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Hank Hager
Behind the dish

Harrington in no-win situation with Lions

Somewhere in Cincinnati on Sunday, Carson Palmer must have had a smile on his face.

The first-year pro, for one, was on the sidelines as the Bengals defeated Baltimore, 34-26, for their second win of the season.

He didn't see any playing time in the win, but by just staying on the sidelines he was gaining more of a future than Joey Harrington did in Detroit's 38-7 blowout loss to Dallas.

The former Oregon hero was just 5 of 13 against the Cowboys for 30 yards and two interceptions. He was pulled in favor of backup Mike McMahon in the first half.

As Drew Sharp of the Detroit Free Press pointed out in a column Monday, Harrington's quarterback rating against the Cowboys was a paltry 7.1.

"But on the Lions' scale it is but another all too familiar rumbling, a groundswell of questioning the quarterback's competence," Sharp wrote. "Harrington's pathetic individual effort in the most horrid collective exhibition of Lions football in the last three years will set the tone of public outrage in the aftermath of Sunday's 38-7 loss to Dallas.

"Screaming for the quarterback's head in this town has become reflexive, but creating a quarterback controversy is a foolish waste of emotion because for there to be a 'controversy' there must first be a 'quarterback.'"

Where Palmer is being given a chance to compete in the future, Harrington has been set up to fail by the mere fact he has stepped on the field every game in just his second professional season.

The Lions are 1-5 this season. They haven't had a winning season since 2000 when Detroit went 9-7.

The specter of a winning season has shrunk quickly this year, and the title wave that engulfed Ford Field has washed away Harrington's early potential. Detroit is a sinking ship, even with head coach Steve Mariucci, and the Detroit brass has done nothing but hurt the Portland native's ability to get tried and true experience.

Throwing Harrington in games, as the Lions did last season, was unfair. He is getting experience, but it isn't of a quality nature.

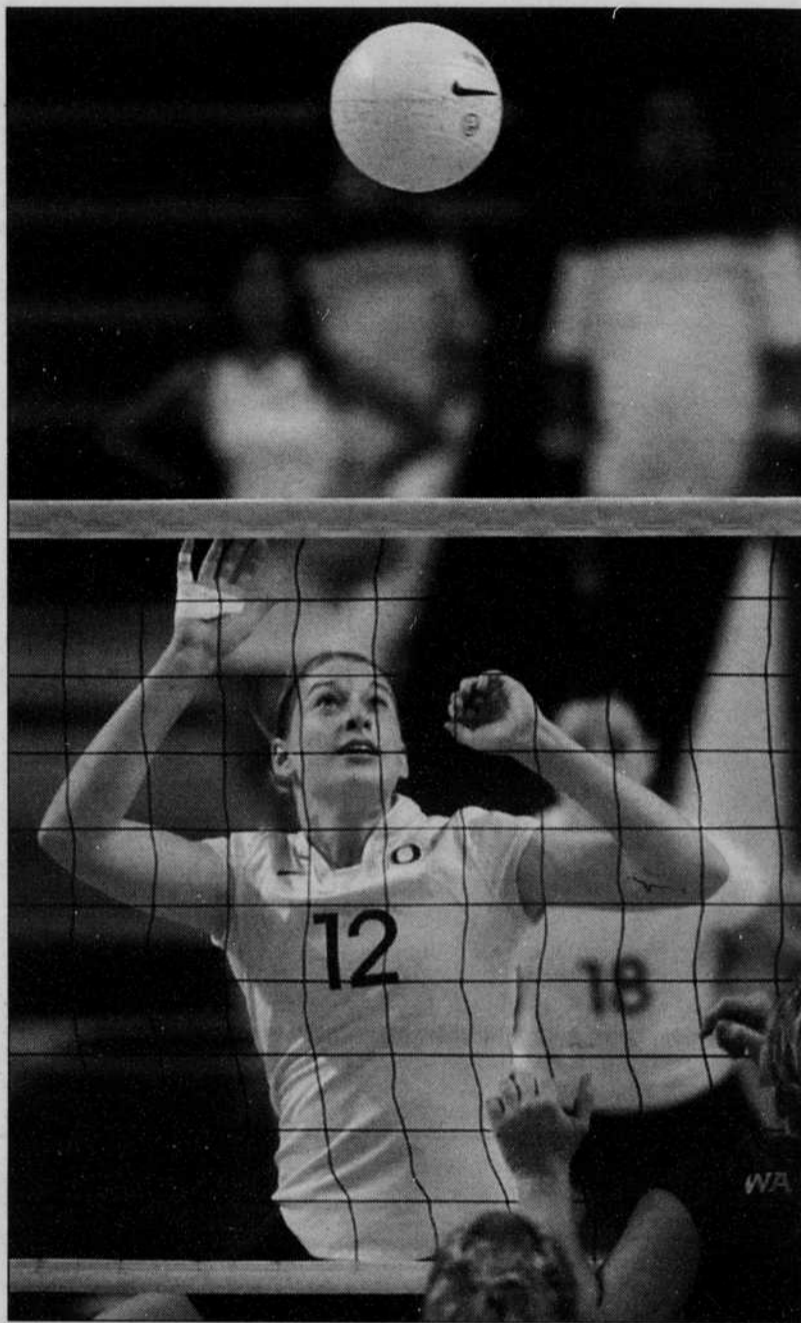
Harrington doesn't have receivers that can make or break a game. His top go-to guy, Charles Rogers, broke his collarbone in early October and may not see the field for at least a few more weeks.

