

incredible depth at every position.

The Wolverines have two warm-up home games against Central Michigan and Houston before their first real test of the season, Notre Dame. The Fighting Irish surprised Michigan last year, 25-23, but must play in Ann Arbor this fall. This is a critical game for the Wolverines for obvious reasons, but it is of special interest for the Ducks, since it occurs the week before Michigan plays its first road game at Autzen. And traditionally, Big Blue lets down in their first trip away from home. Could the Notre Dame battle set the stage for a big upset? It's possible, if the Ducks are ready.

WASHINGTON STATE COUGARS

Saturday, September 27, 12:30 p.m. (PDT)
Autzen Stadium, Eugene

Series Record: Oregon leads, 38-35-7

Head Coach: Bill Doba (1st year)

2002 Record: 10-3, 7-1 (first in PAC 10)



CORNERBACK
JASON DAVID

The operative word for Washington State this year is new, specifically because Bill Doba is in his first year as a head coach after serving as the Cougar's defensive coordinator for nine seasons. And because senior **Matt Kegel** will be the starter at quarterback, following the departure of Pac-10 Co-Offensive Player of the Year, Jason Gesser. Whether new translates into good will determine the direction of Washington State's season.

Kegel has played sporadically over the past three years, mostly because of Gesser's dominant leadership on and off the field, and due to a knee injury. At 6-5 and 235 pounds he is similar in size to his famous and infamous cousin, Ryan Leaf, who quarterbacked the Cougars to the Rose Bowl at the end of the 1997 season before going on to a short-lived NFL career. Kegel threw for only 211 yards

last year and will have sophomore Chris Hurd (6-2, 217) and redshirt freshman Josh Swogger (6-5, 243) looking to take over if he fails to produce.

Junior tackle **Calvin Armstrong** (6-8, 321), first team All Pac-10 last year, will anchor the offensive line. Senior Mike Shelford (6-2, 275) and sophomore Nick Muhlhauser (6-2, 282) will compete at the center position, while returning senior starters Billy Knotts (6-7, 283) and Josh Parrish (6-6, 232,) will mix-and-match with junior Sam Lightbody (6-9, 310), and sophomores Riley Fitt-Chappell (6-6, 310) and Norvell Holmes (6-3, 295) at the other line positions.

Running back Jermaine Green (5-11, 220) returns for his senior season, hoping it's his best. Last year he rushed for 829 yards and averaged 5.5 yards per carry, in spite of MCL and groin injuries. His health will be an important factor for the WSU offense, since backup Jonathan Smith (5-10, 190, senior) was injured most of last year and has little experience.

Junior Devard Darling is the only returning receiver with much experience and proven ability. At 6-3, 206 pounds and with 4.3 speed he will be a big play threat on every down, but he will need others to step up and absorb some of the attention that opposing defenses will undoubtedly steer his way. Last year he caught 54 passes for 800 yards and 11 touchdowns; next year he'll be playing football on Sundays, if he leaves school early.

Senior defensive linemen Jeremy Williams (6-4, 284), Isaac Brown (6-3, 222) and D.D. Acholonu (6-3, 230) are major candidates for post-season honors. However, the linebackers behind them are undistinguished and are possibly the weakest part of the defense.

Three-fourths of the secondary returns in senior safeties Virgil Williams (6-1, 195) and Erik Coleman (5-10, 200) and cornerback Jason David (5-8, 165). David made seven pass interceptions and had 10 pass breakups last year and the safeties were solid, but, putting everything in perspective, their jobs were a whole lot easier due to the presence of cover corner Marcus Trufant, who controlled half the field by himself and was the #1 draft choice of the Seahawks this spring.

With so many new faces in new positions, including the head coach, it will be difficult for Washington State to match last year's record. Coach Doba has a few good men, but lacks quality depth, something that may affect the outcome of several games. Look for the Cougs to finish somewhere in the middle of the Pac-10. They have a tough non-league schedule, playing Idaho at Seahawk Stadium, both Notre Dame and Colorado on the road, and New Mexico, favored to challenge for the Mountain West title. Oregon should win a spirited battle in Eugene this year.

