

SPORTS

Sports Editor:
Peter Hockaday
peterhockaday@dailyemerald.com

Best bet
MLB Playoffs: San Francisco
at Atlanta
10 a.m. Saturday, ABC Family

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In his words: Casanova remembers full football life

George Beres

This guest commentary can be read in full at www.dailyemerald.com

I worked in college athletics for three decades, and never have I known a man who combined great athletic and coaching skill with the qualities of a good and caring person better than Len Casanova.

I last visited with Cas three weeks before his death. As often was the case, the context was football. This time, there was an unhappy difference. The alert, jovial man — loved perhaps more than any other sports figure in Oregon history — was, at age 97, struggling to make the adjustment to a Eugene nursing facility where he'd moved only weeks before.

We were in the recreation room to watch the telecast of the Ducks' game against Fresno State. The setting could not have been more different from that of the many hundreds of football games he had played in, coached and scouted for almost a full century.

Two years earlier, sensing Cas' time with us had to be growing short, I invited him to a local studio to record his recollections. In halting but still vigorous language, Cas shared with me the following memories that covered most of 20th-century football.

"My interest in football began when I was a little kid," Cas said. "I'd go to the local high school games and watch them in Ferndale, Calif., near Eureka. That's when they didn't wear helmets, and some didn't even have shoulderpads.

"I set one national record in my playing days at Santa Clara. The ball was on our two-yard line. I was in the end zone to punt, and kicked over the safety man's head. It ended on the three-yard line for a 95-yard punt. At that time the ball was rounder, so it rolled more. A couple of years later, they changed the shape of

the ball to make it easier to pass. Before that, we used to pass the ball as sort of a palm ball coming from the direction of the sidelines. They changed it to make it easier to grip.

"In 1950, my Santa Clara team beat Bear Bryant's team in the Orange Bowl. We supposedly were not good enough to be on the same field with them. But we beat them. Bear then went to Alabama where he had his great success.

"When I was (Oregon) coach, we could win only four games against Oregon State. I always had trouble against them. We never were beat badly. Rick Brooks changed that. He never lost to the Beavers, even though he once had

played for them.

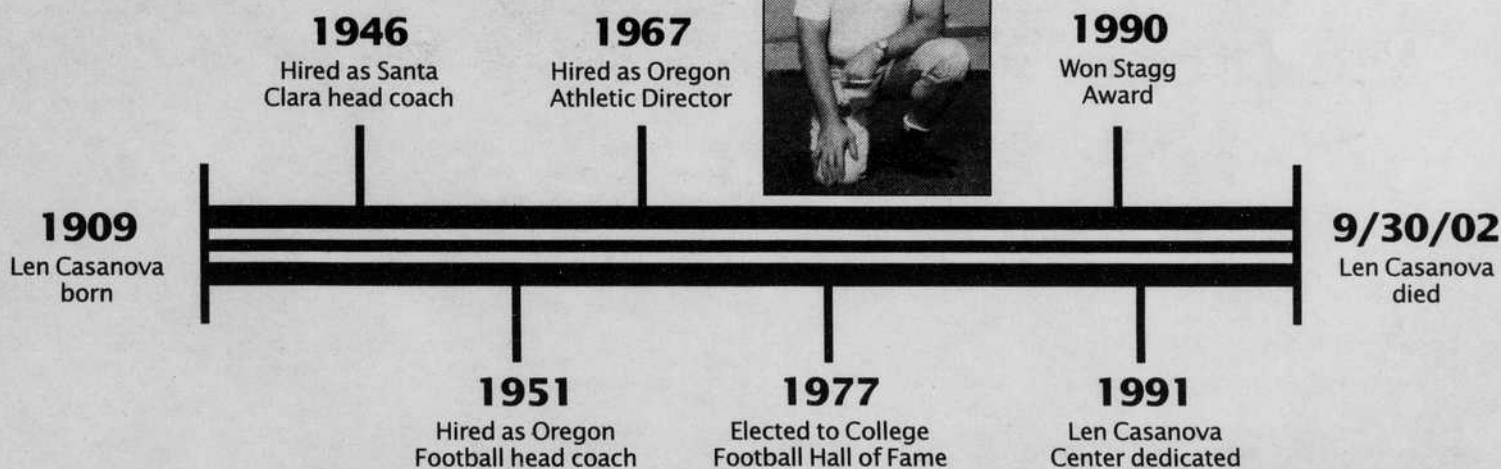
"I got undeserved credit for coaching another big comeback. We were at Indiana, trailing 22-7 at halftime. I was mad in the halftime dressing room. As our kickoff man, Dave Tobey, got up to go to the bathroom, I told him to sit down and wait until I was finished talking. I talked and yelled until officials knocked on the door to call the team out for the second half. Tobey was squirming but had no time for the bathroom. He had to kick off. Turns out he could hardly lift his kicking leg

without having an 'accident,' and he wound up just tapping the ball. It bounced crazily, and went far enough for one of our players to fall on it. We went on to score and won the game, 29-22. The press then called me a genius for having thought of the onside kick.

"I was assistant coach at Santa Clara when we played UCLA at the Los Angeles Coliseum. I found that our phone was mistakenly connected to the UCLA bench, and I could hear the plays they were calling. We could have capitalized on it, but I decided to report it to the officials. Jackie Robinson of UCLA was one of the greatest athletes I ever saw. I was coaching

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Len Casanova timeline



Photos courtesy of Oregon Athletic Dept.

