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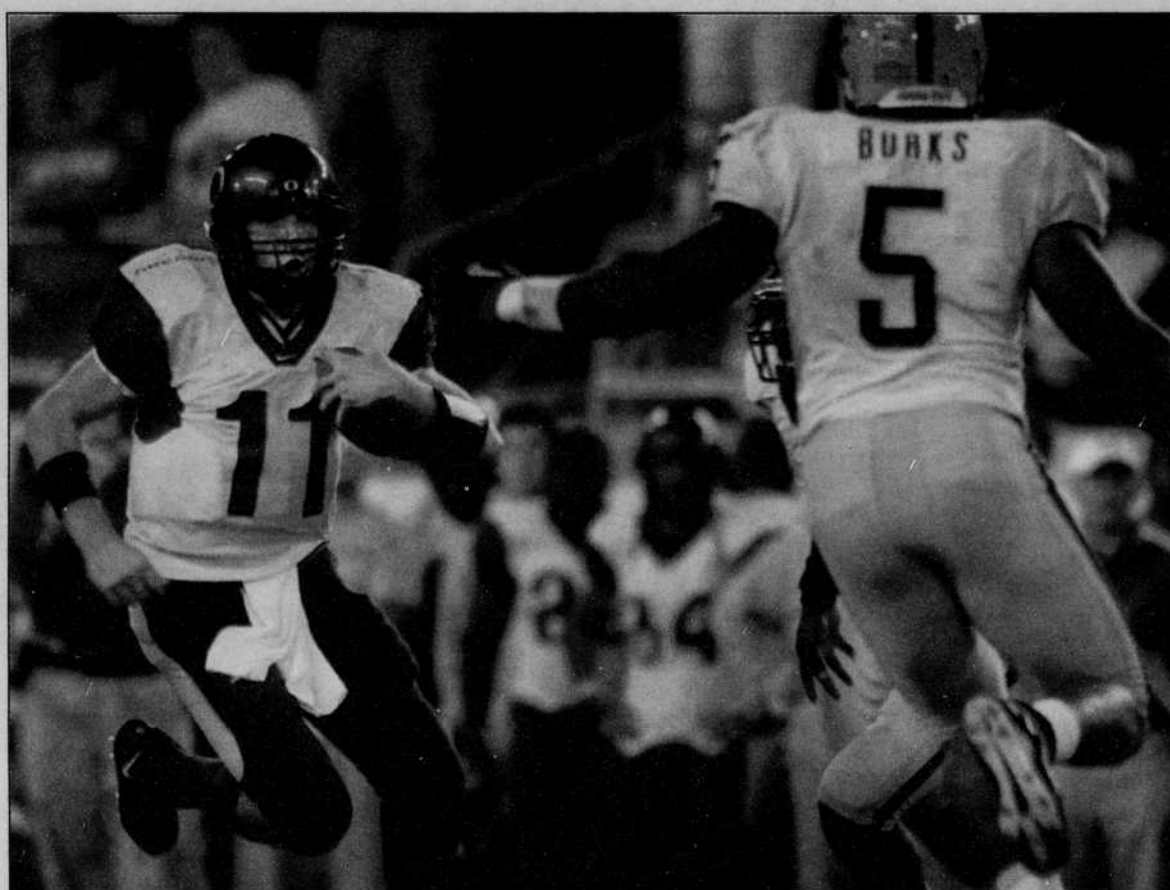
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LAUREN WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon quarterback Kellen Clemens (11) returns from his six-touchdown performance last week against Washington State to face Arizona Saturday in Eugene.

Improved Wildcat team will present tough test for Ducks

First-year head coach Mike Stoops has Arizona playing on a higher level

BY CLAYTON JONES
SPORTS EDITOR

With new leadership and a new attitude, this year's Arizona team will be a far cry from last year's squad, which Oregon flattened 48-10.

Mike Stoops has turned a team that gave up points at will last season into a team that has become more than respectable, though Arizona's 1-4 overall and 0-2 Pacific-10 Conference record doesn't show it.

"I think they are a dramatically improved team that has great speed on defense," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "They are five plays away from being undefeated."

The Wildcats, other than Saturday's 37-17 loss to UCLA, have been in every contest this season. They were a last-second field goal away from beating No. 10 Wisconsin, and a late fumble cost them the Washington State game.

"We're certainly two plays away from being 3-2 at this time," Arizona head coach Mike Stoops said.

Stoops, who was the defensive coordinator under brother Bob Stoops at Oklahoma, has brought a defensive tenacity and discipline to Arizona. The Wildcats are third in the Pac-10 in total defense and average the second-fewest yards in penalties per game.

