

Oregon's big *Day*

Tim Day's ability could make life easier for the Oregon offense

BY JON ROETMAN
SENIOR SPORTS REPORTER

The solution to Oregon's lack of big plays in the passing game is clear as day — Tim Day, that is.

Oregon's massive tight end is still playing his way back into shape after missing four weeks prior to fall camp with a stress fracture in his right foot. Once the junior returns to top form, however, his presence in the middle of the field will no longer allow defenses to focus on stopping the Ducks' talented group of wide receivers.

"Tim Day determines how many balls Tim Day gets," head coach Mike Bellotti said. "He's not totally in shape yet. I would anticipate, each week as he gets more into playing shape, that he will become more of a factor in what we do."

Day got open when he was needed most against Idaho last Saturday, hauling in three catches for 27 yards and two touchdowns. Oregon receivers hope Day's performance against the Vandals is a sign of things to come, seeing as how the tight end's pair of scores doubled the amount of touchdowns produced by Duck wideouts this season.

"He opens everything up," wide receiver Marcus Maxwell said. "If we can get Tim Day the ball, we'll be very successful. I believe we've got to get him the ball seven to 10 times a game. If we get him the ball, guys will be focusing on him and it will open it up for us on the outside."

A lot of responsibility has been placed on the Las Vegas native, who made the transition from guard to tight end before his senior year at Western High School. One look at Day's physical stature, however, reveals why the Oregon coaching staff expects so much from its pass-catching phenom.

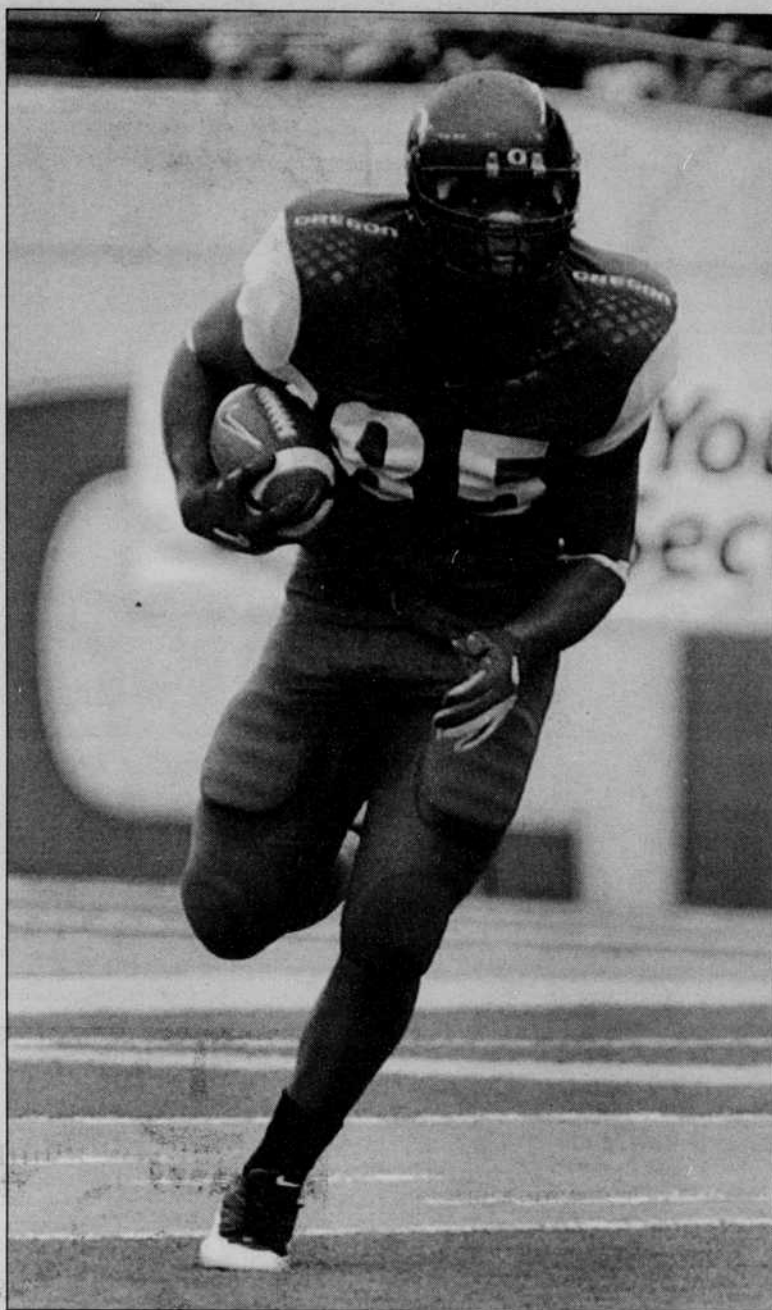
Day's 6-foot-4, 268-pound frame gives quarterbacks a can't-miss target. His enormous hands are capable of snagging even the most errant of passes and his tree-trunk legs make sure he punishes any defender that gets in his way. His 540-pound squat is good for third on the team.

