

CIVIL WAR NOTEBOOK: 'Special' Ducks fight off gritty Beavers

BY STEVE BRANDON

The Portland Tribune, Dec 4, 2009, Updated Dec 4, 2009

EUGENE — Oregon coach Chip Kelly can be a man of few words.

Usually, though, those few words aren't as funny as his succinct statement after Thursday's Civil War, upon hearing that the new Pac-10 champion Ducks were "officially" invited to play in the Jan. 1 Rose Bowl.

"We'll come," Kelly said, without missing a beat.

- The Ducks, who beat Oregon State 37-33 to clinch the Rose Bowl spot, trailed 23-21 at halftime.

"They didn't listen to me in the first half," Kelly said, a bit tongue in cheek, perhaps. "I've got to do a better job in pregame."

- Kelly, however, was beaming about his team's ability to bounce back, be it from the Boise State debacle to open the season, or the loss to Stanford, or the 10-point deficit late at Arizona, or the nine-point hole the Ducks dug in the third quarter against Oregon State.

"They never doubted themselves," Kelly said, of his players. "They understand how to fight back. It's a special group."

Kelly used an analogy he called "watering the bamboo," which he said he got from a book by a former basketball player turned motivational speaker, Greg Bell.

"You water the bamboo the first year and nothing happens," Kelly said. "You water the bamboo the second year and nothing happens. You water the bamboo the third year and nothing happens. You water the bamboo the fourth year and it grows 90 feet."

- Quarterback Jeremiah Masoli, on Oregon's knack for regaining its equilibrium and overcoming mistakes: "I think it's just a mindset you have to have. Some guys have it, some guys don't."

- Oregon leads the all-time Civil War series 57-46-10.

At Autzen Stadium, the Ducks are 13-7-1.

- Oregon's LaMichael James added 166 yards to his Pac-10-record freshman rushing record, giving him 1,476 yards this season.

James averaged 6.6 yards per carry against the Beavers, just under his 6.9-yard season average coming into the game.

- James' three TDs, all on the ground, matched his career high.

Also, he has rushed for more than 100 yards nine times, including seven games in a row.

"He's an awesome kid," Kelly said. "He's always got a smile on his face. And he can hit a hole and hit a second gear and take off."

- Oregon State continued its secure handling of the ball — throwing no interceptions and not fumbling. That helped the Beavers almost pull off the upset; they were 10-point underdogs.



Jeremiah Masoli of Oregon (left) barrels into Oregon State safety Lance Mitchell on his way to a pivotal first down on a fourth-and-3 run late in Thursday's Civil War at Autzen Stadium.

JAIME VALDEZ / THE PORTLAND TRIBUNE

- The Beavers scored 10 points off Oregon's turnovers — a far cry from the 2008 rout by Oregon (65-38), in which the Ducks had two defensive touchdowns.

- The temperature at Autzen dropped from 35 degrees at kickoff to 28 by late in the game.

- Kelly has won more games (10) in one season than any other rookie Duck coach.

Mike Bellotti set the old mark of 9-3 in 1995.

- The Ducks finished 10-3 last season. They are 10-2 going into the Rose Bowl versus Big Ten champion Ohio State.

It's the fifth time Oregon has reached the 10-win mark and only the second time the Ducks have hit 10 wins in back-to-back seasons.

- Oregon State didn't score quite enough to nab its first Rose Bowl invite since the 1964 season, but the Beavers have tallied 30 or more points in four straight games. It's their longest streak since the end of the 2006 campaign.

- The Beavers, who would have gone to the Rose Bowl with a win on Thursday, might drop in bowl stature to the Dec. 22 Las Vegas Bowl, but they will make their fourth consecutive bowl appearance, a school record.

- Much-maligned and much-discussed UO running back LeGarrette Blount restored the roar at Autzen when he entered the game in the third quarter, shortly after the Ducks had fallen nine points behind.

Blount hadn't played in 10 games, eight while under suspension for his tirade and punches thrown after Oregon's loss at Boise State on Sept. 3.