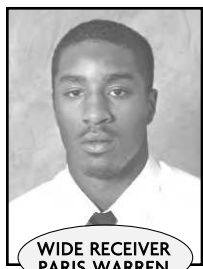
UTAH UTES

Friday, October 3, 7 p.m. (PDT)
Rice Eccles, Salt Lake City

Series Record: Oregon leads, 17-7

Head Coach: Urban Meyer (1st year)

2002 Record: 5-6, 3-4 (fifth in Mountain West)



WIDE RECEIVER
PARIS WARREN

Utah is projected to finish in the second division in the Mountain West Conference due to their history of underachieving and the fact that they have a new head coach, Urban Meyer. Ute fans hope he will generate a turnaround in Salt Lake City much like he did at Bowling Green. Prior to his arrival, that program had suffered through six straight losing seasons, finishing 2-9 in 2000. In the last two years he led the Falcons to 8-3 and 9-3 records. Of course success at a Mid-American Conference school is usually viewed with scepticism by teams from other "major" (BCS) conferences, and the Mountain West is rated only slightly better than the MAC. So Meyer will be working to prove himself at this level where the competition will be considerably tougher.

As for the Utes over the past few years, they have played just well enough to be competitive, but have lost a lot of close games. For example, last year Utah outscored other teams (249-226) and had more total yardage (4,094-3,653), but had a losing record. And for Ute

fans, just being competitive at the I-A level isn't going to cut it. This year's team will need to kick it up a notch in order to prove itself.

Utah is betting on the best running back combo in the conference, senior Marty Johnson (5-11, 230) and junior Brandon Warfield (5-10, 210), to lead the offense. Last year Johnson ran for 405 yards (7.0 yards per carry) in the first two games before suffering a season-ending injury. Warfield became the starter in seven conference games and averaged 127 yards.

Junior quarterback Brett Elliott (6-3, 205) started the last six games of 2002, completing 58.8% of his passes for 1,529 yards and 10 touchdowns. Former starter Lance Rice (6-1, 207, senior) and sophomore Alex Smith (6-4, 205) are waiting in the wings. Elliott is the most mobile, Rice has started more games (20), while Smith has the best arm. All three may be needed.

The top three receivers from last year are gone, so whichever quarterback will be looking for some new guys. Junior starter **Paris Warren** (6-1, 213), who transferred from Oregon a year ago, looks to be one of them, and he'll be highly motivated to perform at Autzen when he comes running out of the other tunnel. Junior receivers Lynzell Jackson (6-2, 190), Larry Miles (5-11, 180), Travis LaTendresse (6-1, 194) and JC transfer Jerome Wright (6-0, 181) should also be factors in the Ute passing attack.

Defensive end **Jason Kaufusi**, a 6-3, 250-pound senior, has been first-team All-Mountain West for the last two years. He will be counting on senior Josh Savage (6-4, 276) to hold down the other end, while the interior line gains experience. Senior Ray Holdcraft (5-11, 242) is the only returning linebacker with much experience. In the secondary strong safety Dave Revill (5-11, 205, senior) led the team with 89 tackles last year, while senior cornerback Arnold Parker has size (6-2, 210) and speed (4.39).

Defensive coordinator Kyle Whittingham's troops have led the Mountain West in total defense for the last three years and in scoring defense the last four years. Extending that record may be problematic given the inexperience throughout the lineup.

Utah plays Texas A&M and Colorado State on the road, and Utah State and Cal at home before hosting Oregon. How the Utes perform in these latter two games (both on a Thursday, both later in the day) may give an indication how they'll play against the Ducks (on a Friday, also at night).

