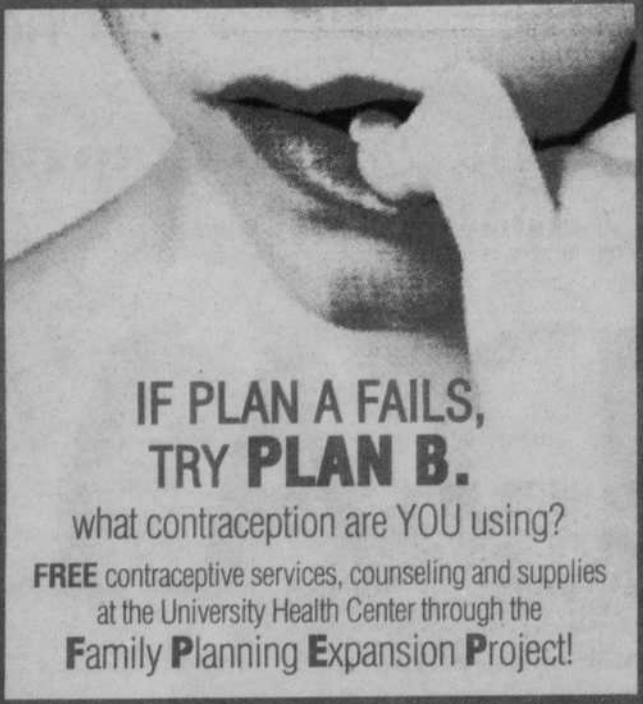


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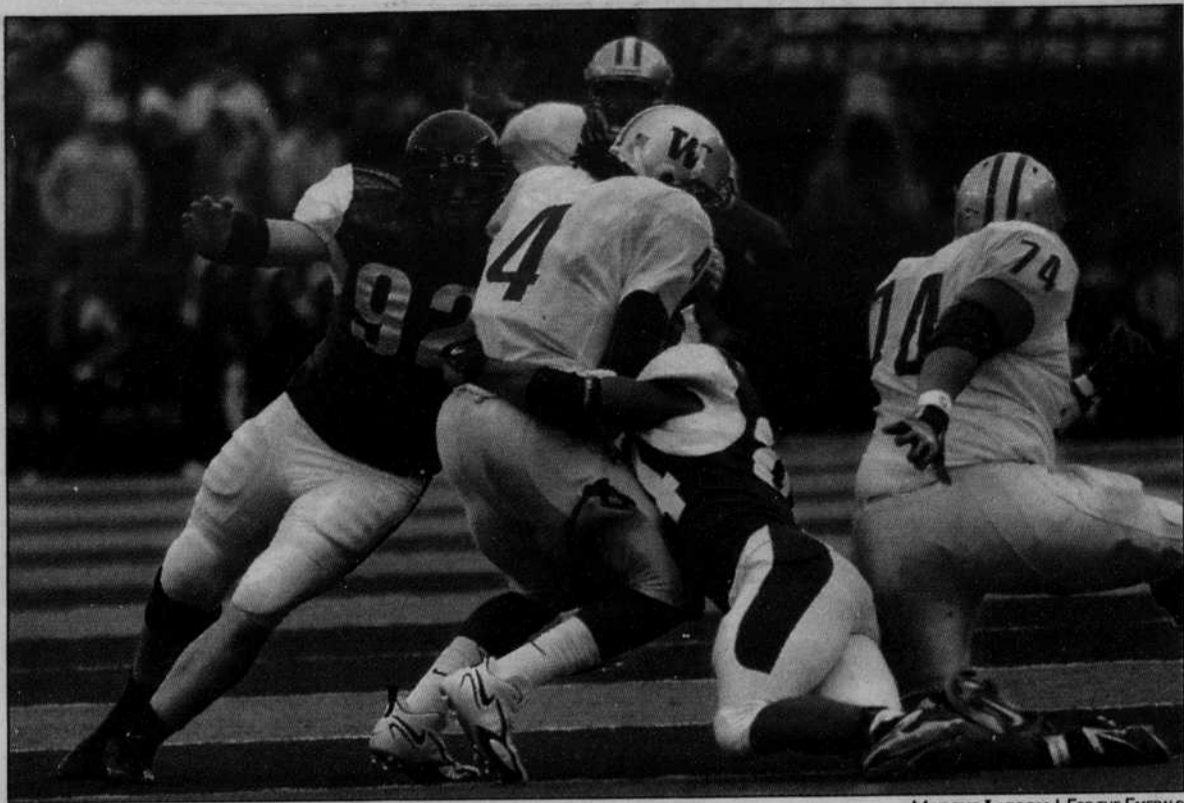
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MARCUS LARSON | FOR THE EMERALD

