



Anything can happen

Oregon cornerback Rodney Woods understands what kind of a chance he has received from UO football

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

There's a birthday party on May 19, 2000, in Palmdale, Calif.

A fight breaks out among high schoolers. Punches are thrown and kicking is involved.

Christopher O'Leary, 18, is fatally beaten. Another, Kevin Walker, is assaulted.

Rodney Woods, then 17 years old, is involved in the incident. Months later, he pleads no contest to felony assault for hitting Walker. He is sentenced to one year at Eastlake Juvenile Hall in Los Angeles.

"I remember it a little, but it's been so long," Woods said Tuesday.

Woods was originally charged with O'Leary's death, but the charge was dropped when witnesses said he never struck the fallen teenager. Marc Raines and Richard Newton, two of Woods' high school teammates, were charged with involuntary manslaughter.

Woods spent over 100 days behind bars for his participation that fateful



Adam Amato Photo Editor

Rodney Woods (17) has gotten another chance in life because of Mike Bellotti.

night after having already served 231 days while in custody. He walked out of the detention center on April 7, 2001.

"I always tell my little brother and all his friends to be careful wherever (they) go because you never know what can happen," Woods said. "I try to tell people to do the right thing. No matter where you're at, anything can happen at any point of time. Be careful and be aware of your surroundings."

It's Nov. 5 and more than two years later, and Woods is a starting cornerback for the Oregon football team. He was brought to the program by Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti, who recruited the Lancaster, Calif., native out of Fresno City College.

He came to Eugene only after Judge Thomas White reduced his charge to a misdemeanor, allowing the 5-foot-10-inch junior to attend classes at Oregon and become eligible to play football.

"I see it as being blessed," Woods said of the support and letters in his

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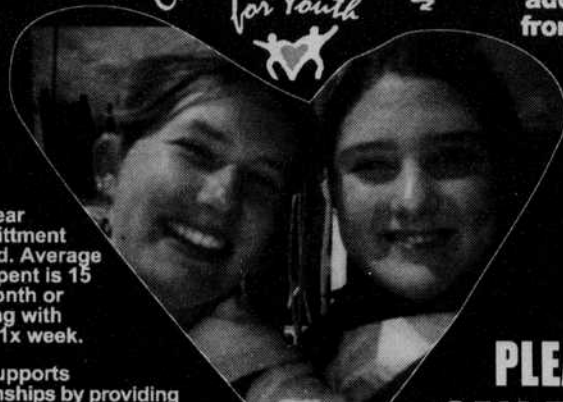
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