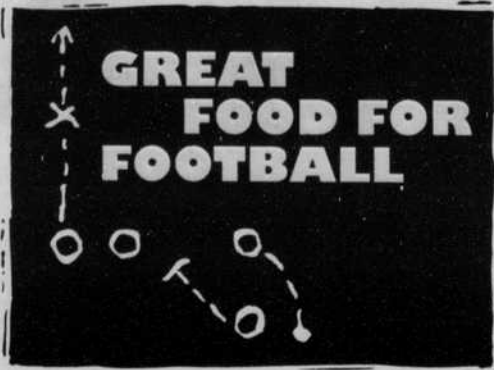


GAME DAY

Friday, September 19, 2003

Sports Editor: Hank Hager



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Hank Hager
Behind the dish

Clemens should be it on Saturday

It's the biggest non-conference game at Autzen Stadium since Notre Dame tied the Ducks, 13-13, in 1982.

No. 3 Michigan's appearance in Eugene on Saturday will be the biggest game — bar none — for those who are going to strap on the pads. And if the Ducks are going to give the Wolverines a game, it's going to have to be because Kellen Clemens plays up to his potential and a whole host of youngsters step up.

What Duck fans are going to see Saturday will be No. 22 Oregon's future, brightly lit by the yellow or green uniforms the team plans to wear.

Leading that charge, though, will be Clemens, the quarterback who has started the first three games of the season. He has led the offense to three victories, and sits fifth in the nation in passing efficiency.

Clemens has averaged more than 189 yards passing per game, and considering he has yet to take every snap in a contest, that's a pretty significant number.

Senior Jason Fife, who, entering the game against Arizona was anointed the backup via the team's two-deep depth chart, has been nearly perfect, completing 22 of his 27 passing attempts.

Again, that's a pretty significant number. But eventually, the Ducks will have to go to the traditional one-quarterback system and break away from the alternating QBs.

Against Michigan, it would be an opportune time to do so. It would allow the offense a chance to show what it can do against one of the nation's best defenses. The offense has averaged more than 40 points a game, so realistically at least 30 shouldn't be out of the picture against the Wolverines.

For Clemens, allowing him to play the entire game would build confidence, and would be a valuable tool to prepare him for the next two seasons because he's just a redshirt sophomore.

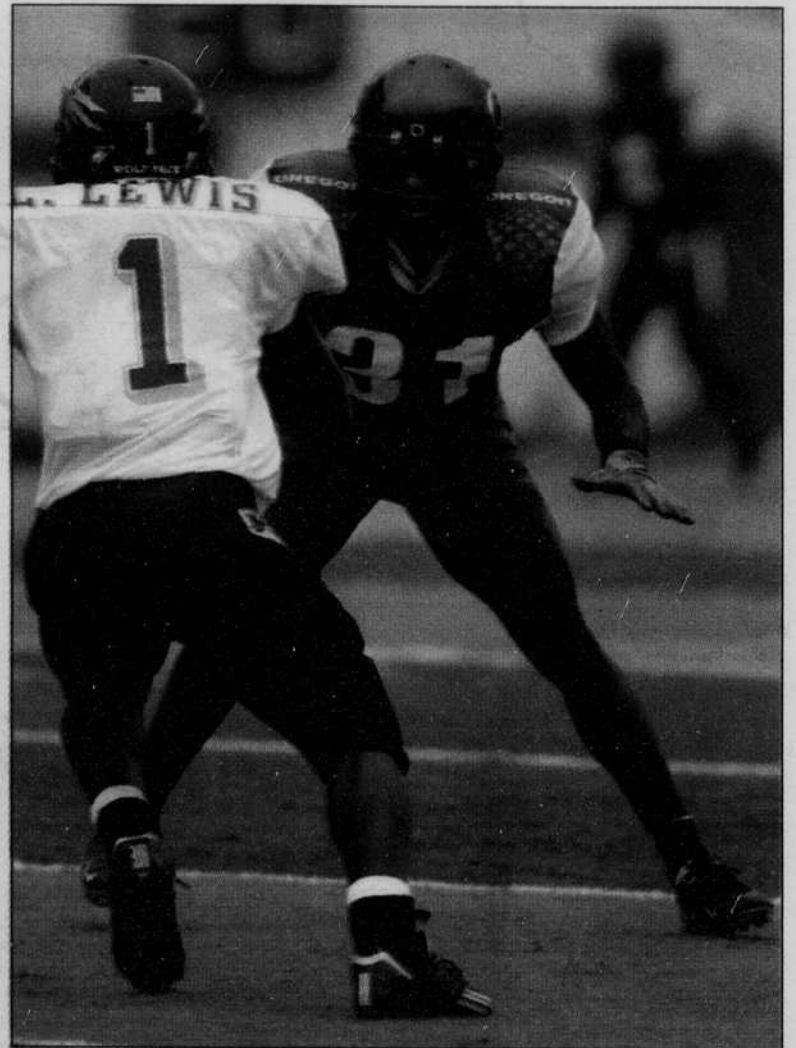
Unlike last season, he seems much more comfortable running the team's offense. More than once he has stayed in the pocket as long as he needs to. Each time, he has stepped up and fired a rocket down the field, getting the Ducks valuable field position.

