



Mark McCambridge Senior Photographer

Oregon linebacker Kevin Mitchell, the top returning tackler in the Pac-10, is averaging 5.25 tackles per game this season.

# 'LUNCHPAIL LEADER'

Kevin Mitchell brings an instinctive attitude and determined work ethic to the Oregon defense

By **Mindi Rice**  
Senior Sports Reporter

If Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti had his way, he would have a Kevin Mitchell on his squad every year.

"I wish we could just clone him and replace him," Bellotti said.

Mitchell — the tenacious linebacker from Orange, Calif. — has eight regular season games left in his last year as a Duck.

For now, he's just savoring every moment.

"That win (against Michigan) felt really, really good," Mitchell said. "But we've still got eight games. It'll always be in my head, forever. I know what we did my senior year against Michigan, but at the same time, I try to tone it down and just know that Washington State and the rest of the (Pacific-10 Conference) is coming up."

The redshirt senior is the Pac-10's top returning tackler, averaging 8.8 tackles per game last season.

This season, Mitchell is second on the team with 21 tackles after four games. The decrease doesn't bother him, though.

"The most tackles someone has right now is 22 — I have 21 and (Keith Lewis has) 20," Mitchell said. "Everyone's making plays so it's a group effort. It's that much better to be a part of. I'd rather go out a winner with a team."

In the three seasons Mitchell has spent time on the field, the Ducks certainly have found their winning ways. Including their 4-0 start this season, Mitchell has seen 32 wins and only 9 losses and has made 276 stops on the field in those 41 games.

"He's just the consummate football player," defensive coordinator Nick Aliotti said. "The guy is just very intelligent; he has great instinct. He comes to work every day with his lunchpail and he's a great leader."

Mitchell is also the elder statesman of sorts. Other redshirt seniors sit on the squad, including Quinn Dorsey and Junior Siavii on defense, but Mitchell has seen the most playing time, with the possible exception of Samie Parker.

"Kevin is going to run a lot of plays, which he has," Bellotti said. "He's a guy that I have come to rely on doing things the right way, doing it full speed and being a great leader by example to this entire football program."

He's on the "watch list" for the 2003 Butkus Award, the second consecutive year he was named to the grouping in the preseason. It's given to the nation's top collegiate linebacker.

He has even drawn praise from Pac-10 coaches other than his own.

"There is no one like Kevin Mitchell playing football in college," Arizona head coach John Mackovic told the Tucson Citizen before his squad played the Ducks on Sept. 13.

"He is one of those players who, if I was a regular fan, he would be a favorite of mine. He energizes that team the way he plays. ... It is infectious because you see other people playing like that."

The spirit of football found Mitchell when he was 9 years old. After days playing t-ball and soccer, he decided he wanted to play football like his older brother. His coaches put him at linebacker and he's been a constant there for 14 years.

"I just started hitting people," Mitchell said. "I really didn't know what I was doing. They were like 'tackle them' so I went out and tackled people."

Two of the people who have seen Mitchell play for 14 years will be in Autzen Stadium on Saturday to watch him play again.

"My mom and dad are staying with my wife and I," Mitchell said.

Yes, the 23-year-old linebacker is married. Mitchell married Melanie, his high school sweetheart, during the summer.

"She applied here before I even got offered a scholarship here," Mitchell

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# Loss of last season's top talent has yet to derail No. 21 Cougars

The Cougars have been successful despite the loss of three talented players from last season's team

By **Jon Roetman**  
Sports Reporter

When the Oregon offense takes the field against No. 21 Washington State on Saturday at Autzen Stadium, one fact will be obvious: These aren't Jason Gesser's Cougars anymore.

After finishing his career at Washington State and signing as an undrafted free agent with Tennessee, the Cougars' all-time leading passer has been replaced by senior Matt Kegel. The 6-foot-5-inch, 235-pound Havre, Mont., native sat behind Gesser for

four years and is now looking to leave his own mark on the Cougar offense.

Throwing for 1,038 yards in four games, Kegel has taken over an offense that led the Cougars to a Rose Bowl bid last season. Meanwhile, he's led the Cougars to a 3-1 record and has gained the respect of opposing coaches.

"(The Cougars) have a great quarterback who is playing at a high level," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "They spread you out, and they won't wait until they're 21 points down to throw the ball. They come out wheel-in' and dealin'."

First-year head coach Bill Doba said the Cougars have been able to utilize Kegel's talents by forcing him to stay in the pocket. Kegel's passing yards per game have increased each week,

including a 346-yard effort against New Mexico.

"(Kegel) has improved little by little each week and gained more and more confidence," Doba said of the former high school All-American. "We've got him to stay in the pocket. He's taken some hits right in the mouth as he's let the ball go, and that's what he has to do."

One problem the Cougar offense has had lately is scoring touchdowns in the red zone. But when the Cougar offense hasn't been able to punch the ball into the end zone, senior placekicker Drew Dunning has been close to automatic. Dunning has connected on 13-of-14 field goal attempts, including 5-of-5 last week against New Mexico.

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