

Diving

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— whew — they look fast. Our motto is respect all and fear none, and that's exactly what we do."

The Ducks will aim to take flight this week with a quarterback just growing comfortable with the Oregon system. Jason Fife, who, ironically, was recruited heavily by Fresno State, will make his second career start on Saturday. In his first career start, Fife passed for 166 yards and three touchdowns, and rushed 25 yards and another score.

"I feel very comfortable in practice, a lot more than last week," Fife said. "I think the comfort level will grow more and more every week and each passing game. I feel more relaxed, more at ease."

As important as Fife's emergence

against Mississippi State was the emergence of several stars around him. Tight end George Wrihster caught four passes for 46 yards and two touchdowns. Cornerback

"I think this will be a dogfight."

Mike Bellotti
head coach

Steven Moore settled into his role as the next great Oregon cornerback, and also had three punt returns for 46 yards. Lewis had six tackles and one interception.

"There's no better way to start," Lewis said of Oregon's win.

Now, the Ducks will have to parlay that success against Fresno State. Since Mike Bellotti came to Oregon in 1995, the Ducks have

lost only two nonconference regular season games, to Michigan State in 1999 and to Wisconsin in 2000. Neither game was at home.

Fresno State is likely to be the last game resembling a test before the Ducks play at UCLA on Oct. 12. And even when the Bulldogs are down — they have struggled early this season and been wracked by injury — they always have the glow of giant-killing wins to bask in.

"They have built confidence over the years by beating people that supposedly are better than them," Bellotti said. "But I don't put us in that class — I think this will be a dogfight."

In other words, Bellotti is telling his team something.

Don't trip.

Contact the sports editor
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Wrihster

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For Wrihster, it was a decision well made. After a year of turning heads on the scout team, he spent two seasons sharing time with Justin Peele, who now plays for the NFL's San Diego Chargers. The two tight ends still talk almost once a week, and Wrihster said he is trying to carry on Peele's legacy as a tough tight end with sticky catching hands.

"Justin's a great player — he works hard," Wrihster said. "That's all you can ask of guys, to give 100 percent. When you give 100 percent and have the talent to back it up, that's how guys get far."

Wrihster had enough talent to be a linebacker in high school, and a pretty good linebacker at that. He had 16 sacks, two interceptions and four forced fumbles as a senior. But the junior has never thought about going back to defense.

"I think it helped me out, because I knew what it took to beat me when I was playing," Wrihster said. "I like playing offense better, though."

Good thing, too. In his first game as the No. 1 tight end last week, Wrihster caught four passes for 46 yards and two touchdowns. The first touchdown came on a short four-yard strike from Jason Fife, but the second was all Wrihster. Fife faked a handoff and passed it 10 yards across his body to Wrihster on the left side of the field. The tight end rumbled 15 yards before meeting a Mississippi State defender, who went low for the tackle while Wrihster went high for the touchdown.

Wrihster's obvious connection with Fife is thanks, in small part, to Peele's example.

"Justin and Joey (Harrington) worked together. I saw them all three summers I was here, working out together to get that chemistry," Wrihster said. "I did that with Fife

and Kellen (Clemens) this summer, along with the other receivers. I catch balls before practice and after practice to improve my hands, because if you're not trying to improve, then you're moving backwards."

Now, Wrihster hopes to move backwards in a different way — back to the Fiesta Bowl, which this

year is the site of the national championship game.

To get there, he may need to pull out that vertical leap every now and then. The 30-inch vertical leap, of course.

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