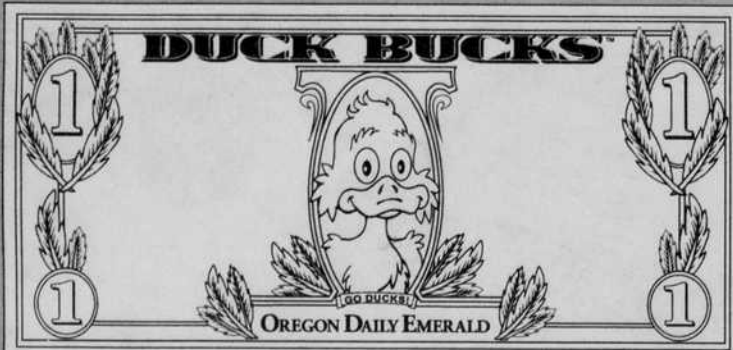


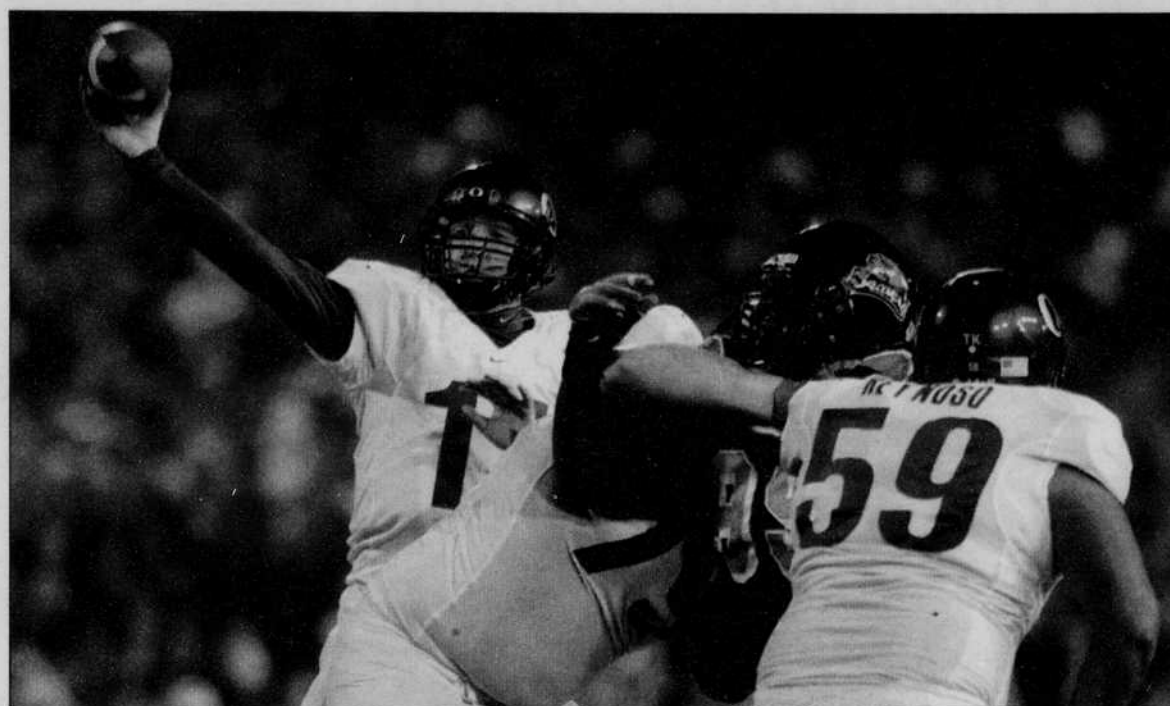
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Oregon quarterback Kellen Clemens, left, managed to record impressive statistics despite suffering the loss of many offensive playmakers, such as juniors Demetrius Williams and Tim Day (not pictured), due to injury. All three players are expected to return next season.

Lofty anticipation turns sour for Duck offense in Game 1

*Oregon's offense sank in
its first game of a season
full of disappointment*

BY JON ROETMAN
SENIOR SPORTS REPORTER

Big things were expected from the Oregon offense this season. On paper, it was comparable to the best in the nation.

