

SPORTS

Sports Editor:
Adam Jude
adamjude@dailymerald.com
Assistant Sports Editor:
Jeff Smith
jeffsmith@dailymerald.com

Best Bet
NCAA hoops: Cal at Oregon
7 p.m., KEZI



Thursday, January 10, 2002

Living up to the hype

■ With soaring expectations, the 2001 Ducks put together a season unlike any in school history

By Jeff Smith
Oregon Daily Emerald

Amid the postgame celebration from Oregon's Holiday Bowl victory over Texas on Dec. 29, 2000, there were two profound emotions.

One, there was a great sense of accomplishment for that team, having recorded a school-record 10 wins and capping off a season that also included a Pacific-10 Conference co-championship.

But in addition, for the players who would return the following season, there was the anticipation of taking Oregon football to the next level — a level that not only included winning the Pac-10 title outright but also playing for the national championship.

"Our goal will be to play for it all next year," Steve Smith said then. "We'll shoot for it and see what happens. It's going to be exciting to see if we can do better than we did this year."

The expectations were high, but they reached unprecedented heights in June when the Oregon football program publicly introduced itself to the rest of the nation.

The Ducks' entrance into the national spotlight came in the form of the 100-foot billboard featuring Joey Harrington in New York City. The excuse for the extravagance was to promote the senior quarterback for the Heisman Trophy.

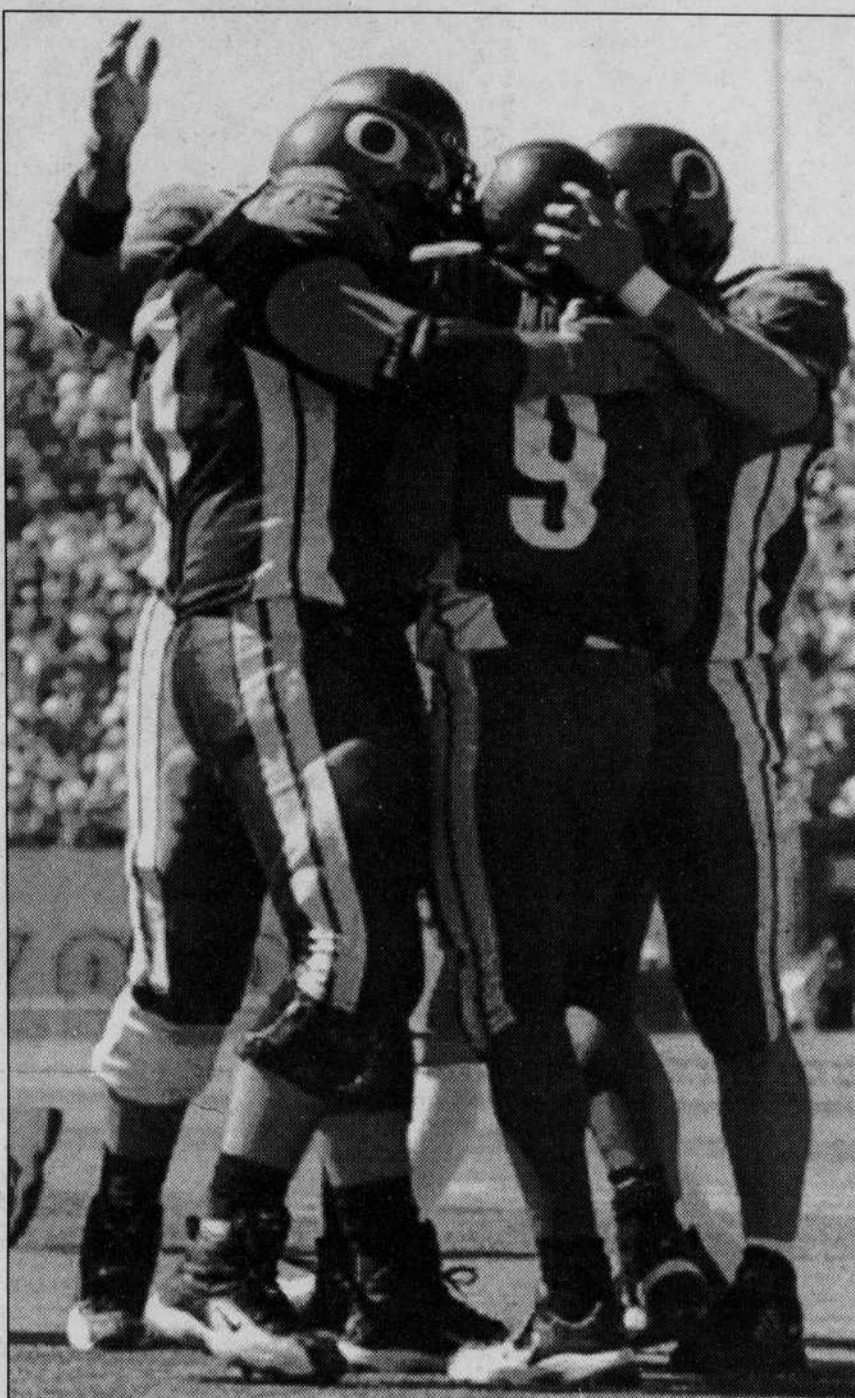
A main reason for the \$250,000 billboard, paid for by private donors, was to let the country know that something special was brewing in Eugene. Same for the billboards of Rashad Bauman in San Francisco and Maurice Morris in Los Angeles.

