

Ducks claw back into series with Bruins

UCLA leads the all-time series between the teams, but Oregon is making a comeback recently

Peter Hockaday
Sports Editor

UCLA leads the all-time series with Oregon 37-19.

But the Ducks, like the good comeback team they've become in the past few years, are clawing their way back into it.

Oregon has won the last two games against UCLA. Prior to that, the Bruins won four straight, but since 1989 UCLA's advantage is only 6-4.

And just like a comeback, the games have been close.

21-20 last year. Overtime in 1998. Discounting Oregon's 29-10 win in Eugene two years ago, the last five games have been determined by eight points or less.

"It's always a close, hard-fought game," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "I think that's what everyone would like to see, except maybe the coaches."

In a struggle for Pacific-10 Conference supremacy between South and Northwest, no series has defined the war like UCLA-Oregon.

Maybe it's because many Oregon players are from California and they play with emotions high against UCLA. Maybe it's because of Bruin head coach Bob Toledo, who spent five years as offensive coordinator at Oregon.

Whatever the reason, Bruins-

Ducks is sure to provide a thrill.

Even three years ago when Oregon blew out UCLA, the game was won by the team that played with the most emotion, the then-underdog Ducks who went on to lose only one more game en route to a Holiday Bowl win over Texas.

Heading into Saturday's contest, Oregon will once again be the underdog to UCLA, by 2.5 points.

"That's football," Oregon quarterback Jason Fife said. "Sometimes you're the underdog, sometimes you're the front-runner."

In order to be the Pac-10 front-runner at the end of this season, the Ducks will once again have to upend the Bruins. Many of the Oregon players remember last season, when the Ducks went into the Rose Bowl needing a win to keep BCS Bowl hopes alive. In a thriller, Joey Harrington led a fourth-quarter charge with less than 10 minutes left in the game to put Oregon ahead 21-20. With seconds remaining on the clock, the Ducks stopped a UCLA drive near midfield, and the Bruins were forced to kick a 50-yard field goal that fell short to give the Ducks the win.

"We hope to not have any nail-biters (like past years)," Fife said.

When Oregon and UCLA meet this year, several factors could lead to a close game. Both offenses are high scoring, with the Bruins reliant on an experienced quarterback, Cory Paus, and the Ducks reliant on an experienced tailback, Onterio



Emerald

Oregon fans celebrate the Ducks' win over UCLA in 2000, a victory that started a three-game Oregon winning streak in the series.

Smith. Both teams have talented but inexperienced players in Fife and Tyler Ebell, UCLA's newfound talent at running back.

On paper, at least, the matchup shouldn't break the trend of nail-biters, as much as Fife and his coach would like to think otherwise.

Contact the sports editor at peterhockaday@dailyemerald.com.

Onterio raises his own standards

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Adam Jude
Out in Left Field

And so does he.

Battling nagging injuries throughout the preseason, the junior tailback is getting healthy at the right time for the Ducks.

"My body feels real strong," the 5-foot-10, 204-pound Sacramento native said Monday. "I am 100 percent healthy."

Finally, you say.

For a guy who openly, if not matter-of-factly, stated in August that he wanted to rush for 2,000 yards this season, you would think he would have put up jaw-dropping numbers against the likes of Idaho and Portland State. But during Oregon's four-game non-conference swing, Onterio averaged only 117 yards per game.

More, more, more, you cry.

After a week of rest, the Sacramento native bolted back to Superman status with his 145-yard, two-touchdown performance in the Pacific-10 Conference opener in Ari-

zona. And, like a true superstar, he's saving his best for the best.

"I'm hungry for more," he said Monday. "Not being healthy those first four games, and having the chance in the Arizona game to prove that I was healthy was a big step for me."

"I feel like I'm back on track now and I can start putting up the numbers that I want to put up and everybody else wants me to put up."

Three hundred yards, five touchdowns, you demand.

As unrealistic as your demands may be, Onterio is trying to live up to them.

Still, you unenthusiastically slumped on your couch last Saturday as Onterio put up his fifth-straight 100-yard game. Your eyes got heavy at the sight of another broken tackle.

Nice run, you thought. But not enough to get you excited. Nothing that could shake you out of your seat, like Onterio often does to defenders.

Onterio brings your discontent upon himself. After two years of playing in the Autzen Stadium shadows — his first on the scout team and last year as a backup to Maurice Morris — he wants to carry this team to national glory.

Woohoo.

He created your expectations when he called out Barry Sanders' NCAA single-season record of 2,628 yards. To even get to 2,000 yards by the end of the regular season, he'd have to average 198 yards for each of the next seven Saturdays. Even for one of the best ball-carriers in school

history, that's unheard of, if not downright absurd.

Then again, if anyone can do it, it's Onterio.

That's what I like to hear. Run, Onterio, run.

Because he's stayed out of the trouble that got him booted from Tennessee, Onterio has put himself in a record-setting position and could become Oregon's first Heisman Trophy winner.

"I have no concerns about Onterio," head coach Mike Bellotti said. "I don't feel there's a need to oversee what he does. He's a man and he understands what's at stake for all of us."

"Big Brother is not watching."

And neither, at times, are you. Onterio's 4.7-yard average and league-leading nine touchdowns are about as monotonous to you as another Oregon win.

You want a repeat of his record-setting performance at Washington State last season, when he racked up 285 yards and bowled over defenders like they were Cheerios.

"I'm still far away from a breakout game," Onterio said. "A breakout game for me is 250 and above. You know, three or four touchdowns. That's a breakout game."

"But I'm back healthy, and my offensive line, and fullback and tight ends and receivers continue to block, and good things will come."

They'll come, all right. You just keep watching.

OK.

Contact the senior sports reporter at adamjude@dailyemerald.com.

Penalties

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38.8 points per game, good for third in the Pac-10. They are sixth in the conference in total offense, with 402.4 yards per game.

Oregon is third for total penalty yards in the Pac-10. Oregon State has 619, Arizona State has 480 and California has 455. Nationally, Oregon has the most penalty yards of any top-25 school. Only seven Division I

teams have more penalty yards.

Bellotti is not the only one unhappy with the penalty situation.

"(For me) it's just about as frustrating as it must be for those guys to see me miss a ball every now and then," junior quarterback Jason Fife said. "It's fixable, and that's why Coach Bellotti is stressing it big time this week. And we're aware of it, it's stuff that we can take care of it, it won't hurt us in the future."

With rival Oregon State the only team with more penalty yards this season, some are wondering if there's something in the water.

"The penalties trouble me," Oregon State head coach Dennis Erickson told the Corvallis Gazette-Times.

"Some of them I just don't understand."

Mindi Rice is a freelance writer for the Emerald.

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