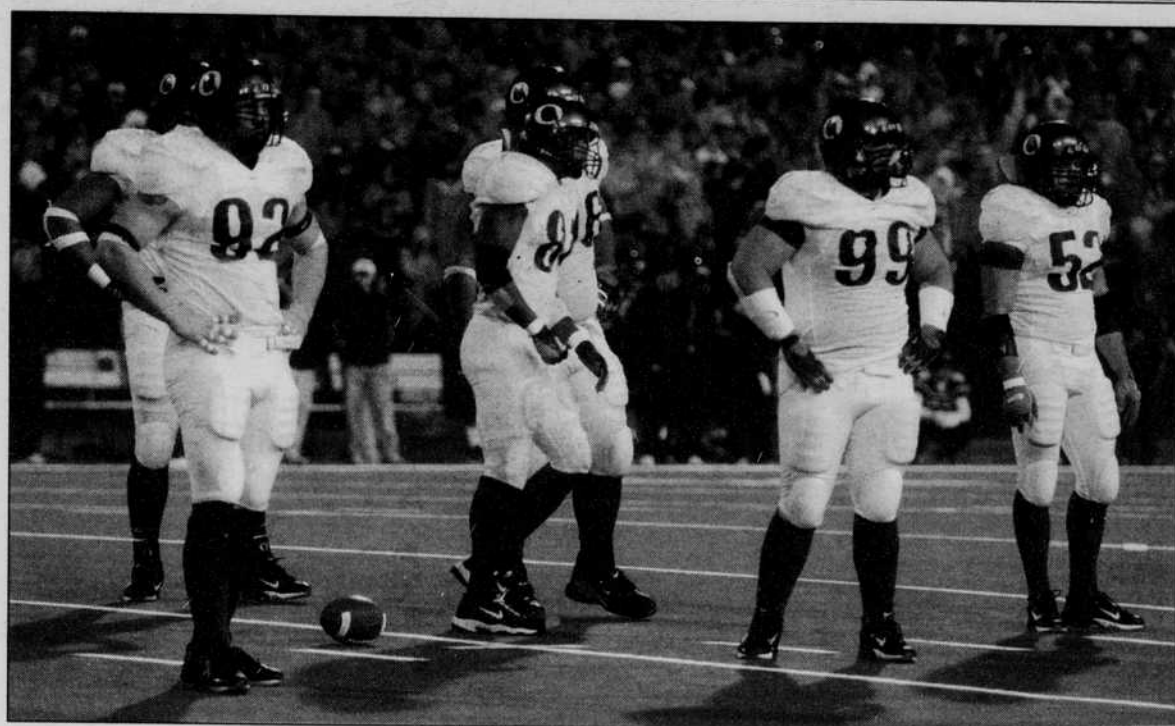




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Oregon's Devan Long (92) accumulated a team-high 7.5 sacks this season. Long anchored a defensive line that ranked third in the Pacific-10 Conference in rushing defense and gave up 125 yards per game.

So-so statistics left Ducks ineffective on defense end

Oregon ranked eighth in the Pac-10 in points allowed to opponents

BY CLAYTON JONES
SPORTS EDITOR

The Oregon defense will have to live with the memory of watching Derek Anderson throwing at will during the Civil War game, ending the season for the Ducks.

Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said the team wasn't even worried about the run, but the Ducks still couldn't stop the pass.

What seemed like a strength — stopping the pass — turned into a weakness. This was the trend for the entire season. No one knew what kind of defense was going to show up.

Compared to the rest of the Pacific-10 Conference, the defense was average. The Ducks finished fourth in the conference in total defense, giving up 338.9 yards per game. They were third in the conference against the run but still gave up nearly 125 yards per game. In the air, the Ducks finished sixth, yielding 216.8 yards per game.

The Ducks finished near the bottom in the most-important category: points allowed. Oregon finished eighth in the conference, allowing 25.6 points per game.

Oregon's worst game statistically came against an explosive Cal team, when the Ducks relinquished 494 yards of offense in a one-point loss to the No. 4 team in the nation. Oregon's most-memorable defensive lapse was the pounding it took by Anderson and the Beavers when Oregon State ran up 50 points on the Ducks.

The defense will be looking to fill big shoes next season.

Defensive line

For the past few seasons, the Ducks have had one of the best defensive lines in the conference. This season was to be no different with the return of the 6-foot-5, 345-pound Haloti Ngata.

The line excelled at the beginning of the season with junior Devan



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Oregon defensive lineman Haloti Ngata (96) recorded 46 tackles in 2004, tying for fifth on the team. He also recorded 8.5 tackles for loss, despite facing double-teams all year long.

Long, who made his way into the all-time top-ten list at Oregon in sacks, adding 7.5 this season.

Much of his success could be attributed to the double and triple teams Ngata was receiving each game. Though the sophomore would record only 3.5 sacks, the attention he received helped open things up for his fellow linemen.

Senior defensive tackle Robby Valenzuela and senior defensive end Chris Solomon also came up big. Valenzuela recorded two sacks and a bone-crushing hit to Stanford's Trent Edwards in Oregon's victory at The Farm in Stanford.

Solomona picked off two passes this season and returned them for touchdowns.

With the Ducks losing Valenzuela and Solomon, they will be looking to Matt Toeaina, David Faaeteete and Darius Sanders to pick up the slack.

Linebackers

Going into the season, the linebacker corps looked to be one of the biggest question marks for the Oregon defense, but ended up being the most consistent.

Former walk-on and senior Jerry Matson was the only player at the position returning with any experience, but senior Ramone Reed and junior Anthony Trucks stepped in and played well.

Matson went on to lead the team

in tackles, and Reed was third, intercepting two passes and recording two sacks.

Trucks will be the lone returnee for the Ducks next season, but freshman A.J. Tuitele received valuable time spelling linebackers this season. Junior Justin Andrews, along with two freshmen who redshirted this year, Ryan Phipps and John Bacon, may figure into the mix.

Secondary

For the past couple of seasons, the secondary was the point of much criticism. This season, it seemed to prove critics wrong, but in some games, it looked like the secondary of old.

Junior Aaron Gipson emerged from a sophomore season where he barely saw the field to record a team-high four interceptions. An injury to starting rover Marley Tucker forced Justin Phinisee to rover, but gave freshman Jackie Bates a chance to shine. He would record an interception while providing great coverage against the pass.

Sophomore J.D. Nelson filled the shoes of the departed Keith Lewis quite nicely and record 66 tackles, good for second on the team.

The secondary returns everyone except Tucker. The Ducks will look upon freshman Ryan Gilliam to play a greater role in the secondary.

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