His receivers seem comfortable getting the ball from him, and aside from a poor first half against Arizona, he has shown the ability to do that consistently.

Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti has indicated that he and offensive coordinator Andy Ludwig plan to continue using the quarterback rotation.

"I think the competition at that position has made us better," Bellotti said. "We're leading the nation in passing efficiency right now. This is

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Mark McCambridge Senior Photographer

Justin Phinisee and the Oregon defensive backfield have improved since the 2002 season.

Oregon looking for possible upset against Michigan

The Ducks host No. 3 Michigan, the highest-ranked nonconference opponent to play at Autzen

By **Mindi Rice**
Senior Sports Reporter

Don't believe the players when they say it's just another game.

No. 22 Oregon hosts No. 3 Michigan on Saturday, the first time since 1992 that a top-five opponent has taken the field at Autzen Stadium.

"All the guys on the team are looking forward to the opportunity to play against them," wide receiver Samie Parker said.

The Ducks, who have averaged more than 40 points per game, will have to make headway against a team that has allowed just one touchdown and one field goal through three games.

"I'm excited, because as a football team, this will be a great test for us," Michigan head coach Lloyd Carr said. "I think it's a game that prepares our team as we go into the Big Ten season."

Michigan (3-0) has high hopes for its season, and many of those rest with quarterback John Navarre and tailback Chris Perry.

Navarre has thrown for 580 yards and four touchdowns. He has only been intercepted once. Perry has run for 549 yards to lead the nation.

"I think Michigan is a potential national championship team," Ore-

gon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "Just look at the way they play and what they are on paper. Obviously we want to derail some of those hopes this weekend."

One of the keys this season for Oregon (3-0) has been the improved play of the defensive backfield. Steven Moore has continued his starting duties from the 2002 season at cornerback. Justin Phinisee has started two games this season, the first two starts of his career.

Last season, teams threw past Oregon defenders who were just a step or two behind. In three games, both Phinisee and Moore have been on the ball, ready to make tackles when and where needed.

Duty will call when Navarre and his blue and maize teammates take to the turf.

"The nervousness is more excitement because it's a big game on ABC," Moore said. "There's more opportunity for you to show off what you can do and show people that we're back. It's a different team versus last year."

The nation's most efficient passing duo also has its work cut out. Quarterbacks Kellen Clemens and Jason Fife face a defense that has given up only one touchdown — to Central Michigan — and one field goal to Houston.

The Wolverines held then-No. 15 Notre Dame scoreless Sept. 13.

Michigan has allowed 305 passing yards in three games, while the Ducks come in averaging 284 yards per game from the air.

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