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'Gess'-ing Game

Heisman candidate Jason Gesser says beating Oregon would be sweeter than beating close rival UW

Adam Jude
 Senior Sports Reporter

Gess who's ready for the Ducks? Jason Gesser, the Washington State senior quarterback, has said that he wants to beat Oregon more than hated intrastate rival Washington.

That's a big statement, but it makes sense, considering the recent history of the Oregon-Washington State rivalry.

Two years ago in Pullman, Gesser broke his leg as he was hit for a sack, as the Ducks squeaked out a 27-24 victory in overtime.

Last season, Gesser had three passes fall incomplete in the game's final drive, the last on a questionable non-call in the end zone as time expired. Oregon spoiled the Cougars' undefeated season, 24-17.

"We are better than Oregon," Gesser said after that 2001 game, which he finished 17-of-37 for 249 yards. "But we didn't play better on the field today. We should have."

This season, Gesser hopes, will be different. And by many accounts, it is.

Gesser, not Oregon's quarterback, is a legitimate Heisman Trophy candidate. The Cougars, ranked No. 5 — their highest ranking ever, are favored in the game and favored to win the Pacific-10 Conference title.

Gesser has led the Cougs to an 8-1 overall record — their only loss was to No. 3 Ohio State — and to the top



Courtesy Washington State Media Services

Jason Gesser leads the conference in pass-efficiency rating. In his senior season, Gesser has led the Cougars to an 8-1 record and the top of the Pac-10 Conference.

of the Pac-10, where they're in the driver's seat for the Rose Bowl.

"I was getting tired of using two hands to show our ranking," Washington State head coach Mike Price told WSU's Daily Evergreen. "We haven't gotten to the point where we can hold up one finger yet, but at least we're down to one hand."

But the Cougs want nothing more than to beat the Ducks. Oregon has won four-straight against Washington State.

"From what I heard, the players were talking about it during the summer," Price said. "They're anxious, because no one on this team has ever beat Oregon."

A Honolulu, Hawaii, native, Gesser leads the conference with a 150.8 passing efficiency rating. His Heisman campaign was kicked off last summer with a 25-foot billboard in Dusty, Wash., population 10, a spoof of Oregon's New York billboard campaign for Joey Harrington last season.

The talk in the Palouse is that Gesser is the top quarterback in school history, which is saying something considering WSU's history of great quarterbacks, which includes Drew Bledsoe, Mark Rypien and Ryan Leaf, to name a few.

Gesser passed WSU legend Jack Thompson on the school's career Turn to **Gesser**, page 7B

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