

IN BRIEF

Poll predicts third-place Pac-10 finish for Oregon

Oregon is predicted to finish third in the Pacific-10 Conference by the league's annual football preseason media poll.

The poll predicted that USC will win next year's Pac-10 Conference championship with a total of 240 points — claiming all 24 first place votes. California was second with 210 points and Oregon took third with 192.

Last season, USC captured its 10th national championship after going 12-1 and winning their last nine games. It is the second

year in a row that the Trojans were picked in the media poll to win the conference title.

Oregon finished third last season with an overall record of 8-5.

The Pac-10 media have correctly selected the past four Pac-10 champions, including Oregon in 2001.

They have also correctly picked five of the past six champions. In 1999, the media members wrongly predicted Arizona to win the conference title, but the Wildcats ended up finishing sixth. Stanford won the Pac-10 crown that year after being predicted eighth.

In the rest of the media poll, Oregon State was picked fourth (138), followed by Washington State (133), Arizona State (131), Washington (100), UCLA (98), Stanford

(40) and Arizona (38).

In the ESPN/USA Today Coaches Preseason Top 25 Poll released Saturday, Oregon slipped in at No. 25.

— Alex Tam

LiaBraaten ready to play both ways

Junior tight end Nate LiaBraaten will be seeing action on both sides of the ball Saturday against Indiana.

The Bend native is a backup for both the tight end and defensive end positions, according to the latest depth chart.

LiaBraaten has caught three passes in his career with one touchdown, but still hasn't seen any time on defense.

"Nate's a warrior and he will

probably see double duty," head coach Mike Bellotti said. "He's smart enough and in good enough physical condition to handle that."

Bellotti still doesn't know whether he will see more action offensively or defensively.

"Because of our tight end situation, he probably needs to play tight end more, but I'm not sure if we can take him away from the defense because he's a valuable asset on that side too," Bellotti said.

Starting season strong

Season openers for the Ducks have treated them kindly over the past 20 years. Oregon has lost only twice, with its last loss coming at the hands of Michigan State in 1999.

Oregon also has won 11 straight

home debuts and 19 of its last 20 since 1983. Its only loss came in a 21-15 defeat at the hands of Pacific to open the 1983 season.

Series history

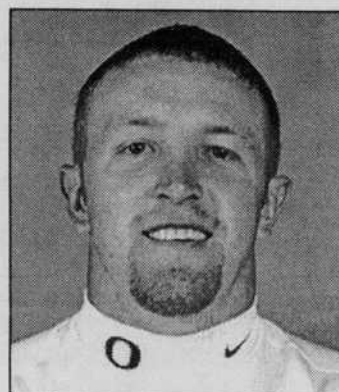
Oregon has beaten the Hoosiers in the team's only two meetings, with the last one taking place in 1964 in Bloomington, Ind. The Ducks beat Indiana 29-21 with quarterback Bob Berry completing 14 of 25 passes for 211 yards.

Saturday's game will be the first between the two in Eugene because the other game took place in Portland's Multnomah Stadium in 1963, where Oregon won 28-22.

— Clayton Jones

DUCK CAPTAINS

Four Ducks, two on offense and two on defense, were chosen as this season's team captains. Each will be looked upon to lead Oregon to its 11th straight winning season



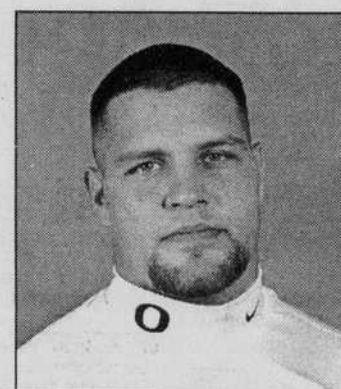
Kellen Clemens

#11 Quarterback/Jr.

6-2, 215 lbs.

Hometown: Burns

Clemens became Oregon's youngest starting quarterback since Danny O'Neil in 1992. In 2003, Clemens passed for more yards (2,400) and touchdown passes (16) than any other sophomore in Oregon history. He threw for a career-high 363 yards on 32 of 42 passing and three touchdowns against Minnesota in the Sun Bowl last season. He also set the school record for pass completion proficiency by going 15 of 17 against Stanford for an 88.2 completion percentage.



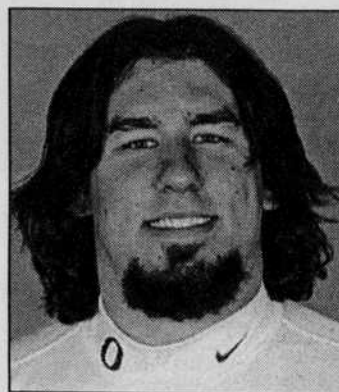
Jerry Matson

#52 Linebacker/Sr.

6-1, 225 lbs.

Hometown: Edmonds, Wash.

The former walk-on was third on the team in tackles in 2003 with 81, including 14.5 tackles for a loss. Matson's 59 solo tackles was second on the team. He returned his first career interception for a touchdown against UCLA last season. He tallied at least one tackle for a loss in 11 of the Ducks' 13 games last year. He also recorded a career-high 12 tackles against Washington. Matson is the team's only linebacker to have played all three positions, so his flexibility and knowledge aids all of the linebackers.



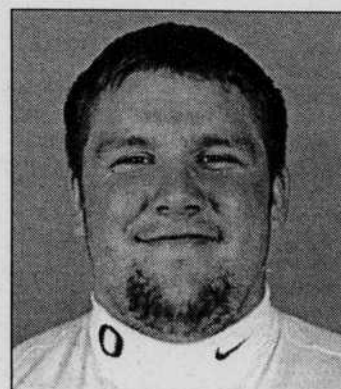
Adam Snyder

#72 Offensive Tackle/Sr.

6-6, 325 lbs.

Hometown: Whittier, Calif.

Snyder begins his senior year as a candidate for the Outland Trophy, awarded annually to the top interior lineman in the country. In 2003, Snyder became the first lineman to earn Pacific-10 Conference Offensive Player-of-the-Week since 1995 for his play against Michigan. He also became Oregon's first first-team All-Pac-10 offensive lineman in 20 years. He also helped lead the way to a season-high 218 yards rushing against Oregon State last season. He made a career 24 starts for the Ducks with his first start against USC his freshman year.



Robby Valenzuela

#99 Defensive Tackle/Sr.

6-2, 310 lbs.

Hometown: Modesto, Calif.

Dating back to his freshman year, Valenzuela has played in 30 straight games and returns as the defensive line's most experienced player. He recorded a career-high eight tackles against Utah in 2003. Valenzuela also ranked third on the team with 4.5 sacks last season, including two sacks against Michigan. He also had sacks against Washington and Utah and combined for another versus Arizona. He recovered his first career fumble against Mississippi State in 2003.

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