"It's not as much risk-taking as it is investing for the future," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said.

The investment in Harrington's billboard could have easily backfired if the Ducks didn't live up to the hype. And that hype also included being the favorite to win the Pac-10, being ranked No. 7 in preseason polls and having Harrington splashed across the cover of an August Sports Illustrated issue with Oregon State's Ken Simonton.

But somehow, these Ducks thrived under the pressure. Close wins over Wisconsin and USC highlighted their 6-0 start. And after the 49-42 loss to Stanford on Homecoming weekend, in a defeat that ended the nation's longest home-winning streak, the Ducks picked themselves up with the motto

Turn to **Football**, page 12A



Seniors Maurice Morris (9) and Ryan Schmid (left) played a big role in bringing the Ducks together this season and not letting them be deterred by the preseason hype.

Staying up is the real challenge

They made their move. Now they must move on.

The Oregon football team reached its way to the top in the 2001 season and was within a couple computer points of the ultimate high.

The Fiesta Bowl victory over Colorado was as close to perfect as Oregon has ever been. It's something to remember, to cherish.

"Winning that game gives us the credibility, but more, the ability to enjoy," head coach Mike Bellotti said.

Enjoy indeed.

But don't dwell.

The past is the past. It has little significance now or on Aug. 31, when Mississippi State rolls into town for next season's opener at newly-renovated Autzen Stadium. What matters now is that instead of playing catch-up, the Ducks are play-

ing stay-up — and that's even harder.

The Ducks have always thrived at being the underdog, just ask Colorado. But instead of hunting, the Ducks are now the hunted — the two-headed beast of the Pacific-10 Conference, and everyone wants a piece of them.

It's a long fall off the top of a pedestal, and if the Ducks don't have their wings ready next year, they could fall head first.

"I think, obviously, we've said all along that if we played a game tomorrow, we'd have some holes," Bellotti said.

One notable hole: Quarterback.

Turn to **Jude**, page 10A



Adam Jude

Out in left field

Men face tests against Bay Area squads

■ Oregon takes on Cal tonight, before All-American Casey Jacobsen leads Stanford into Eugene on Saturday

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

Last year, the Oregon men's basketball team couldn't stop California. Not even McArthur Court, with all its atmosphere, could help the Ducks slow the Golden Bears.

But this is a different Oregon team. But this is a different California team. Cal is 10-2 on the season and fresh off a win over No. 14 Stanford — the Ducks' opponent on Saturday. The Golden Bears lead the conference in many defensive categories, including scoring defense, steals, turnover margin and blocked shots. On Sunday, the Bears held the offense-minded Cardinal to just 31.9 percent shooting from the floor.

