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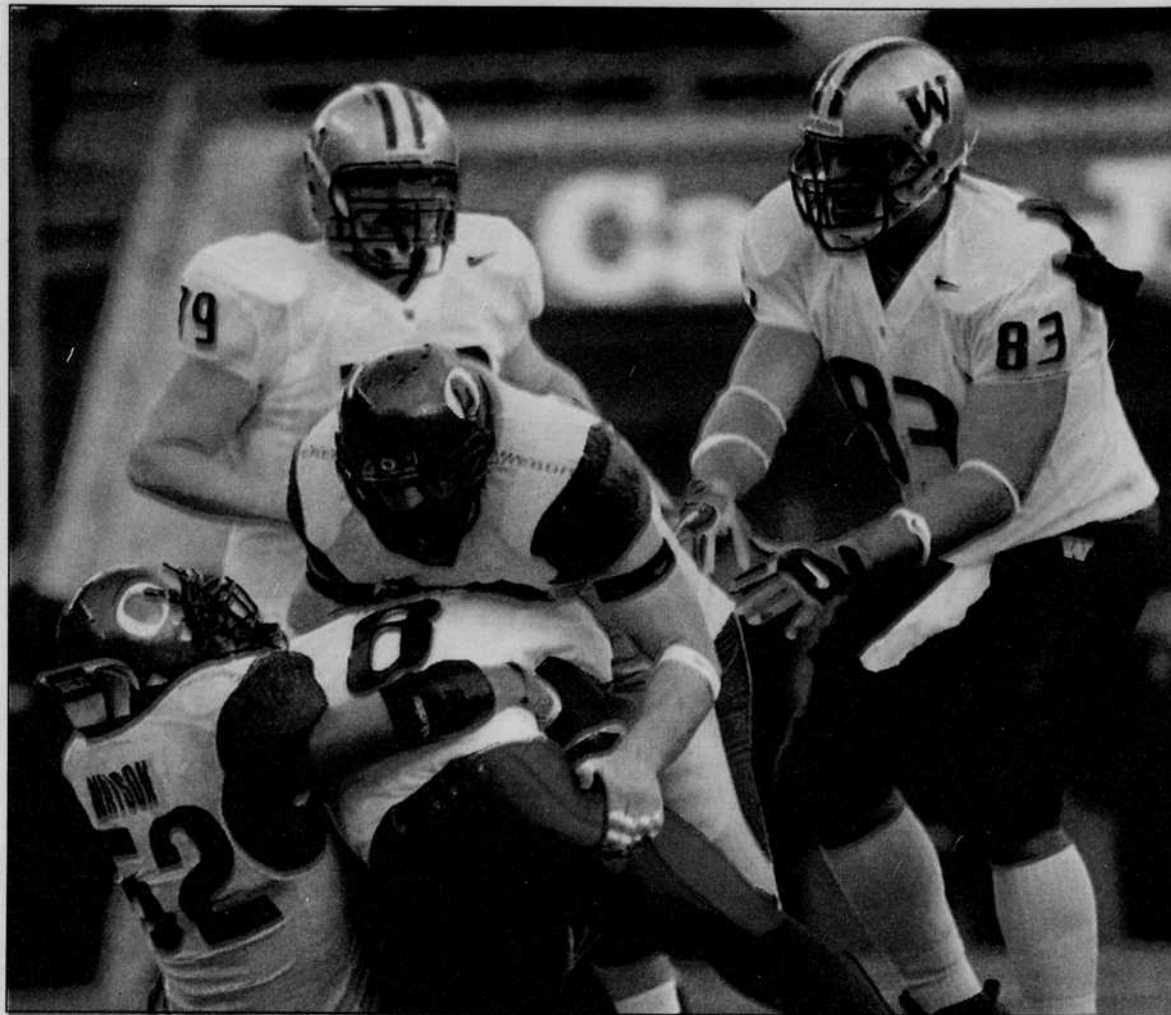
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OREGON DAILY EMERALD

The independent newspaper for the UO community

11/03/04



ERIK R. BISHOFF | PHOTOGRAPHER

Led by middle linebacker Jerry Matson (52) and defensive end Devan Long (also on tackle), the Oregon defense has allowed only 33 points during its last three games. They will be tested against the No.1 scoring team in the Conference.

UO anticipates Cal game with anxious confidence

The Ducks face a top-five opponent on the road for the second time this season

BY JON ROETMAN
SENIOR SPORTS REPORTER

Saturday's showdown between Oregon and No. 4 California is more than just a battle for second place in the Pacific-10 Conference. It's a chance for the Ducks to prove they belong with the nation's big boys.

