

Ducks rally to top Fresno

By ANNE M. PETERSON

Associated Press

EUGENE — Anthony Brown Jr. was blunt about No. 11 Oregon's offensive struggles against Fresno State.

"It wasn't clean enough," he said.

Brown scored on a 30-yard quarterback keeper with 2:57 left and the Ducks overcame a wobbly season opener with a 31-24 victory over the Bulldogs on Saturday night, Sept. 4.

Oregon jumped to a 21-6 lead, but Fresno State scored two unanswered touchdowns to tie the game midway through the third quarter, then took the lead early in the fourth on Abraham Montano's field goal.

Camden Lewis kicks a 25-yard game-tying field goal before Brown's go-ahead touchdown.

The performance was somewhat concerning given the Ducks face No. 4 Ohio State next weekend.

"In order for us to go where we need to go, we have to be



Sean Meagher/The Oregonian

Oregon defensive tackle Brandon Durlus sacks Fresno State quarterback Jake Haener as the No. 11 Ducks face the Bulldogs in a college football game at Autzen Stadium in Eugene on Saturday, Sept. 4, 2021.

The Ducks were hurt by the loss of defensive end Kayvon Thibodeaux, who left the game at halftime with a left ankle injury.

Oregon had not played a game at Autzen Stadium for 644 days and the game came amid a surge in coronavirus cases in the state.

Oregon and Oregon State were among the first schools

wildfires in the region. Air quality was deemed unhealthy in the Eugene region by the U.S. Air Quality Index.

Fresno State quarterback Jake Haener threw for 285 yards and a touchdown. The Bulldogs (1-1) already started the season with a 45-0 victory over Connecticut.

"We talk about weathering the storm, especially when you go into a hostile environment and the storm hit is pretty hard in the first quarter, and we weathered it," Fresno State coach Kalen DeBower said. "You just get so far behind that it's catching up, and when you finally take a lead, you have to make a lot of plays to get to that point."

After Thibodeaux sacked Haener and caused him to fumble for a turnover, CJ Verdell ran for a 2-yard touchdown to give the Ducks the early lead.

Another Fresno State fumble led to a 4-yard scoring run from Travis Dye to make it 14-0. The duo of Verdell and Dye went into the game with a combined 4,363 rushing yards, most of any returning pair at the FBS level.

Thibodeaux, widely considered a possible Heisman Trophy contender this season, appeared to injure his left ankle but had it taped on the

sidelines and returned before the end of the first half. He came out of the break in street clothes and wearing a boot.

"I know it's a sprain, which we're very optimistic that it's nothing too serious," Oregon coach Mario Cristobal said.

Montano kicked a pair of field goals, from 33 and 39 yards, before Brown found Johnny Johnson III in the end zone with a 32-yard pass to make it 21-6. Jalen Cropper caught a 17-yard touchdown pass from Haener to close the gap for Fresno State to 21-13 just before halftime.

Haener scored from two yards out on a keeper and the conversion tied the game at 21 before Montano's 22-yard field goal with 13:03 left gave the Bulldogs a 24-21 lead.

Cristobal wasn't sure what caused Oregon's offensive lapses.

"It's hard to put your finger on it, because the energy was real good, preparation was real good. We thought our physicality and pregame was well, also," he said. "I know they have some good players. They did what we thought they would do, we did what we thought we would do."

THE TAKEAWAY

Fresno State: Fresno State hadn't played a ranked opponent since 2018. ... The Bulldogs are celebrating their 100th year of football this season.

Oregon: Senior linebacker Dru Mathis left the game in the first half with what appeared to be a left knee injury. ... Oregon leads the series against Fresno State 7-2. The Bulldogs haven't downed the Ducks since 1982.

UP NEXT

Fresno State hosts Cal Poly next Saturday.

Oregon travels to No. 4 Ohio State on Saturday.

Strong's 2 TD passes lead Nevada past Cal

By JOSH DUBOW

Associated Press

BERKELEY, Calif. —

Nevada's whirlwind month as vagabonds ended with a very satisfying win.

Carson Strong threw for 312 yards and two touchdowns to lead the Wolf Pack to a 22-17 victory over California on Saturday night, Sept. 4 in the season opener for both teams.

Nevada has been forced to adapt because of smoke from wildfires that made it impossible to practice outdoors on campus. That forced the Wolf Pack to travel nearly 2,000 miles and practice on basketball courts, conventions centers and even a hotel parking garage.

"What we've had to go through this last month just to prepare to play was something — seven different fields we practiced on, we traveled 1,953 miles to be exact to different places to practice," coach Jay Norvell said. "We never cheated the kids on their preparation. We did everything we needed to do to get ready for this game. We didn't cut any corners. Boy did they respond."

Strong connected on TDs to Romeo Doubs and

Elijah Cooks for a happy homecoming to Northern California.

Strong grew up about an hour away from Memorial Stadium, attending Cal games and camps. But after a knee injury his senior year in high school in Vacaville the Bears didn't recruit him and he has turned into a star at Nevada.

"I always want to win no matter what but this one is pretty sweet," Strong said. "This is probably my favorite one."

Cal scored TDs on its first two drives but then stalled, going three-and-out on the next four drives. While the Bears couldn't move the ball, Nevada scored 22 straight points.

The Wolf Pack cut the deficit to 14-13 at the half on a pair of field goals from Brandon Talton and Strong's 43-yard TD pass to Dobbs.

Strong then put together an impressive drive to open the second half to give the Wolf Pack the lead for good. He completed a 17-yard pass to Cole Turner on third and 17, a 46-yarder to Tory Horton on third-and-9 and then a 16-yard TD to Cooks on the next play to make it 19-14.



Chris Pietsch/The Register-Guard

Oregon quarterback Anthony Brown breaks through the Fresno State defense for the game-winning 30-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter of the Ducks' 31-24 victory at Autzen Stadium.

firing on all cylinders, which we weren't today. And that was obvious," Brown said. "We're going to see it on the tape, fix what we need to fix and move on and progress from it."

Brown threw for 172 yards and a touchdown while running for 62 yards and the winner. It was Oregon's 17th straight home-opening victory. Brown, a sixth-year senior, transferred to Oregon last year from Boston College but was backup to Tyler Shough until getting playing time in the Pac-12 title game and the Fiesta Bowl. Shough transferred to Texas Tech in the offseason.

to require proof of vaccination or a negative virus test to attend football games. Gov. Kate Brown also imposed a mask mandate, even at outdoor events.

The game was also marred by smoky conditions from

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