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GAME DAY

Best bet
Notre Dame at Florida State
9 a.m. Saturday, ABC

Friday, October 25, 2002

The big box of football

Tasty morsel No. 1

The Ducks have not lost two straight games since 1999. Oregon lost at Washington on Oct. 2, 1999 and at UCLA the following week. Since then, the Ducks have lost a total of four games.

Morsel No. 2

The Ducks have won four straight games against USC, including three by four points or less.

Trivia Bowl

Who was Oregon's starting quarterback when the Ducks last lost to USC?

Rank me

Oregon and USC in the 2002 Pac-10 rankings

Rushing offense
Oregon.....1
USC.....7

Passing offense
Oregon.....9
USC.....5

Scoring offense
Oregon.....1
USC.....8

Total offense
Oregon.....4
USC.....6

Rushing defense
Oregon.....1
USC.....3

Passing defense
Oregon.....10
USC.....1

Scoring defense
Oregon.....4
USC.....1

Morsel No. 3

Oregon's Keenan Howry and USC's Kareem Kelly, both senior wide receivers, could make history Saturday. Each has tied the Pac-10 record with a reception in 42 straight games. The NCAA record is 46 games.

Trivia answer

Jason Maas was Oregon's starting quarterback when the Ducks last lost to USC, 24-22, at Los Angeles in 1997. Akili Smith replaced Maas in the second half.

USC looks to end skid at Oregon

With a redefined team and an improved offense, the USC Trojans are looking to find their way to a Pac-10 Championship

Jesse Thomas
Sports Reporter

The USC Trojans come to Oregon this weekend, and they come with a vengeance.

The Trojans have nothing to lose, with the exception of their second Pac-10 game, because the recent history between the two teams has USC a little upset.

USC (5-2, 3-1 Pac-10) has lost its past four matchups with Oregon. Last year, the game was decided by an Oregon field goal with 14 seconds left, and in 1999, the game went to triple overtime. That game was also decided by a field goal.

But things change. USC has changed. Many of the Trojan players have stepped up in their roles this season with several beginning to fulfill their potential.

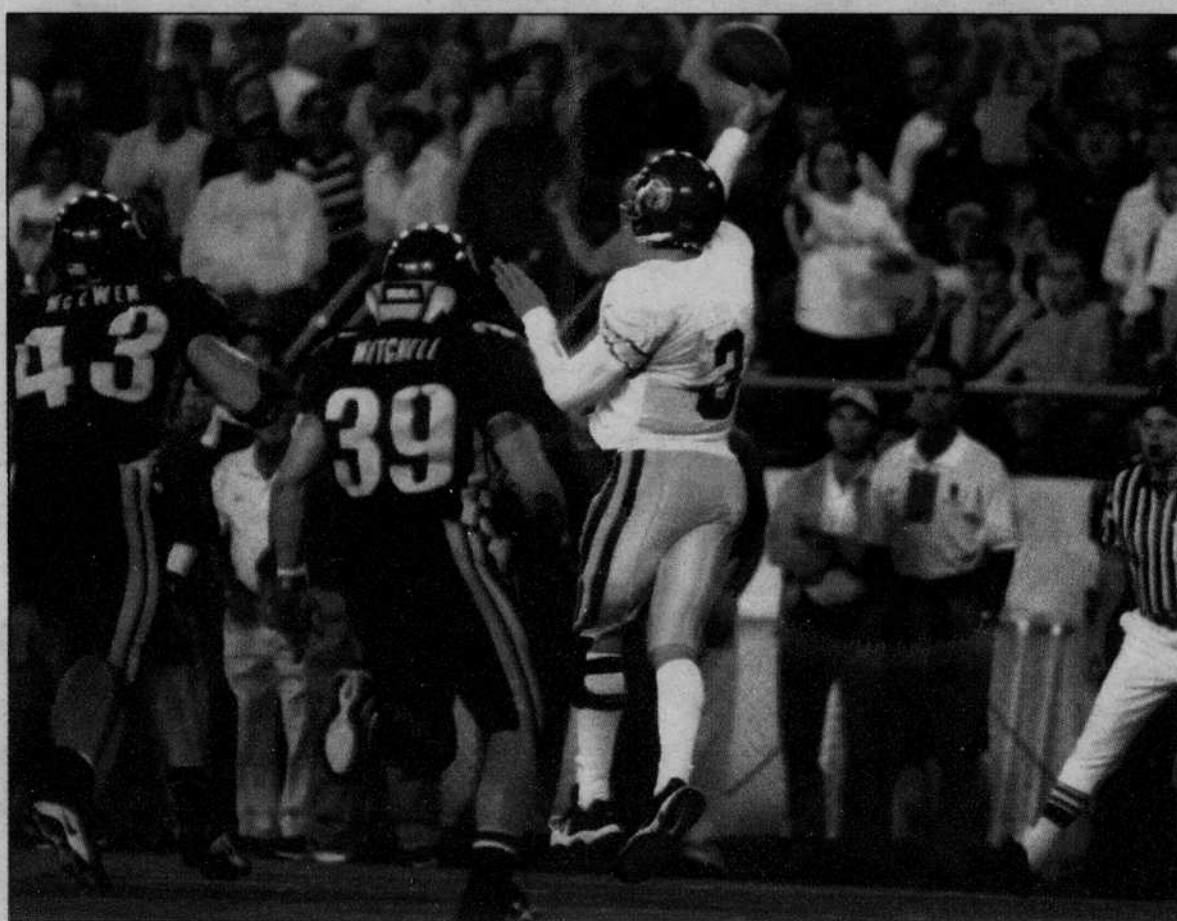
Senior quarterback Carson Palmer leads the Trojans and has found his niche as one of the nation's marquee signal-callers.

