

Clemens shows hot hand at end

Oregon's quarterback rotation plays a vital role in the team's sudden come-from-behind victory Saturday

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

When sophomore Kellen Clemens went cold after six passes in the first quarter, senior Jason Fife took control of the Oregon offense and led the team on a second quarter scoring drive that tied the game at seven.

When Fife went cold after a five-play drive in the fourth quarter, Clemens came back in and worked miracles for the win.

Overall, the duo went 17 of 34 for 224 yards passing and two touchdowns.

"It was great," Fife said. "I had his back coming in early and he had mine coming back late."

When the Ducks won their first four games of the season, Clemens and Fife were considered the next best thing. They combined to throw for zero interceptions and led Oregon to an upset win over then-No. 3 Michigan.

But in the team's last four losses in five games, they've gone cold and have received their fair share of flack for Oregon's slump.

Saturday's game may have revali-

dated head coach Mike Bellotti's rotation of the two.

"Jason and I don't think about it," Clemens said. "We trust the coaches to make their decisions. I guess they're the ones that lose sleep over it sometimes, not us."

The night the lights went out

With 14:40 left to play at 9:21 p.m. in the fourth quarter, the Ducks and Golden Bears received quite a surprise.

Lights on the south side of the stadium turned off, leaving Autzen Stadium in partial darkness. Players from both teams went back into their locker rooms after they were told there would be a lengthy delay due to the time it takes to fully cool down the lights and repower them.

The game started 23 minutes after the lights initially flickered off.

"It's a distraction," California wide receiver Geoff McArthur said. "You hope it doesn't distract your guys. You want to go out there and continue to play with intensity, but it's unfortunate it happened. I don't think it damaged anything for us."

California had the ball when the lights went out, but didn't score. Two possessions later, though, the Golden Bears increased their lead to 17-7.

That's when Clemens took over, leading Oregon to the victory.

According to an Oregon official, the cause of the problem was a control failure, much like a computer shutting down the system due to a power surge.

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Mark McCambridge Photographer

Oregon quarterback Kellen Clemens returned to the game late in the fourth quarter, leading the Ducks to a comeback victory.

Before the lights went out, the south concourse also went dark, as did the press box.

"We just wanted to get out there and play," McArthur said of the delay. "Me, honestly, I didn't care if we played with half the lights on and half the lights off. I thought it was a fair chance for both teams."

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"I knew it was going to be a special fourth quarter when the lights went out," Bellotti said.

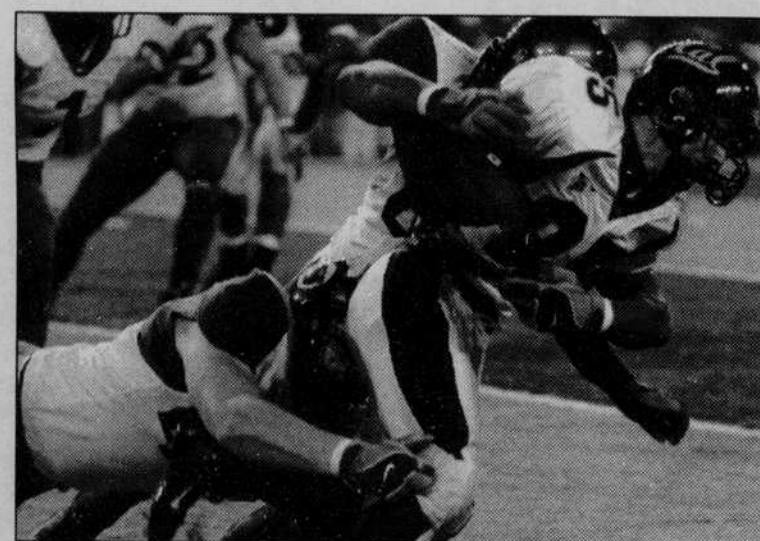
Random thoughts

The 57,511 in attendance at Autzen Stadium marked the 29th straight sellout for the Ducks. That streak predates the expansion of Autzen Stadium, which occurred prior to last season. The last time Oregon failed to sell out a game was on Sept. 25, 1999 when 45,660 watched the Ducks defeat USC, 33-30, in three overtimes.

