

New Autzen brings droves of Duck fans

Oregon players are enjoying the improved facilities and bigger crowds.

Hank Hager
Sports Reporter

The anticipation for the expansion of Autzen Stadium had been built up for years.

Finally, when the structure began to go up, all that was left was wonder. What was the place going to look like from inside? What would the noise level be like? And best of all, would the Ducks continue their storied success in the bowl?

After three games, three sellouts and three wins, Oregon players are taking a new liking to the place.

"With every single game, like us, it'll just keep getting filled and keep getting better and better," junior quarterback Jason Fife said. "I don't know if it was that loud the first game, but in the second game, with the close game and it coming down to the fourth quarter and everything, it started coming alive again, feeling like Autzen."

Oregon fans have come in droves, evidenced by the 55,977 average attendance in the first three games.

"It's definitely bigger," senior defensive tackle Kai Smalley said. "It's kind of hard to tell if it's loud or not. Definitely, you can really feel the fans out there, especially when you're near (the expanded) side."

More important to the players is the new FieldTurf laid on the field before the season. After a year on NeX-turf, the Ducks' brass decided to switch to the new synthetic grass.

"I love this turf," Smalley said. "It's got that much better grip on it. It gives more when you fall. It's much better turf than we had last year."

How the turf holds up, however, is a bigger question. Oregon practiced on the turf in inclement weather earlier this week, head coach Mike Bellotti said, so that in the case of rain, the Ducks will be prepared for its different intricacies.



Adam Jones Emerald

Duck fans have been flocking to Autzen Stadium already this season, selling out the first three home games.

"We have not really played in these conditions on this surface," Bellotti said. "From what I understand from playing on it at Washington State in rain and snow, it held up well, so I'm curious to see."

Also included in the 12,000 seat expansion was a slight renovation to the Oregon Hall of Fame in the Casanova Center and an expanded weight room.

"The weight room expansion and renovation is designed to be the best weight room facility in the nation," Bellotti said. "The game day experience is for fans, recruits and basically the public. They can come in there and relive experiences and see the game day setting."

"Those things help us in recruiting because we can let a young man walk down that hallway and see what Oregon is like on a game day."

Contact the sports reporter at hankhager@dailyemerald.com.

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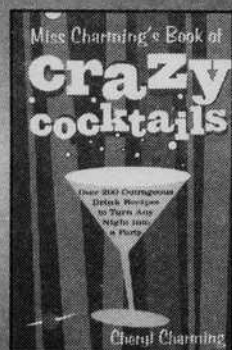
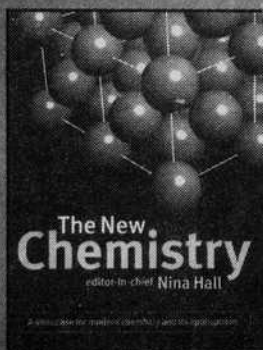
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