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Football: Defensive stands amount to wins

Continued from page 5

ence-high 41 sacks last season — a 3.73 per game average.

More questions arose as center Enoke Lucas and right guard Ian Reynoso were the only returning linemen with significant experience. Losing guard Shawn Flanagan to injury prior to the season didn't help matters either.

But with the emergence of Schwartz, right guard Palauni Ma Sun, left guard Josh Tschirgi and left tackle Max Unger to aid Lucas and Reynoso, question marks have quickly turned to exclamation points.

"I thought last week against Washington was the best protection afforded an Oregon quarterback maybe in the time I've been here," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said.

The offensive line has given up only eight sacks in seven games this season and has helped the No. 15-ranked Ducks race to a 6-1 record.

"We just have to continue to keep playing how we've been playing," Lucas said. "We're all doing a good job and playing really good."

In Oregon's six wins this season, quarterback Kellen Clemens has been sacked only five times. He was sacked three times in Oregon's 45-13 loss to top-ranked Southern California, but was not sacked at all in wins against Arizona State and Washington.

"I think it's learning the concepts of the offense," Lucas said of the offensive line's marked improvement. "And Kellen's doing a great job of getting rid of the ball when he's feeling pressure and runs when he has to. Kellen helps us and we help him."

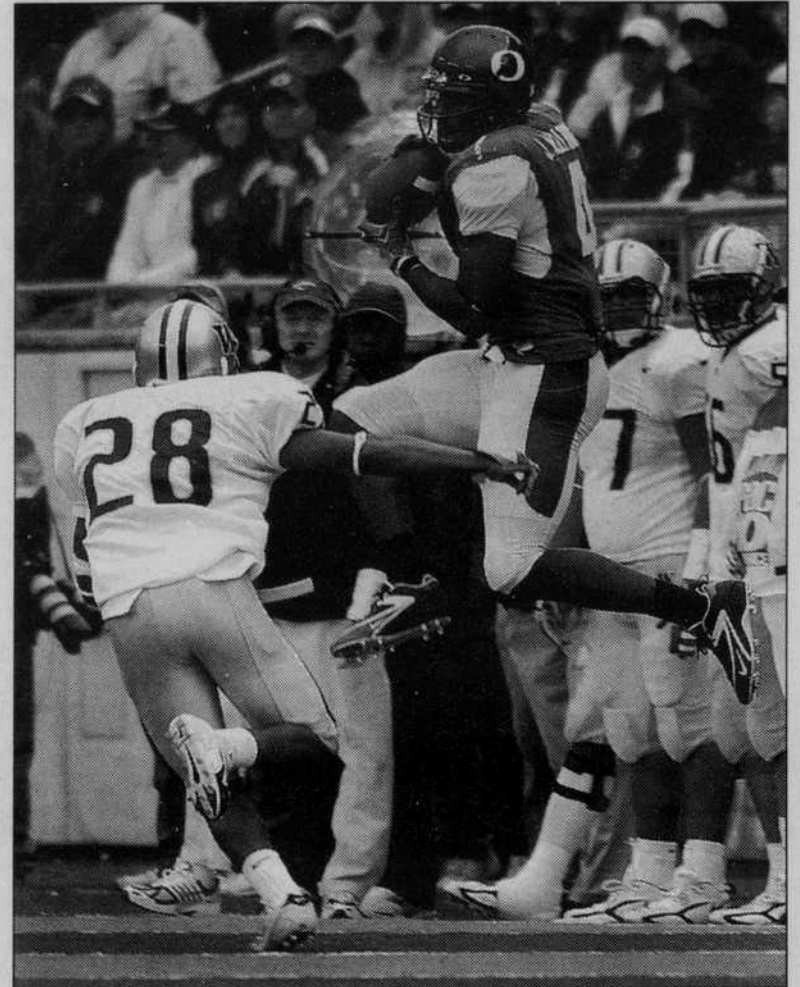
The offensive line has allowed Clemens time to throw the ball and the senior from Burns has responded. Clemens is currently second in the nation in passing yards and 15th in passing efficiency.

Likewise, the Duck offense ranks in the top 20 nationally in scoring (19th), yards per game (13th) and points per game (13th).

"Offensively, we just have the kind of confidence that we're going to go out there and get our job done no matter who's playing in front of us," Schwartz said. "That's a good confidence to have."

Defensive domination

With the offense moving the ball efficiently, the play of the defense



MARCUS LARSON | FOR THE EMERALD

Oregon wide receiver Jaison Williams (4) catches a ball over a Washington defender last Saturday. Williams caught five passes for 55 yards and a touchdown.

has lifted the Ducks to their highest national ranking since the 2003 season. Led by Haloti Ngata, Matt Toeaina, Victor Filipe and Devan Long, and complemented by an improved secondary and surprising linebacking corps, the Oregon defense has allowed a stingy 788 yards in its last three games.

The Ducks have outgained their opponents by a combined total of 944 yards this season. The defense gave up only 238 yards of offense last Saturday against the Huskies.

"We did a great job on defense, I wouldn't have planned to turn the ball over the first two times we touched it, but I was very glad we recovered from that," Bellotti said. "We didn't panic and again, this team has that confidence."

Injury update

Sophomore linebacker A.J. Tuitele ran in practice on Monday in attempt to return from a leg injury that has sidelined him for consecu-

tive games this season. If Tuitele does not have any setbacks, according to Bellotti, he could make a return to the lineup against Arizona on Saturday.

Senior wideout Demetrius Williams suffered bruised ribs in the first half against the Huskies and his status will be determined by his mobility in practice this week.

Senior defensive end Nate LiaBraaten, on his doctor's advice, was forced to leave the team after suffering a series of concussions. He suffered his last concussion in the 45-13 loss to USC. LiaBraaten, a former walk-on from Bend who played in 11 games last season and started two, will remain with the program as an assistant.

"It's very difficult. Nate's a great young man," Bellotti said. "It's one of those things that you hate to see happen."

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