

Beavers confident they are on the right path to success

By Steve Gress
Corvallis Gazette-Times

It's been a tough five years for the Oregon State football program as the Beavers have failed to make a bowl game since the 2013 campaign.

During that stretch, the Beavers have gone 5-7 in what was Mike Riley's last season, then had 2-10 and 4-8 seasons under Gary Andersen before a 1-11 campaign in 2017 when Andersen left six games in.

It wasn't a whole lot better in 2018 under first-year coach and former Beavers star quarterback Jonathan Smith as Oregon State was just 2-10.

Add that up and the Beavers are a dismal 14-46 since finishing 7-6 after a Hawaii Bowl win over Boise State on Christmas Eve 2013.

Most outside of the program don't expect much to change this season, but the players remain optimistic that there will be plenty of growth and success in Smith's second season.

"If you look at the strides that we've made and where we're at compared to last year it's a whole different squad," said senior offensive lineman Blake Brandel. "The amount that we've improved over the past year and a half, longer than that, since the coaching staff got here, is a testament to us and I think it's a testament to the coaching staff for getting us right."

"I think we've made huge strides and it's going to be a fun year."

For the Beavers to have success, it would appear they need to be more competitive at the line of scrimmage.

Oregon State had just 15 sacks in 12 games last year, tied for 118th out of 129 Football Bowl Subdivision teams. On the other side, the Beavers

gave up an FBS worst 48 on offense.

Smith said Friday he felt better about the line of scrimmage than a year ago but putting that in perspective may not be all that comforting to many.

"I think the defense has done a great job," senior defensive lineman Elu Aydon said. "Our focus was stop the run and get pressure on the quarterback."

The defensive line had a rough season thanks to injuries that destroyed any depth the Beavers may have had.

But the addition of Jordan Whitley and others on the line has helped, even with the loss of Jeromy Reichner to an ACL injury.

"All the new guys have come in and they've contributed," Aydon said. "Camp was basically a baseline for everybody and getting to see where people are. I feel like we will be ready for the game next Friday."

Brandel said he has seen the improvement each day in camp.

"They've made huge strides," he said. "The best part about that is they get better and then they challenge us so we've got to get better so it's kind of feeding off each other's energy and making each other improve. They've been huge in us improving and I think we've been huge in them improving."

The defensive players understand just how bad they were last season: 128th against the run (281.1 yards per game), total defense (538.8) and points allowed per game (45.7).

They have owned up to the performance and vowed to be much, much better.

"I believe we've grown a lot," junior linebacker Hamilcar

Rashed Jr. said. "That's in every position group. I feel like everybody's grown. We have young guys and they've stepped up a bunch so I feel like every position group, even my room, we've stepped up. Every day we've got to compete and it's a big step right now and we're going to continue to fight."

Another area for concern with the defense from last season is tackling. It was often a topic of discussion following each game but Smith said he has liked what he has seen in camp.

"Obviously we'll find out better here in a week," he said.

While the defense had its struggles, the offense was able to be competitive despite playing musical chairs at the quarterback position due to a rash of injuries to Jake Luton and Conor Blount.

Luton received a sixth year of eligibility and was announced as the starter on Friday, beating out Nebraska transfer Tristan Gebbia. Luton passed for 1,660 yards and 10 touchdowns last season and led a miraculous comeback at Colorado.

"We feel good either way with both guys whether one goes down or not," senior tight end Noah Togiai said of the quarterbacks. "Obviously I've been with Jake for three years now I know what he can do and this year he's performing at the highest level I've seen him perform at. It makes me excited, everybody on the offensive side and the defensive side excited to see what he's going to do."

Luton has been the starter for the opener the past two seasons but was injured in the fourth game of the 2017 season and did not return, then and suffered a concussion in the opener last season

and also missed some time with an ankle injury.

And while Luton is healthy and confident, the offensive line and tight ends know they have to keep whoever is under center upright and as untouched as possible.

"I think we took major strides in the protection," Togiai said. "We are a lot more comfortable in the schemes

that coach M (Jim Michalczik) gives us. I know we have more experience ... everybody knows what they're doing with different looks that we get, different pressures that we get, we're more comfortable with picking them up."

Smith said he has, for the most part, liked what he has seen out of the offense in training camp.

"The passing game has been crisp, I think we've been solid in our pass protection and the ball coming out on time," Smith said. "I think we've been deep at running back, B.J. Baylor; the way he's been carrying it has been a positive. I think still we can clean up some details in the run game (but) I can say that for everything."

Colts suddenly out of Luck

The Associated Press

Andrew Luck watched one last game from the sideline Saturday.

Then he said goodbye to the NFL.

The Indianapolis Colts quarterback heard boos as he walked away from the field, then walked to the podium and made the surprise decision official. The oft-injured star is retiring at age 29.

"I'm in pain, I'm still in pain. It's been four years of this pain, rehab cycle," Luck said. "It's a myriad of issues — calf strain, posterior ankle impingement, high ankle sprain. Part of my journey going forward will be figuring out how to feel better."

Luck wasn't planning to make the announcement following Saturday's 27-17 loss to the Chicago Bears. But when ESPN first reported the news during the fourth quarter, Luck changed the plan for a Sunday afternoon announcement.

Instead, he held a 25-minute impromptu news

conference.

At times he sounded wistful. At others, his voice cracked with emotion.

One thing was clear: The endless barrage of injuries stripped away his joy for the game and prompted him to walk away so he could enjoy the life he wants.

"There's no doubt when you hear him talk about the cycle of pain and injury and

rehab, you can hear that," coach Frank Reich said. "There's a saying in football that everyone knows and everybody lives by, it's next man up and even though this situation is unique, no one is exempt."

That task now falls to Jacoby Brissett, a fourth-year player whom the Colts acquired in a cutdown week-end trade two years ago.

SOCCER

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Marley Farrell with just three minutes left to keep the score even.

Cottrell again had three saves. Nan Kiebert and Bassett were the offensive aggressors for EOU with six and five shots, respectively. Kiebert put five shots on goal, and Bassett had three.

Eastern had 15 shots total, nine of which were on goal, while Midland had 14 and four, respectively. Rodriguez took five shots for Midland.

The Mountaineers (1-0-1 overall) will face yet another ranked opponent when they host No. 10 Embry-Riddle (Arizona) on Friday.



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A photograph of Karen King, a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a grey zip-up jacket over a teal turtleneck and blue jeans. She is holding a blue football helmet with both hands. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a fence.

Karen King
Pendleton, Oregon