

Oregon reserves learn to wait their chance

Three key Ducks — for this season and the future — sit on the sideline, watching and learning

By Jesse Thomas
Sports Reporter

For the underclassmen on the Oregon team, football has become a waiting game.

Players like redshirt freshman Chris Vincent, freshman Johnny DuRocher and sophomore Darius Sanders don't take the field for the first snap or first defensive play.

They must learn from the veterans; from the stars that they one day wish to be. For the time being, they are learning and waiting. And for some, that is all right.

"It's all up to the coach," Sanders said. "It's all about the team. If the coach doesn't feel I can produce, I'm just here. My job is to be ready when he calls my name, my number."

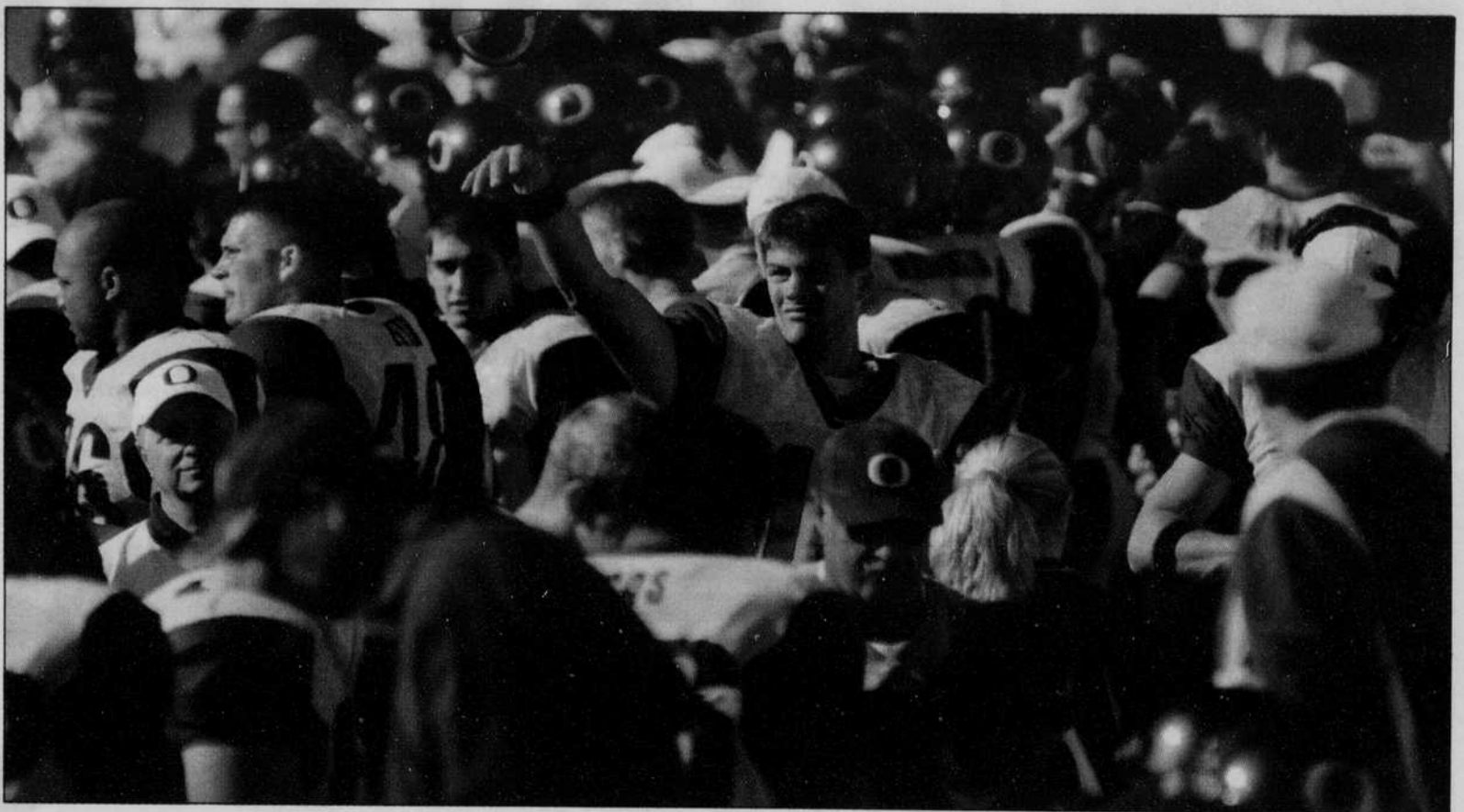
Vincent has his No. 22 called more than most freshmen. At the start of the season, the running back position was done on a rotating basis. Three different players started the first three games including Vincent, sophomore Terrence Whitehead and junior Ryan Shaw.

