

# Dropping THE Redshirt

Starters' injuries allowed tailback Jeremiah Johnson to step up and seize the spotlight against the Cardinal

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Lost among the shadows of a loaded backfield including senior Terrence Whitehead and freshman phenom Jonathan Stewart, Jeremiah Johnson was virtually unknown heading into the 2005 season.

That all changed Saturday when, after injuries sidelined Whitehead and slowed Stewart, the Los Angeles native was thrown into the lineup for Oregon's Pacific-10 Conference road opener at Stanford.

Johnson, a true freshman, was intending to redshirt this season for the Ducks because of a limited opportunity for playing time.

The Ducks already had a bonafide 1,000-yard rusher in Whitehead and landed possibly the biggest recruit in the program's history by signing Stewart.

Alongside them were sophomores Terrell Jackson and Andiel Brown, who rounded out one of the deepest backfields in Oregon history as all four figured to vie for playing time this season.

Now Johnson can be added to that list of backfield hopefuls.

"Certainly we have great depth there. It's one more guy we have to factor in terms of how we're going to get him the ball," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "But overall I like that. It's a great problem to have."

For Johnson, the transition from scout team to second team was a smooth one. The 5-foot-10-inch, 190-pound Johnson led the Ducks in rushing, gaining a game-high 63 yards in 11 carries and a touchdown against the Cardinal.

"I knew all along that he could help us, but I kind of wanted to save him," said running backs coach Gary Campbell, who was forced to lift Johnson's redshirt status because of the aforementioned injuries. "Now that he's gotten in the lineup, I plan to use him as much as possible and

try to find some things for him offensively as well."

Johnson's play also got the attention of Bellotti.

"I was very pleased for Jeremiah to step up in his first college game and be the leading rusher," Bellotti said. "He did as we thought he would do. He's a quality back. He is fearless. He is fast. He is a great receiver out of the backfield, and I thought in his first Pac-10 game he did very well."

Though Johnson likely will not see significant time in the backfield after Whitehead and Stewart return to full strength, he is confident that he can contribute to this year's team.

"It really didn't matter," Johnson said of losing his redshirt status. "I came here to play ball and Coach (Bellotti) and Coach Campbell gave me an opportunity and I made stuff happen. Hopefully I will go further."

"I'm trying to make something happen so I can be ready for next year and hopefully start."

Johnson will be a part of the special teams unit, serving as the kick returner against Arizona State on Saturday.

"I'm having fun back there," Johnson said. "It is pretty intense, but I can do it."

## Johnson's road to Eugene

Johnson first became familiar with the University of Oregon's football program after his brother, Jerome, a fullback, signed with the Ducks as a member of the 2003 recruiting class.

However, Jerome was ruled ineligible by the NCAA and has since left the university.

"He played a big role on my part,"

said Jeremiah, referring to his brother's influence to attend Oregon. "We were going to be two running backs in the backfield, but he had a little situation so he's not here right now. I am just going to stick with it and do what I can without him here."

Johnson also attended Dorsey High School with current teammate Jerome Boyd, and Johnson's brother competed against Whitehead while Oregon's back was at Dorsey's rival, Crenshaw High School.

"Jerome (Boyd) helped me a lot with my decision to come here,"

Johnson said. "And I always looked up to Whitehead when I was in high school."

As a senior at Dorsey High School,

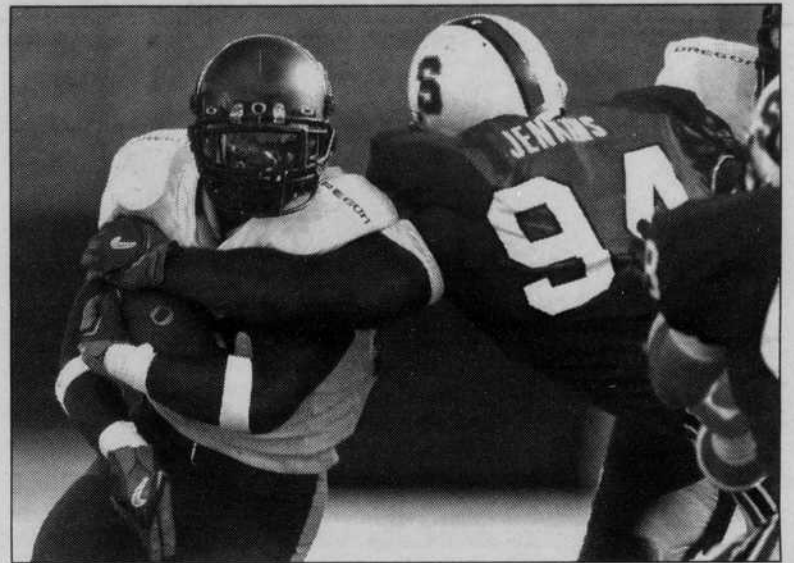
Johnson, returning from an ankle injury sustained during the previous season, ran for 1,615 yards and 18 touchdowns, helping to lead the Dons to a 12-2 record and a Coliseum League championship. He averaged nearly 9 yards per carry and ran for 100 yards or more in six of his seven games, while finishing as the conference's leading scorer.

Johnson has even loftier goals for his four years at Oregon.

"I hope to be an impact in other team's game plans," said Johnson, who was the Oregon Football Camp MVP in 2004. "And I want to be a Heisman winner or get an award. I

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JEREMIAH JOHNSON | Oregon running back



DAVID GONZALES | STANFORD ATHLETICS

True freshman Jeremiah Johnson carries the ball Saturday, which was his first collegiate game. Johnson rushed for a team-high 63 yards against Stanford and Johnson will play Saturday against Arizona State.

want to try to be an impact in college history."

## Beginning a career

Johnson's stellar high-school career rushing the ball may have been overshadowed by his defensive play. He was recruited by many to play defensive back after being named to an all-defensive team by the L.A. Times.

The ability to play running back, the position Oregon recruited him as, appealed to Johnson, who also notes Eugene's community environment as a big reason for his decision.

"I like this atmosphere a lot right here. I feel at home," Johnson said. "I

am having fun out here."

Johnson intends to major in criminal justice with the possibility of law school.

"He's one of those guys that you just tell him what you want and he's happy to do it," Campbell said. "When we anticipated that we might redshirt him, he was fine with that and worked really hard down with the defense. Every day I heard something about him and how well (the defense) thought he was doing."

Now the opponent will be the ones talking about Johnson's performance.

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