

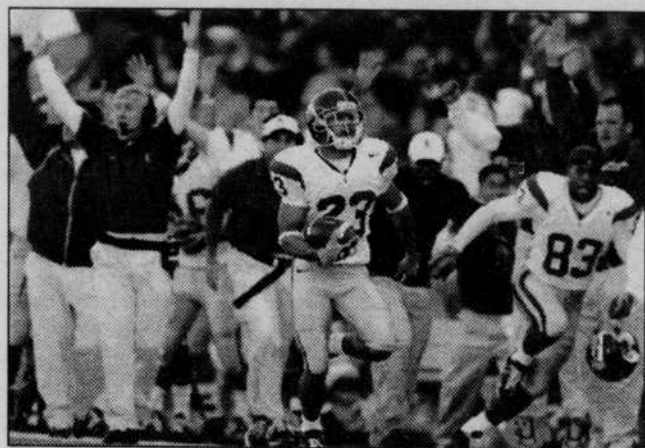
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SPORTS

Best bet
College football:
Bowling Green at Miami (Ohio)
4:30 p.m., ESPN2

Tuesday, November 4, 2003

USC makes its case for Sugar Bowl; second in BCS



John Lok The Seattle Times

Ronald Nunn returned an interception for a touchdown in USC's win over Washington earlier this season. USC is No. 2 in the BCS.

USC is in line to play in the BCS Championship game after garnering a No. 2 ranking on Monday, behind Oklahoma

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

USC is coming to the party. The Trojans knocked off Pacific-10

**PAC
10**

Conference heavyweight Washington State in Los Angeles on Saturday, 43-16, paving the way for USC to be a major player

in the Bowl Championship Series. On Monday, the Trojans were ranked as

the No. 2 team in the BCS standings. USC also sits at No. 2 in both the Associated Press Top-25 Poll and the ESPN/USA Today Coaches Poll.

"We're playing the best football we've ever played," USC defensive end Shaun Cody told the Daily Trojan after the game against the Cougars. "It's amazing to watch the offense work."

USC has a bye this week, and then begins a three-game portion of its schedule that will decide the reality of a potential Sugar Bowl bid and chance at a national championship game. The Trojans play at Arizona on Nov. 15, a game that could be a pushover in USC's eyes.

Then comes a game at the Los Angeles Coliseum against traditional rival UCLA on Nov. 22, which is followed by a game against Oregon State on Dec. 6 that is ex-

pected to be nationally televised.

Not much room to breathe. "I don't want to approach this as a week off because that's the wrong thing to do," USC head coach Pete Carroll told the Los Angeles Times on Monday. "In general, we're going to practice like crazy and work real hard on Sunday night."

"This comes at a real good time for us. ... I think we'll come out of it better and stronger."

If the Trojans are able to win out, the chances of landing that bid to the Sugar Bowl become enhanced. That would make USC the first Pac-10 team to go to a BCS Championship game.

In 1998, Tennessee won the inaugural game, followed by Florida State, Oklahoma,

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Hank Hager

Behind the dish

Bowl-less season would be beneficial

There comes a time in every college athletics program when failure has to happen for the benefit of the future.

The past two seasons of Oregon football have seen more ups than downs, and with three games left in the season, the prospects of the Ducks going to a postseason bowl are being lessened with each opponent's touchdown.

Oregon must win two of its next three games to reach seven wins, a figure that would almost guarantee the team a berth in the postseason. Three wins would guarantee a spot, while only one more would require some sweet talking because it isn't often that a team in one of the six major conferences goes somewhere with a 6-6 record.

Maybe, though, that's not such a bad thing. Maybe a step back will be better for the Ducks than a bowl, which would almost be a smoke screen in front of all the things that have bothered Oregon this season.

No bowl.

No bowl?

No bowl.

Injuries, miscommunication on offense, explosive plays against the defense, shanked punts and penalties have all haunted the Ducks this season.

Granted, Oregon is 5-4, which indicates that the team has done good in more games than it has done bad. But those four losses have come with significant setbacks that outweigh the good.

Imagine the defensive line with a healthy Haloti Ngata. Think of an offensive line with Joey Forster and a healthier Mike DeLaGrange, who has been out at intermediate points this year.

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Valadez moves to forefront with Ducks

In her first season on the field with the Ducks, Andrea Valadez is already a leading presence on offense

By Jesse Thomas
Sports Reporter

Just six weeks ago, redshirt freshman forward Andrea Valadez scored her first career goal as a Duck. She came off the bench in the game against Pacific and scored a game-winning goal in the 76th minute to give Oregon the 2-1 win.

Now, Valadez leads Oregon in goals after recording three this weekend in Oregon's final road trip. The Torrance, Calif., native scored two on Friday against Arizona State and one against Arizona on Sunday, giving her seven on the season and surpassing redshirt sophomore Nicole Garbin's tally of five.

"I'm incredibly excited for (Valadez)," Oregon head coach Bill Steffen said. "She's starting to pick and choose her moments well. She believes in herself, and she's a very hard worker."

Valadez's recent path to success has been far from glamorous. She was forced to stay on the sideline last year after tearing her anterior cruciate ligament. Other past injuries include — dating back to her prep days — tearing the ACL in her other knee, a bulging disc in her back and ligament damage to her ankle.

"She overcomes amazing obstacles," Steffen said. "For her to be able to come back and have this kind of weekend, it's pleasing."

Valadez's performance this weekend places her seventh all-time among Oregon's career leaders. That mark comes after playing in just 16 games, whereas everyone above her on the list has played in more than 30 games.

In her prep days at Bishop Montgomery High, Valadez was a first-team all-league pick her senior year and was voted the team's Offensive Player of the Year. At Oregon, Valadez is studying biology and hopes to become a pediatrician one day, according to Steffen.

"She's very focused," Steffen said. "She has plans and aspirations, and she's very clear on that. She's going to accomplish whatever she sets her mind to."

Valadez was unavailable for comment Monday.

In the future, Steffen expects Valadez to be the type of player that others look to because of her on-the-field actions and her off-the-field drive. Valadez is expected to start both games this weekend against USC and UCLA.

Making history

It was talked about. It was speculated on. It was nearly a given.

It finally happened on Sunday when the Ducks shut out Arizona on the road, 1-0, to give them their ninth win of the season and the best record in program history. The former record was held by the 2001 team that finished 8-8-2 overall.

But right now it means nothing. When the team celebrated on Sunday, it was more focused on winning its games this weekend and

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Mark McCambridge Photographer

Redshirt freshman Andrea Valadez (10) is leading the Ducks with seven goals this season after scoring three on the road trip last weekend.

Civil War loss still lingering in Oregon's mind

Oregon is still disappointed after Thursday's loss to Oregon State and needs to recover this week

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

The Oregon volleyball team entered Monday's practice with bad memories.

Thursday's 3-1 loss to Oregon State was disappointing for the Ducks, who were hoping to pull

out a win over their intra-state rivals.

While Pacific-10 Conference opponents have been unkind to Oregon (0-12 in conference play), the youthful Ducks have improved against some of the nation's top teams.

But Thursday's loss to the Beavers was different.

After dropping game one, Oregon sent the McArthur Court crowd into a frenzy as the Ducks won game two and built a

23-15 lead in game three. The Beavers, however, responded with nine consecutive points and eventually won game three, 31-29. Oregon State would put away a demoralized Oregon team, 30-24, in game four.

The Ducks let one slip away and they knew it. "I think coming in this morning, we were still disappointed," junior Lauren Westendorf said Monday. "I know for me, reality just set in this morning."

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**DUCK
VOLLEYBALL**