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In my opinion

A must-win is not too far away from the truth for the Ducks

Everybody has heard the term, "This is a must-win game for us," and while it's a terrible cliché, it also captures the pure essence of a needed win.

While Oregon's game against UCLA Saturday isn't technically a "must-win," it's pretty darn close.

The Ducks are one victory away from the magical land of bowl eligibility with the Civil War on the horizon.

Sure, the team is talking about wanting to keep its streak of 10-straight winning seasons intact, but it's a bowl game that gives the Ducks the big bucks.

And at this point in the season, a winning record means a bowl game anyway, so keeping the streak alive is that much more important.

Taking care of things at home against UCLA is vital for a team that has shown streakiness on both sides of the ball and inconsistent special teams play.

The Ducks should be able to run rings around this soft and young UCLA defense. Its one standout is tackling extraordinaire linebacker Spencer Havner, and he can't be everywhere on the field at once.

Terrence Whitehead should find gaping holes to run through this week.

The question will be, can Oregon stop UCLA's rushing attack? The Ducks have shown cracks in their defensive armor when a tough running back is lined up across from them.

Cal's J.J. Arrington bounced off and through Oregon defenders for 188 yards.

UCLA's Maurice Drew is very much the same style of runner as Arrington and he could very well have



CLAYTON JONES
SEVENTH INNING STRETCH

the same kind of day. Drew demolished Washington's defense earlier this year for an incredible 322 yards and five touchdowns.

Another key aspect of this game is that it is pretty much a "must-win" for UCLA as well. The Bruins host top-ranked USC next week, meaning a loss for the Bruins for all practical purposes.

The Bruins need this win in order to become bowl eligible. They are hungry for this victory and no doubt want to get rid of the taste of Oregon coming down to the Rose Bowl for the last four years and putting it to the Bruins.

This is a dangerous team coming into Autzen Stadium Saturday. Drew Olson is establishing himself as a proficient quarterback for this team and ranks fifth in the conference in passing efficiency (130.7). If he can find his weapons, particularly UCLA's all-time receptions leader Craig Bragg, this team could throw quite a one-two punch at the Ducks on Saturday.

One thing is for certain, Oregon doesn't want its season coming down to a do-or-die matchup with the orange and black to the north.

The odds of an Oregon victory this week against UCLA are much better than next week against an Oregon

State team that seems to be getting better with every game.

This is an Oregon State team that almost defeated the so-called undefeatable Trojans of USC last weekend in a thick cloud of fog.

They would have beaten then-No. 3 LSU if just one of three missed extra points would have gone through the uprights.

As I'm sure most of the state knows, this year it's at Corvallis.

The last seven Civil War games have gone to the home team. This game is at Reser Stadium.

Not good for the Ducks. Oregon could break the streak, and has the talent to do so, but remember it's Oregon State.

The Beavers have a veteran quarterback in Derek Anderson, who, despite being maligned by the media as a bust, has thrown for over 10,000 yards in his career.

