

## ■ In my opinion

# Do we all expect too much from Oregon every year?

It's their chance to redeem themselves.

It's their chance to show the whole country that last weekend's loss to traditional Big Ten Conference cellar dweller Indiana was a fluke.

It's their chance to prove to the fans that there is hope for the season.

The Ducks, who play at No. 2 Oklahoma on Saturday at 12:30 p.m., now look to bounce back from the turnover-happy game that marked last Saturday's loss.

However, were the expectations too high here in Eugene before the season?

Since the Joey Harrington era, and even before that with the 1995 Rose Bowl team, Duck fans have come to expect big things

from their team every year.

Since 1995, Oregon has made a bowl game nine straight seasons. Not bad for a program that made a total of just nine bowl games in the 87 years before that. In the more recent bowl games, the Ducks have a 4-5 record, including two losses in a row the last two years.

This past weekend, Oregon fans didn't take long to express their frustration toward their team when the booing began near the end of the second quarter in the 30-24 loss to Indiana.

As the players entered the locker rooms for halftime, an enormous shower of boos flooded Autzen Stadium for the first time in a very long while.

A home crowd — which usually reserves its booing for the visiting

team, the referees or a poorly created mascot — simply kicked down its team even further as the Ducks trailed by 23 points after the first half.

The expectations just continue to rise at Oregon, year after year.

The question is, were the expectations set too high for this school's football team this year?

Every year, fans continually set lofty goals for their Ducks. Those



ALEX TAM  
HOLDING COURT

include finishing at the top of the Pacific-10 Conference, going to a high-profile bowl game, winning and then doing it all again next time.

The Ducks have made their imprint on the country as a program that will make a bowl game every year. But I think it's still safe to say that Oregon, as a football program, still has a little ways to go before it is considered among the elite programs in the country.

Is Oregon up in the same ranks as Miami, Florida State, Florida, Texas, USC or even this weekend's opponent, Oklahoma?

No, not yet, but close.

Could it eventually be?

Yes, it's possible.

Certainly, building a traditionally winning program helps out, which is what head coach Mike Bellotti has done in the past decade. In his nine seasons at the helm of Oregon football, Bellotti has accumulated 75 victories out of 109 games. He is just seven wins shy of tying former Oregon head coach Len Casanova as the

second-winningest football coach in school history.

That winning tradition always attracts big name recruits. It also helps to have a \$3.2 million state-of-the-art locker room.

The building blocks are in place here for a national championship contender every year.

But still, are they there yet?

A simple no, not yet.

Losing to an Indiana team in the home opener in front of at least 57,000 does not happen at an elite football program.

Seven turnovers, including four fumbles in the first quarter and two interceptions on the last two drives, cannot happen at all.

I believe, though, that Oregon will eventually be one of the elite football programs in the country.

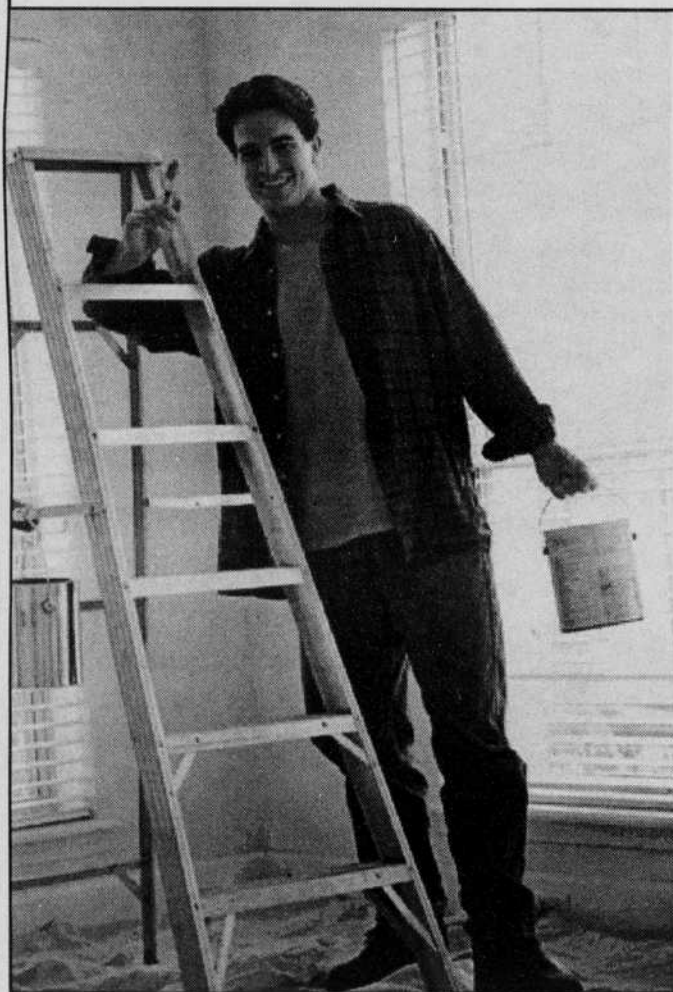
We'll just see how far the Ducks are from it after their game in Norman, Okla., this weekend.

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### ■ Oregon notes

## Oregon's injuries heal and look to be healthy for Sooners

*Day is 100 percent, Ngata suffers only postgame soreness and Phinisee is probable for Oklahoma*

CLAYTON JONES  
SPORTS REPORTER

Though a stress fracture kept him from practicing as much as he would have liked, it appears Oregon's all-conference tight end Tim Day is at full strength and ready to go against Oklahoma.

Day said his stress fracture is completely healed and a slight injury last week hasn't hampered his practices. He is getting all his repetitions in with the first team.

"I tweaked my knee during the week of the Indiana game," Day said. "I'm doing everything 100 percent, full-go at practice and will be ready."

Day didn't start the game against Indiana for precautions, but had two receptions for 32 yards. He will have to be a bigger part of the offense if the Ducks want to pull off the upset against No. 2-ranked Oklahoma.

Day said he understands that his staying healthy will be one of the keys to the team's success against Oklahoma.

"Now I'm better and ready to go get the Sooners," Day said.

Oregon's late-season success last year was the team's ability to throw to an array of receivers and to utilize Day's pass catching skills.

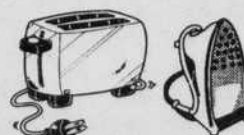
OREGON, page 5

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