

■ In my opinion



SHAWN MILLER
FULL-COURT PRESS

Pressure pushes two quarterbacks to the top

Pressure causes funny reactions.

Take, for instance, a tire. Too much pressure and it will explode, just like former NFL coach Jim Mora at each and every press conference.

There is immense pressure on Oregon athletes and coaches, especially the ones who play at Autzen Stadium or McArthur Court. If they win, they were supposed to. If they don't win, they were overrated. So what happened when arguably one of the best quarterbacks to ever play at Oregon was lost for the remainder of one of the most promising football seasons in the program's history?

Pressure!

This time the pressure was on backup Dennis Dixon, who started his first game behind center Saturday against then-No. 23 California. Dixon probably didn't live up to expectations. I'm sure most 20-year-old athletes shoved into the limelight wouldn't accomplish perfection, but he did keep the Ducks in the game offensively.

And then there was a fired-up defense. There were Ducks swarming from the first series of the game until overtime, when Cal gained only 2 yards on four plays. Take away three breakout runs, 26, 31 and 52 yards, from Cal running back Marshawn Lynch and his 189 rushing yards doesn't look so great.

What about Brady Leaf? Two weeks ago the third-string quarterback probably couldn't imagine playing more than third-string minutes the rest of the season, but Saturday he was the quarterback who threw the game-winning touchdown in overtime.

Senior Terrence Whitehead averaged just more than 55 rushing yards per game this season before his 119-yard performance Saturday. Whitehead looked like a puppy at Christmas, squirting all over Autzen.

Saturday's monumental victory over the Bears was accomplished by the team. Dixon didn't have to carry his teammates, they carried themselves. And that is the outcome the Ducks wanted to have going into the final two games of the regular season.

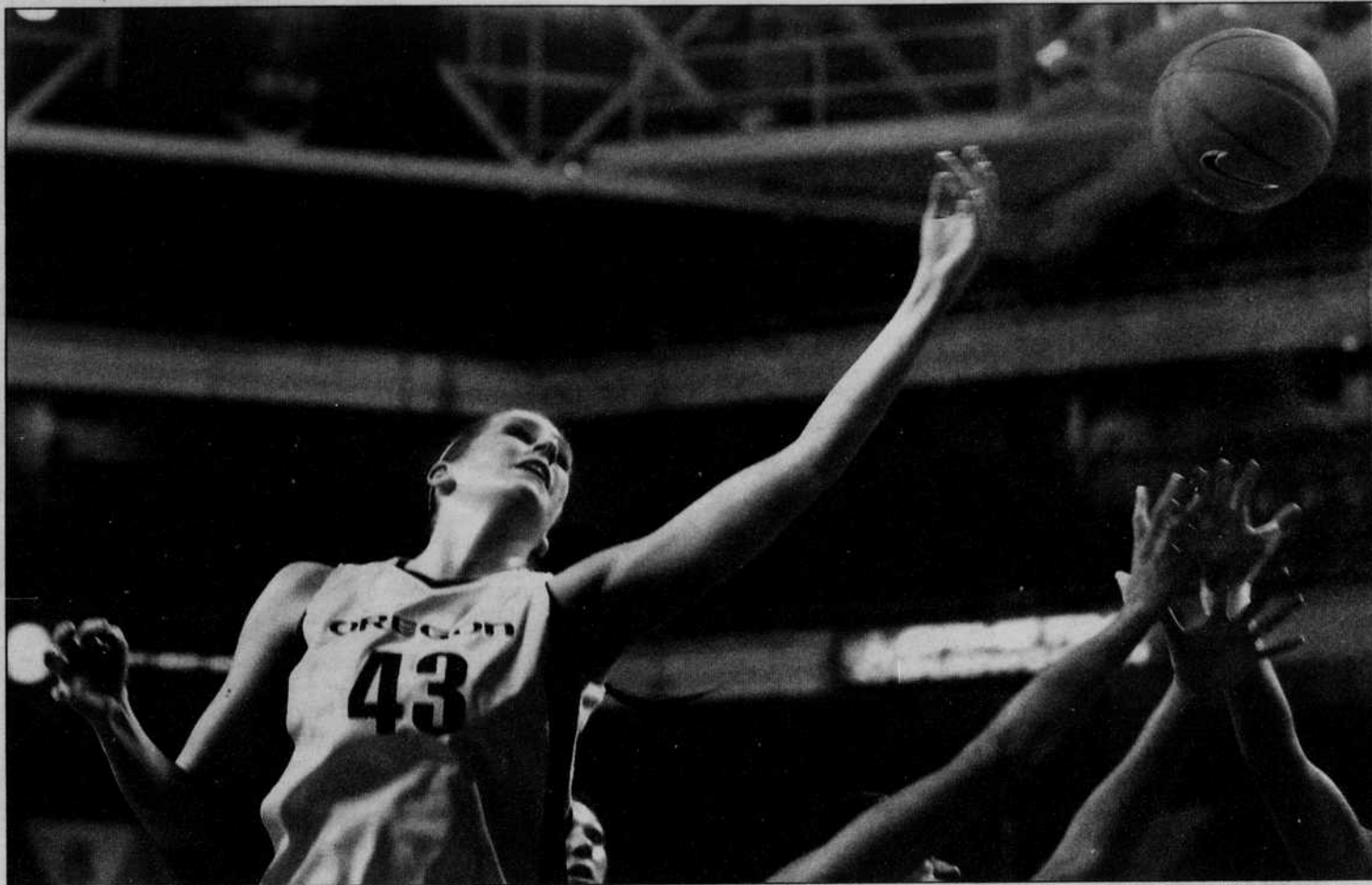
A Bowl Championship Series game isn't out of the question, although it isn't really part of an answer either. However, should the Ducks escape a potentially snowy Pullman with a win this Saturday and defeat in-state rival Oregon State at home the following weekend, it would tie a school-record 10-win regular season, and the Ducks would have that shot at the BCS.

