

# Ducks tight end McCormick's long fight with ankle injury nearly over

By CHRIS HANSEN  
The (Eugene) Register-Guard

EUGENE — Cam McCormick's football career the last three years has been a revolving door of surgeries, setbacks, more surgeries and more setbacks.

But with less than three weeks until Oregon opens its season at home against Fresno State, the sixth-year senior tight end from Bend is on track to play for the first time since he was the opening-game starter in 2018.

When that happens, "I might shed a tear, I don't know," fellow tight end Spencer Webb said recently. "I know what he's been through. I know what his family's been through with that situation. I'm going to be freaking the loudest one on the sideline going crazy. I'll probably run on the field and get a penalty. I'm excited for him and can't wait for that moment."

It's been a wild ride for the 6-5, 259-pound McCormick, whose athleticism and pass-catching skills moved him to the top of the depth chart as a redshirt sophomore.

However, late in the first quarter against Bowling Green at Autzen Stadium on Sept. 1, 2018, McCormick caught a pass from Justin Herbert and was tackled for a 2-yard

loss that sent him into a three-year tail spin.

McCormick broke his fibula and tore the deltoid ligament in his ankle on that play, sidelining him for what he assumed would be just the rest of the season.

It became a considerably longer recovery process.

McCormick played in the 2019 spring game but was experiencing discomfort in his ankle by the time fall camp began, leading to another surgery to replace a screw from his initial procedure.

"Hardware malfunction," McCormick said Friday, Aug. 13, after practice.

It wouldn't be the last.

In the summer of 2020 he was again having discomfort in the ankle and learned that two screws holding his ankle together had impinged a ligament, causing it to rupture.

On Dec. 23, McCormick had ankle reconstruction surgery performed by renowned orthopedic surgeon Dr. Robert Anderson, who has worked with the Green Bay Packers and Carolina Panthers.

Eight months later, McCormick returned to the practice field and is now preparing for his first season in three years.

"I'm really close. I feel really

close," McCormick said. "I'm just excited to be out here for fall camp. I haven't been out for fall camp in a really long time. ... It's surreal. It's surreal being back out there."

McCormick participated in Oregon's scrimmage Aug. 14 inside Autzen Stadium, playing with the second-team offense. He didn't catch a pass, but being in uniform and taking live reps was a big step in his comeback.

"I want to enjoy being a college football player," McCormick said. "I want to show everybody what I can still do. I know it's been a while since I've been out there, but don't doubt me. I still have got it."

A three-sport star at Bend's Summit High School, McCormick redshirted his freshman year at Oregon in 2016. That winter, McCormick and two other Oregon players were hospitalized after suffering rhabdomyolysis — the breakdown of damaged skeletal muscle — from strenuous workouts under new coach Willie Taggart.

McCormick built back his strength and in the 2017 season he played in all 13 games as a redshirt freshman, recording six receptions for 89 yards and one touchdown in the Ducks' 7-6 season.

In 2018, under new coach Mario

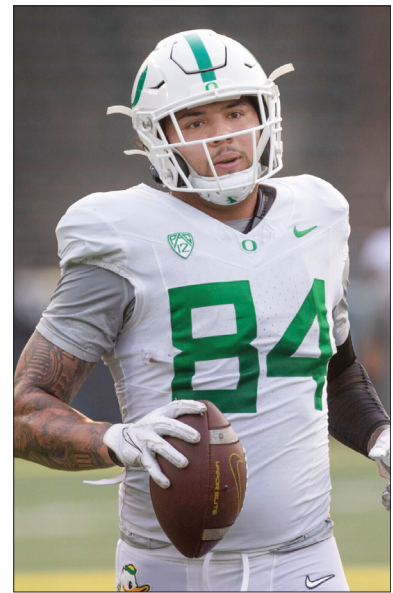
Cristobal, McCormick earned the starting spot at tight end over Jacob Breeland. But then came the injury in the Bowling Green game and three years of setbacks.

The tight end room looks much different these days than the last time he played, but McCormick is still a well-respected presence.

"It's been awesome just to have him out there, have him in the meeting rooms, the leadership, the experience and the character he's shown, because it takes a lot to come back after all these years and really not being able to have an opportunity to play," said tight ends coach Bobby Williams. "But man, he's been looking good in practice and it's been a pleasure to have him around."

Despite not playing, McCormick hasn't let the time just go by. He is working on his master's degree in advertising and brand responsibility through the School of Journalism and Communication, and despite being a 23-year-old grad student, McCormick still has three seasons of eligibility remaining for football thanks to medical redshirt rules and the exemption for 2020 being a non-counting COVID-19 season.