Oregon linebacker Kevin Mitchell moved to sixth all-time in tackles for the Ducks. He had 10 against California, bumping his career total to 341. He passed Mark Kearns, Steve Rennie and Chad Cota. He needs 13 to tie Chris Cosgrove for fifth.

Keith Lewis' fourth-quarter interception was his 11th career pick, moving him into a 10th-place tie on Oregon's all-time list with Kenny Wheaton and Les Palm.

Contact the sports editor at hankhager@dailyemerald.com.



Danielle Hickey Senior Photographer

California punt returner Vincent Strang is tackled by Oregon players Saturday.

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During the first quarter, the game moved at a snail's pace with California controlling the clock for 12 minutes and 50 seconds of the 15-minute time frame.

The Golden Bears put the first points on the board with a 1-yard touchdown run by Echemandu four seconds into the second quarter.

Oregon tied the game eight minutes later when Jason Fife threw a 13-yard pass to Samie Parker in the far corner of the end zone.

California regained the lead with less than three minutes remaining in the half on a 53-yard field goal by Tyler Fredrickson, giving the half-

time score of 10-7 that held until the fourth quarter.

Rodgers, coming off a 307-yard passing game a week before, was held to 188 yards in the air by the worst passing defense in the conference.

"We just didn't execute very well," Rodgers said. "(The Ducks are) a great defensive ball team."

Rodgers and the Golden Bears had the last opportunity of the game. With 1:15 on the clock, California got the ball on its own 25-yard line.

"It's a tough situation," Rodgers said. "Forty-one seconds and (75) yards to go. We hit a couple passes right off the bat and I thought we were going to do a little more, but I made a bad decision on the last one and we just couldn't do it."

After two completed passes

stopped the clock and moved the Golden Bears to the Oregon 33, Rodgers missed on two straight to create a 3rd-and-10 from Oregon's 33.

But Rodgers was intercepted by Keith Lewis with eight seconds remaining to hold the game for Oregon.

As the Golden Bears recover from such a dramatic finish, they have things they need to focus on, or one thing in particular.

"It's a two-game season," Rodgers said.

With a 5-6 record following Saturday's heartbreaking loss to the Ducks, California has two games left to become bowl eligible.

Contact the senior sports reporter at mindirice@dailyemerald.com.

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Autzen at game time — the team was unprepared for the high intensity of Oregon attitude.

Golden Bear players said they practiced with the noise levels higher than normal this week but it may not have helped.

"When you get in the game situation, it's way different," tight end Garrett Cross said. "I've never heard a sta-

dium so loud."

Loud? Saturday was nothing. Saturday was like listening to the Willamette River compared to when Autzen is really loud, much like the 2001 Civil War or this season's game against Michigan.

The Oregon fans "are infamous for their noise," Cross said.

With an announced attendance of 57,511, Oregon's 29th-consecutive sellout at Autzen, the Ducks were still missing fans. A surprising part of the student section — half of an entire section and chunks in the others —

was empty for the game.

Although the students really can't be blamed, I suppose. Many people were expecting a blowout of epic proportions, or at least not the exciting, come-from-behind, last-chance win that Oregon hadn't seen since early in the 2002 season.

The fans were noisy, I will give them that. In the final minutes of the game, it was rockin' and rollin' in the stands, even while many fans had left because of the 23-minute dark spell, rain, cold or the probability of the Ducks losing

another game this season.


But after Jason Fife started to run cold, Bellotti made another change, and Clemens returned after starting the game one of six. The quarterback-by-committee system returned to its early glory of one helping the other when in need.

And the fans who remained cheered. It wasn't as loud as it could have been, but considering how many fans had departed, the remaining ones still made an impression on the visiting Golden Bears.

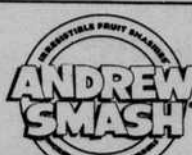
"It's something you're always looking forward to when you're young, playing in Division I football," Cross said. "Autzen is different, the noise is so big. It's really fun, it gets you really going. There's nothing like it."

That's for sure. Nothing like it at all. Oregon players know it and Duck fans make it happen.

Contact the senior sports reporter at mindirice@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



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