

OREGON vs. MISSISSIPPI STATE

GAME PREVIEW

Saturday, August 30
6:00 p.m. (PDT)

Davis Wade Stadium
Starkville, Mississippi

Radio: Oregon Sports Network
(Jerry Allen, Mike Jorgensen)

Live TV: ESPN II

Series Record: Oregon leads, 1-0

Head Coach: Jackie Sherrill
(13th year), 73-65-2

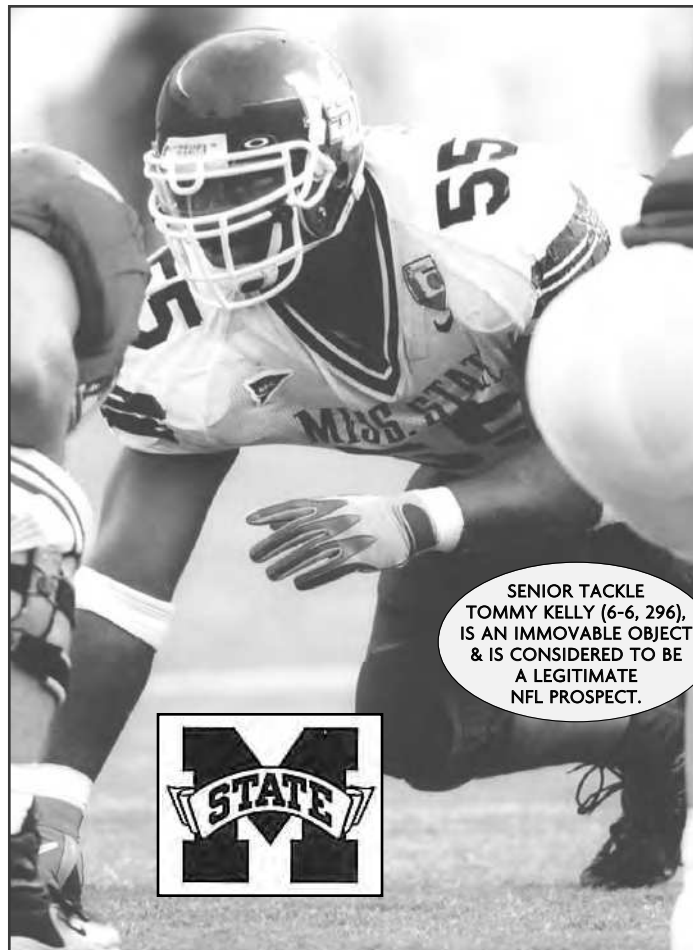
2002 Record: 3-9, 0-8
(6th in SEC West)

LAST YEAR Oregon pummeled the Bulldogs 36-13 in Eugene. In that season opener for both teams the Ducks dominated in almost every phase of the game, rolling up 371 yards of total offense to MSU's meager 223, most of which came from a desperate catch-up passing attack after the score got out of hand early. Oregon put 27 points on the board in the first half, but gave up a first-half shutout by allowing an 80-yard drive (including a 29-yard pass reception, imagine that!) and a touchdown 20 seconds before halftime. Apparently satisfied with their lead, the Ducks coasted in the second half, missing opportunities to make the final margin of victory a lot bigger than it was. Lost amid the post-game celebrations were some disturbing stats, portents of games yet to be played: five different Bulldog receivers caught at least one pass of 15+ yards from a freshman backup quarterback, and, of the 12 MSU first downs, eight were accomplished through the air, three by penalty.

THE DUCKS are looking for some southern hospitality in their first visit to Starkville, and hope to start their season with some much needed momentum. In last season's second half collapse they dropped six of their last seven games, including a 38-17 embarrassment at the hands of Wake Forest in the now-defunct Seattle Bowl. Those failures left a bad taste in everyone's mouth, especially that of head coach Mike Bellotti. "Losses provide negative reinforcement for players, but positive reinforcement for coaches. It makes us work harder," he said, in referring to Oregon's need to correct deficiencies and forge ahead.

The defensive and offensive lines look to be the strength at Oregon this year, led by DE Igor Olshansky, DT Haloti Ngata, DT Junior Siavii, center Dan Weaver, guards Joey Forster and Nick Steitz, and tackles Adam Snyder and Mike DeLaGrange, all with extensive starting experience, proven skills and a lot of trust in each other.

The Ducks need either senior Jason Fife or sophomore Kellen Clemens to show marked improvement at the quarterback position for the team to win more than seven games. Leadership and decision-making will be crucial. Similarly, at tailback, sophomore Terrence Whitehead, redshirt freshman Chris Vincent, and juniors Ryan Shaw and Kenny Washington will have to sort out who's da man to take advantage of



the holes provided by the O-line. Swift senior Samie Parker (10.18 for 100 meters on the UO track team) has game-breaking ability to score on the long ball and will lead a talented, but inexperienced receiving corps.

Hard-hitting senior linebacker Kevin Mitchell and senior free safety Keith Lewis (second team All Pac-10) will be principle players behind the D-line, while the onus is on cornerbacks Steven Moore, Aaron Gipson and Marques Binns (with possible help from some talented newcomers) to greatly improve on a pass defense that allowed a shocking 35 TD receptions last year and finished the season 115th in the nation in passing yardage allowed.

THE BULLDOGS are hoping that their hometown heat and humidity will deflate the Ducks and produce a stark upset. Head coach Jackie Sherrill and his team are looking for payback for last year's whuppin' by the Ducks, and are anxious to put last year's entire 3-9 season far back in their rearview mirror. Since 2000 when MSU posted an 8-4 record including a bowl victory over Texas A & M, the Bulldogs have fallen into the SEC basement with an overall record of 6-17, and a 2-14 mark in conference play.