Palmer is a four-year veteran with USC and holds six career records for the Trojans. Palmer has completed 60.3 percent of his passes for 1,981 yards and 13 touchdowns in 2002.

The senior is ranked 16th nationally in total offense, at 271.6 yards per game, and third in the Pac-10.

"Carson Palmer is playing like a true veteran quarterback," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "He's always been a great athlete, but he's playing like a great quarterback right now."

Last week, Palmer threw for 348 yards and four touchdowns against



Adam Amato Emerald

USC quarterback Carson Palmer (3) makes his fourth appearance at Autzen Stadium, looking for his first win in Eugene.

Washington to lead No. 19 USC to a 41-21 victory over the Huskies.

In other offense, rushing hasn't been the strongest point for the Trojans in the recent past. In 2001, USC averaged only 87.7 rushing yards per game, mostly because injuries plagued the Trojan runners.

The fact that senior tailback Sultan McCullough was sidelined after six

games in 2001 with a strained abdominal muscle didn't help, either. But he is back now and better than ever in leading all other USC rushers.

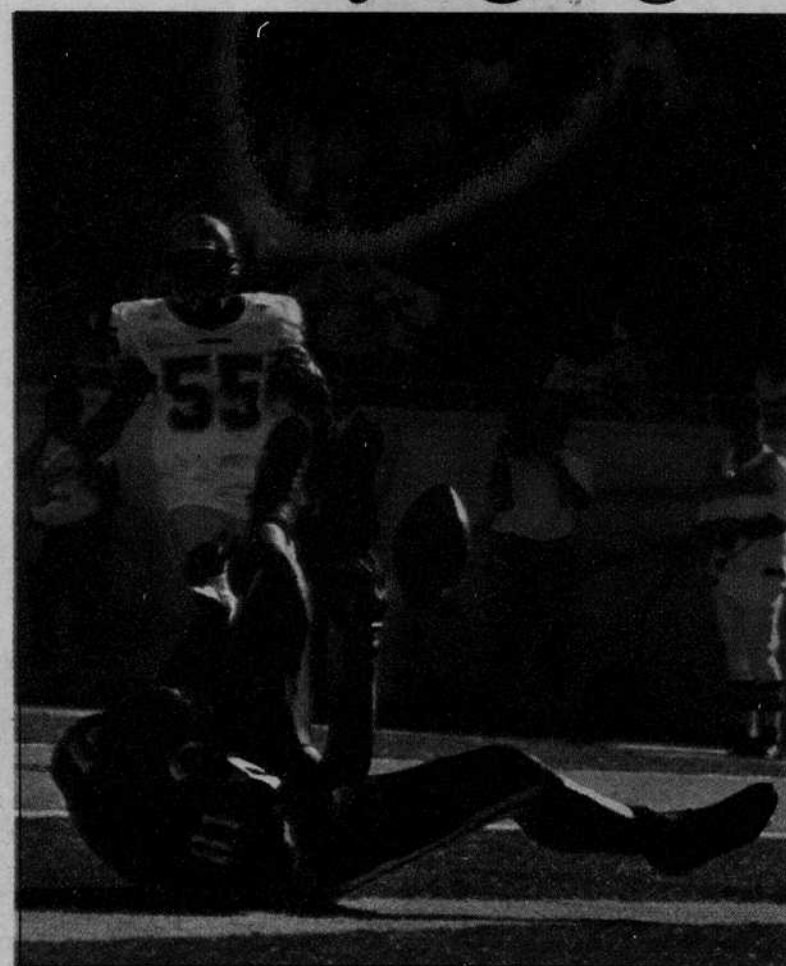
McCullough has rushed for 608 yards this season and is averaging 80.9 yards per game, placing him third in the Pac-10. He has rushed for 100 yards 11 times in his career. McCullough is also one of the fastest

players to ever wear a Trojan uniform after winning the 1999 Pac-10 100-meter championship in track and field.

"Sultan McCullough is the fastest running back we will face, and probably one of the fastest in the nation," Bellotti said.

The Trojan defense isn't looking Turn to **USC**, page 19B

Ducks flying together again after loss



Jeremy Forrest Emerald

Tight end George Wighster just misses a potential touchdown catch in Oregon's 45-42 loss to Arizona State last week at Autzen Stadium.

Oregon lost as a team last week and hopes to win as one this week

Hank Hager
Sports Reporter

The 45 points.
