



KEN WOODY
Feature Writer
DUCKS ILLUSTRATED

Gopher Offense presents Tough Combination

It may not sound like a football match made in heaven, but the 2003 Sun Bowl, matching the Minnesota Golden Gophers, fourth-place (tie)



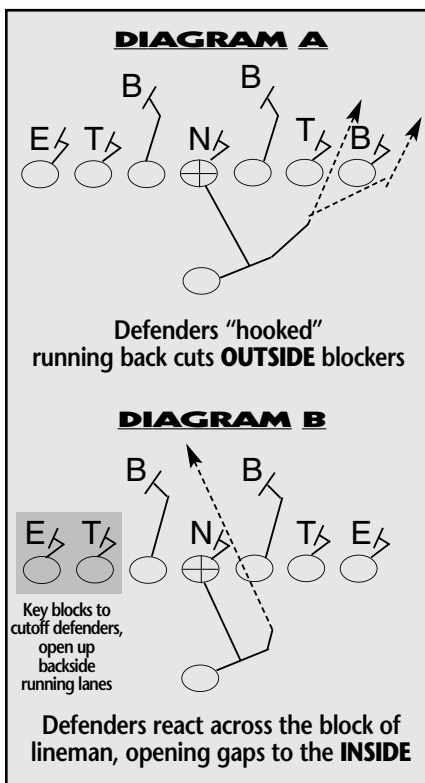
Offensive coordinator Mitch Browning



Minnesota quarterback Asad Abdul-Khaliq

finishers in the Big 10, against the Oregon Ducks, third (tie) in the Pac-10, shapes up as a defensive coordinator's nightmare. Oregon's Nick Aliotti, who helped orchestrate

Photos courtesy: University of Minnesota Media Services



one of the better defensive "about-faces" this year with three straight wins to help the Ducks get into a better bowl, must be having nightmares watching Minnesota on film. Under Aliotti, the Ducks have always matched up well against power running teams in a big game: Colorado in the Fiesta Bowl, Michigan and Oregon State this year. It has been a combination of playing the percentages (Michigan showed decisive run tendencies by formation this season, allowing the Ducks to stack up the line of scrimmage in many situations), and having opponents who could not pass to win (Colorado, Oregon State). In both situations, the Ducks forced their opponents to pass when they expected them to, allowing for creative pass rush and downfield coverage situations.

But Minnesota is a "go-for" of a different color. Not only do they boast the nation's number three rushing team, with two rushers over 1,000 yards: Marion Barber III, and

true freshman Laurence Maroney, but they also have the nation's third-ranking quarterback in throwing efficiency, Asad Abdul-Khaliq, who has completed 146 of 229 passes, 17 touchdowns and only 5 interceptions. That combination spells trouble for Oregon's defense, because it is a balanced offense between power running and passing, led by a quarterback who can scramble and make intelligent throwing decisions while under pressure. The Gophers can score, averaging 39 points per game while giving up only 21. Some say Minnesota had an easy time of it in the early going, but they only lost three games, to Michigan by three (after having a 28-7 lead), Michigan State by six, and Iowa 40-22.

Minnesota's top receivers also have speed. Aaron Hosack (6-5) caught 45 balls for 8 TD's and a 15.7 average and Jared Ellerson



Running back Marion Barber III

caught 44 for 909 yards (20.7 average) and five touchdowns. Statistically, the Gophers have a good punt return unit with Barber III averaging 14.9 per return, and their field goal kicker, Rhys Lloyd (out of Dover, England) nailing 13 of 16 tries, 2 of 3 from 50-yard range. The Gophers will use a variety of formations, from spreading the field with five receivers, to two tight ends. Abdul-Khaliq is comfortable both behind center and in the shotgun. Glen Mason, who is in his seventh year as UM's head coach, has had a long reputation as an outstanding offensive coach, and this team could be his best ever in that category.

A typical running play for Minnesota is the "zone" play with two tight ends (*see diagrams at left*). This play is similar to Oregon State's favorite for Steven Jackson, although the Gophers have a better offensive line, including an All-American sophomore at center, Greg Eslinger, #61. The offensive linemen fire off

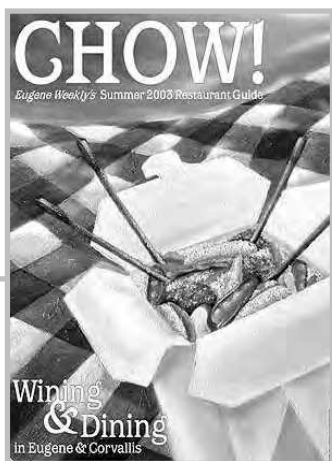
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MINNESOTA OFFENSE

WR	84	Aaron Hosack (6-5, 210, Sr.)
T	74	Rian Melander (6-7, 295, Jr.)
G	68	Mark Setterstrom (6-3, 290, So.)
C	61	Greg Eslinger (6-3, 280, So.)
G	70	Joe Quinn (6-4, 285, Sr.)
T	78	Joe Ainslie (6-7, 305, So.)
TE	82	Ben Utecht (6-6, 250, Sr.)
QB	8	Asad Abdul-Khaliq (6-1, 215, Sr.)
RB	21	Marion Barber III (5-11, 210, So.)
WR	83	Jared Ellerson (6-1, 195, So.)
WR	17	Tony Patterson (6-2, 205, Sr.)

OREGON DEFENSE

DE	92	Devan Long (6-4, 262, So.)
DT	53	Igor Olshansky (6-6, 305, Jr.)
DT	94	Junior Siavii (6-4, 323, Sr.)
DE	30	Quinn Dorsey (6-4, 275, Jr.)
LB	39	Kevin Mitchell (5-11, 220, Sr.)
LB	52	Jerry Matson (6-1, 224, Jr.)
LB	21	David Martin (6-0, 219, Sr.)
CB	31	Justin Phinisee (5-10, 195, So.)
SS	23	Marley Tucker (6-0, 181, Jr.)
FS	16	Keith Lewis (6-1, 200, Sr.)
CB	4	Steven Moore (5-9, 179, Sr.)