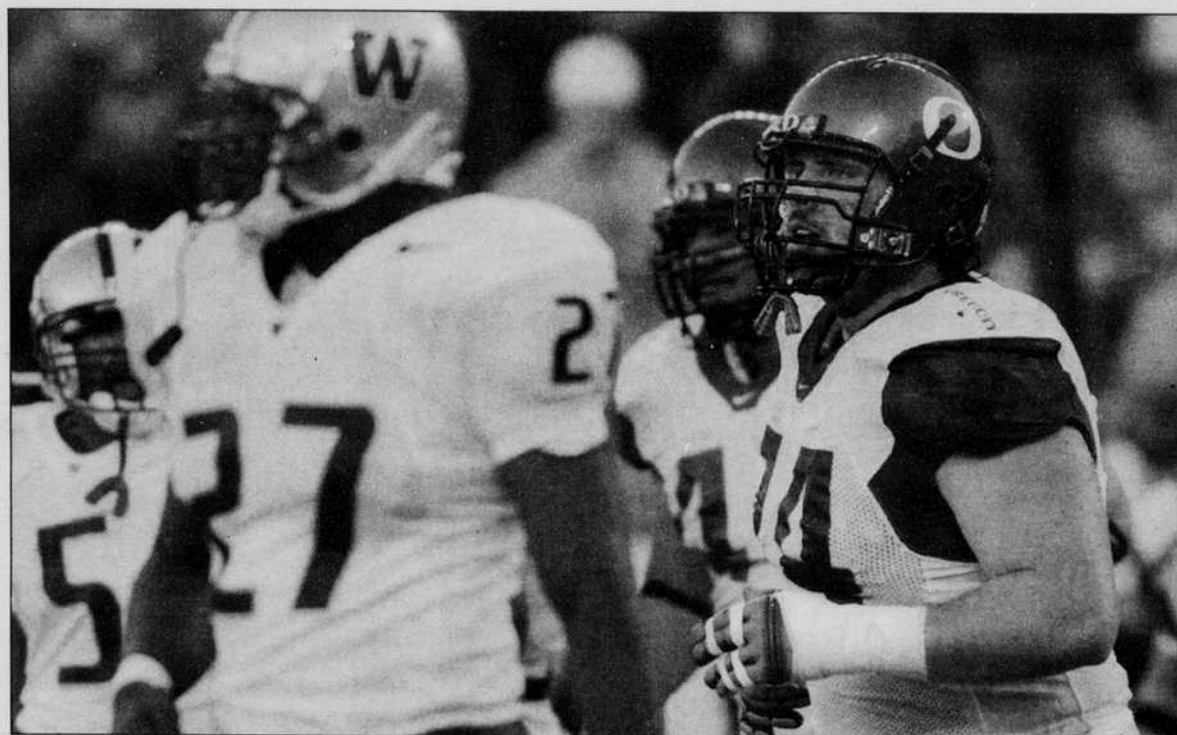
They have the confidence to know they can play with anybody in the country despite what might be a .500 record if they beat Stanford.

I apologize to the sports-writing gods for using this cliché and hope the writers' union doesn't take away my mental or 401K plan.

You can throw the record out the door when these two teams get together.

So as much as UCLA's hopes pin on this game because of its unfortunate finale against No. 1 USC, Oregon's future may be told during the 60 minutes of football played on Rich Brooks Field.

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Oregon offensive lineman Nick Steitz, seen here against Washington, and teammate Marcus Maxwell have been invited to play in the Las Vegas All-American Classic Jan. 22. Steitz will play his last game at Autzen Stadium Saturday against UCLA.

Oregon: Whitehead second in Pac-10 rushing

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teammate Anthony Trucks.

The biggest contribution that Solomona has made has been his two interception returns for touchdowns. It's a rare thing in football for linemen to score a touchdown, so the fact that Solomona has done it twice is special.

His first one came against Idaho late in the first quarter, where he stepped in front of a Michael Harrington pass and returned it 34 yards for a score.

"It was a great job of disguising coverage," Bellotti said, "but it was also a good job of getting pressure

right in his face."

His second came against Washington. On a third-and-16, Solomona intercepted a Casey Paus pass and ran it in from 10 yards out.

Whitehead nears 1,000

Oregon junior running back Terrence Whitehead stands on the brink of becoming the 10th player in school history to rush for over a 1,000 yards in a single season. With his 91 yards against Cal last week, Whitehead is now 90 yards shy of 1,000. His 910 yards rushing ranks second in the conference behind Cal's J.J.

Arrington. The all-around specialist also ranks 24th nationally in rushing with a 101.1-yard per game average.

Whitehead is fourth in all-purpose yardage in the conference and 22nd nationally, averaging 145.9 yards per game, and is the conference's leading receiver among running backs with 37 catches. He is also ninth in the conference in receptions per game.

Whitehead is averaging 113.7 rushing yards per game in six conference games this season.

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