Most likely Oregon would be shut out even with two more wins, leaving San Diego the desired spot for a holiday bowl. Which is exactly that, the Holiday Bowl against the third-place team from the Big XII Conference.

Oregon holds its destiny in its hands and winning as a team against a top-25 opponent Saturday proved that no matter how big of a loss hits the depth chart, the Ducks fight as a collective unit bound for another check mark in the win column each weekend.

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■ Women's basketball



NICOLE BARKER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Six-foot-6 forward Jessica Shettters rises above the rest for a rebound Sunday night during an exhibition game against Northwest Sports. The Ducks outscored Northwest Sports by 19 in the first half before running away with an 87-56 victory.

Ducks easily down exhibition foe

Senior guard Chelsea Wagner had to leave the game after injuring her knee in the first half, but she does not believe it to be serious

BY JEFFREY DRANSFELDT
SPORTS REPORTER

The Oregon women's basketball team received a scare Sunday when Chelsea Wagner limped off the court during a game against Northwest Sports.

Oregon warmed up after a slow start and won the exhibition game easily 87-56 in front of 2,850 at McArthur Court.

Toward the end of the first half, Wagner twisted her knee and limped off the court. Afterward concern centered on Wagner, who is returning to the court after her junior season ended in the 15th game with an injury to the same knee.

She said she felt a pop, but doesn't believe it is serious.

"I don't have any fears whatsoever,"

Wagner said. "My knee is strong. I didn't tear my ACL or anything. It's nothing horrible."

Wagner will undergo a precautionary MRI today, head coach Bev Smith said.

"Any time (an injury) happens it's a concern," Smith said. "We've been through it. She's a warrior and I know she'll bounce back as quickly as she can."

Two other players returning this season, Carolyn Ganes and Kedzie Gunderson, made their presence felt offensively and defensively.

Ganes answered several Northwest Sports runs in the second half with mid-range jumpers around the three-point line. She also spread the defense as Oregon outscored Northwest Sports 38-18 inside the paint.

She finished with 18 points on 64 percent shooting.

"Carolyn is one of the purest shooters I've ever seen, not only in this country, but in the world," Smith said.

The redshirt forward entered this season needing to work on defense and rebounding, Smith said. Ganes had four defensive rebounds Sunday.

Complementing Ganes, Gunderson — known as a standout defender — had several opportunities within Oregon's offense. She tipped a rebound to herself and made a layup. Gunderson also showed a jump shot when she dribbled past a defender and swished a mid-range jumper.

"Kedzie is a slasher," Smith said. "She's got a great little dribble jumper that she pulled out (Sunday)."

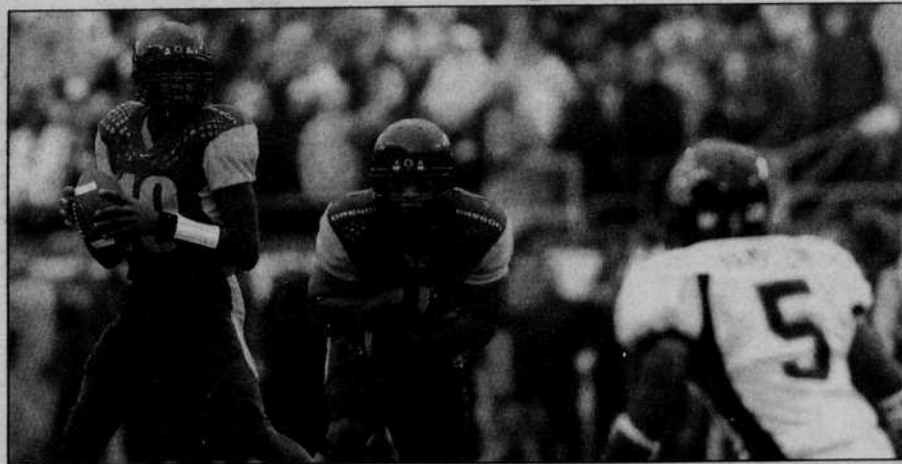
Defense is her main focus.

"I'm definitely, now, working more on crashing the boards, getting some offensive rebounds and doing the little dirty work," Gunderson said.

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■ Football recap

Ducks emerge victorious against Cal



TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTO EDITOR

Quarterback Dennis Dixon (10) and running back Terrence Whitehead execute a play-action pass Saturday. Whitehead rushed for 119 yards and one touchdown, while Dixon threw for 139 yards and one touchdown.

Reserve quarterback Brady Leaf found James Finley in overtime for the game-winning touchdown

BY LUKE ANDREWS
SPORTS REPORTER

An unlikely hero was born on a soggy, windy afternoon at Autzen Stadium Saturday.

Reserve quarterback Brady Leaf came off the bench and tossed his first career touchdown pass — a four-yard strike to wideout James Finley — in overtime to give then-No. 15 Oregon (8-1, 5-1 conference) a 27-20 win over No. 23 California (6-3, 3-3).

After third-year starting quarterback Kellen Clemens went down with a season-ending ankle injury two weeks ago, much of the focus Saturday was on quarterback Dennis Dixon making his first career start.

However, after a 20-20 tie at the end of regulation,

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