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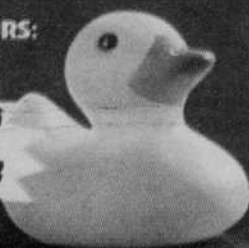
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OREGON DAILY EMERALD

The independent campus newspaper for the University of Oregon

Turnover ratio a deciding
factor against the Cougars

*Last season's disappointing
opener is a distant memory
and a constant motivator*

BY SHAWN MILLER
SPORTS EDITOR

Two-hundred eighty-four dates have been scratched out since that last loss, and the Oregon football team is looking to forget a dismal 2004 season — from the way it started to the way it ended.

Today — the day that kicks off the 2005 college football season — is finally here and there is something new to focus on: the University of Houston Cougars.

Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti stated that it will take a complete effort by his team to walk away with a victory.

"Our offense has to move the ball, no turnovers. Our defense has to prevent the big play, get some takeaways. Our special teams has to create field position, and through it all we have to avoid penalties and negative plays," Bellotti said.

That might sound easy to accomplish against last season's three-win Houston squad, but it isn't the same team it was one year ago. The Cougars returned eight starters on offense and defense, including junior quarterback Kevin Kolb, who has been named to the preseason Maxwell Award and Davey O'Brien watch lists. The two honors are given to the nation's top offensive player and top quarterback, respectively.

"They've got a good running back, great receiver, great quarterback," Bellotti said, "and they package it in an unconventional offense with a lot of unique plays."

Seniors Vincent Marshall (wide receiver) and Anthony Evans (running back) bring stability and quickness to the field. Marshall, who has caught a pass in each of the last 24 games, currently ranks sixth in consecutive games with a reception. Evans rushed for more than 1,100 yards two seasons ago before an injury sidelined the back for one-third of the season last year.

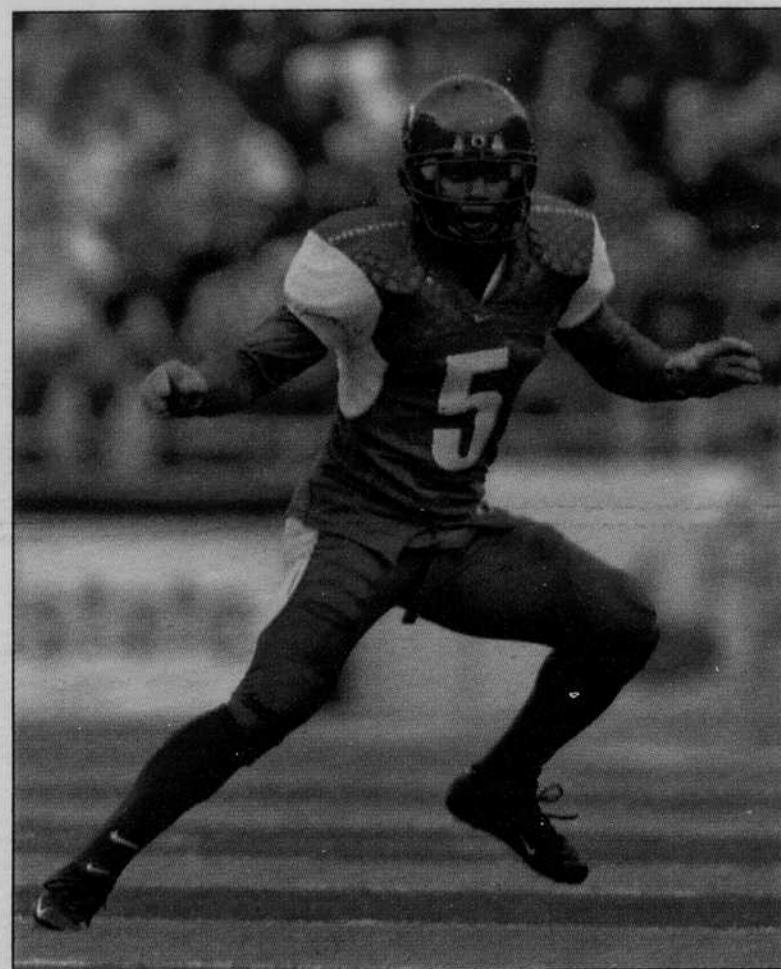
The Ducks have a quarterback of their own who has been nominated during the preseason for awards. Senior Kellen Clemens was also on the Davey O'Brien watch list as well as the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award, which is given to the nation's top senior collegiate quarterback. Clemens is excited to put the new offensive scheme to work.

