

Bigger, better opportunities await Oregon's Clemens

The opportunity is there, for everyone.

It may be just the Seattle Bowl — which could be considered an anti-opportunity for the Ducks, who where oh-so-close to playing for the national championship last season — but it's an opportunity for Oregon fans to see their team in a bowl game close to home.

For Keenan Howry, the Seattle Bowl is a disappointing end to a disappointing season in what was otherwise a great career.

"It's just another opportunity to get out of the way and go on to bigger and better things," Howry said.

The senior wide receiver, who holds the school record with 168 career receptions, may get bigger and better things if the NFL calls his

name in April.

But that's far down the road — and even on a different map — for most on the Oregon sideline.

For Kellen Clemens, the Seattle Bowl is not something to just simply get out of the way. This is his chance to shine. This is the opportunity for Clemens, a redshirt freshman quarterback who's watched patiently as the Jason Fife-led Ducks faltered at the end of the season.

"I'm excited to get the opportunity to play," Clemens said Sunday. "We're excited about one more game to go out on a positive note."

Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti confirmed Sunday that Clemens and Fife will both play against Wake Forest on Dec. 30.

"We will have two quarterbacks in the bowl game," Bellotti said. "But I don't know who will start."

Fife, the No. 1 starter since the spring, and Clemens have been splitting time with the starting unit in practice this week.

With Fife, Oregon (7-5) lost five of its final six games while finishing

ninth in the Pacific-10 Conference in passing at 232.8 yards per game. And while it's hardly fair to point the finger at one individual for Oregon's struggles, it may be time for a change at quarterback.

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It may be inevitable, anyway. Clemens is clearly the future quarterback, and is in a position Joey Harrington found himself in three years ago while backing up A.J. Feeley (now the starting quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles). Midway through his sophomore year, Harrington supplanted Feeley as the starter, and the rest, well, is history.

Harrington obviously made the most of his opportunity. Clemens is still waiting for his. But he shouldn't

have to wait long.

With a national audience watching on ESPN, Clemens should see significant action in the Seattle Bowl, something he has not had much of this season.

Clemens started the third quarter of Oregon's 42-14 loss to Washington, but his first pass was intercepted. He played just two series before Fife was brought back in.

In five games, Clemens has completed 4-of-9 passes for 40 yards with one touchdown and one interception.

The Oregon coaches have made it clear that this bowl season, with little fanfare compared to the Ducks' Fiesta Bowl charge last season, is as much about preparing for next year as it is for ending this season with a win.

For Clemens, that means proving himself in every opportunity. Could he head into spring practices as the top quarterback?

"We can't really worry about that right now," Clemens said.

Certainly, Fife has taken his lumps in his first season. Clemens could

easily experience the same if he's given the opportunity next season. But isn't it at least worth a try, given Clemens' heralded prep career?

A native of Burns, Clemens was the only player in the state to attract All-American attention and was rated the third-best prep quarterback in the nation by PrepStar magazine as a senior. He passed for 3,226 yards and 37 touchdowns while rushing for 15 more scores in his first prep season.

But that's in the past, and Oregon needs a spark for the future. Is Clemens the answer? In the 19 days he has to prepare as Oregon's quarterback, starter or not, Clemens has the opportunity to create an even better opportunity for himself next year.

Fife's opportunities have seemed to run dry. Clemens' first one starts now, and may just lead to bigger and better things.

