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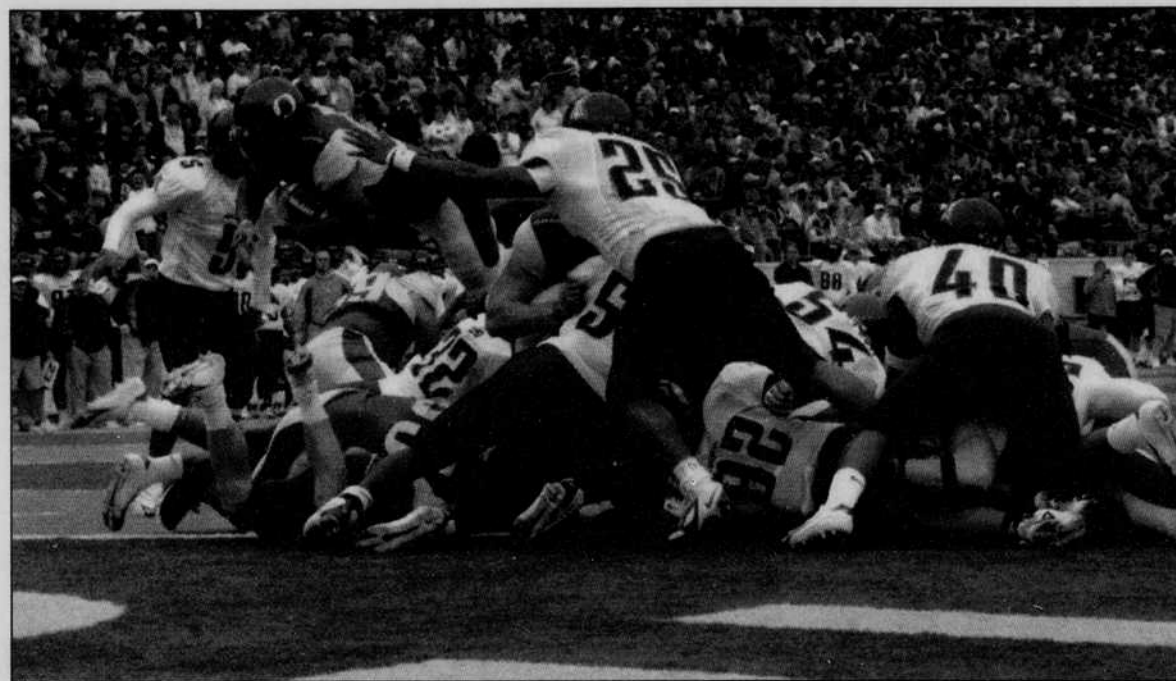
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Oregon running back Terrence Whitehead jumps over a pile to score one of his three touchdowns in a 28-14 win against Arizona Saturday.

Much-improved Stanford poses threat to Oregon

Oregon's passing game needs to succeed to beat Cardinal on the road

BY JON ROETMAN
SENIOR SPORTS REPORTER

Another week, another important game for the Oregon football team.

After two much-needed conference wins, the Ducks (3-3 overall, 2-1 Pacific-10 Conference) travel to Stanford, Calif., to take on the Cardinal Saturday at Stanford Stadium.

Oregon makes its first trip to "The Farm" since 1997, when Stanford was on the winning end of a 58-49 shootout.

The Cardinal (4-2, 2-1) has been the biggest surprise of the Pac-10 season, having already equaled its win total from 2003. Stanford has held its own in one of the nation's toughest conferences, including a near upset of top-ranked Southern California.

Led by the strong right arm of quarterback Trent Edwards, the Cardinal poses a serious threat to derail the Ducks.

Edwards has rebounded from a shoulder injury he suffered last season to complete 56 percent of his passes for 1,390 yards and eight touchdowns in 2004.

Edwards' play has grabbed the attention of Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti, who said the sophomore is one of the most dangerous quarterbacks the Ducks will face this season.

