

Analyze That!



JERRY THOMPSON
Editor
DUCK ILLUSTRATED

Carpe Diem Time for 2003 Ducks

Rare Opportunity:

Seize the day, carpe diem. If there was an alignment of the planets that affected Pac-10 football it is now, and now is the time for the Ducks to make the most of a great opportunity with its plethora of coaching changes and teams still in the building stages. In the Northwest "Slick Rick", "the Price is Wrong" and "Dennis the Menace" are gone. Keith Gilbertson has been hired to restore order and Mike Riley is the prodigal come home to Corvallis. Gilbertson and Riley have this in common: they have both been head coaches in the Pac10 before and never produced a team with a .500 or better record. Price's successor, defensive coordinator (Bill Doba) could fall victim to the Jim Lambricht peter principle. UCLA always has talent, but they have a rookie head coach (Karl Dorrell) who brings a lot of enthusiasm, but they have no proven quarterback and often it takes a team some time for the new system to jell. On top of the new coaches, Stanford and Cal's programs are rebuilding as they are led by second year coaches with few lettermen returning. Arizona's head coach is John Mackovic, a man who talks to his players like Mr. Rogers did to kindergartners is on the hot seat with a probable 1-11 season. That leaves USC, who lost their Heisman QB and who the Ducks don't play for the next two years, and Arizona State. Dirk Koetter has the Sun Devils on a roll as they return most of their team which almost beat Kansas State in the Holiday Bowl. Their schedule is favorable as they do not face the Huskies with arguably the best quarterback-receiver combination in the country (Cody Pickett to Reggie Williams) and tackle Oregon and USC at home. The October 4th game against the Trojans could well decide the conference champion. If coaching experience means anything, the Ducks should have an advantage over the rest of the Pac-10 with Mike Bellotti entering his 9th season. He is the dean of the Pac-10 coaches by far with Koetter and Mackovic entering only their 3rd seasons boasting the next longest tenures.

Burying 2002: A Strange Duck Season

As magical as the 2001 football season was with the Ducks finishing #2 in the nation, the Ducks in the 2002 seemed to have been put under a spell and the reverse magic carried over into recruiting and to the end of the spring. Here's a list of the weird events that put a damper on the football program. I suggest after reading the list we all cut it out and burn it as a sort of funeral or exorcism!

1. Rent for pay scandal that resulted in Quinn Dorsey being suspended for the first 4 games this year.
2. Second half collapse during last part of the season as Ducks start 6-0 and finish 1-6.

3. The strange Lynell Hamilton recruiting story where he wanted to be a Duck but his parents wouldn't let him.
4. The Rodney Woods recruitment controversy that had many debating whether he should be offered a scholarship.
5. The cruel beating of Devan Long and subsequent suicide by his attacker.
6. The Keith Lewis-Brandon Holliday incident where Lewis broke Holliday's nose with a punch.
7. The revealing by Nike of the proposed all-white road uniform that looks like a high school team's practice uniform. Seinfeld was a show "about nothing". By the same token could it have been George Kastanza who designed this "nothing" uniform?

Reasons for Optimism:

The 2003 team has the potential of being very good and instead of listening to my often too negative inclinations, I've reconsidered my initial 5th place choice. I'm counting on the Ducks to upset a couple of teams and finish 3rd in the Pac-10. The main reason for picking the Ducks near the top is that the strength of the team is both lines, see pages 6 and 7. Sure, a skilled veteran quarterback is a big factor in a team's success, as Steve Tannen aptly points out in the adjacent column, but I'm going with "the game is won in the trenches" philosophy. Both sides of the ball are talented, enormous, and focused. I think Fife or Clemens will come of age and lead the team, and as long as there are enough healthy receivers and linebackers, the Ducks should outscore their opponents.

