

# Preview

continued from page 1B

playing the Huskies last year, the rivalry's intensity may have simmered. But he doesn't want his team to worry about any of the off-field antics.

"I like to have my players focus on playing up to their potential, and not succumbing to emotionalism," he said. "The depth of emotion is felt more by the fans and boosters who want to get on the Internet and compare notes. The players play the game because they want to play and win."

And both teams are desperately searching for a win after a rough stretch in the Pacific-10 Conference.

While there's no Rose Bowl bid at stake, No. 23 Oregon (7-3 overall, 3-3 Pac-10) and Washington (5-5, 2-4) have plenty to play for.

The Ducks will look to get back on track after losing three of their last four. Oregon, playing its last game of the season at Autzen, has not lost a home finale since 1993.

"We just need to win. We need to beat the Dawgs," senior safety Rasuli Webster said. "I think we're up to the challenge. I think we're just

ready to go out there and play."

The third quarter has been a sore spot for the Ducks this season. In a 32-21 loss at Washington State last week, the Oregon offense netted just two yards, although the Ducks outscored the Cougars 7-3 thanks to Mitchell's 20-yard interception return.

"We won the third quarter, and that was our goal," Mitchell said. "But there's still something missing. We need to find that niche. We need to find that (winning) attitude again."

Nursing a sprained big toe on his right foot, Oregon tailback Onterio Smith did not practice earlier this week, and is questionable for the game.

The Huskies, meanwhile, have not had a losing season since 1976 and have not missed a bowl game since 1994, when they were on NCAA probation.

After losing three straight to USC, Arizona State and UCLA, the Dawgs took out their aggression on Oregon State last week in Seattle, winning 41-29.

During an indoor practice session on Tuesday, the Huskies' speakers blew out while trying to prepare for the noise at Autzen.

"I know there's going to be a lot said about the game, the rivalry and the feelings that exist between the two programs," Neuheisel said. "Ultimately, it gets down to two football teams who are going to fight in an honorable way."

Pickett, who needs just 136 yards to break the Pac-10's single-season passing record, and star receiver Reggie Williams, have helped the Huskies become the fourth-best passing offense in the nation with 354.5 yards per game. Oregon's pass defense ranks 114th (out of 117) in the NCAA.

The Huskies, however, rank 113th in rushing offense with 74.2 yards per game. Oregon ranks 13th nationally against the run, allowing 95.9 yards per game.

"We've gotten better (defensively) the past couple weeks," Bellotti said. "The improvements are somewhat incremental at this point, but they are there."

Mitchell said the Ducks will likely lighten the box against the Huskies to provide help for its young secondary.

"It just comes down to making plays," Mitchell said.

And, apparently, not saying much — at least not until Saturday.

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



Adam Amato Emerald

Oregon linebacker Kevin Mitchell said the Ducks "just want to play ball" this week when Washington visits Autzen Stadium.



Mark McCambridge Emerald

Oregon safety Keith Lewis called Washington's Cody Pickett "overrated" last week, but was banned from interviews this week.

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