

Adam Amato Emerald

Igor Olshansky has developed into a leader on the Oregon defense, which is looking to improve in the Seattle Bowl.

Big-name star

When the crowd chants Igor Olshansky's name, the lineman responds with hard-nosed play

Peter Hockaday
Sports Editor

Igor Olshansky is one of the few Oregon athletes to know the feeling of having his name chanted by a crowd of 50,000 people.

Every time he makes a big play — which has been more and more often as his career has unfolded — the crowd at Autzen Stadium lets him know about it.

"Eeeeeee-gor."

But the "Pain from Ukraine" hardly takes it to his head.

"I think sometimes it's undeserved," Olshansky said. "I don't know if I really make a great play, or if it's because the crowd likes saying 'Igor.'"

Olshansky's name is not the only unique thing about him. For one, the redshirt sophomore defensive lineman came over to the United States from the Ukraine when he was eight. For another, he's only been playing football for five years.

And that ability to learn — he picked up football only slightly faster than he picked up English — has led him to the top of a young defensive line that is getting better almost by the quarter.

Haloti Ngata, the top-tier freshman lineman who is also rapidly improving, described Olshansky as a leader, despite the fact that he's only a sophomore.

"He'll watch film with me, tell me what I need to do, what to focus on," Ngata said. "He'll look at me instead of himself, tell me what's good for me and what I need to work on. So he's been a real big help to me."

Olshansky and the defensive line have done a good job of stopping the run this season — Oregon is

ranked 15th in the nation in rushing defense — but he is the first to shoulder the blame for a pass rush that has hardly stopped many shoulders or throwing arms in the second half of the season.

"I think I can really improve on my pass rush, and you can always become a smarter player," Olshansky said. "You can never be too smart on a football field."

But if Olshansky was smarter, he would look at a statistics sheet and see he isn't nearly responsible for any floundering the Ducks did during the regular season. He has 60 tackles on the year to go along with three sacks and eight tackles for loss.

"It's kind of hard because the team's not doing well; that's what really matters," Olshansky said. "As far as my personal success, I don't think it matters."

As the Ducks head to the Seattle Bowl on Dec. 30, they'll be looking to Olshansky to step up as he has in big games in the past.

He did, after all, step up on the biggest of stages last year.

After a season in which he started only two games, Olshansky was forced to start in the Fiesta Bowl against Colorado's fearsome rushing game. He responded to the pressure by notching three tackles and was one of the main reasons the Ducks were able to hold the Buffaloes to 49 yards on the ground. For his efforts, he was named to Sports Illustrated's All-Bowl team.

This season, Olshansky has gradually improved even more. He topped off the year with 16 tackles in the past two games against Washington and Oregon State.

"He's matured a lot," junior linebacker Kevin Mitchell said. "He's matured in the way that he's not just

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Fledgling Seattle Bowl tries to establish respect

The former Oahu Bowl game is trying to become a main event in the Northwest as it establishes a 'bowl week'

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The Seattle Bowl isn't exactly a Northwest tradition, but it's getting there.

If fans haven't ever heard of the bowl, it's because 2002 is only its second year in the Northwest. The bowl was formerly called the Oahu Bowl, but even that bowl was only around for three years before moving to Seattle.

So now, the directors of the bowl are trying to establish it as a viable alternative to bowls in warmer climates, mostly by playing up Seattle's diversity. The scheduled "bowl week" offers events from a Washington basketball game to fish-throwing at Pike Place Market.

"Our goal is to take care of the student-athlete, the alumni and the fans to make sure they come away with an unbelievable bowl week experience," said Jim Haugh, president of Aloha Sports, Inc., which runs the Seattle Bowl.

Last year, Georgia Tech and Stanford battled in the first Seattle Bowl at Safeco Field, the home of major league baseball's Seattle Mariners. But in the offseason, Aloha Sports signed a contract with Seahawks Stadium to play the bowl there for the next five years, starting this season.

Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti and Wake Forest head coach Jim

Grobe agreed that Seattle is an optimal place to play a bowl game. But the coaches are also eyeing the stadium as an optimal venue. The players will stay at a hotel near Seahawks Stadium, and many of the bowl week events will take place close to the area.

"I talked with (former Stanford head coach) Tyrone Willingham about his trip there last year, and he was very positive about the way the people took care of the players and the great time they had at the Seattle Bowl," Bellotti said.

"Seattle is one of my favorite towns," said Grobe, who said that Georgia Tech's coaches were also positive about last year's bowl.

The bowl week kicks off with "NFL Day" on Dec. 22, when the Seahawks will take on the St. Louis Rams at the stadium. Dec. 23 is "Husky Basketball Day," and will feature Washington taking on Houston.