Oregon defensive lineman Devan Long (92) combines with teammate Anthony Trucks to sack Washington quarterback Isaiah Stanback last Saturday. Long has 4.5 sacks on the season, including 2.5 against the Huskies.



## Ducks strive to improve special teams against 'Cats



*On paper the Wildcats are inferior, but Oregon is prepared for a fight*

BY SHAWN MILLER  
SPORTS EDITOR

Picture this: Your team has won six straight games and 10 of the last 11 against its next opponent. The game isn't going to be televised live and the opponent hasn't held a Division I foe to less than 20 points. Better than that, they haven't scored more than 24 against a Division I team this season. So what do you focus on to get your team fired up?

"We just need to make sure that we are not only going to match, but we are going to exceed the intensity and the physical aspect of the game on the field," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "One of my roles is direction, focus, philosophy, motivation and emotional support."

Without looking at the stats on paper, Oregon (6-1 overall, 3-1 conference) isn't going to overlook Arizona (1-5, 0-3). Forget about the past, forget about the current records. The most important thing is to continue a three-game winning streak and correct the miscues.

One of those areas of minimal success and mostly trouble has been the special teams units.

"I think we started off so poorly in some areas that we are still digging ourselves out of a hole," Bellotti said. "At this point, I am not pleased enough with special teams to say that it has been a positive or a negative. We need to make sure that we improve in that area."

"To complete this stretch run in the way we want, we have to have our special teams step up, to improve, to become more consistent, to become a huge, positive factor in our opportunity to win."

So far this season, the Ducks rank last in the Pacific-10 Conference in kickoff coverage (net average 37.1) and touchbacks (seven).

Meanwhile, Arizona has been struggling. Second-year head coach Mike Stoops brings a fiery attitude that could motivate even the most stubborn tree hugger to climb down. It is Arizona's defense that has



COURTESY

Arizona safety Darrell Brooks currently leads the Wildcats in total tackles (51). Brooks is 12 tackles away from breaking into the top 20 on Arizona's career list.

kept the team in each game. With the offense ranking last in Pac-10 in turnover margin (-17), the defense has had to play with a short field and is averaging giving up 26.7 points per game, good enough for fourth in the conference.

"They are basically a zone blitz team," Bellotti said. "They are a very disciplined defensive football team. The concept of zone blitz is to bring four guys from a side and drop somebody into coverage... and still play basically a two deep, three deep or four deep zone behind that. But create an overload to one side or the other."

With a bye week looming after a trip to the Grand Canyon State, the Ducks are focused on taking that seventh win into the off-week.

"We just got to stay focused and get better this week, have a good week of practice," Oregon linebacker Brent Haberly said during the week. "... 7-1 going into the bye week would be really huge."

The one category in which Arizona does lead the Pac-10 is punting with a 42-yard average. That should come in handy as Arizona ranks

ninth in total offense, while the Ducks stand third in total defense.

The first Bowl Championship Series poll was released on Monday and had Oregon at No. 13. The Ducks also rose to 15th in The Associated Press and 16th in the Coaches' polls. Despite the current success, the players don't want to look ahead or predict a possible bowl game.

"We are taking it one game at a time and then we will see what happens at the end of the season," Geoff Schwartz said. "It's fun to look at where we are. We don't harp on it at all."

With Arizona one loss away from securing a losing season, Bellotti knows he and the Ducks will get the Wildcats' best shot.

"Arizona is right now at the brink... they are 1-5 and obviously another loss takes them out of that picture (for a winning season) so I expect their best football game," Bellotti said. "It's a team very capable of playing at a level to win in the Pac-10."

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