

Beavers compete, but it's another defeat

By **KERRY EGGERS**
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MINNEAPOLIS — If it's going to be different for Oregon State this season, being competitive is an important first step.

The Beavers were all of that Thursday night at TCF Bank Stadium, on the road against a middling Big Ten opponent.

In the end, though, Minnesota had just enough to secure a 30-23 victory in the opener for both schools.

Oregon State took a 23-17 lead into the fourth quarter, but the Gophers had enough answers down the stretch to send the Beavers home unhappy.

"We're not satisfied with the game being close," said OSU safety Devin Chappell, who made seven tackles and was a stalwart in defeat. "Whether you lose by an inch or a mile, a loss is a loss. We need to win, and that's what we're going to do."

"We know we could have won that game. We know we should have won that game. Whether that's encouraging or not, we'll take that 'L' and move forward."

After getting swamped in many one-sided losses through the Pac-12 portion of a 2-10 first season for Coach Gary Andersen, progress is what the Beavers are looking for now. There was some of that Thursday night; just not enough to result in an upset victory in a contest in which OSU was a 13-point underdog.

"Being that close, everybody was excited to be in the game (in the late stages)," said OSU linebacker Manase Hungala, who had eight tackles. "Finishing was the problem."

Mistakes

Each team made enough mistakes to give the other victory.

Oregon State quarterback Darell Garretson fumbled while being sacked twice, leading to short fields and a pair of Minnesota touchdowns. A short squib kickoff after the Beavers had tied the score at 14-14 late in the second quarter resulted in a Gopher field goal and a 17-14 lead as time expired before intermission.

Minnesota obliged with five false-start penalties and three targeting fouls that led to expulsion of players. The Gophers muffed a punt to set up a third-quarter touchdown that gave Oregon State a 23-17 advantage, and had two bad snaps — one resulting in a 23-yard loss, the other rolling into and out of the end zone for a safety.

"We shot ourselves in the foot on some plays," first-year Minnesota coach Tracy Claeys said. "But in the end, we didn't quit. The kids hung in there together and played hard. Most of the time when you do that, you're going to win the game."

Offense and defense

The difference was Minnesota's dominance in the trenches on both sides of the ball.

Oregon State won the total



Oregon State safety Hunter Mattson drives against Minnesota defensive lineman Hendrick Ekpe, right, during an NCAA college football game Thursday in Minneapolis. Minnesota won 30-23.

offense battle 317 yards to 280, and Minnesota managed only 130 yards through the air. Minnesota tailback Rodney Smith carried 25 times for 125 yards and two touchdowns, but the Gophers' most important weapon was senior quarterback Mitch Leidner.

Leidner completed 13 of 26 passes for 130 yards but was more dangerous on the ground, rushing 13 times for 76 yards and two scores. The OSU defense failed to sack Leidner even one time.

In his first game playing for Oregon State, quarterback Darell Garretson connected on 25 of 40 passes for 228 yards and three TDs and also scrambled twice for first downs. Garretson was harassed by the Minnesota defense throughout, however, which resulted in the two critical fumbles as well as four sacks and a host of hurries.

"The negatives that were glaring were our inability to rush the passer in our base defense and our inability to protect the passer," Andersen said. "(Leidner) made some plays with his feet, but he was sitting back there taking the time he needed to throw the ball. Even when Darell was completing it, most of the time he was crawling back up off the ground."

Garretson made some good throws and some great ones, including a thread-the-needle six-yard touchdown to tight end Noah Togiai between a pair of defenders for the game's first touchdown, and an on-the-money 30-yard strike to Victor Bolden to tie the game at 14-14 just before the half. The 6-foot, 210-pound junior — playing his first game in nearly two years after a transfer from Utah State — also missed on some others, including an underthrown ball to an open Bolden that could have been six points in the third quarter.

"There were a couple of balls I missed down the seam," a grim-faced Garretson said afterward. "Wish I'd got-



Minnesota defensive lineman Tai'yon Devers (92) sacks Oregon State quarterback Darell Garretson during the first half of the game Thursday in Minneapolis.

ten the ball out a little quicker. Other than that, I played all right. Not to my standard."

Garretson avoided the rush deftly at times, but never saw Minnesota's Tai'yon Devers coming on either of his two sacks.

"I got blindsided on both of them," Garretson said.

OSU struggles

OSU's offensive line had a struggle all night, both with opening holes for the run game and pass protection. Sophomore Ryan Nall rushed 13 times for 71 yards, but 31 of the yards came on one first-quarter blast. The Beavers managed 89 yards rushing for the game.

Minnesota adopted a pin-the-ears-back approach to its defensive approach in pressuring Garretson, and the Gophers didn't even have to blitz often.

"There are some situations that were unprotected, that were uncouted for," Garretson said. "That's got to be on me. I have to see that better, get the ball out a little quicker."

With first-time starters Yanni Demogerantas at center and Blake Brandel at left tackle, the OSU O-line figured to have some problems. Garretson didn't have enough time to throw vertically to his major targets. Seth Collins caught five passes for 57 yards in his first game at wideout

outside, but not a lot of plays you can draw up on the board when you have to throw it in 1 1/2 seconds every snap. It's hard to get No. 22 (Collins) the ball, No. 13 (Villamin) the ball and No. 6 (Bolden) the ball when you have no time."

Garretson, Andersen said, "did a good job."

"He had to get the ball out quicker as the game went on," Andersen said. "You're not going to find a tougher kid than that. He'll stay in there and fight like crazy. He didn't just get hit; he got drilled numerous times. To take those shots on the turnovers and hang in there and then stick some of those balls he did ... those were big-time plays. There's a toughness to that kid I already know about. He'll lay it all out there on the field."

The Oregon State defense had plenty of good moments, but never was able to get much pressure on Leidner. The Gophers' QB was able to scramble for some critical

yardage, especially in the second half.

"They did a nice job protecting," Andersen said. "We didn't get many free runners (at Leidner). We'll have to study game video to see how much we have to change personnel groups to get different kids on the field in those settings. There were a couple of scrambles that were huge. Those are going to happen sometimes, but there were too many of them tonight."

Said Chappell: "We need to play a better game on defense. We played hard, but we need to make more plays. We need to step up in those big-time moments. Everybody on the defense has to play his role and do his job. If we'd done that, it would have been a different game."

If the Gophers are a bit pedestrian on offense, they're top-drawer at the defensive end.

"Those boys could play," Garretson said. "They were strong, they were physical, they blew around, they knew what they were doing. But we put up a pretty good fight against them."

Indeed the Beavers did. As they filed back to their locker room afterward, though, there was only silence. This was not a moral victory.

"We knew what we were getting in Minnesota — at least I did," Andersen said. "They're a tough, hard-nosed, physical team. The second half, they're going to try to come out and impose their will on you. We handled those situations pretty well, which was a good thing to see."

"I was proud of the fight. Proud of the hurt that showed in their faces after the game, which is important."

It was a game the Beavers could have won with what they call a "clean sheet" in the soccer world.

"Got to bounce back," Nall said. "Can't let our heads hang low. We have a bye week, and then we'll focus on Idaho State (Sept. 17 at Reser Stadium). It's a done deal now. We're moving forward."

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