I have noticed a greater intensity this fall in practice by both coaches and players and I think the team has the type of chemistry they need. There are no real big egos or stars on this team. They just want to win. All the players I have talked with have said that the team attitude is much better and the players are more close-knit group on and off the field than last year. New secondary coach John Neal is a positive person and a "player's coach" who is a breath of fresh air. In addition, Andy Ludwig appears more intense as well as comfortable leading the offense. He has added some new wrinkles which of course I cannot divulge now, but I am definitely looking forward to seeing a more creative and productive offense than last year. A season can turn on a play or two but that's the fun of it. I just hope that 2003 will show that 2002 was an anomaly and 2003 will be a return to those "big fun" days when we upset a top-10 team at home on ABC (a la BYU in 1990 — this year: Michigan), we go to Seattle and whip the Huskies, and we send the Beavers home at the end of the season without bragging rights. It all starts Saturday in a hostile environment at Mississippi State in what amounts to a must win for Oregon. A game where the offense is productive all four quarters and where the defense does not allow the Bulldogs to have their best passing game of the year as last year's opponents did is what the doctor has ordered. That will help all fans forget 2002 and have a new sense of optimism as bright as those "thunder green" and "lightning yellow" uniforms. Go Ducks! **O**



STEVE TANNEN
Feature Writer
DUCK ILLUSTRATED
addr: stevetannen@clearchannel.com
Host of SPORTTALK on AM1120 in Eugene, 5:30 -7pm weeknights, the region's premier sports program



Mallard Musings

Decisions, Decisions

No question the rule in the Pac 10 recently has been "best quarterbacking wins". I trace it to Jake Plummer with the '96 conference champion Sun Devils. Follow the line with me from 1997 through Carson Palmer last season. Big Baby Leaf, Cade McNown, Stanford's Todd Husak in 99, Marques Tuiasosopo, then of course Joey 2 seasons ago. Look at the damage Jason Gesser did in leading Wazzou to the Rose Bowl during 2002. It's why I think them darn Dawgs are going to win the league this autumn. Cody Pickett is the best QB out here and possibly from sea to shining sea. If you're Mike Bellotti or Andy Ludwig, what does your gut tell you about Jason Fife or Kellen Clemens? Throw out Jason's numbers from 2002. They don't tell the story. He repeatedly struggled to convert 3rd downs when things got tough from the USC loss on. You can lay a lot on the defense, but the quarterback needs to sustain drives and give those guys a chance to regroup. Fife ended the season with 24 touchdown passes. Over those final 5 league games and the Seattle Bowl defeat against Wake, he had one TD throw in the second half. It came to Keenan Howry against the Trojans with just over a minute left and was meaningless. In his defense, he was a first year starter, showed a major league arm and we've seen guys make monumental leaps in production between their junior and senior seasons. Check out the aforementioned Palmer! Looked like a bust until he dominated on his way to the 2002 Heisman. In Clemens, we have a blue chipper, rated among the Top-10 high

school quarterbacks in the nation! He was thrown into some difficult situations and did not go to pieces. The upside to his talent is through the roof, but I'm not hearing raves about either guy as show time approaches. I'm filled with concerns about this season. The linebackers are the walking wounded and now we've got academic concerns regarding senior David Martin who was supposed to be in the starting mix on the strong side. Kevin Mitchell is the constant in a sea of variables as Jerry Matson and Ramone Reed battle dings. With an unproven secondary beyond Keith Lewis my first thought is the defensive line best play like a combination of the Steel Curtain and Fearsome Foursome! The schedule is a double-edged sword. It's a good season to miss USC but the road games in Seattle and Tempe are killers. The opener at Mississippi State will not be a walk on the beach. We're talking about a pretty good SEC program and having to deal with that miserable deep-south humidity. As an East Coast guy, trust me, aside from Florida native Ryan Gilliam, none of the players has witnessed this. Let's end with some positive stuff. I look for Chris Vincent to emerge as the stud back. The recruiting brain trust created competition among talented players in key areas and the coaching staff is excellent. ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit referred to Mike Bellotti as one of the 4 best offensive minds in the country. This team could win 8 games.

Steve hosts *SportsTalk* on KPNW Radio AM1120, Eugene, Monday-Friday, 5-7 p.m. **O**



LET US SHUTTLE YOU IN OUR 2004 XC90

Alpine Import Service
Exclusively Volvo

PARTS ON LABOR GUARANTEED ONE YEAR REGARDLESS OF MILEAGE
541.726.1808 • 12th & Main, Springfield