"It's a different offensive philosophy this year," Clemens said. "We are going to stretch the field vertically. It is going to be a lot of just getting the ball into the hands of the playmakers. I think our arsenal is loaded a lot more this year than it has been in the past."

Early in the week the Cougars were still adjusting the game plan, but that didn't concern head coach Art Briles.

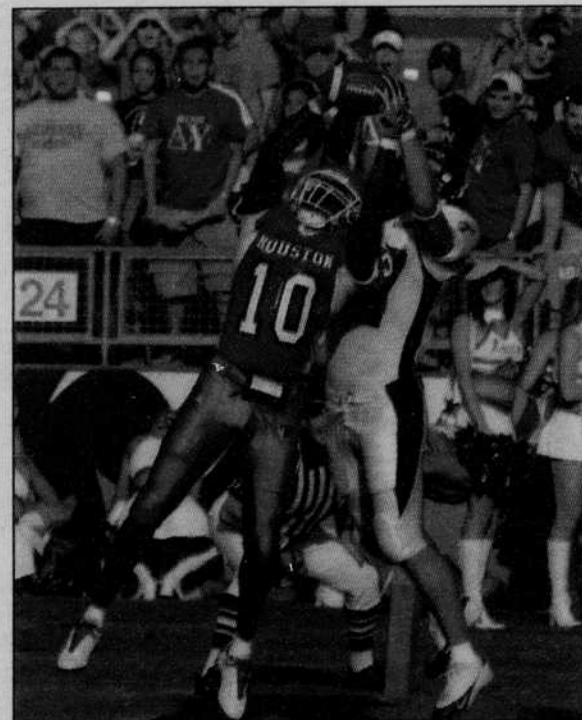
"We're still adding and deleting some things," Briles said. "Our team is pretty mature. We have a general idea heading in of what we want to do, but we'll alter that as the game goes along."

The game is slated to be shown in front of a national audience on ESPN2, the first of Oregon's five scheduled



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Oregon corner Aaron Gipson is one of six upperclassmen in the Duck secondary, which defensive coordinator Nick Aliotti calls the greatest area of strength for the Oregon defense.



Houston's Willie Gaston (10) intercepts a pass during the Cougars' 24-3 victory over the Tulane Green Wave last season.

COURTESY

televised games of the season.

Oregon last opened the season with a Thursday night road game on national TV in 1999, which turned out to be a 27-20 loss to Michigan State University.

Bellotti believes winning that first game is crucial to, "Your state of mind, your confidence, your composure."

"You work very hard, and I think the results of your first game tend to encourage you or discourage you," Bellotti added. "I want to be encouraged by what we've done and what we've put in in the off-season."

The Ducks have won 18 of their last 21 season openers, including an 8-2 record during Bellotti's tenure.

"The number one key to winning a

football game is winning the turnover/takeaway ratio," Bellotti said.

Oregon learned that lesson the hard way last season when Indiana shocked the Ducks by taking the ball away seven times en route to a 30-24 victory.

"Last year our performance in the first game left a lot to be desired," Bellotti said. "Our first game and our last game both were very disappointing. Obviously there is nothing we can do about that, but we can certainly change what happens this year."

Turnover margin wasn't the only category that Oregon struggled with. The offensive line gave up a Pacific-10

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