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DUCKS ILLUSTRATED

Chalk Talk

Ducks Win, Gain Confidence

Mike Bellotti is very proud of his team right now, and he should be. Despite a middle-season segment of poor performances that smelled like season-old sweat socks, Bellotti maintained his poise and composure and focused on the positive, and the potential. The potential of this Duck football team continued to grow last weekend with a decisive 31-13 victory over the beleaguered Bruins of UCLA. Bellotti called the first half, "our best of the year, it was the way you would draw it up—we have some confidence now." For a long time, (October), Bellotti was the only person in Eugene who had confidence in the Ducks. Now, with two excellent wins in a row, they are playing as he envisioned all along.

How did it happen? Ask defensive back Justin Phinisee and he will tell you it's because they've improved their work ethic in practice and they're playing with more enthusiasm. There is no doubt that Oregon coaches did not panic, or at least if they did, it never showed. Schemes have been simplified on defense, the front four is playing more to their capabilities and the linebackers have begun to make big plays. All the while, the secondary has cut down on giving up the easy score or big play. "Defense has made the biggest difference" said Bellotti, regarding the Ducks' coming of age. In addition, special teams have cut foolish penalties and provided solid returns of kicks and punts and the offense has cut down turnovers. This turnabout helps erase the memory of last year's meltdown and puts Oregon fans in the mood for a stirring Civil War experience this weekend. But, make no mistake, Bellotti and his staff have done a remarkable job of breathing life back into what was, after the Arizona State debacle, a moribund corpse. A victory in the Civil War could make this one of his finest coaching jobs ever at Oregon.

Up Next: OSU & the "Civil War"

If you look at the history of the Civil War (lately), you will see that the Oregon Ducks should beat the Oregon State Beavers in Autzen Stadium Saturday, because the home team has won the last six in a row. However, if Beaver quarterback Derek Anderson completes 50% or better of his passes, Oregon State should win the game, as they are 11-0 when he hits more than half his attempts. On the other hand, if Oregon quarterbacks Kellen Clemens and Jason Fife do not throw an interception, the Ducks should claim victory, as they are 7-0 under those circumstances. But, if you've been following the Pac-10 race closely this year, you understand that this is a wacky, unpredictable season that isn't over yet. Consider that Washington beat OSU in Corvallis, 38-17; beat Oregon 42-10, and lost to California 54-7. That's the same Cal team the Beavers stoned in Berkeley, 35-21, and the Ducks beat 21-17.

So it sounds to reason, that there will be no predictability to the 107th Civil War football game — or, not?

How the Beavers Could Win:

1. Out rush the Ducks — in particular, unleash All-American Steven Jackson, who rushed for 153 yards last year in a 45-24 Civil War win.
2. Pick off a pass — last year the Beavers pilfered three of Jason Fife's throws in their victory; three years ago they stole five off Joey Harrington.
3. Protect Derek Anderson, a sometimes fragile-psyched quarterback so he can get the ball to James Newson, (who caught 11 balls for 168 yards in last year's victory), tight end Tim Euhus and former walk on Mike Hass on more than half his attempts. Last year, Anderson completed 21 of 37 for 370 yards and no interceptions.

How the Ducks Could Win:

1. Hold the Beavers under 100 yards rushing.
2. Have a rusher get over 100 yards — the Ducks usually win those games.
3. Protect the quarterback, (probably Clemens), and give up no interceptions.
4. Have no turnovers; the Ducks usually win those games, too.
5. Play with enthusiasm and class and get the home crowd to become an intimidating factor.
6. Continue the sensational punt and kickoff returns that have sparked the Ducks' revitalized scoring drives the past two games.

How the Beavers Could Lose:

1. Give up long punt and kickoff returns.
2. Continue to get stupid, undisciplined penalties for late hits, taunting, and other personal fouls.
3. Allow the Ducks to pressure Derek Anderson, who is not very good when he is forced to scramble.
4. Fall into long third down situations, being forced to throw the ball.

How the Ducks Could Lose:

1. Play run defense like they did against the Huskies, allowing 388 (total) yards in the second half, after holding a 10-7 lead.
2. Give up the long pass like they did against WSU, Utah, Arizona State, and Washington.
3. Continue to get penalties for undisciplined play, like offsides against the defense or holding on the offense.
4. Have senior players make inappropriate remarks towards the Beaver Nation that could be posted on OSU bulletin boards and fan their fire.

If you had to bet the ranch on this game, you'd look at some key stats that mean something in a rival game that is likely to be played in miserable weather. Many years ago, I was visiting John Robinson, then head Coach at USC, while his team was preparing to play Michigan in the Rose Bowl. He told me that one of the most significant things he learned in his time at Oregon (as both an offensive and defensive coordinator), was how important it was to have a power running game. "All those years, we would come into the Civil War game with the fancy passing attack and see it go to hell in the wind and the rain," Robby said. "What I learned was that if you were going to

win in November, you had to have a power running game that would be as good in the last game as it was in the first." With that in mind, the edge goes to the Beavers. They have the best back, Steven Jackson, who at 230+ pounds, is a true power runner, Bellotti calls him the "best in the country." The Beavers also have the edge because they have the best defense in the league, more physical and faster than Oregon's defense.

But hang on Duck fans, because Oregon's defense is getting better, and has, on more than one occasion, rallied to shut down big-time running backs, like this year with Michigan's Heisman candidate, Chris Perry. The Ducks have a fighting chance on defense because they can mass and stymie Jackson, (like the Huskies did), and still have some gusto to contain Anderson. The Ducks can win this game if they force the game to be decided by Anderson, a quarterback who dearly depends on his running game to keep the defensive rush from teeing off on him. In those situations, Anderson doesn't see defenders very well, throws off his back foot, takes sacks, and makes poor decisions. He's much like a baseball pitcher who must stay ahead in the count to be successful. The Ducks also have (at this stage of the season), an edge in special teams play, particularly in the return game. If Kenny Washington and Justin Phinisee continue their return work and the Duck cover teams continue to do well, look for a big play to happen in the kicking game for Oregon.

In this Civil War game, key players from the state of Oregon will make the difference, because the game means that much more to them. For the Beavers that group would include quarterback

Anderson, tight end Euhus, wide receiver Hass, and defenders Bill Swancutt, and Mitch Meeuwse. For the Ducks, quarterback Clemens, fullback Matt Floberg, center Dan Weaver, and tackle Robin Knebel are candidates. At the beginning of the season, the Ducks had 24 Oregon high school players on their roster while the Beavers listed 35. Maybe the winner of the Civil War will be the team whose Oregon-sourced players perform the best.

My only suggestion — if the game goes into overtime, instead of playing, stage a "taunt-off" between OSU's linebacker Richard Seigler and the Ducks' Keith Lewis. Unfortunately, the "Civil War" is an ironical moniker for a game that sometimes gets "uncivil." The team that maintains the greatest civility could be the winner. When the Ducks experience tough times, they get down — 39 TDs allowed/27 points per game allowed. When the Beavers experience tough times, they get stupid-116 penalties for 1,152 yards. To win, the victor is going to have to battle critical tendencies that have been established and not completely overcome, through this wild and wacky Pac-10 race. **O**

Ken Woody played defensive back, wide receiver and place kicker for the UO from 1966-70. He coached college football for 18 years, including stints at the UO, UW, and WSU. He was a head coach twice, at Whitman College and Washington University-St. Louis. He also did television football color commentary for KCPQ (Seattle-Tacoma) and Fox Sports Northwest for 14 years.

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