Oregon coaches said it wasn't a case of them calculating that Blount would make his return at just the right time in only the biggest game of the year, the Civil War.

"Coach Kelly went to the bullpen for the right-hander," joked offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich.

Being more specific, Helfrich added: "We thought we had a couple things going with the run game that he could help with" — plays the Ducks thought would work and that fit Blount's style and abilities.

Kelly said he thought the Ducks can wear down opponents, and did Oregon State, with its continual run game, and that the pounding of Blount helped in that regard on Thursday night.

Helfrich also pointed out the special physicality that the 240-pound Blount brings when he spells James, a jitterbug and speedster but only a 180-pounder.

"LaMichael's not going to win any Mr. Universe contests," Helfrich said.

- Running backs coach Gary Campbell of Oregon said he told Blount during the Civil War not to try to do too much in his return to live, game contact.

"I said, 'Whatever you do, just hang on to the football, I don't care about you making a big play. Just make some first downs,'" Campbell told the big back.

- Blount has 46 yards on 17 carries in his two games played this season.

"LeGarrette's been through a lot. I'm proud of him," Kelly said.

Kelly reiterated that Blount had worked his way back into the rotation through weeks of various unspecified efforts.

"We made him do a lot, and he did," Kelly said. "Nothing was handed to him. He was fifth string when he started this thing (coming off suspension)."

- Blount's 12-yard touchdown run in the third quarter, which cut a nine-point deficit to two (30-28), was the Paul Revere-like signal to everyone that the Ducks were coming.

"That TD set the tone for us," Masoli said.

- Campbell said he was especially happy to see Blount get back on the field.

"I wanted it for him," Campbell said, "because I recruited that kid. I love him.

"He lost control (at Boise State), and that's not who he is, and I know that. So it was very rewarding for me to see that he felt good about himself and could show people that he's a personality, not a character ... and that he's

a viable football player.

"He was very disappointed not to have played yet, but I explained why he didn't play (against Arizona State and Arizona), and eventually he understood. It was really tough for him, having been a starter."

- Masoli, on Blount's limited play this season: "You wonder sometimes, (what) if he was out there all year ... "

- Oregon's somewhat unsung wideout, Jeff Maehl, caught a touchdown pass in his third straight Civil War. He got behind the solo coverage of OSU cornerback James Dockery to catch a 73-yard TD strike from Masoli in the first quarter. It was the longest reception in Maehl's career and the longest pass play by the Ducks in 2009.

"The Maehl Man has definitely delivered for us," Masoli said.

Maehl attributed the opportunity to make a play like that 73-yarder to the Ducks' other offensive options.

"Defenses, they lose us receivers out there," he said.

Kelly said he thinks that "Jeff is starting to hit his stride. And Jeremiah has so much confidence in what Jeff can do."

- Receiver/return man James Rodgers came through with 303 all-purpose yards for the Beavers in the Civil War. He reached 2,098 yards for the season, an Oregon State record.

Against Oregon, he grabbed 10 passes for 139 yards, a personal season-best.

- OSU's Jacquizz Rodgers scored the Beavers' first touchdown Thursday on a 1-yard run through the line. That gave him 20 rushing TDs this season, a school record.

Ken Simonton (1999) and Steven Jackson (2003) each ran for 19 touchdowns in a season while at OSU.

- Casey Kjos' 9-yard touchdown catch of a Sean Canfield aerial was his first TD reception as a collegian, and it gave the Beavers their 30-21 advantage after the opening possession of the second half.

- The Ducks came away hugely impressed with the Beavers, from Canfield and the Rodgers brothers to the coaching of Mike Riley to other OSU players, notably 6-1, 285-pound junior defensive tackle Stephen Paea, who had two tackles-for-loss and five tackles overall.

"That guy's a heck of a player," Helfrich said. "I'm still not sure we blocked him, ever. His playing days are far from over."

- Helfrich said he was proud of the Ducks' offensive line for its continued growth, though.

"Those guys, at the beginning of the year, were kind of kicked to the curb," he said. "People said that they were going to be our weakness."