Oregon (5-3 overall, 4-1 Pac-10) with its revamped defense travels to Memorial Stadium in Berkeley, Calif., for a regionally televised (ABC, 12:30 p.m.) contest with Cal, whose only loss came at the hands of top-ranked Southern California. The Golden Bears (6-1, 4-1) rank at or near the top in almost every major statistical category in the Pac-10 and have outscored their opponents 273-86.

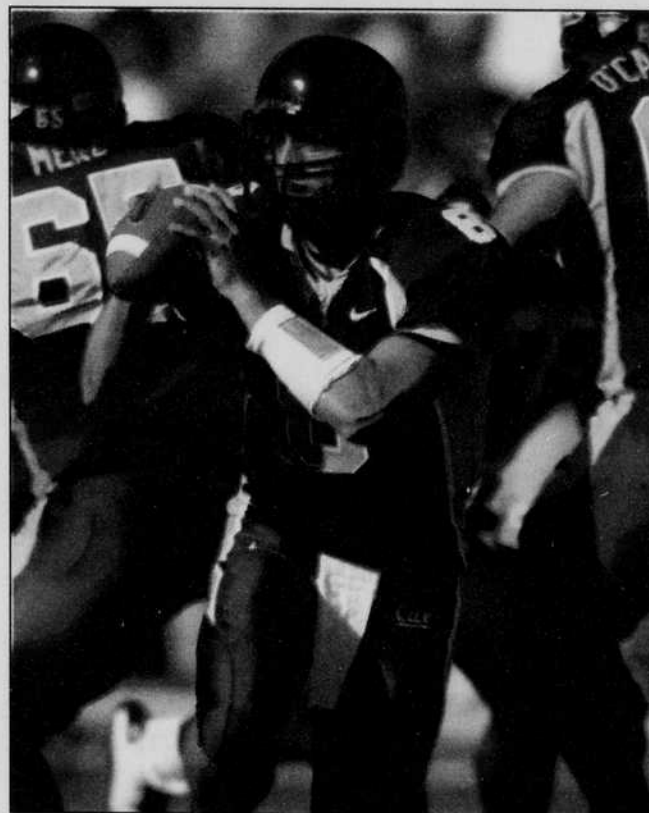
Cal also sports the nation's fourth-best offense, ninth-best rushing attack and is ranked No. 14 in total defense.

While the two teams feature equal conference records, odds-makers aren't giving Oregon much consideration for a victory. Sportsbook.com lists the Golden Bears as a 21-point favorite against the Ducks, who are 0-2 against ranked opponents this year.

Oregon remains hopeful, however, with a first-string defense that has allowed only one touchdown during the last 12 quarters.

"Everybody thinks Cal is going to beat on us," cornerback Aaron Gipson said. "It really doesn't matter what people think or how much they say we're going to lose by. It just matters if we believe we can win."

Oregon defenders exuded plenty of confidence during practice this week, following a three-week stretch of dominance. The Ducks have allowed 33 points during the last three games, with 14 points coming against second-stringers late in the fourth quarter against Arizona. The streak includes a 10-sack performance against Stanford, where the Ducks held the Cardinal to minus-8 yards rushing.



Cal quarterback Aaron Rodgers has transformed himself from a junior college transfer into a Heisman Trophy candidate during two seasons with the Golden Bears.

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Last week, Oregon held Washington to a pair of field goals and forced seven Husky turnovers.

The defense has compensated for an offense that has sputtered of late. After putting up 41 points against Washington State, Oregon has struggled with turnovers and has failed to cash in on scoring opportunities.

While offensive execution would greatly increase Oregon's chance for an upset, Gipson said it isn't necessary for a win.

"It will take a complete effort to beat Cal," Gipson said. "But if that doesn't happen, I think we can count on our defense to stop Cal's offense. On defense, I feel like we can do anything right now."

Stopping Cal's offense is easier said than done. The Golden Bears feature some of the nation's top talent in a system run by head coach and former Oregon offensive

coordinator Jeff Tedford.

Quarterback Aaron Rodgers is a Heisman Trophy candidate, who leads the Pac-10 with a 167.8 pass-efficiency rating. He has thrown for 1,541 yards and 15 touchdowns, while accounting for nearly 226 yards of total offense per game.

The junior transferred to Cal last season after playing his freshman year at Butte College in Oroville, Calif. Rodgers emerged as one of the nation's best signal callers in 2003 — despite being all of 19 years old — throwing for 2,903 yards and 19 touchdowns, while leading Cal to a victory against Virginia Tech in the Insight Bowl.

Rodgers' top target has been All-American wide receiver Geoff McArthur, who has 32 receptions for 476 yards and four touchdowns. The senior became Cal's all-time leader in



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