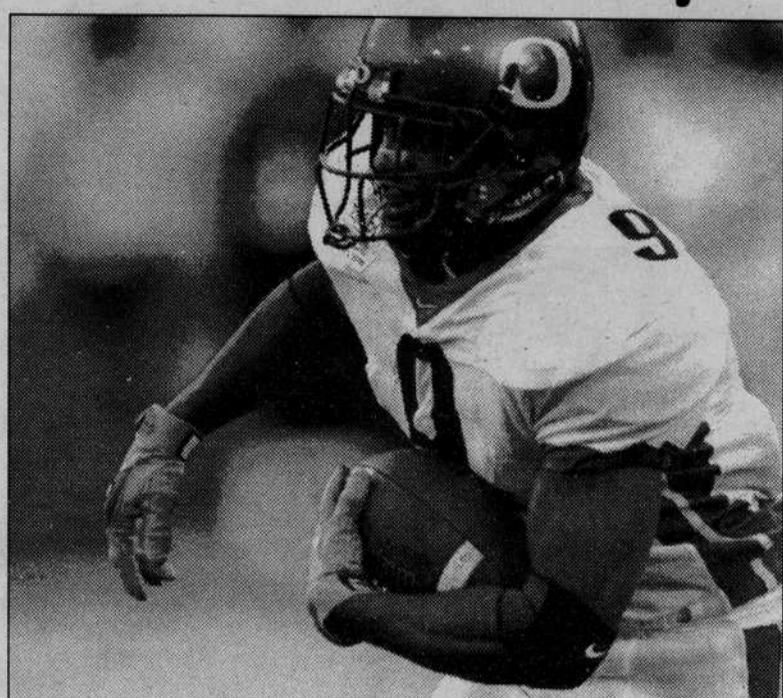
Morris entered the Fiesta Bowl needing 40 yards to reach 1,000 for the season. Before his scoring run in the third quarter, he was just two yards shy.

So not only did the highlight reel play push Morris past the 1,000-yard mark, but it gave Oregon the cushion it needed en route to its 38-16 Fiesta Bowl victory against Colorado.

Smith had reached the hallowed four-digit mark against Oregon State, and Morris's team-high 89 yards gave him 1,049 total to mark the first time Oregon has ever had two 1,000-yard backs.

"I'm tremendously glad that he got it," Smith said.

Colorado wasn't. Morris's run seemingly deflated the Buffaloes, who only trailed 21-7 before the play.



John Stoops for the Emerald

Senior tailback Maurice Morris became the third Duck in program history to record consecutive 1,000-yard seasons. He led Oregon with 89 yards against Colorado.

Amid a cluster of Colorado defenders, Morris confused nearly everyone on the field — his own teammates included.

"I'm running down there, and then I stop, thinking the play was over," offensive lineman Ryan Schmid said. "The next thing I see is Maurice taking off toward the end zone, so I hit some guy, and probably clipped him.

"It takes an incredible athlete like Maurice to do something like that."

Morris outran Colorado defensive back Medford Moorer. Then he was tangled up briefly by Roderrick Sneed. Sneed's attempted

tackle caused Morris to lunge backward, but as he fell, he rolled over the back of linebacker Joey Johnson and ran untouched into the end zone.

"I didn't hear no whistle so I got up and started running," Morris said.

Morris's teammates were thrilled to see the hard-working senior go out in style.

"I hope Maurice remembers tonight for the rest of his life," Schmid said. "I know we'll always remember him."

Contact assistant sports editor Jeff Smith at jeffsmith@dailymerald.com.

Smith

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And to win the way they did? Well, welcome to the big time, Ducks.

The postgame emotions on the field of Sun Devil Stadium had a different feel than those from Qualcomm Stadium after Oregon beat Texas.

While the two on-field celebrations were similar in that they both involved a stage with Bellotti and Harrington accepting congratulations and trophies, they differed in one crucial way:

In San Diego, the Ducks took a huge step that led to the sky-high preseason expectations and continued their climb up the college football ladder.

But in Tempe, the Ducks arrived.

Sure, there's still more room for growth, with the national championship not yet attained and the Rose Bowl barely eluding Oregon two years in a row.

Though what really matters is that the Ducks were presented with a program-changing opportunity in the Fiesta Bowl — and they didn't waste it.

"I hope it leaves a mark to the rest of the nation as to what kind of team we are," Schmid said.

Schmid doesn't have to worry. This will be a game that few will forget, if not more for the BCS madness and the wonder of whether Oregon would have given Miami a better game than Nebraska did (which it clearly would have).

Although Miami claimed sole possession of the national championship, the Ducks have a lot to be proud of given that they were the No. 2 team in the country in the final polls.

Years from now, this season will stick out in fans', players', coaches' and even reporters' minds alike for the uniqueness and freshness of big-time college football fully introducing itself to the town of Eugene.

So before you start looking forward too quickly, pull the car over to the side of the road.

Adjust the rear-view mirror. And look back on all that was accomplished and realize how fortunate you were to be along for the ride.

Contact assistant sports editor Jeff Smith at jeffsmith@dailymerald.com.

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GO DUCKS!

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