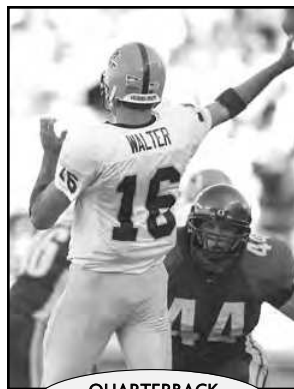
ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS

Saturday, October 11, TBA (PDT)
Sun Devil Stadium, Tempe

Series Record: Arizona State leads, 14-9

Head Coach: Dirk Koetter (3rd year), 12-13

2002 Record: 8-6, 5-3 (third in Pac-10)



QUARTERBACK
ANDREW WALTER

Arizona State was the surprise of the Pac-10 last year; after pre-season estimates placed them ninth in the league, the Sun Devils finished with a 5-3 record, placed third in the conference, and nearly upset Kansas State in the Holiday Bowl. Head coach Dirk Koetter (who was Oregon's offensive coordinator a few years ago) welcomes back 16 starters and will again employ an explosive offense (averaging 33 points per game over his first two years) and a tough defense. Most pre-season polls this year pick ASU to finish at least third in the Pac-10, with USC and Washington as the other contenders. Fortunately the Sun Devils play the Trojans in Tempe and don't have to play the Huskies at all.

The key player on offense is junior quarterback

Andrew Walter (6-5, 221), who completed 56.7% of

his passes for an astounding school-record 3,877 yards and 28 touchdowns. And he started in only 10 of the 14 games. Sophomore Chad Christensen (6-3, 206) started the first four games of the season, but returns as the backup signal caller. (Duck fans would like to forget how Walter shredded the Oregon secondary last year, throwing for 536 yards (a Pac-10 record), and leading his team to a 45-42 come-from-behind victory at Autzen. That game started the Ducks' slide down the standings and exposed Oregon's Achilles heel to the rest of the country.)

The principle downfield targets in ASU's passing attack will be junior Daryl Lightfoot (5-9, 171), senior Skyler Fulton (6-0, 200), sophomore Derek Hagan (6-1, 192), each of whom had at least 30 receptions last year. Highly regarded redshirt freshman Terry Richardson (6-0, 182) will make his presence known this year, also.

Senior fullback Mike Karney (6-0, 260) is a great blocker, and tailbacks Mike Williams (6-0, 205, senior) and sophomores Cornell Canidate (5-9, 197) and Hakim Hill (6-0, 210) figure to be the beneficiaries. Last year these three combined for 1,293 rushing yards and 22 touchdowns. The entire offensive line returns; lining up from left-to-right will be sophomore tackle Chaz White (6-4, 291), senior guard Tim Fa'aita (6-1, 305), junior center Drew Hodgdon (6-3, 285), senior guard Regis Crawford (6-3, 304) and sophomore tackle Grayling Love (6-3, 282). And there is depth here with two others with starting experience in reserve.

Three of the starters on the defensive line return. Junior end Jimmy Verdon (6-3, 273), and senior tackles Shane Jones (6-2, 290) and Brian Montesanto (6-5, 261) had a great year together last year, but will have to step up their play this fall to compensate for the absence of All-Everything end Terrell Suggs (73 tackles, 24 sacks), who was the #1 draft pick of the Baltimore Ravens last spring. This year's linebackers will have very little experience, and will depend on Honorable Mention All Pac-10 junior safeties **Riccardo Stewart** (5-10, 203) and Jason Shivers (6-1, 193) for help. Junior cornerback R.J. Oliver (5-9, 171) has a lot of speed as shown by his 18 pass breakups and 48 tackles last season.

Special teams coach Tom Osborne (also a recent Oregon assistant) is happy to have second team All Pac-10 senior punter Tim Parker (6-0, 192) returning, and may try him as the Sun Devil placekicker as well.

Arizona State looks to be favored in its first four games leading up to their big showdown with USC on October 4. This could work in the Ducks' favor, since they visit Tempe the very next week. Will the Sun Devils have a letdown when Oregon comes to town?