- Oregon had the better offensive balance in the Civil War. The Ducks finished with 288 yards rushing and 201 passing. The Beavers had 306 yards passing but only 83 rushing.

- A year ago, Masoli and the Ducks beat Oregon State by 27 points, and led 37-10 late in the first half. Oregon averaged 7.55 yards per rush, totaling 385 yards on the ground, and passed for 309 yards — a total of 694 yards in offense.

This year, the Beavers were able to cut those numbers to 5.9 yards per rush and 288 yards on the ground, plus 201 in the air — a 489 total.

- OSU's offense stayed with Oregon's through three quarters on Thursday, but the Beavers had the ball for only seven plays in the fourth quarter and picked up 43 yards — with no points.

That gave Oregon its 489-389 final edge in total offensive yards.

- Not that it mattered, but Oregon's 37 points in the Civil War were its fewest in the last 10 games with Masoli as starting quarterback. Of course, the Ducks had the ball at the end, but were content to run out the clock at the OSU 14.

- UO tight end Ed Dickson didn't catch a pass, but Masoli said "he had a lot of impact on the running game."

- Oregon converted two fourth-down runs on the six-minute, end-game possession that ran out the clock and preserved the win.

Said Kelly, of having his players go for first downs in those situations: "You've just got to look in their eyes."

Masoli ran for the first fourth-down conversion on that final drive, barreling into free safety Lance Mitchell and rolling forward for the extra yards the Ducks needed.

The play was designed as a rollout pass to tight end Ed Dickson, who was covered. Masoli keeping the ball was one of the options.

"I just kind of made something happen," Masoli said.

An even bigger play might have been the one that came moments later, on third-and-16, when running back James zipped around the right side for 14 yards. That gave Oregon a legitimate chance to convert fourth-and-2, which Kenjon Barner did on an option pitch from Masoli, going wide left.

- Barner set the Oregon school record for kickoff-return yardage in Thursday's game. He ran back eight kicks for 160 yards, giving him 898 yards this year.

- Oregon tight end David Paulson had one catch in the Civil War, and naturally it went for a first down.

This season, 11 of his 12 catches have moved the chains.

The Ducks kicked a field goal three plays after Paulson's catch; this year, Oregon has scored on 11 of the 12 drives on which Paulson has a reception.

- Oregon improved to 18-2 in games after a bye week, going back to 1995.

- The win by UO, which was ranked seventh in the Associated Press poll, over No. 13 OSU pushed Oregon's 2009 record to 4-1 against top-25 teams.

- The Beavers' Justin Kahut was 4 for 4 on field goals, tying his career- and season-best total for makes in a game, set this year versus UCLA.

But how the Beavers would have liked to convert at least one of those field goals into a touchdown.

On those field goals, Oregon State got to the Duck 23-, 11-, 10- and 23-yard line, before stalling.

- Each team had only five senior starters.

For the Ducks, they were tight end Ed Dickson, kicker Morgan Flint, defensive end Will Tukuafu, defensive tackle Blake Ferras and free safety T.J. Ward.

Kelly, again able to poke fun at himself after the victory about his succeeding Mike Bellotti as Oregon coach, said that those Oregon seniors "probably were thinking, 'Why'd they hire this crazy guy in their last season?'"

For the Beavers, the senior starters in the Civil War were receiver Damola Adeniji, quarterback Sean Canfield, right guard Gregg Peat, linebacker Keaton Kristick and cornerback Tim Clark.

Clark suffered a fractured leg with 9:18 remaining in the third quarter.

- Kelly was asked what he told his Ducks at halftime, when they trailed 23-21.

"I told them, 'Get a drink, we're fine,' " he said. "It was a two-point game, which is like a 0-0 game."

- Oregon fans predictably stormed the field in glee after the game, as their heroes tried to make their way to the locker room.

"It was too crazy," Masoli said, smiling. "I couldn't see for about half the time. Guys were hitting me on the helmet. Some fans punched me in the stomach. They were just too excited or something."