

Preview

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this week who has the highest pass-efficiency rating in the league.

Lewis said he isn't afraid of Gesser — in fact, he said he didn't "see anything special about him" — but acknowledged that the Ducks will need to be defensive Saturday.

"We can't give up explosion plays," Lewis said. "We know they're going to try to throw early."

That challenge, the Ducks said, coupled with the challenge of playing on the road, will motivate them for Saturday. The last time Oregon faced a higher-ranked team was late last season at UCLA. The Ducks won that game, and have the conference's longest road winning streak, at seven games. That streak is nine if you include Oregon's bowl wins of the past two postseasons.

"It's definitely a different mindset going on the road," Bellotti said.

"And our kids have fared well. We're not exactly knocking people dead in those situations, but we're getting the job done.

"We've done a good job of handling adversity on the road, and I like that."

This road trip won't be a vacation to the beach — more like a trip to Alaska. The forecast is for cold rain Saturday, and the Ducks say that won't affect them at all.

"It would feel weird to play them here," Moretti said. "The Palouse is kind of a home away from home for us."

But perhaps the Oregon players don't want to think of this as a road game. Perhaps they want to play up the fact that it's on the road, in a cold place against a very good team. They think those things play into their favor.

Even if most other teams would think the opposite.

Contact the sports editor at peterhockaday@dailymerald.com.

Gesser

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passing list in the Cougars' win over Arizona State last week.

"There couldn't be a better person to break Jack Thompson's records than Jason Gesser," Price said. "He's a true winner and he represents all of us."

"When Jack (Thompson) walks into a room, every Cougar knows who he is. That's how it'll be for Gesser."

Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said pressuring and containing Gesser, also a dangerous runner, will be key for the Oregon defense, which was burned for big plays in losses to Arizona State and USC.

"He's very dangerous because his eyes always stay down field," Bellotti said. "The bottom line is

winning, and he's done that in the last couple years."

Oregon safety Keith Lewis, always a good trash talker, was not quite as eloquent when talking about the WSU captain. Lewis said the Ducks have faced better quarterbacks than Gesser this season.

"I don't see anything special about him," Lewis said.

Lewis also told a Seattle radio station on Tuesday that the Ducks "look at Washington State's field as our back yard."

Gesser will try to prove Lewis wrong Saturday at Martin Stadium.

Like recent matchups, Saturday's game should come down to the wire. Who will win is anyone's Gess.

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

Bowling

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we are trying to be."

In the bowl race, heading to Pullman is something different for the Ducks. Oregon has become accustomed to playing teams ranked lower than they are, but Washington State is sitting fifth in both national polls and the Cougars sit atop the Pac-10 as the only undefeated team.

"They're sitting on cloud nine right about now and they feel like they have nothing to lose in these games coming up," Howry said. "They probably feel like they are going to the Rose Bowl but we have got to let them know they have one more game at least, and that's us."

With the Cougars leading the race to the Rose Bowl, it will be battle for both squads. But if the Ducks are victorious and some other upsets occur, then Oregon could have a chance for

the Rose Bowl or the Holiday Bowl.

For the Ducks to be in one of the top two bowls in the Pac-10, they must win against the Cougars, then defeat Washington and ride the momentum train all the way through Corvallis. Arizona State needs to lose twice, WSU needs to lose one other game if the Ducks defeat the Cougars, which would then place Oregon second to USC. But if USC loses twice, including to Arizona State, then the Ducks would finish second behind the Sun Devils.

But the players said it comes down to Oregon taking care of its business and winning the rest of its games, and then hoping for other possibilities.

"Honestly, there's no way to tell right now because there's a lot of football left to be played," junior tight end George Wrihster said.

Contact the sports reporter at jessethomas@dailymerald.com.

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