And then, of course, there are the tight end's hulking arms, which appear larger than an average man's thighs. Each massive branch features a tattoo of one of his initials. The "T" on his right was done first, when he arrived at Oregon as a freshman in 2001. He added the "D" on his left arm at the end of his freshman year.

While his mother, Levon Day, wasn't a big supporter of the body art, Day's ink is symbolic of what he can create on the field.

Touchdowns.

"Mom wasn't too happy about



LAUREN WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon's vertical passing game will excel if tight end Tim Day can get on track. The junior caught two touchdown passes last Saturday against Idaho.

them," Day said with a smile. "I'd been wanting to get one for awhile but she said once I move out of the house and I'm paying my own bills, I can get my tattoos."

"At first they were just for my initials, but they took on a double meaning. My coaches and teammates call me TD."

While scoring touchdowns gets notoriety, it's an under-appreciated skill for which Day is most proud of: The tight end's size and strength has helped turn him into one of the team's best run blockers.

"Any tight end can catch the ball," Day said. "But I take pride in blocking."

Day's skills at the tight end position have evolved rather quickly. He went from being an athlete with tremendous potential during his redshirt year in 2001 to an honorable mention All-Pac-10 Conference tight end by his sophomore season in 2003. If he continues at this pace, the name Tim Day will certainly be added to the long list of Oregon tight

ends — including Justin Peelle and George Wrihster — who have played at the next level.

Day gave Oregon fans a glimpse of just how good he could be during a nationally televised showdown with California last season. He turned a short pass into a 31-yard touchdown to help the Ducks overcome a 10-point deficit in the game's final six minutes.

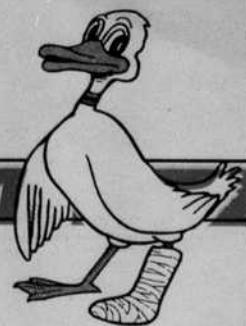
This season, Day has caught seven passes for 81 yards and two touchdowns in three games. With Oregon entering Pac-10 play against Arizona State on Saturday, the Ducks might need Day to reach those numbers every game.

One thing's for sure: Day's physical talents make him capable of anything.

"He's kind of freakish because there aren't too many guys who can go out there and run or be as athletic as Tim," defensive back Jackie Bates said. "He's pretty rare I would say."

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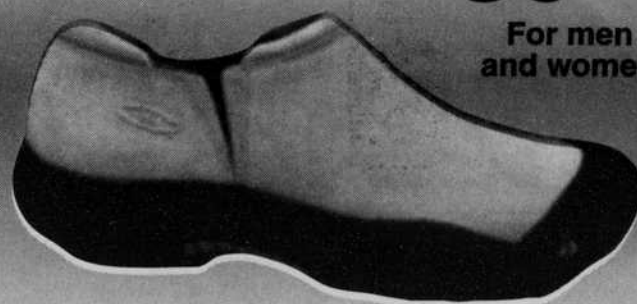
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