

by Jerry Thompson

What Happened? Ducks Now at Turning Point in Season

How does a team go from beating Michigan to getting shellacked by Washington State the next week? It was the worst loss in terms of point margin (39) in Coach Bellotti's tenure. The 38-6 Cotton Bowl loss in 1995 was the worst before last Saturday. In 1991 Oregon lost by 38 (45-7) to Cal when Bellotti was offensive coordinator. If you think the loss to the Cougars was bad, and it was, be thankful you weren't in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1985 when Oregon lost to Nebraska 63-0, also on September 27th.

First let's look at some factors that the Duck coaches and players said were not the reasons they were "thumped":

1. Overconfidence: Coach Bellotti said they were confident as a team, but not overconfident. "You have to have confidence and we were realistic," Bellotti said.

2. The 100 degree heat and sun in the Ducks' faces while WSU was in the shade. "Not a factor", Bellotti said.

3. Poor practice and hangover from the Michigan exhilaration. Bellotti said the WSU practice week was as good or better than the Michigan preparation.

4. Not "fired up." Kellen Clemens said that the atmosphere in the hotel Friday night and in the lockerroom before the game was very similar to that before the Michigan game.

5. Their quarterback got hot. Hardly. Although Kegel hit some good long passes, overall he completed only

13 passes and threw 20 incompletions.

6. Tipped passes was WSU strategy based on what they saw on film. Coach Doba laughed and said that was not the case. "We work on that (tipped passes by D-line) all the time on pass rush drills in every practice."

7. Cougars surprised the Ducks with formations etc. No. Clemens said he saw nothing new but "what they did they did very well." The only trick by WSU's offense was the halfback pass which they could have saved for a closer game.

8. Ducks gave up. Clemens and Bellotti both emphasized that the team on both sides of the ball continued to "battle". One of Kellen's scrambles in the second half where he made some 2nd and 3rd efforts showed how he continued to give 100%.

Reasons the Ducks got "thumped":

1. Too many "explosion" plays. Kegel's first quarter 41-yard pass to Sammy Moore and 38-yarder to Devard Darling appeared to be misjudged by Justin Phinisee. Coach Doba said that he thought they could throw on Oregon's corners.

2. No running game. The Cougars' defensive interior stuffed Oregon's run and the entire line got their hands up to tip passes. The Ducks became one-dimensional as they tried to play catch-up. Doba said he thinks his team can stop any team's run. He said against Notre Dame they cramped up in the 4th quarter and couldn't stop them.

3. Blocked punts: Coach Ross said WSU had almost blocked punts in every game and this time they did. After the first punt was blocked inside, the Oregon punt blocking group over-compensated inside and the next time the Cougars came from the outside.

4. Quarterbacks forced passes: Jason Fife's first interception was a good idea as he tried to throw the ball out of bounds, but he didn't quite throw it far enough. Fife and Clemens later would force some passes into coverage.

5. Big Miscues: The Demetrius Williams fumble and the Parker drop in the first half were critical plays that undoubtedly would have made the game much closer at halftime.

6. Pressure on the quarterback: WSU made 4 sacks and had Clemens and Fife on the run. Ducks only had two sacks and Kegel often had plenty of time.

7. Oregon was beaten by a better team: "I just think we got outplayed," said Clemens. Bellotti said he's never had a team play that poorly in a half or a game. Coach Doba was gracious in victory: "You have a darn good football team and honest to God the ball bounced the right way and we got lucky." Credit WSU, the defending Pac-10 Champs. Doba told coach Bellotti that his Cougar defense may be the best he's ever had in his many years at WSU.

Turning Point

Friday night's non-conference game



Justin Phinisee was in position to deflect or intercept WSU's second TD, but he misjudged the ball.

with Utah, a team similar to WSU, will tell a lot about this Oregon team. Will they return to last year's funk and tank, or will they fight back and overcome? Kellen Clemens: "There's an entirely different atmosphere now than on the '02 team that should help us down the backstretch." The team is approaching the loss as an aberration or "bad day at the office", concentrating on the job at hand, and making some necessary corrections. A win over Utah would be huge with probably the weakest two Pac-10 opponents left on the Oregon schedule up next in Arizona State and Stanford. If Oregon could win 2 of 3 in October and 2 of 4 in November they would still finish 8-4. Of course, the team and fans are hoping for much better. In 1969 Oregon got trounced 60-13 by Air Force in the infamous "fog game". The next week the Ducks came back and beat Washington 22-7. That's the kind of turnaround Oregon needs, or this could become a real long season.

Observations

Although it was very frustrating to see Oregon drop their first game and play so poorly at home, at least it was against the Cougars. I have no fondness for any of the other Pac-10 schools, but I admire Washington State, a team which is not "rich" or "cool". To go to the Rose Bowl twice in the last 5 years is "dazzling". Their athletic department budget according to the figures I've seen is just a little over 1/2 of Oregon's and they have the worst football stadium in the Pac-10. Although coach Doba would probably not admit it, I suspect a very high percentage of their players were not wanted by most of the Pac-10 teams. Let's face reality, they are at a big disadvantage because of location. Very few players really want to go to Pullman. One last thing. I admired the way they came out the second half against Oregon with a 36 point lead. They didn't sit on it. Instead, they passed almost every down. Over the years they have seemed to learn that you have to put teams away and never become conservative. **O**

Game MVP



Igor Olshansky

Six of Olshansky's game leading nine tackles were solo. Three of his tackles were for loss (total of 16 yards) and he had one sack. Great effort Igor!