

Duck Tales

Jason Fife is a complex mixture of crazy, serious and football

Peter Hockaday
Sports Editor

When writing a feature on an athlete, it's common practice to start with a story, some anecdote that illustrates who that person really is.

But with Jason Fife, there are so many stories.

There's the story of Fife sitting on a desk in a Washington State weight room, calmly shouldering the blame for Oregon's loss to the Cougars.

There's the story of Fife receiving the compliments of ESPN's Harold Reynolds in the Casanova Center last week, and Fife, afterwards, admitting giddily that he's still rattled by the spotlight, no matter how long it's been on him.

There's the classic one from last season about Fife's mullet. Or the one about Fife dressing up in a tiger suit for a Halloween segment on local television, which ties into the one about Fife's child-acting days on "The Addams Family."

With so many stories, where does the real Jason Fife tale begin? Does it start at the beginning, with Fife bouncing around Southern California, acting for the aforementioned television show, struggling through a move to suburbia?

No, this is a football story. So it starts with a football.

This was no ordinary football. Well, maybe it was an ordinary football, but Jason Fife didn't think so. Because this football wouldn't throw.

"I didn't play football up until my freshman year in high school, and in my freshman year in high school, I couldn't really throw a spiral," Fife said. "At all."

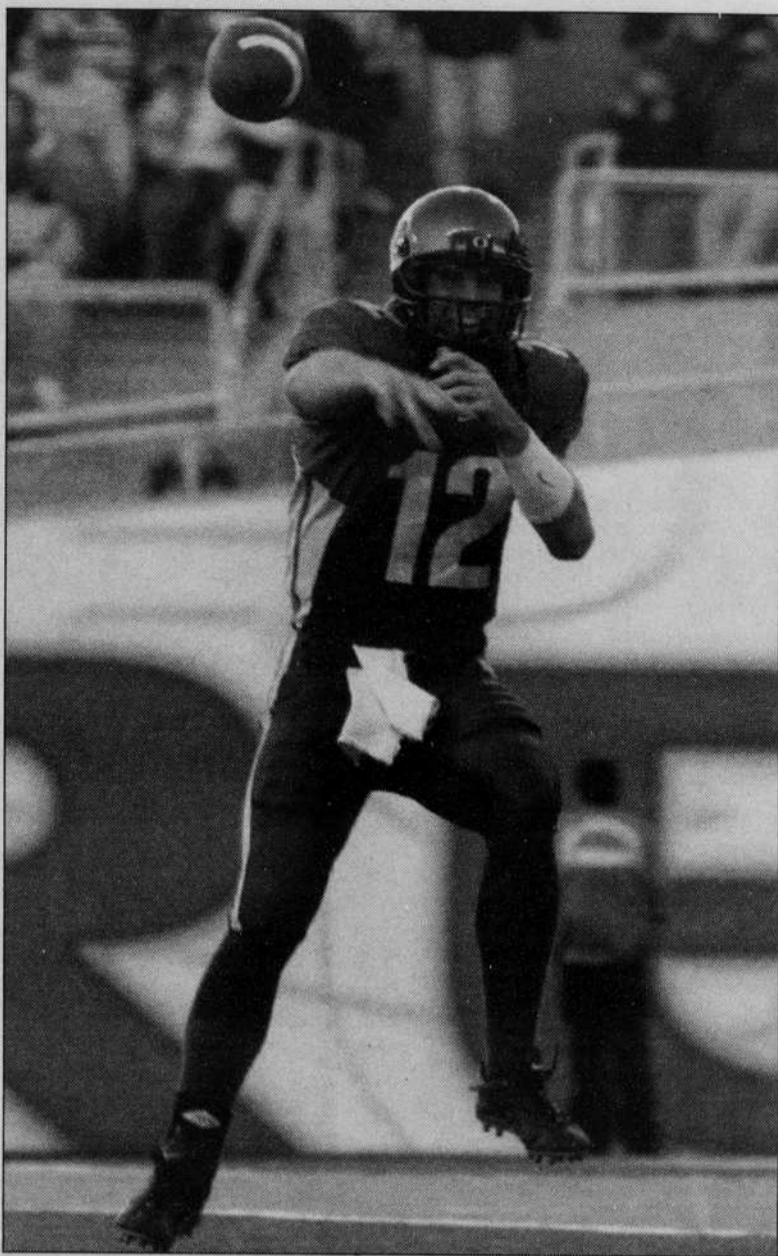
The freshman who couldn't throw a spiral instead played linebacker and wide receiver that year, spawning a love for football. In the offseason, he would turn his attention to mastering that spiral, and then he would master it.

"I wanted to be the leader on offense, that guy that everybody looks up to in the huddle, gets the play called right, makes sure things run smoothly," Fife said. "I wanted to be that guy."

Then, all of a sudden, Fife was that guy. He started his junior and senior seasons for Temescal Canyon High School, a small school whose players harbor little hope of getting noticed by Division I scouts, the same players who only heard the names of the big-time college recruits.

"I knew about Samie (Parker), Keenan (Howry), Kevin Mitchell; those were big names down there," Fife said. "I remember watching the Mater Dei-De La Salle game, it was televised, for crying out loud. I mean, they played it at Edison Field, it was like a college game."

But the story goes that Fife threw



Mark McCambridge Emerald

Junior quarterback Jason Fife, a former child actor, didn't start playing football until his freshman year of high school, but quickly became the starter for Temescal Canyon.

1,920 yards his senior season, including 21 passing touchdowns and six more on the ground. This may have been because of a stud offensive lineman who was being recruited nationally, but Fife's numbers were gaudy all the same.

Of course, that stud offensive lineman was being recruited nationally. So national scouts were watching Fife's team. That's when a California-Berkeley scout noticed Fife, and word spread through the Pac-10 that there was an arm at Temescal Canyon.

"Oregon and Cal were fighting over Kyle Boller, and I was going to be the 'second choice,'" Fife said. "If I wanted to go Pac-10, Kyle Boller held my fate."

Boller went to Cal, Fife went to Oregon, and the rest is football history.

Fife redshirted a year, stood on the sidelines for the next two and won a battle with Kellen Clemens for the starting spot before the

2002 season.

He navigated preseason blowouts and a nailbiter with another team that recruited him — Fresno State. He suffered his first loss to Arizona State, then another the next week to USC, and again tasted defeat in Pullman. But he's still the 15th-rated passer in the nation in pass efficiency, and still the starter.


"We're extremely confident (in him)," linebacker and former roommate Mitchell said of Fife. "He makes the plays he has to."

"He makes first-year mistakes, but everybody does. He's grown a lot in these past couple weeks, and he wants to do great things, and we see that in him."

Clemens has the unique position of watching from the sidelines, a position Fife himself is familiar with.


"Everything with our competition earlier, the adversity he's gone through this year and the success that he's had, he and I's relationship

Turn to **Fife**, page 12B



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