When Harrington was with Oregon, he had a cast of offensive players that was well suited to his ability. Granted, Detroit can't base its offense on his talents, but there needs to be an adjustment.

Before all the blame is placed on Detroit itself, Harrington must be tossed some of the criticism himself. Sharp may have been a bit harsh to criticize the former Duck so bluntly. Still, a passer rating of 7.1 is downright nasty to look at.

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USC, UCLA loom large for Oregon



Mark McCambridge Photographer

Kristen Bitter is seventh in the Pac-10 with 1.04 blocks per game in conference play.

The Ducks return to McArthur Court this week to face two teams ranked in the top-10

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

This week provides the Oregon volleyball team with a good news, bad news scenario.

The good news: The Ducks have completed the first half of their Pacific-10 Conference schedule and will be better prepared when they face opponents for a second time.

The bad news: It may not matter how prepared Oregon is when the Ducks face No. 9 UCLA on Thursday and No. 1 USC on Friday.

The Bruins and Trojans are talented enough to strike fear into the heart of any opponent, but the Ducks are staying upbeat and positive about their chances.

"They're both awesome programs, and they both have strong traditions behind them," freshman middle blocker Kristen Bitter said. "It is (easy to be in awe), especially as a freshman going against the No. 1 team.

"But it's so exciting. Not very many people get this opportunity, so I look at it as a blessing and an honor."

Bitter added that the Ducks can relax and go after their first conference win now that they have seen all of the Pac-10 teams.

"I don't think things will go the same during the second half of the Pac-10 (schedule)," Bitter

said. "We know what we're going up against. The shock factor is gone, and now it's just time to play volleyball and see who we can get."

Oregon head coach Carl Ferreira said UCLA (14-4 overall, 6-3 Pac-10) presents a smart opponent that will not beat itself. The Bruins are led by juniors Brynn Murphy and Heather Cullen. Murphy is averaging 3.88 kills per game, while Cullen is at 3.06.

"They have a high volleyball IQ," Ferreira said. "They have a very methodical attack and hit their shots over and over and over."

Collegiate power

The Trojans (18-0, 9-0) are the defending national champion and have held the top position in the collegiate rankings for the entire season. They have three players averaging more than three kills per game, and Ferreira said the Trojans usually have the size, athleticism and experience to overwhelm their opponents.

To put it in perspective, Ferreira added that USC has more than 100 matches of international experience among its players, compared to none for Oregon.

