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Oregon State tailback Steven Jackson, averaging 126.6 rushing yards per game, ran for 153 yards in last year's Civil War.

## Jackson in class of his own as leader of Beaver offense

Oregon knows it needs to slow down Steven Jackson to have a shot at winning the Civil War

By Jon Roetman  
Sports Reporter

The question facing Oregon this week: How do you stop Steven Jackson?

Its answer: You don't. Along with Duck defenders, head coach Mike Bellotti spoke highly of Oregon State's bruising running back and said a defense's best option against Jackson is trying to contain him rather than stopping him.

"Steven Jackson is the one that makes the (Beaver) offense go," Bellotti said. "When (he) runs the ball, a lot of things happen. I think you have to try and contain him. He's a tremendous back."

Just how tremendous is Jackson? "He's the best back in the nation in my opinion," Bellotti said.

During the 2002 Civil War, then-sophomore Jackson carried the ball 36 times for 153 yards and two touchdowns. He also caught two passes for 70 yards and another score, helping the Beavers to a 45-24 trouncing of the Ducks.

An amazing blend of size and speed, the 6-foot-3-inch 229-pound junior owns the fastest 40-yard dash time in school history at 4.3 seconds.

In order to contain Jackson, the Oregon defense will need to be quick to the ball as it often takes more than one defender to bring him down.

"He's a hell of a back," Oregon linebacker Jerry Matson said. "He's so fast that you wouldn't think he's (229) pounds. We just have to do our jobs, fly to the ball and gang tackle. He's a hell of a player, and you have to take care of him. It's no easy days' work."

Jackson entered 2003 as an Athlon Sports first team preseason All-American. So far, he's held up his end of the deal as he enters Saturday's Civil War with the nation's sixth best rushing average of 126.6 yards per game. Jackson has rushed for 1,266 yards this season, which is more than four other teams in the Pacific-10 Conference.

With opposing defenses focusing on him, Jackson's body often takes a beating. He's averaged 28 carries a game this season, which is up from 25 a game in 2002. Despite the physical punishment he's received, the Las Vegas native is ready for Saturday's showdown with the Ducks.

"I feel pretty good," Jackson said. "The pounding that I'm taking is why you lift weights weekly and take care of your body in the training room. The training and the strength staffs have done a great job helping me stay healthy."

While his statistics speak for themselves, the most impressive aspects Jackson brings to the table are his physical attributes. Along with blaz-

ing speed, Jackson can bench press 355 pounds, squat 520, power clean 314 and has a 38-inch vertical jump.

"He's got the size, he's got the speed and the strength, he's got the vision, he's got good hands, he's able to run after he catches the ball or when they hand him the ball," linebacker Kevin Mitchell said. "He's got everything you want as a running back."

Jackson has a mutual respect for Mitchell as well. The Oregon State star admires Mitchell's talents, but said he's up for the challenge of facing the Duck linebacker.

"Kevin is a good player," Jackson said. "But you have to remember I go up against guys like Richard Seigler every day in practice, so I'm used to competing against very good players every day."

Jackson's talents have NFL scouts drooling. Mitchell said the running back "has what it takes" to play at the next level. The decision whether or not to leave for the professional ranks after his junior season awaits Jackson at the end of the year. Until that time comes, however, Jackson and the rest of the Beavers will be focused on beating the Ducks.

"To me there's no question who the most outstanding player in the (Pac-10) is," Oregon State head coach Mike Riley said. "I wouldn't trade him for anybody."

Contact the sports reporter at [jonroetman@dailymerald.com](mailto:jonroetman@dailymerald.com).

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