

■ Oregon notes

Ducks anticipate another strong season start

Odds are stacked in Oregon's favor; the team is 8-2 in season opening games and 3-1 on the road

BY LUKE ANDREWS
FREELANCE REPORTER

The last time Oregon and Houston met was 22 years ago, when the

Ducks defeated the Cougars 15-14 in Eugene. Including Oregon, Houston is 10-19 all-time against the Pacific-10 Conference, with the last win coming

against Arizona State in 1990. The Cougars, however, are 0-7 versus the Pac-10 since 1993.

The most recent common opponent for the Ducks and Cougars came last season when both teams traveled to Oklahoma. The Sooners trounced Houston 63-13 and defeated the Ducks 31-7 a week later.

Bellotti, Ducks typically strong in openers

Under head coach Mike Bellotti's direction, the Ducks are 8-2 in season-opening games, including a 3-1 record on the road.

In addition, Oregon has accumulated a 31-9 regular season and bowl

game record against non-conference opponents during Bellotti's tenure. However, five of the nine losses have occurred in the last three seasons, one of which was last year's disappointing home loss to Indiana, a team that finished the season with only three wins.

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■ Houston notes

Offense will decide Cougars' wins and losses this season

Houston's mediocre defense leaves the team's record in the hands of the offensive line and QB Kevin Kolb

BY SCOTT J. ADAMS
FREELANCE REPORTER

After punching their tickets for Hawaii two years ago to play in the 2003 Hawaii Bowl, the University of Houston Cougars lost their touch last season. The Cougars managed only three wins, all notched against sub .500 teams.

Houston fell out of the gate in its opener against Rice 10-7 and never recovered, thus making this season's opener against Oregon a prime chance to right the ship.

Cougars third-year head coach Art Briles has tuned his offense to put up numbers similar to last year's. Houston was 28th in the nation in passing yards per game in 2004. With a satisfactory at best

defense, the production of Houston's offense will be the supreme factor deciding wins and losses, and it all starts with junior quarterback Kevin Kolb. Kolb was placed on the preseason watch list for the Maxwell and Davey O'Brien Awards and passed for nearly 3,000 yards last season.

With a dismal average of 138.3 rushing yards per game in 2004, the Cougars were without a decent running attack, but senior tailback Anthony Evans and seven other starters from last year's roster return, including two receivers and three veteran offensive linemen.

Sophomore wide receiver Donnie Avery leads the corps, but watch for senior Vincent Marshall to challenge

the Ducks with deep routes over the middle from the slot.

Aside from defense, Houston's biggest weakness this year will most likely be its special teams. Junior kicker Justin Laird will handle all kicking assignments this season in place of Dustin Bell, who struggled with kicking field goals more than 30 yards last year. Laird punted last season for Houston, but managed only 39.8 yards per punt and did not receive any help from the punt coverage team that yielded a 31.7 yard net average.

The 2005 season opener could not have come any quicker for Houston, a team that wants nothing more than to make last year's record a distant memory. Briles is excited for the opener against Oregon and feels confident with his squad.

"We are just going to line up and

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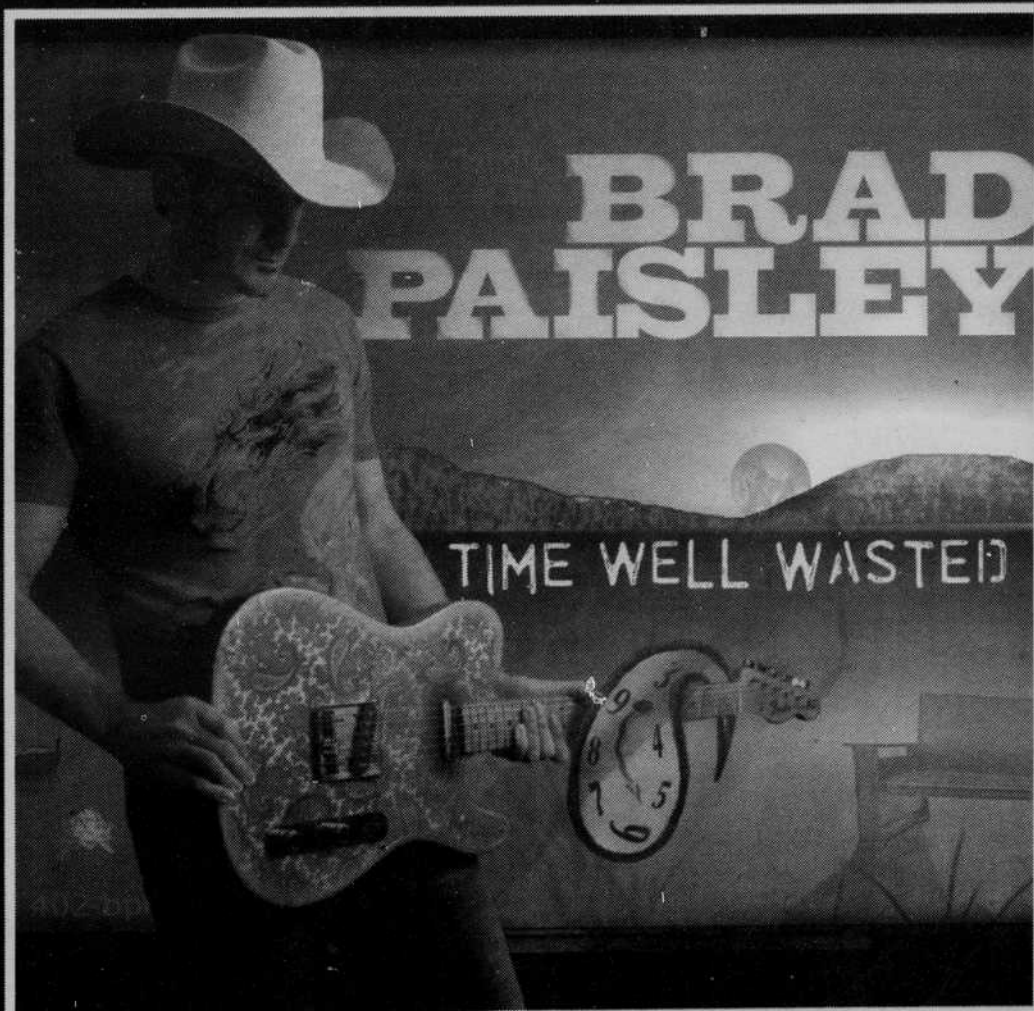
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