"They're the best collection of collegiate players on a volleyball team I've ever seen," Ferreira said. "They're just very good at what they do."

Double-digit Mason

Freshman outside hitter Sarah Mason led the Ducks with 10 kills in the loss on Friday at Arizona State. Mason, who has recorded double-digit kills in 10 of the Ducks' last 11 matches, stands ninth in the Pac-10 with 3.59 kills per game during conference play.

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Bruins fighting for conference crown

UCLA has won and become a big surprise in the Pac-10 this season

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

For anyone who thought UCLA would be in the bottom half of the Pacific-10 Conference standings at the conclusion of the 2003 season, the Bruins have been surprising.

So startling that UCLA could be considered the surprise of the Pac-10 this season. UCLA (5-2 overall, 3-0 Pac-10) proved that with a 23-20 overtime victory over California on Saturday at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

PAC 10

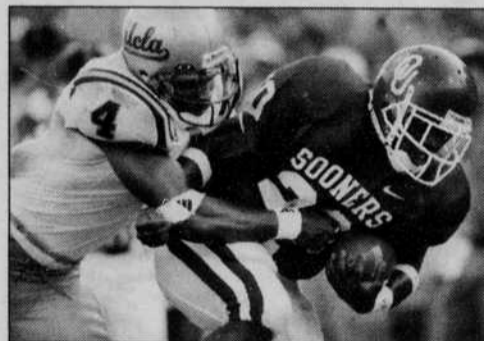
"We keep finding a way to win," UCLA head coach Karl Dorrell said after the game. "We have a little luck on our side. It was a heck of a football game."

California trailed for most of the game, but came back to tie the score with a touchdown and 2-point conversion with 11 seconds to play.

UCLA's Justin Medlock kicked a 41-yard field goal in extra time, then watched as California's Tyler Frederickson hit the left upright on a 50-yard attempt, giving the Bruins the victory.

The close win allowed UCLA to stay in a tie for first in the Pac-10's race for the conference crown.

The Bruins had to battle through a quarterback



Sharon M. Steinman Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Jarrad Page (4) and the Bruins have won each of their first three Pac-10 games to remain in a tie for first.

dilemma early in the season that claimed sophomore Matt Moore.

He won the starting job to begin the season, but gave way to sophomore Drew Olson after an injury in the first game of the season against Colorado, a 16-14 loss.

At the time, Moore was expected to miss 4-to-6 weeks with a severe bone bruise on his left tibia.

Moore is back but has been designated as the backup to Olson. He has seen action in two games since coming back from the injury but is waiting for his chance to start.

"Right now we have a four-game winning streak," UCLA offensive coordinator Steve Axman told the Los Angeles Times. "I feel our quarterback is playing well, and he's getting better. To make a change — you've got to worry about making that

type of change. On the other hand, we feel very confident in Matt and his ability to step in."

Olson has passed for 1,107 yards this season in six games, five of which are starts. He has completed 91 of 162 passes and has thrown four touchdown strikes while being picked off five times.

The Bruins are 5-1 this season when Olson starts.

Walter wastes no time

Arizona State quarterback Andrew Walter lit up North Carolina Saturday, just one week after throwing for more than 300 yards against Oregon.

The junior was 34 of 58 for 408 yards. He has now thrown for more than 300 yards in three straight weeks after accomplishing the feat in a win over the Ducks and a loss to USC.

Walter's Heisman campaign, which was in full steam entering the season, has dwindled a bit, and it's unlikely it will get back on track enough for him to make a charge this season.

But next year is a different story.

Not going to happen

ESPN.com reported on Monday that the Western Athletic Conference plans to raid the Sun Belt Conference. An announcement was made last week that Rice, Southern Methodist and Tulsa would leave the WAC after accepting invitations to join Conference USA.

The WAC, according to the article, is eyeing eight teams from the Sun Belt as possible replacements.

Speculation now has it that the Pac-10 will follow

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