Bellotti said Stoops has brought his Oklahoma-style defense to Arizona.

"They remind me of Oklahoma because they do recruit speed on defense and they're allowing that speed to run and play," Bellotti said.

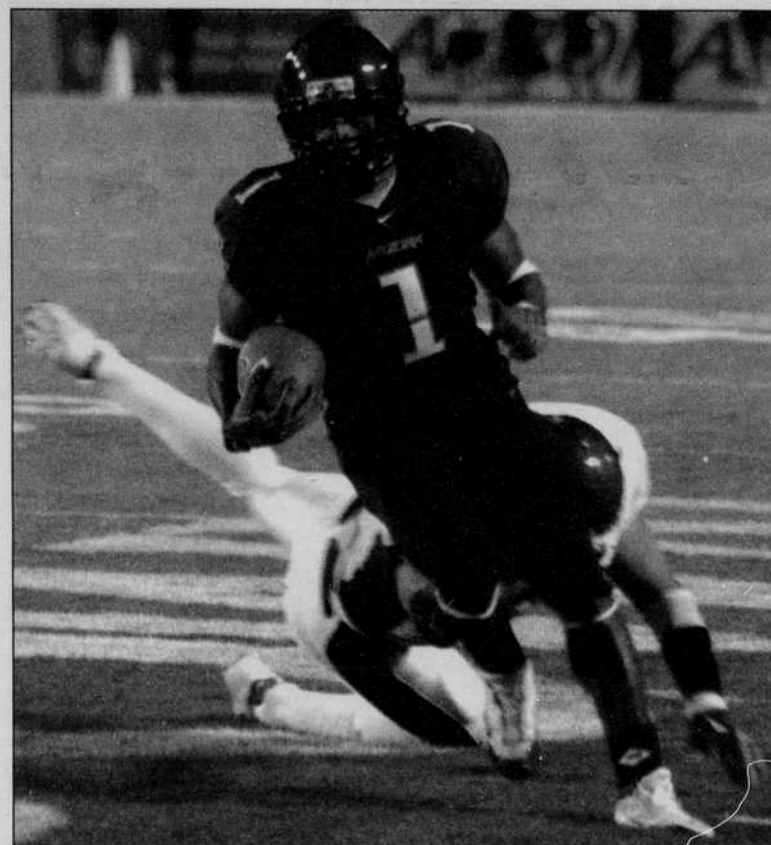
Stoops doesn't see the comparison between the two defenses.

"I don't think it can (be the same defense) unless we can borrow some of (Oklahoma's) players," Stoops said.

"We're not that blessed," Stoops said. "We have to work harder and create negative plays."

The Wildcat defense has received a boost from junior strong safety Lamont Means' play. He leads the team in tackles with 35 and has a sack and a recovered fumble.

"Lamont Means is a great football



COURTESY | ARIZONA ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT

Sophomore Syndric Steptoe leads Arizona receivers in almost every offensive category. This season, Steptoe has caught 15 passes for 258 yards and three touchdowns.

player," Bellotti said. "He makes a lot of plays and against Wisconsin he had a monster game."

Means had a career-high 12 tackles against the Badgers, including eight solo tackles and two for a loss.

The defense as a whole has stepped up as they are allowing 151 yards less per game than last season.

Arizona's defense will be put to the test Saturday because Oregon's offense was revived last weekend as it put up a massive 646 yards of total offense on Washington State, the then-No. 2 defense in the conference.

Stoops said Oregon quarterback Kellen Clemens' performance wasn't surprising.

"He's a gamer," Stoops said. "I like the way he plays. He's hard to bring down. He buys time, and he is a very talented player."

While the talk about the impressive numbers has run rampant the last week, Clemens knows they have

to put it behind them.

"It's not going to do us any good if we don't beat Arizona," Clemens said. "We can't get too high in the wins or too low in the losses."

A key for the Oregon offense is keeping a balanced attack. While the talk was about Clemens' performance, Terrence Whitehead put together a quiet 237 all-purpose yards.

While the Ducks offense has put it into third gear, the Wildcat offense hasn't gotten out of the driveway yet.

Arizona's offense sits at the bottom of the Pac-10 in passing, scoring and total offense.

The main problem seems to be its passing game. The Wildcats ran for 263 yards last week, but quarterback Kris Heavner and the rest of the Arizona offense could only manage 93 yards through the air.

Though his statistics aren't very impressive, Bellotti said that

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