

Bellotti still strong in ninth season with UO program

Head coach Mike Bellotti leads Oregon into Autzen against the team's toughest home opponent of his tenure

By Mindi Rice
Senior Sports Reporter

It's only fitting that a game against No. 3 Michigan at Autzen Stadium — one of the biggest games of Mike Bellotti's tenure — is also the 100th game with the head coach at Oregon's helm.

Only Duck legends Len Casanova and Rich Brooks have coached more games at Oregon than Bellotti. Casanova did it from 1951-66 and amassed 163 games, while Brooks totaled 204 from 1977-94.

"It's another game for me and I guess it's my 100th game here as a coach," Bellotti said. "That may mean as much to me as anything."

It means a lot to the players and the fans, too.

Bellotti, in his ninth season as head coach at Oregon, is in a conference where coaches turn over more often than pancakes on a griddle.

On the other side of lauded football legend, Penn State's Joe Paterno and Florida State's Bobby Bowden — nationally revered coaches who have both topped 330 wins with their current programs — are closing in on retirement.

But in Eugene, the Bellotti era is going strong.

The UC Davis graduate took over the program Feb. 13, 1995, one month removed from a Rose Bowl appearance and Oregon's first undisputed Pacific-10 Conference title in school history.

It hasn't been all smooth sailing for Bellotti's Ducks since then — a 6-5, no bowl-game season in 1996 and

the 2002 spiral to 7-6 — but the highlight films take up more space in the proverbial closet.

For starters, there's the 23-game Autzen winning streak that stretched from Oct. 18, 1997 to Sept. 22, 2001.

The 2001 season also marked the first 11-win season in the history of Oregon and the Ducks finished with an all-time top ranking of No. 2 in the Associated Press and ESPN/USA Today polls.

"I think if you look back at what they've done, what Mike Bellotti has done, they've established that program as a consistently ranked team," Michigan coach Lloyd Carr said.

Bellotti has led Oregon to seven bowl games in his eight seasons, including six consecutive appearances.

Factor in victories in four of those bowl games — the Fiesta Bowl, Holiday Bowl, Sun Bowl and Las Vegas Bowl — and Bellotti's teams have more postseason wins than under any other Oregon coach.

"He's a great coach," outside linebacker Anthony Trucks said. "He's a very smart man and he's created a history for this program."

Bellotti has the best career winning percentage — 70.7 — at Oregon since C.W. Spears coached 19 games from 1930-31 and had a 73.6 winning percentage. Spears has the best winning percentage of any coach who led the Ducks for more than one season.

Starting in the 1996 season and continuing on through 2001, Bellotti's teams moved steadily up the win column. The 1996 squad had a 6-5 record, and each consecutive team added one victory until the 2001 squad made it 11-1.

His old job of offensive coordinator, which he held at Oregon from 1989-1994 during Brooks' tenure,

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