This year Mississippi State is looking for a rededication to winning, as exemplified by Sherrill's major overhaul of his coaching staff. He hired Morris Watts from Michigan State as offensive coordinator, Ron Cooper from Wisconsin as defensive coordinator, as well as three new position coaches.

The coaches will choose between two contrasting players for their starting QB. Now a fifth-year senior, Kevin Fant (6-2, 207) was suspended for last year's Oregon game and was injured much of the rest of the year, but still threw for 1,918 yards, 10 touchdowns and

12 picks. He missed the last two weeks of spring practice due to personal problems. Sophomore Kyle York (6-0, 205) completed only 49% of his attempts last year, but got 192 of his 693 yards against the Ducks.

The top tailbacks are junior Fred Reid (5-9, 180) and sophomores Jerious Norwood (6-0, 185) and Nick Turner (5-10, 182). Last year Reid had more rushing attempts, but Norwood averaged 6.0 yards per carry. Senior Justin Jenkins and junior Ray Ray Bivines are fast and athletic

wide receivers, but will be looking for a legitimate tight end to help relieve defensive pressure.

The MSU defensive front will be anchored by DE Tommy Kelly, who will probably be playing on Sundays next year. Look for sophomore linebacker Marvin Birdsong to be tough up the middle, while versatile Jason Clark, a defensive end, may occasionally line up as a safety in Coach Cooper's 4-2-5 defense. Sophomore free safety Darren Williams was a Parade All-American and will lead the secondary.

GAMETIME QUESTIONS

1. Will Oregon's quarterback find other receivers when Samie Parker is covered?
2. Will Mississippi State's new coordinators befuddle the Ducks with alignments and plays not seen last year?
3. Will the Duck secondary's new schemes eliminate "explosion" plays downfield?
4. Which team will establish the better running game?
5. Will Oregon's punt and punt return teams make a positive difference?
6. Will Coach Bellotti find the player leadership and team chemistry to put the Ducks back on track?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Given the geographic distribution and readership of this publication, two predictions are in order:

The Wildly-Optimistic-Ducks-Are-Awesome Prediction:

Ducks 42, Bulldogs 10

The Objective-Get-Real-Ducks-Have-Questions Prediction:

UO 23, Mississippi St. 20

BOTTOM LINE BONUS

Other games of interest this week:

Thursday

Oregon State 56, Sacramento State 7
(7 PM in Corvallis)

Saturday

Southern Cal 33, Auburn 30
(3 PM in Auburn)
California 20, Southern Miss 19
(3 PM in Berkeley)
Ohio State 31, Washington 28
(5 PM in Columbus)
Nevada 35, Southern Utah 3
(7 PM in Reno)
UTEP 16, Arizona 10
(7 PM in Tucson)
Washington State 24, Idaho 14
(7:30 PM in Seattle) **O**

Mississippi State University TWO DEEP

OFFENSE

- SE** 8 JUSTIN JENKINS (6-1, 210, Sr.)
9 Brandon Wright (5-9, 149, So.)
- T** 77 RICHARD BURCH (6-5, 302, So.)
71 James Redmond (6-7, 319, Fr.)
- G** 64 BRAD WEATHERS (6-5, 323, Jr.)
74 Otis Riddley (6-1, 340, Fr.)
- C** 63 BLAKE JONES (6-2, 284, Sr.)
50 Chris McNeil (6-3, 283, So.)
- G** 50 CHRIS MCNEIL (6-3, 283, So.)
68 Johnny Wadley (6-2, 349, So.)
- T** 60 DAVID STEWART (6-6, 295, Jr.)
70 Avery House (6-4, 294, So.)
- TE** 87 AARON LUMPKIN (6-4, 252, Sr.)
86 Blake Pettit (6-4, 238, Fr.)
- QB** 16 KEVIN FANT (6-2, 207, Sr.)
17 Kyle York (6-0, 200, So.)
- TB** 7 NICK TURNER (5-10, 182, So.)
12 Jerious Norwood (6-1, 185, So.)
- FB** 33 DARNELL JONES (5-11, 240, Jr.)
31 Nick Signaigo (6-3, 241, Jr.)
- FL** 10 RAY RAY BIVENS (5-11, 176, Jr.)
83 Tee Milons (5-9, 165, So.)

DEFENSE

- DE** 40 JASON CLARK (6-1, 240, Sr.)
92 Roosevelt Tate (6-4, 260, Fr.)
- DT** 93 RONALD FIELDS (6-2, 303, Jr.)
96 Markell McKinley (6-2, 294, Fr.)
- DT** 55 TOMMY KELLY (6-6, 296, Sr.)
91 Lennie Day (6-3, 261, Sr.)
- DE** 36 WILLIE EVANS (6-2, 263, So.)
59 Robert Spivey (6-1, 245, Jr.)
- LB** 32 MARVIN BIRDSONG (6-2, 240, So.)
19 Rico Bennett (6-0, 209, So.)
- LB** 53 T.J. MAWHINNEY (6-1, 230, Sr.)
52 Lenny Kern (5-11, 230, So.)
- LB** 29 CLARENCE MCDUGAL (6-1, 215, So.)
47 Cody Upton (6-1, 240, Jr.)
- CB** 6 ODELL BRADLEY (5-10, 180, Sr.)
24 Demetric Wright (6-0, 200, Sr.)
- SS** 30 KEVIN DOCKERY (5-10, 181, So.)
26 Chris Swain (5-11, 197, Jr.)
- FS** 22 DARREN WILLIAMS (6-2, 204, So.)
27 Gabe Wallace (5-11, 196, Jr.)
- CB** 2 QUINTON CULBERSON (6-2, 210, Fr.)
25 Slovakia Griffith (5-11, 190, Jr.)