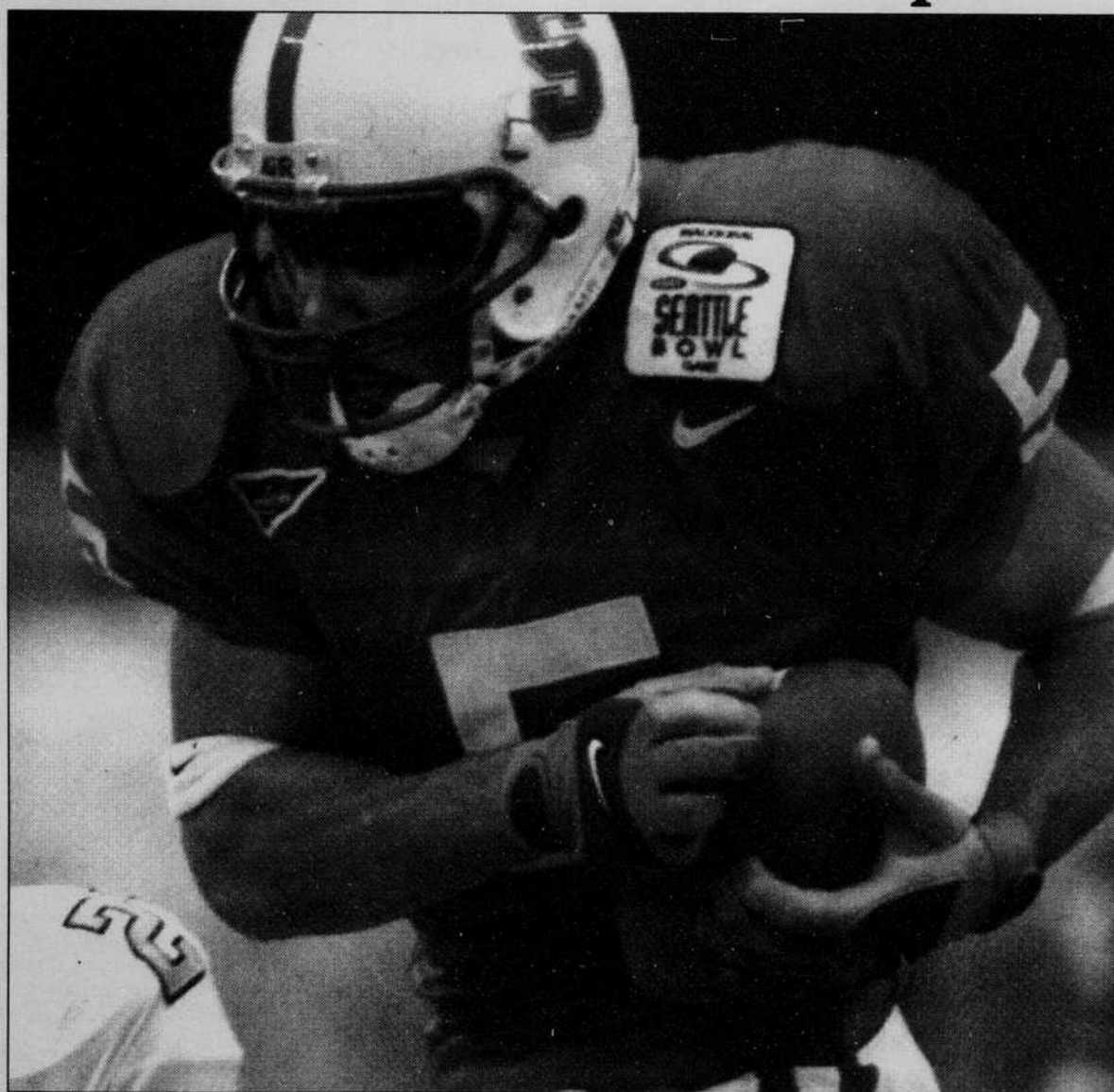
The Ducks will arrive on Dec. 26, "NBA Day," with a game between the Seattle Super Sonics and Toronto Raptors.

After the teams arrive, the week turns event-oriented, as the teams will tour the Experience Music Project museum, toss fish at Pike Place Market and have a banquet at the Museum of Flight.

"The question is, where else can you go in North America to see the NFL, the NBA, college basketball, hockey and a college bowl game in the same week?" Haugh said.

The answer, of course, is nowhere. Only Seattle.

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Courtesy The Seattle Bowl

Teyo Johnson and the Stanford Cardinal lost to Georgia Tech last year in the inaugural Seattle Bowl, played at Safeco Field.