In Oregon's first game against Mississippi State, Vincent led the team with a seven-yard average per carry. In his starting debut against Arizona he led the team with 80 rushing yards.

But for the last four games, Vincent has played backup to Whitehead. After Whitehead's 172-yard rushing performance against Stanford, that starting spot looks like it may be claimed for good by Whitehead.

"He played real good," Vincent said. "That was the best game of his career. He's the running back with the most experience out of all four of us. He understands the offense a little bit better. I learned the offense, but he knows it a step further."

Vincent is the second-leading rush-



Adam Amato Photo Editor

Johnny DuRocher (13) will play an integral part in Oregon's future, but for now the quarterback is spending the season on the sideline learning from Jason Fife and Kellen Clemens.

er for Oregon. In his 55 rushes, he has carried the ball for 161 yards. "I just feel I'm not playing to my potential," Vincent said. "Coaches have big expectations of me. They put a lot of pressure on me. I was averaging 70 yards a game against Mississippi State and got hurt. And I never really bounced back from that, and that took a lot out of me."

Vincent understands that this is his chance to learn the offense in his first year. But learning means waiting, and waiting means not playing as much.

"I didn't want it to be that way, but that's the way it ended up, and that's the way it usually ends up with college players," he said.

Like Vincent, DuRocher knows he must wait. He is the key reserve behind sophomore Kellen Clemens and senior Jason Fife at the quarterback spot, but he doesn't think he will take a single snap this season.

He acknowledges that it is hard to sit on the bench, especially in situations where Clemens and Fife are having rough games. That occurred in games against Washington State and Arizona State.

It's hard "a little bit," DuRocher said. "But those two guys are playing for a reason. They're better than me. I haven't beaten those two guys out yet. I have no reason to step in and say I need to be playing."

Although it is difficult to warm the bench for some, especially when the starters don't produce, that has become a reality. The only thing to do is work just as hard in practice as everyone else and hope that chance comes.

For Sanders, he has seen some playing time. At the two defensive end positions, he is listed behind juniors Igor Olshansky and Chris Solomona at one end and senior Quinn Dorsey and sophomore Devan Long at the other. Sanders has played in four games this season, recording five total tackles, four of which are solo.

All Sanders can do is play his heart out on the field when he gets the chance and hope to produce. He

knows he must wait, and he respects how the system works.

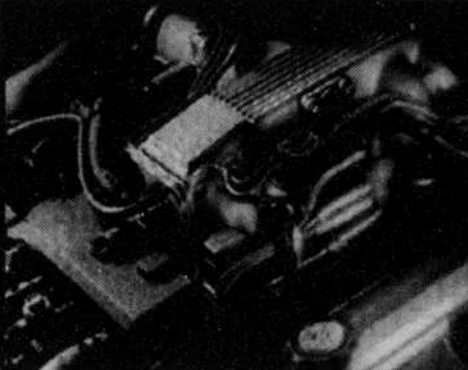
"I leave it up to the coach," he said. "I trust the coach. He's going to put the best players in."

And so they wait.

DuRocher must call plays from the sideline and not behind center. Sanders said he just needs experience and to work on technique. Vincent must continue to learn the offense and run again like he did against Arizona and Mississippi State.


One day, they hope, they will get their starting chance.

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