"It's great to talk about, it's great to put it on paper, it's great to put your hands in a huddle and say you're going to play hard," Cal coach Ben Braun said about his team's tenacity on defense. "It's another thing to go out and do it. I hope our players realize that no matter how good you are, that it's

something that you can't just turn on and off."

Oregon, on the other hand, has blossomed this year with team unity, and while it has improved on the defensive side of the ball, the most impressive numbers have come on the offensive end.

The Ducks lead the conference in points per game, as they average 88.1 per contest. They lead in several other categories, including field goal percentage, three-point percentage and scoring margin. They blow out their opponents by an average of 20 points per game.

Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said his team's improved play comes from its balance.

"The two Lukes (Ridnour and Jackson) are going to have themselves ready to play every night," Kent said. "Chris (Christoffersen) is going to be there every night, Robert (Johnson) has been a consistent force, and Freddie (Jones) needs to be there every night."

Three of the five players Kent mentioned — Jackson, Ridnour and Jones — are averaging in double figures.

Cal's offense comes from two main sources, junior forward Joe Shipp and senior center Solomon Hughes. Shipp averages 14.4 points per contest, and

dropped 31 on poor Fresno State in a 97-75 California win in December. Hughes averages 11.4 points per game, but is questionable to play tonight because of a strained knee.

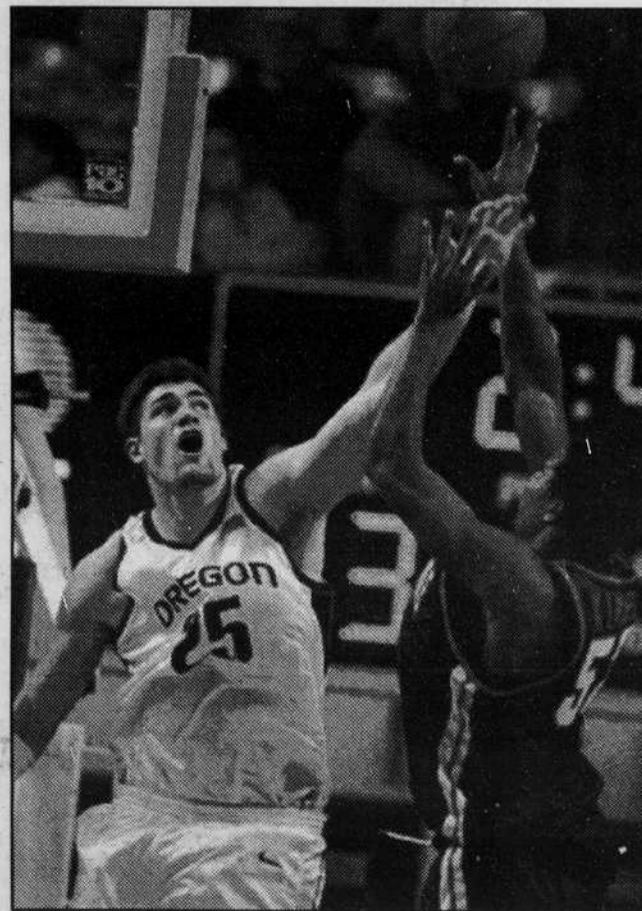
"Joe is a scorer, not just a shooter," Braun said. "He's putting the ball on the dribble, he's going to the basket, he's scoring in transition. He's been finding ways to score."

Oregon's opponent on Saturday, Stanford, features one of the nation's most prolific scorers who just happens to give the Ducks hissy fits. Casey Jacobsen, an All-American last season, scored 33 total points in two victories over Oregon last year.

"He's a great player," Duck senior guard Anthony Norwood said of Jacobsen. "We're definitely going to have to be on our horse and ready to go against him. But our intensity level is going to increase with that kind of player on the floor."

The basketball team will also get a chance to see Teyo Johnson, the 6-foot-7 sophomore forward who burned the Ducks as a wide receiver for the Stanford football team. Johnson tallied 95 receiving yards and a touchdown in Oregon's only loss of the season, but it

Turn to **Basketball**, page 12A



Adam Amato Emerald

Senior post Chris Christoffersen's inside presence will be crucial for Oregon against Cal and No. 14 Stanford this weekend.