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In my opinion

Sun Devils look to beat Ducks and improve Pac-10 standings

For one half in the grueling Tempe, Ariz., heat, the Arizona State Sun Devils looked like the best team in the Pacific-10 Conference.

Leading 21-3 at halftime, Sam Keller, Terry Richardson, Derek Hagan and a host of others had the No. 1 USC Trojans and its 25 game win streak on the ropes.

Instead, as they did a week prior against Oregon at Autzen Stadium, the mighty Trojans rallied to overtake the Sun Devils, winning 38-28.

And, as crazy as it may sound, I'd like Oregon's chances in Tempe Saturday against Arizona State had the Sun Devils held off USC's comeback and pulled off the improbable.

Why would I prefer Arizona State to knock off college football's biggest and best dynasty a week prior to playing Oregon?

It's not because I've lost my mind; it's because emotional let-downs are a huge part of the roller coaster that is college football from week to week.

Case-in-point: The 2003 season for the Oregon Ducks.

After taking down a heralded No.



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3 Michigan team and gracing the cover of Sports Illustrated, Oregon dropped the ball, literally, against Washington State a week later, losing 55-16 to the Cougs.

Laying an egg, screwing the pooch, the SI jinx — you've heard them all.

We've witnessed emotional let-downs already this season around the country.

Notre Dame went into Ann Arbor, Mich., and shocked the Big House by upsetting then No. 10 Michigan 17-10, only to return home to lay an egg against Michigan State at home, losing 44-41 in overtime.

Speaking of Michigan State, after impressive victories over Notre

Dame and Illinois on the road, the Spartans returned home and lost to rival Michigan 34-31 in overtime.

How's this relate to Oregon's upcoming trip to Arizona State?

Well, had the Sun Devils defeated the Trojans, chances are they'd be eyeing a BCS Bowl and the Pac-10 Championship. Instead, all their focus is squarely on the Ducks and improving to 2-1 in the Pac-10 standings.

Plus, the last thing Oregon needs is a hungry Arizona State team looking to avenge a loss.

Case-in-point: After its first loss this season, a 35-31 heartbreaker to LSU, Arizona State went on a tear, posting 94 points and 1,248 yards of total offense in its next two games — wins against Northwestern and Oregon State.

Factor in that Keller is looking to make amends for his five interception performance against USC, and things do not bode well for the Ducks' defense and its suspect secondary.

Let's just hope, for Oregon's sake, that history does not repeat itself.

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In my opinion

Duck offense needs to bring 'A' game in order to win in Tempe

Four touchdowns, no interceptions and 350-plus yards through the air.

That has to be Kellen Clemens' line if Oregon has a chance to defeat No. 17 Arizona State.

Clemens has to bring his best performance — his 'A' game if you will, and utilize the Ducks' weapons to their full extent. Instead of being dangerous, the weapons have to become deadly.

The senior quarterback has to have touch, have velocity and work errorlessly.

Touch: Demetrius Williams leads a corps of wide receivers that will stretch the defense.

Velocity: Tim Day and Dante Rosario are golden on the short routes, finding the gaps in the zone just past the first-down marker.

Errorlessly: Veteran running back Terrence Whitehead and the young players in the backfield are waiting to explode on every clean handoff.

The weapons are there, it is just a matter of looking off the safety and firing away.

Clemens hasn't beaten a ranked



SHAWN MILLER
FULL-COURT PRESS

opponent on the road in his career and has been tested twice this season. He completed 28 of 38 attempts for 332 yards and four touchdowns to lead Oregon to a 37-34 victory over No. 23 Fresno State at home on Sept. 17. One disappointing week later, Clemens was 15 of 30 for 162 yards and one touchdown during a 45-13 loss to top-ranked USC.

Clemens currently ranks sixth in the nation in total offense (331 yards per game) and 17th in passing efficiency (154.3). He also is second in the Pacific-10 Conference to Arizona State's Sam Keller in total offense and touchdown passes (12).

Sportscasters, fans and people gen-

erally associated with both programs predict a shootout. I feel no different.

The first team to 40 points wins and the turnover/takeaway ratio will determine the winner.

Last week, Keller tossed five interceptions during a 38-28 loss to USC. He had thrown only two picks in his four previous games of the season. Clemens threw his first interception last week at Stanford.


The bottom line is who will put the touch on the deep ball and won't allow the defense to make a play, let alone an interception. Which signal caller will lead his team down the field with calm precision?

This is Clemens' opportunity to prove critics wrong with a top-notch performance rivaling a top-tier quarterback manning his ranked team. Clemens is already climbing the record charts and all of the conference coaches know him as a threat on all fronts.

The only thing he is focused on accomplishing is a key victory in a ranked opponent's home.

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