

New age quarterback

Oregon's future looks bright with Freshman Dennis Dixon in town

CLAYTON JONES
SPORTS REPORTER

The quarterback position has evolved over the last 15 years. Drop-back and pass quarterbacks are a thing of the past: Most college programs now seek a versatile and athletic quarterback who can create time for himself and make plays.

While quarterbacks like Akili Smith, Joey Harrington and Kellen Clemens have proved to be somewhat versatile, Oregon has something cut from a different mold in freshman Dennis Dixon.

His pure athletic ability combined with his size to see over the line and his pure quarterback skills pose a dangerous threat to opposing defenses.

"Every time you know a quarterback can run the ball as well as throw, it's so mind-boggling that you get frustrated," junior cornerback Justin Phinisee said. "You have to cover the receiver against the pass until the quarterback crosses the line of scrimmage then you have to try and make a tackle — an open field tackle at that."

But Dixon still has some experience to gain before he can take the reins of the Oregon football team.

"The coaches want to go with experience and I understand that," Dixon said. "I'm not up to par yet, but I will be and once I get to that point I'll be ready to play."

Sports is life for Dixon

Dixon's love for sports is evident in the fact he was a three-sport athlete at San Leandro High School in California. Growing up, Dixon said he and his friends would play anything they could get their hands on.

"Anything to do with a ball we were around and would play all the time," Dixon said.

Dixon's choice to become a quarterback was also made at a young age while playing Pee Wee Football.

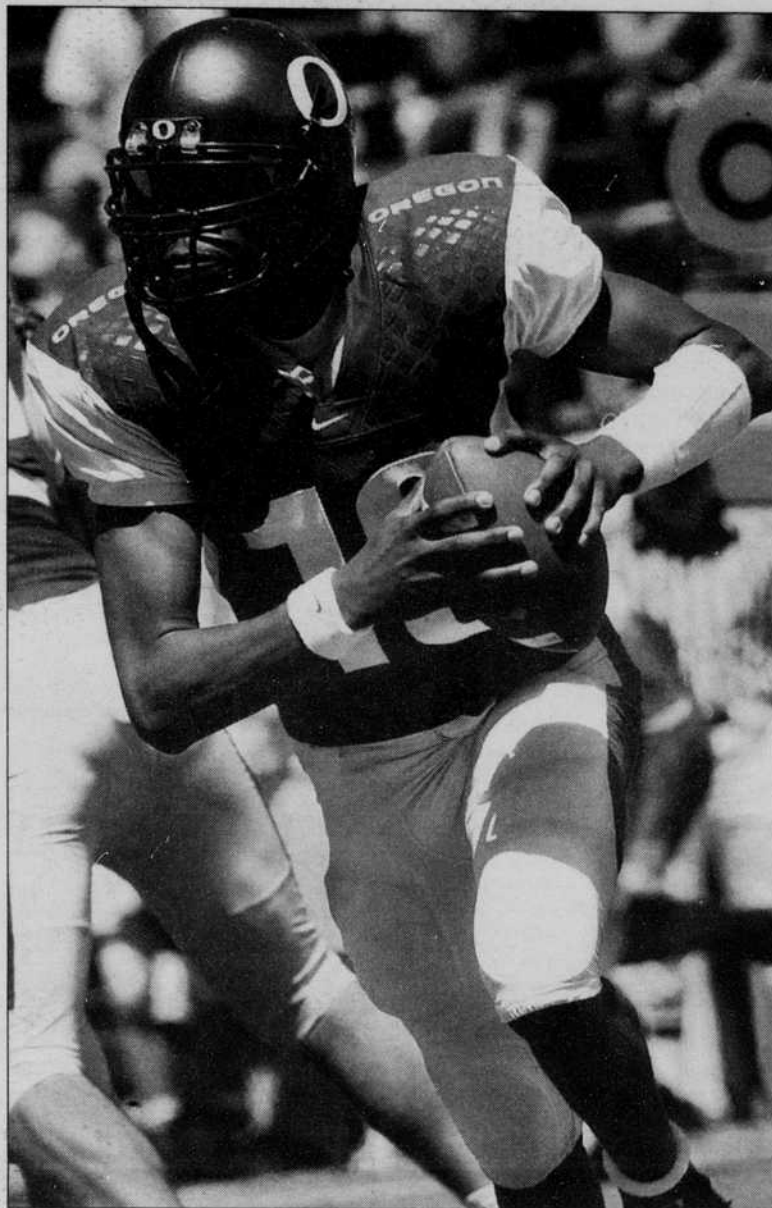
"I was always the receiver, but one day I got frustrated at the quarterback after a bad pass," Dixon said. "I threw the ball back and threw it farther than the actual quarterback could, and since then I have played quarterback."

In high school, Dixon's reputation was as a winner. He completed his high school career with a 36-3 record as a starter. All three losses came at the hands of the mighty De La Salle High School team, who recently had their 13-year, 151-game winning streak snapped.

Dixon dominated in high school after throwing for 5,951 yards and 79 touchdowns.

But football wasn't the only sport Dixon excelled at. Dixon was rated one of the top 100 high school prospects as an outfielder by Team One Baseball. With his football career still an option, many scouts were scared to draft the left-handed hitting Dixon, fearing he would choose football. He dropped to the 20th round drafted by the Cincinnati Reds in the 2003 amateur baseball draft.

Dixon's plate was pretty full in high school as he was also the



ERIK R. BISHOFF | ONLINE & PHOTO EDITOR

Freshman backup quarterback Dennis Dixon was drafted by the Cincinnati Reds in the 20th round of the 2003 amateur baseball draft as an outfielder.

starting shooting guard for his high school basketball team.

"It was a handful playing all the sports, but I never thought about quitting one of them," Dixon said. "I always got to be moving. If I'm not playing sports, I see life as boring."

Tough decisions need to be made

While in high school, Dixon had to choose a college to play football for. He knew baseball was still an option for him, depending on when he was drafted and the contract offered to him.

Dixon said he had other schools in mind, like UCLA and Washington. With his family living in Portland, he knew Oregon would be a good fit for him.

"It's like a second home for me and I knew I wanted to be in the Pac-10," Dixon said. "I get to see my family every week, whether I go up there or they come down here."

Once Dixon found out where he placed in the baseball draft in June 2003, he had to make a decision. According to Major League Baseball rules, he wouldn't be eligible for the draft again until 2006 if he didn't sign with Cincinnati before he started college. The Reds weren't offering a deal acceptable to him, so he didn't sign. Dixon then chose to come to Oregon and play football.

"It was a tough decision to make

between football and baseball," Dixon said. "I still really don't know what I'm going to do. I'm keeping my options open. Next summer I might end up playing a little summer baseball."

Adjusting to college life in Eugene

Dixon enrolled at Oregon during winter term so he could participate in spring football. The change from the Bay Area to Eugene was a good one for the soft-spoken quarterback.

"It is much quieter here, and I like that," Dixon said. "I hang out with a lot of guys from the Bay Area, so in that aspect not a lot has changed."

To keep himself entertained, Dixon said he and some of his teammates get together and hang out.

"We chill and lay back at home and play video games," Dixon said. "We go to a party every once in a while because you do have to get out."

The game of choice for the players is NCAA Football 2005, and Dixon says it's exciting to see himself on the game.

"You got to be yourself when you're playing," Dixon said. "Also, seeing guys you know from high school on there is a good feeling."

But it is his playing on the field that is giving everybody who watches Dixon a good feeling.

"He's a really good athlete and passer, so I'm glad he's on our team,"

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