McCormick wasn't ready to commit to playing through 2023, but for the first time in a long time, the



Chris Pietsch/The Register-Guard  
**Oregon tight end Cam McCormick, a former star at Bend's Summit High School, works out with the Ducks during practice Saturday, Aug. 14, 2021, at Autzen Stadium, Eugene.**

upcoming season is looking good.

"There were times when it was tough and I was ready to be done," McCormick said. "Over the course of these three years I've really learned that football does end at some point ... but not yet for me."

## Teams:

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coach Mario Cristobal has been recruiting, but Oregon has finished a season ranked just once in the last five years.

**No. 12 Wisconsin (4-3)**  
Opener: vs. No. 19 Penn State, Sept. 4.

Reality check: In two of the last three seasons, Wisconsin started ranked and ended unranked. It's happened a total of four times to the Badgers in the previous 13 seasons, but the last time Wisconsin went two straight seasons finishing outside the Top 25 was 2003.

**No. 13 Florida (8-4)**  
Opener: vs. Florida Atlantic, Sept. 4.

Reality check: Coach Dan Mullen has brought some consistency with three

straight ranked finishes, a first for Florida since Urban Meyer left after the 2010 season.

**No. 14 Miami (8-3)**  
Opener: vs. No. 1 Alabama in Atlanta, Sept. 4.

Reality check: There are many ways to describe how underwhelming the Hurricanes have been since joining the ACC in 2004, but how about this? Miami has finished the season ranked just six times as a member of the ACC and never better than 11th.

**No. 15 USC (5-1)**  
Opener: vs. San Jose State, Sept. 4.

Reality check: Since 2010, the Trojans have had four seasons that started ranked and ended unranked. Coach Clay Helton could have a hard time surviving another season at USC that doesn't live up to expectations.

**No. 16 LSU (5-5)**  
Opener: at UCLA, Sept. 4.

Reality check: The Tigers became the first defending champions since Auburn in 2011 to finish the season outside the Top 25. There is talent for a bounce back in Baton Rouge.

**No. 17 Indiana (6-2)**  
Opener: at No. 18 Iowa, Sept. 4.

Reality check: Coach Tom Allen's Hoosiers will try to become the first team in the history of the program to start and end the season ranked.

**No. 18 Iowa (6-2)**  
Opener: vs. No. 17 Indiana, Sept. 4.

Reality check: In 22 seasons under Kirk Ferentz, the Hawkeyes have neither finished four straight seasons ranked, nor had three straight seasons that began and ended in the AP poll. Iowa can

accomplish both of those this season.

**No. 19 Penn State (4-5)**  
Opener: at No. 12 Wisconsin, Sept. 4.

Reality check: The Nittany Lions had a string of four straight Top 25 finishes snapped last year. There is reason to believe it was just a glitch, but a tricky early season schedule should reveal a lot.

**No. 20 Washington (3-1)**  
Opener: vs. Montana, Sept. 4.

Reality check: The Huskies seemed primed to settle into a perennial Top 25 team under coach Chris Petersen when they had three straight ranked finishes from 2015-18. Second-year coach Jimmy Lake is trying to prove the program's slip was small.

**No. 21 Texas (7-3)**  
Opener: vs. No. 23 Louisi-

ana-Lafayette, Sept. 4.

Reality check: Former Alabama offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian takes over a program that for all the drama has finished ranked three straight seasons for the first time since a 12-year run under Mack Brown from 1998-2009.

**No. 22 Coastal Carolina (11-1)**  
Opener: vs. The Citadel, Sept. 2.

Reality check: The Chanticleers will try to follow up their magical 2020 season by becoming the first Sun Belt team to begin and finish a season ranked.

**No. 23 Louisiana-Lafayette (10-1)**  
Opener: at No. 21 Texas, Sept. 4.

Reality check: The Ragin' Cajuns will try to follow up 21 victories in the last two seasons by becoming, yes,

the first Sun Belt team to begin and finish a season ranked.

**No. 24 Utah (3-2)**  
Opener: vs. Weber State, Sept. 2.

Reality check: The Utes had a run of three straight seasons from 2014-16 in which they started the season unranked and finished ranked. Utah doesn't get undervalued quite so much anymore. Like a lot of Pac-12 teams, the Utes bring back a boatload of experienced players.

**No. 25 Arizona State (2-2)**  
Opener: vs. Southern Utah, Sept. 2.

Reality check: The Sun Devils are ranked in the preseason for the first time since 2015. Arizona State has only had one season (2014) in the last 24 years that began and ended ranked.

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