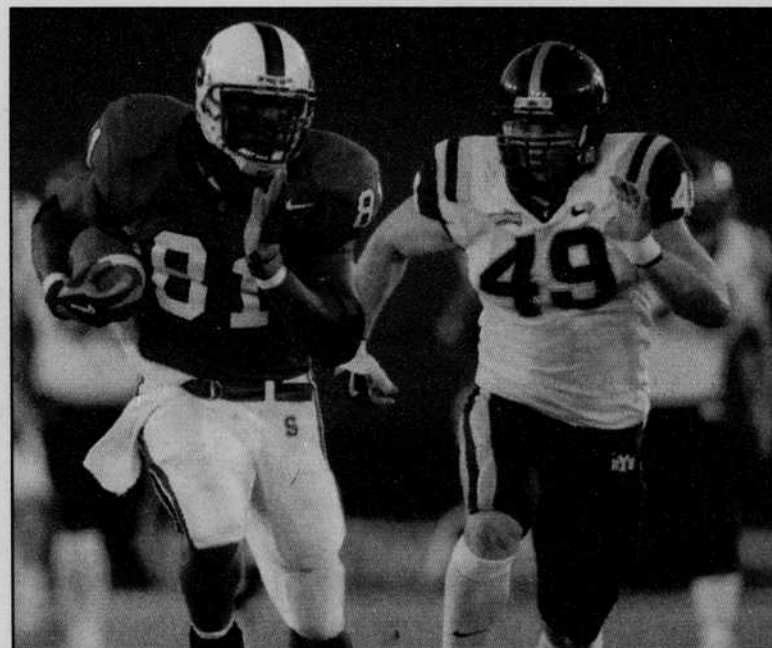
"Stanford is a much improved football team," Bellotti said. "I think you can trace it to the development of Trent Edwards. He's a very accurate passer, and one of the most mobile quarterbacks I've seen this year. I have great concerns with limiting his mobility and keeping him in the pocket."

Along with his own athletic ability, Edwards has plenty of weapons around him. Tight end Alex Smith leads the Cardinal with 25 receptions. The 6-foot-5, 255-pounder has been a solid mid-range target for Edwards, amassing 286 yards and a score.

Evan Moore produces constant mismatches on the outside. The 6-foot-7 wide receiver, who is also a forward on the basketball team, leads the team with 407 receiving yards and five touchdowns.

When Smith and Moore are covered, Mark Bradford (6-foot-2) and Justin McCullum (6-foot-4) have been dependable targets.

While Oregon cornerbacks Aaron Gipson (5-foot-9) and Jackie Bates (5-foot-10) have been solid of late, Bellotti said the vertically challenged duo will need to play technically



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Stanford tight end Alex Smith (81), seen here against BYU, has a team-high 25 receptions. The senior has accrued 286 yards and one touchdown this season.

sound football in order to deal with Stanford's towering receivers.

"They'll be tested because they're not the biggest corners in the world," Bellotti said. "But they're very athletic, very quick and playing with great confidence."

"It just comes down to playing with good technique. You have to be in the correct position, and you have to be ready when the ball is there. No matter how tall a guy is, at some point they bring the ball down, and the ability to punch it out or drive through the extended arm (is important)."

When asked what else his corners could do to compensate for a lack of height, Bellotti jokingly said, "wear elevator shoes (or) put springs on (their) feet."

Stanford has also been successful on the ground with running backs J.R. Lemon and Kenneth Tolon. While their running styles differ, both backs have produced. Lemon leads the team with 397 yards and six touchdowns in 72 carries. Tolon has added 274 yards and a score in 62 carries.

"J.R. is more of a power type guy and Kenneth has more of a 'wiggly,'" Stanford head coach Buddy Teevens said. "They both do a good job of making cuts, and I think they complement one another. It makes it difficult for a defense to prepare for both of them at the same time."

Oregon's defense is tops in the Pac-10 against the pass (174.5 yards per game) and sixth against the run (128.8 ypg), making for some interesting matchups.

"They're a really balanced team,

so you can't get a very good beat on what they are trying to do," Oregon linebacker Jerry Matson said. "They've turned themselves around and put their athletes into a position to make a lot of plays."

Offensively, Oregon should attack Stanford through the air. Quarterback Kellen Clemens has re-established his on-field rapport with receiver Demetrius Williams and tight end Tim Day, leading to more than 750 passing yards during the last two weeks.

Stanford's defense ranks dead-last in the Pac-10 against the pass, allowing 228.3 yards per game. Where the Cardinal excels, however, is keeping opponents out of the end zone. Stanford has allowed only 16.2 points per game, good for second-best in the conference.

If the Ducks can capitalize on their scoring opportunities, they'll be in good shape.

One player who will surely help Oregon's chances is running back Terrence Whitehead. The junior tailback has rushed for 566 yards and four touchdowns this season and has been one of the Ducks' most potent weapons.

Despite suffering a hip injury against Washington State, Whitehead has continued to fight for tough yards.

"Terrence has been a warrior," Bellotti said. "He's carried the ball more at this stretch of the season than he has previously. He has done a great job getting yards after contact."

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