

QB Anthony Brown getting his chance with No. 11 Ducks

By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

The turbulence of last year helped prepare Anthony Brown for taking over at Oregon this season. Brown, a sixth-year senior and the Ducks' presumed starting quarterback, suggested he and the team are stronger after enduring a pandemic-shortened season made rougher by delays and cancellations.

"It was hard. I mean, any competitor is going to be upset about anything like that," Brown said at Oregon's recent media day. "But I would say it was needed for what's about to come."

Oregon heads into the season at No. 11 and is the highest-ranked team among the five Pac-12 schools that made The Associated Press Top 25.

Tyler Shough was Oregon's starting QB last season, but Brown saw playing time in the Pac-12 championship game and the Fiesta Bowl. Shough transferred to Texas Tech in the offseason.

Meanwhile, Brown announced he was going to stay at Oregon, taking advantage of the NCAA decision to grant players an extra year of eligibility because of COVID-19.

A New Jersey native, Brown came to Oregon in April 2020 from Boston College. His career with the Eagles was marred by two serious knee injuries that sidelined him for parts of the 2017 and 2019 seasons.

Brown will be working under offensive coordinator Joe Moorehead, who wasn't able to show much of what he had planned for the Ducks last season, his first in Eugene.

"He (Brown) has done a very good job from a performance



Sean Meagher/The Oregonian

Quarterback Anthony Brown (#13) reads the defense as the Oregon Ducks hold their 2021 Spring Game at Autzen Stadium in Eugene, Oregon on Saturday, May 1, 2021.

standpoint, from a leadership standpoint, taken on Moorhead's offensive scheme. At the same time, the freshmen behind him have done an excellent job as well and it merits them getting an opportunity to compete for that position as well," coach Mario Cristobal said.

The young group challenging Brown includes Jay Butterfield, Robby Ashford and Ty Thompson.

Oregon went 4-3 overall and 3-2 in the coronavirus-shortened season. The Ducks got into the Pac-12 championship game when Washington couldn't field enough players, and defeated USC 31-28. Oregon went on to play in the Fiesta Bowl, but fell to Iowa State 34-17.

"What excites me the most is we're throwing some serious adversity and challenges at these guys," Cristobal said. "We're pushing them hard. The only response has been, 'Bring it.'"

COUNTING ON KAYVON

Kayvon Thibodeaux is poised for what could be his final season before going pro. The 6-foot-5, 258-pound defensive end has even made a bold proclamation: He's gunning for the Heisman.

At Oregon's media day, he listed his goals.

"Perfection. Winning every game, being able to play for a national championship and winning fall camp. Me personally, I am trying to be in the Heisman race, and be in the Heisman conversation," he said. "Twenty sacks would be a blessing for me."

Thibodeaux, officially a sophomore, is projected to be among the top picks in the 2022 NFL draft should he decide to leave Oregon early.

MOVING ON

The Ducks had several players

besides Shough who moved on in the offseason. Running back Cyrus Habibi-Likio transferred to Boise State and linebacker Isaac Slade-Matautia is headed to SMU.

Also gone are offensive lineman Penei Sewell, the seventh overall pick in the NFL draft by the Detroit Lions, and safety Jevon Holland, a second-round pick by the Miami Dolphins.

DYNAMIC DUO

One of the Oregon's expected strengths is the running game, led by CJ Verdell and Travis Dye.

Verdell, a junior, ran for 1,000-plus yards in both 2018 and 2019. He has 21 career rushing touchdowns, just two away from cracking the school's top 10.

Dye, also a junior, was the team's top running back last season, with 443 rushing yards. He was also the lone Pac-12 running back with at least 400 yards rushing and 200 yards receiving (239).

EARLY CHALLENGE

Oregon faces No. 4 Ohio State on Sept. 11 in Columbus, a game that's considered to be a big indicator of how well the Ducks will fare this season.

But first they'll face Fresno State on Sept. 4 at Autzen Stadium, which will allow capacity crowds this season.

"I'm excited to play in this stadium," Brown said. "I grew up watching games, I grew up loving Oregon. So this is an exciting one for me, especially since I'm new here, I've never played in this stadium yet. So, I'm just like a little kid getting candy on Halloween."