The 25 unanswered points.
The 559 total yards passing.
Numbers tend to stick out after a loss, especially after a loss of the magnitude that has followed Oregon football around for almost a week.

Gone is the possibility of a perfect season, and, most likely, the chances of a bid to play in the Fiesta Bowl for the national championship.

But while the offense exploded and the defense toiled against Arizona State, no one player can be blamed, the Ducks said. No one unit can be derided.

Because football is a team game, and for a win, everyone must act accordingly.

"We lost as a team, offensively and defensively," junior running back Onterio Smith said. "Everybody admitted to their mistakes, to everything that was done out there. The blown coverages, the missed pass protections, the fumbles. Everybody admitted to that. We just take that and bring it into practice and try to reenergize."

Junior quarterback Jason Fife threw for 288 yards and three touchdowns on 21-of-32 passing.

Smith extended his streak of 100-yard games to seven with 172 yards on 27 attempts.

But it all didn't matter. It all came crashing down when, with 1:35 left in the game, Sun Devil Brett Hudson picked off a Fife pass.

All that, though, may not have mattered if the Oregon defense had successfully held the Sun Devils to less than 35 points in the second half.

"We lost as a team, offensively and defensively."

Onterio Smith
Oregon running back

"I think the defense did their job when they had to," Fife said. "Sure, they had (559) yards passing put up against them, but when it came down to it, they held them to a field goal with about two minutes left for the offense to do their job. So when it came down to it, they did their job, but I just don't think we finished very well."

Oregon, through its first seven games of the season, had become a group that, despite shortcomings in any one area, has gelled. The lines between defense and offense are only drawn by the positions each player plays.

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