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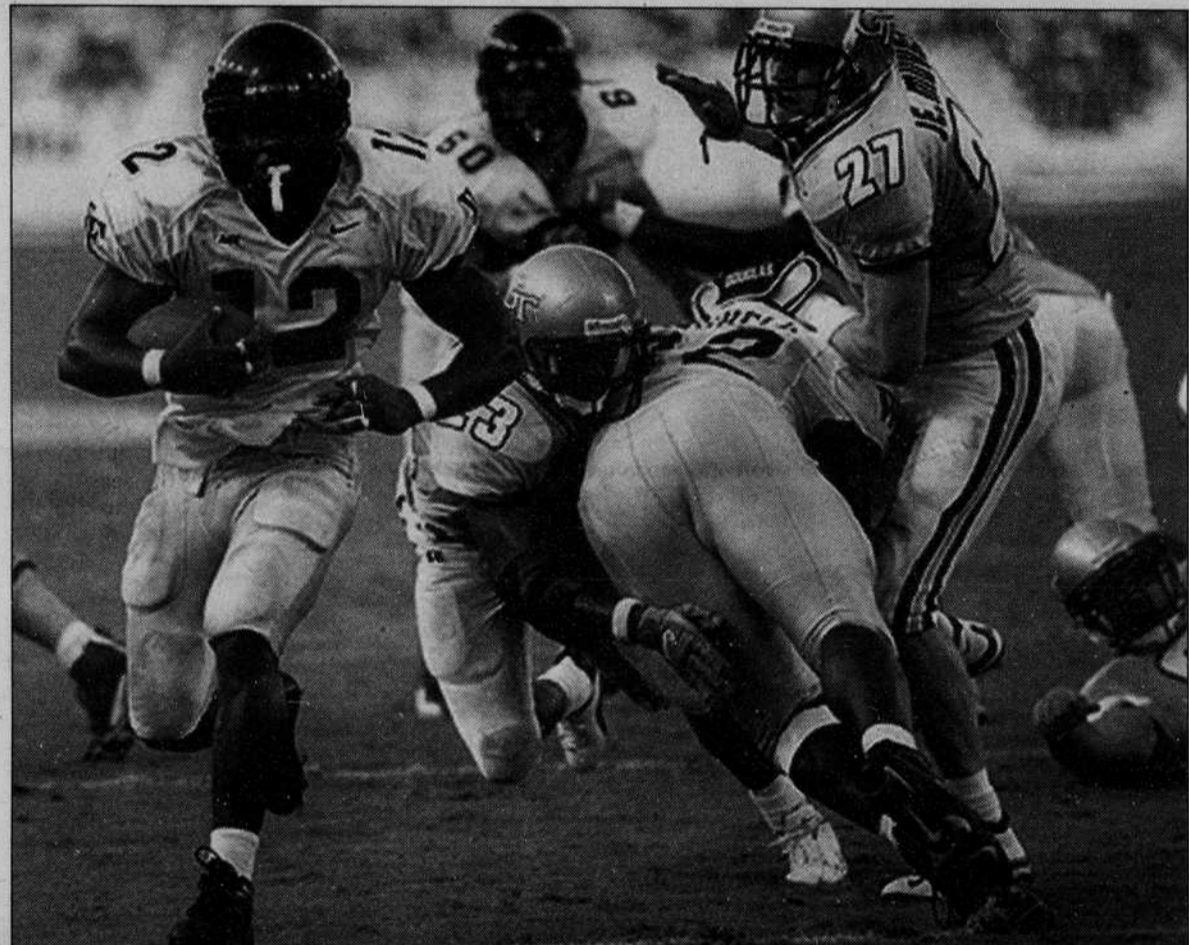
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Tarence Williams (12) leads the Wake Forest rushing attack, but it will be the Wake Forest passing game that will be key. Courtesy Wake Forest Media Services

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Wake Forest

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squeaker to Florida State.

Finally, Wake Forest won its final home game of the season, a 30-27 victory over Navy, then traveled to College Park, Md., and lost to the Terps.

"We played a terrible first half, but I think we showed we can play a little bit in the second half," Wake Forest head coach Jim Grobe told the Winston-Salem Journal after the Maryland game. "It just wasn't enough."

On the offensive side of the ball, Wake Forest is led by quarterback James MacPherson. The senior from Tucson, Ariz., has completed 55 percent of his passes this season for 1,596 yards and six touchdowns.

Senior Tarence Williams leads the Wake Forest ground game with 825 yards and, along with freshman runner Chris Barclay, is the focus of the offense. The two have combined for 1,612 yards, and the Deacons as a team average just less than 240 yards per game on

the ground.

Defensively, Wake Forest, like Oregon, is susceptible to the long passing play, although the Deacons allow just 238 yards in the air per game. However, they have not been able to stop the run, highlighted by the 161 yards per game they allow.

Senior defensive end Calvin Pace was named a first-team All-American last week, Wake Forest's first selection since 1992.

"I am very honored to be chosen as an All-American," the Douglasville, Ga., native said. "I give all the credit to my teammates and coaches. Because of them, I have been able to win some individual honors."

However, Pace has a broken fibula — an injury that kept him on the sidelines against Maryland — and Wake Forest has not said if he will play in the Seattle Bowl.

There is a bit of controversy surrounding the Demon Deacon football program. Despite being the man attributed with building the Wake Forest football team into a semi-power, Grobe has been looking into the head coaching

spot at Baylor.

The Bears have an open position after finishing the season 3-9 and have courted Grobe. He admitted Baylor has made contact with him, but he has yet to schedule an interview with them and declined to say whether he would.

"I'm flattered they're interested in me — very flattered," he said. "But I have nothing more to report right now."

No member of the Demon Deacons has acknowledged the rumors have been distracting, but Wake Forest Athletics Director Ron Wellman said he expects Grobe to remain with the program.

"Every situation is unique unto itself, but the relationship Jim and I have has always been a very open and candid relationship," he said. "I know that I trust him that if there was ever a situation where he would get involved, he would come back and we would just discuss that situation and what is good for him and what is good for our program."

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