The Ducks were loaded with talent at the skill positions and featured an offensive line heavy with depth and experience. They had the weapons needed to be successful on the ground or through the air. And with no sign of mighty Southern California on its schedule, the Oregon offense was poised to lead the Ducks to at least a share of the Pacific-10 Conference title.

It took only one half of one game, however, to prove that wins are earned on the field rather than on paper.

Oregon fell behind Indiana 23-0 at halftime of its season opener and never recovered. The Ducks eventually lost to the lowly Hoosiers 30-24 while turning the ball over a whopping seven times.

As the season progressed, injuries hampered key players such as wide receiver Demetrius Williams and tight end Tim Day. The offensive line, once considered a strength on the team, couldn't block. And most notably, Oregon lacked the ability to make big plays.

By season's end, Oregon was a 5-6 team that found itself out of the bowl picture for the first time since 1996. And after the season's final loss against Oregon State, the Duck offense had been reduced to a sputtering unit, whose leader pondered what could have been during post-game interviews.

"If you had talked about us sitting here at 5-6 at the beginning of the season, not going to a bowl game and not having a winning season ... no offense but I would have called you a liar," quarterback Kellen Clemens said after the Ducks' 50-21 loss to the Beavers. "This is the most empty feeling I think I've ever had."

The 2004 season was one of disappointment for Oregon offensively. While the Ducks averaged nearly 26 points and 400 yards per game, they couldn't seem to find the end zone when it mattered most. A prime example was their heartbreaking 1-point loss to No. 4 California. After



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Junior Terrence Whitehead made a significant impact as Oregon's starting running back this season and was acknowledged as an All-Pac-10 honorable mention selection.

exploding for 27 first-half points and a 6-point halftime lead, the Ducks were shut out in the second half and fell to the heavily favored Golden Bears, 28-27.

There were some bright moments, however. Oregon's top offensive performance came Oct. 9 during a 41-38 come-from-behind victory against Washington State. The Ducks amassed 646 total yards and 29 first downs during a classic Pac-10 shootout.

Clemens produced the second-best offensive day in school history, compiling 473 total yards and six touchdowns. The Burns native completed 223 of 372 passes for 2,548 yards, 22 touchdowns and 10 interceptions. While the numbers are solid in their own right, they are magnified by Clemens playing a big chunk of the season without a healthy supporting cast.

Clemens' top targets will also return next year. Williams and Day have the potential to be the best pass-catching duo in the Pac-10 if they can stay healthy. Williams led the team with 47 receptions for 593 yards when he wasn't held out with a case of turf toe. Day battled foot problems for most of the season, but still caught 35 passes for 457 yards and eight touchdowns.

Junior tailback Terrence Whitehead will also return for his senior season. The Los Angeles native was a pleasant surprise for Oregon, garnering honorable mention All-Pac-10 honors and emerging as the team's featured running back. While lacking breakaway speed, Whitehead was rarely taken down on first contact. He finished the season with 1,144 yards and six touchdowns.

Other impact skill-position players who will return next year are rising junior fullback Dante Rosario and rising sophomore receivers Cameron Colvin and Garren Strong.

The offensive line will see plenty of turnover. Gone will be starters Adam Snyder, Nick Steitz, Robin Knebel and Michael DeLaGrange. While Enoka Lucas and Ian Reynoso are set to return as the Ducks' most experienced linemen, Oregon will look to rebuild up front with young, talented athletes. The list includes Jacob Hucko, Aaron Klovas, Jeff Kendall and Geoff Schwartz.

"We will miss a couple key people," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said, "but overall, the team coming back should be better than this year's team."

Bellotti said with all the offensive talent the Ducks have returning in 2005, the future will be bright for Oregon if it learns from its mistakes of 2004.

"Sometimes you need a wake-up call to shake yourself up," Bellotti said. "You can't assume just because you put the (Oregon) uniform on that you're going to win. We have to re-establish that every year."

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