Oregon, OSU require proof of vaccination or negative COVID test for fans

EUGENE (AP) — Oregon and Oregon State became the first Power Five schools to announce they will require proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test for people over the age of 12 to attend football games.

In its announcement Friday, Oregon said the decision was made with public health authorities and "peer institutions in the state."

The mandate goes into effect Monday and comes at the end of a week when state officials warned of rapidly filling hospitals as daily reported cases reached record numbers.

Oregon is one of several Pac-12 schools that is requiring students and employees to be vaccinated or apply for an exemption.

The Oregon football team opens its season at 54,000-seat Autzen Stadium in Eugene on Sept. 4 against Fresno State. Oregon State begins its home schedule at Reser Stadium on Sept. 11 against Hawaii.

Earlier in the day, Hawaii became the first major college football school to say it would have no fans in attendance for its opening sports events of the season because of a recent COVID-19 surge. Hawaii's first home football game is Sept. 5 against Portland State.

Heated quarterback competition bodes well for Beavers

By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

Oregon State has questions at quarterback.

The Beavers have three solid options at the position heading into the season — a problem any team would welcome.

First, there's Tristan Gebbia, a former Nebraska transfer who started last season but suffered a serious hamstring injury against rival Oregon in November that required surgery.

Chance Nolan stepped in admirably when Gebbia was injured last season, starting the team's final three games.

And there's Sam Noyer, who transferred from Colorado this summer. As the Buffaloes' starter last season, he threw for 1,101 yards and six touchdowns in six games.

All three are battling in camp for the Beavers' starting nod.

"The cream rises to the top when you have that type of competition in August, but also it adds to our depth as the season goes," coach Jonathan Smith said.

The logjam of quarterbacks bodes well for the Beavers as they head into Smith's fourth season as head coach.

Oregon State went just 2-5 last season but one of those wins was against rival Or-

regon, a morale booster. Three of the losses were close.

Smith said the Beavers have closed the gap in the years he's been coach. But Oregon State is still looking for the bowl berth that has eluded the team since 2013.

"We know we've made huge strides, we're confident in what we've got as a program," Smith said. "But we know we have work to do to be able to get over that hump and win all these games that are really close."

The Beavers were picked in the preseason to finish fifth in the Pac-12 North, ahead of Washington State.

MOVED ON

Oregon State lost prolific running back Jermar Jefferson, who opted to forgo his senior season and was a seventh-round pick by Detroit in this year's NFL draft. Despite last season's short schedule, Jefferson rushed for 858 yards and six touchdowns in six games.

Deshaun Fenwick, a transfer from South Carolina, could step into Jefferson's shoes on the offense, as could last season's backup, B.J. Baylor.

Defensive back Nahshon Wright also decided to go pro and was a third-round pick in the draft by the Dallas Cowboys.

JAYDON STEPS UP

Defensive back Jaydon Grant is excited about what the Beavers hope is an improved defense. Oregon State's D struggled last season, ranked 10th in the Pac-12 with an average of 442.8 total yards allowed per game and 34.3 points.

Grant, a junior who had 29 tackles and two interceptions last season, is among the leaders on the defense, joining linebackers Avery Roberts and Omar Speights and defensive tackle Isaac Hodgins.

"I think that this is definitely the best place that we've been in since I've been here. We return our staff for the fourth straight year, which is obviously a big year for this program. And we have a lot of returning guys, especially on defense, and on offense as well," Grant said. "So you talk about the camaraderie of the team, the leadership. We have so many different leaders. We have about 20, 25 guys that all the young guys can turn to as leaders on this team. So that really helps a lot."

VAXXED UP

Smith said at Pac-12 media day that 86% of the team is vaccinated. He is, too. "Really proud of where

we're at as a team, percentage of vaccinations," he said. "These guys buying into that idea, not just for themselves, but for others."

Oregon State requires students to be vaccinated, but allows some exemptions. The Beavers fared well last season

in handling the virus, getting in all seven of their games.

SCHEDULE

The Beavers open the season at Purdue on Sept. 4 before returning home for a game against Hawaii.

Oregon State recently

announced that it would require masks at Reser Stadium throughout September because of local regulations in Benton County, where COVID-19 cases are surging. The county requires masks when distancing isn't possible, even at outdoor events.

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