Fife eyes improvement in Pac-10

The junior quarterback has earned his team's respect, but he says he has been frustrated with himself in the preseason

Football notes

Adam Jude
Senior Sports Reporter

Regardless of what the numbers say, Jason Fife is his own toughest critic.

In his words, the junior quarterback has had only a "decent" preseason, despite an 8-to-1 touchdown to interception ratio and a pass efficiency rating that ranks in the nation's top-15.

"At times, I was frustrated with myself," said the first-year starter, who had the unenviable task of replacing the legendary Joey Harrington. "I've missed some open receivers. And the offense hasn't really clicked yet."

Fife overcame a late fumble to pull off a Harrington-like comeback against Fresno State on Sept. 7, leading the Ducks (4-0) on a four-play, 43-yard touchdown drive in the final two minutes of the 28-24 victory.

"I think Jason Fife has done a great job of taking over the leadership role," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "He's earned his team's respect because he's brought them back from behind to

earn a victory."

Fife has made good on advice to play his own style, not just to imitate Harrington.

"(Fife's) been himself. He's not trying to be 'Joey II' or anything like that," Bellotti said. "He's as tough on himself as anyone else, if not harder."

Speaking of...

Harrington won his first NFL game Sunday, a 26-21 victory over the New Orleans Saints, in his second career start for the Detroit Lions.

A week after throwing four interceptions in his inaugural start, Harrington, the No. 3 pick in the NFL draft this year, completed 20-of-36 passes for 267 yards, one touchdown and no interceptions.

"I thought he did pretty well," Bellotti said of his former quarterback. "He was the beneficiary of some help from his defense early on, but certainly that drive at the end of the game to preserve the win was vintage Joey."

"I'm very happy for him."

Flying south, again

Saturday's game against Arizona marks Oregon's first Pacific-10 Conference game of the season and its first road game. The Ducks have not played on the road since Nov. 10, 2001 — a 21-20 win over UCLA at the Rose Bowl — and have not lost on the road since Nov. 18, 2000, when they fell 23-13 in Corvallis.

"We need to rely on each other and

create our own energy (on the road)," Fife said.

For the second straight season, and the third time in the last four years, Oregon travels to Arizona. The Ducks are also scheduled to play in Arizona next season. "It's just one of those scheduling quirks that I'm not happy about," Bellotti said.

The Ducks practiced inside the Moshofsky Center, where the turf is shorter and the temperature is hotter, on Monday to simulate the atmosphere at Arizona Stadium in Tucson. Weather forecasts call for a high of 88 degrees Saturday.

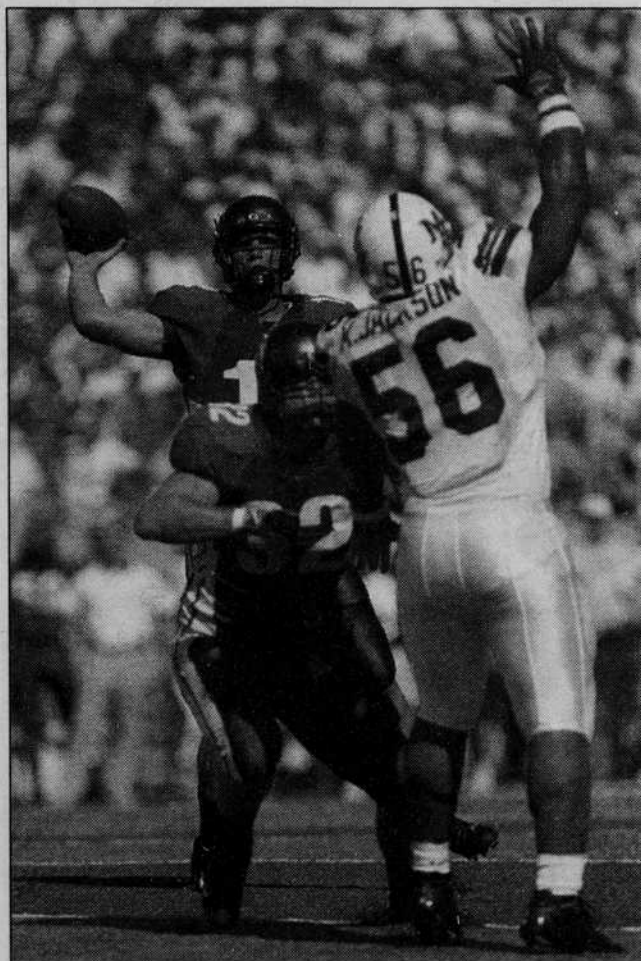
"On the road in the Pac-10 is a very difficult place to be," Bellotti said. "When we go on the road, we have to change our mentality. We have to make sure we beat the home team, not just play with them, because you won't win."

Back on track

Freshman Terrence Whitehead, who rushed 10 times for 32 yards in the season-opener against Mississippi State, will be back in action against Arizona after a two-week eligibility fight with the NCAA.

Whitehead, a backup tailback from Los Angeles, had to retake his college entrance test to be eligible to play after an unknown source questioned the test he

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Adam Amato Emerald

Junior quarterback Jason Fife, protected here by fullback Matt Floborg, said he had a 'decent' preseason for the No. 8 Ducks.