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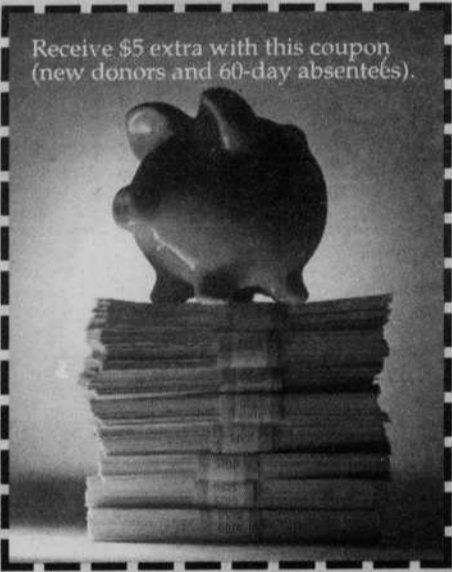
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In my opinion

Duck fans should be upset with this year's BCS snub

For the past two weeks the controversy pasted across grocery store magazines and throughout conversations in the checkout lines has been whether Oregon will get one of the two coveted at-large bids to the Bowl Championship Series ... all right, maybe not so much in grocery stores, but definitely at all of the local water coolers. However, the question that should really be asked is: Does it really matter which bowl the Ducks play in?

After all, it was just more than a year ago that Oregon completed its first losing season in 10 years. A humiliating loss to in-state rival Oregon State settled in deeper and deeper throughout a successful off-season signing period, leaving the thoughts of whether last season was a fluke or the beginning of a tumultuous rebuilding process.

Honestly, I don't know who thought Oregon would be 10-1 and fighting for a BCS berth at the end of the regular season. I sure didn't. In fact, I figured the Ducks would be fighting for a spot in the Sun Bowl (as disgusting as that sounds).

Shouldn't Oregon fans be happy to be headed to a successful bowl game, no matter where it is? The Ducks took care of business on the field and what-



SHAWN MILLER
 FULLCOURT PRESS

ever was decided inside a boardroom is up to a bunch of stiffs in search of selecting the best ratings, a.k.a. pen marks in the checkbook, rather than the next ESPN Classic. Should they be disappointed with a trip to San Diego instead of Tempe, Ariz.?

Without a doubt!

Oregon earned its 10 wins and dropped its one loss. It had the potential to upset top-ranked USC and for one half, it did. Nonetheless, the Trojans outplayed the Ducks when it counted the most and won the battle on the scoreboard.

Narrow victories over three-win Arizona and four-win Washington State shouldn't cloud the Ducks' success. Against the Wildcats, Oregon lost its team leader, quarterback Kellen Clemens, for the season and the defensive unit stepped up. From

that point, two former reserve quarterbacks guided the Oregon offense to four straight victories. Late in the season, it was the combined effort of several student-athletes that helped surge the Ducks to out duel a Cougar team which lost six conference games (excluding USC) by a combined 27 points.

Oregon should be 10-1. The Ducks earned the record just like they earned a spot against a top-tier opponent in a premier game, but in the end it wasn't really up to anybody for the two at-large bids because they disappeared.

Following No. 4 LSU and No. 5 Virginia Tech's implosions in their respective conference championships, Ohio State was able to move up to fourth in the final BCS standings, earning an automatic bid and so did Notre Dame, which finished sixth. That left fifth-ranked Oregon out because each one of the eight openings ended up being closed.

Duck fans can't complain this season about being shafted, but what they can focus on is: Why does Notre Dame have so many eraser shavings surrounding the BCS rules?

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Clemens: Oregon's records secure for now

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record (7-1 Pacific-10 Conference).

During the span that Clemens has been on the sidelines, the biggest controversy has been whether Oregon will receive one of the two at-large bids to a Bowl Championship Series game. The Ducks were one of three teams, along with two-loss teams Notre Dame and Ohio State, up for major consideration.

"I think we deserve to (go)," Clemens said Friday while wearing a jacket with a Fiesta Bowl emblem on it, which he won as part of the 2001-02 Oregon Fiesta Bowl champions. "The business and the politics will keep us out. If we get selected for the Holiday Bowl instead we are going to go there and be happy to hand someone else a loss and get to 11-1."

Clemens feels that last season,

Oregon's first ending with a losing record since 1993, hurt the Ducks in people's minds entering this season.

"We probably lost some respect in various corners of the country," Clemens said of last season's 5-6 finish. "To be honest I don't understand how the whole thing works. I just know that Notre Dame has lost two games and we've lost one to the No. 1 team in the country. It doesn't make much sense to me. And we are ranked ahead of them in the BCS."

"It's just a matter of deserving to be (in a BCS bowl)," added Clemens, who grew up a Notre Dame fan.

Unfortunately for Clemens and the Ducks, the Fighting Irish and Buckeyes claimed automatic at-large spots in the BCS, eliminating any chance the Ducks had of being selected.

Another thing out of Clemens' control is his legacy. The fall graduate wants to be known as a "team guy."

"If you want to sprinkle in a little bit of a guy who played hard and left it on the field," he said. "That's enough. I mean, you look at the records and all of the stuff that I was close to, but close doesn't cut it for a legacy. If I get my name mentioned with some of the greats that have played here I will be content."

Oregon offensive coordinator Gary Crowton notes Clemens' work ethic and toughness as outstanding; However, entering his final season Clemens hadn't found many victories. Before the season began he had a career record of 13-11, while this season he was 7-1 as a starter.

"I wouldn't have traded, I guess, any of it, including this," Clemens said pointing at his protective boot. "It's been up and down. It's been good times, bad times."

"There has been a lot of growth. I guess for me as a person it has been a very good experience."

Rewriting the record books

Clemens found the victories as well as numerous records this season. He was also on pace to break every significant quarterback record at Oregon.

"Barring injury, if I would have kept going, or even slacked off some, I would have probably finished at top," Clemens said. "They were secondary, but I'm not going to sit here and lie to you that I didn't know about them or that I wasn't discouraged."

"I can't get them. I was close. It's apparent, I think, to most people that I was going to get them. There's no sense in saying 'what if' in this deal. It is what it is and move on."


Several records he would have likely broken include total offense, touchdowns thrown, and passing yardage. One record he did set was completion percentage.

The records at Oregon are safe from Clemens, but that doesn't mean they didn't get a scare. They got same one that anyone standing in the way of Clemens will receive.

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