

## Rocky Season Turns Rosy for Ducks

EUGENE, Ore. — Before they get to the Rose Bowl, the Oregon Ducks had to find a way off their own field.

After the final seconds ticked down Thursday night at Autzen Stadium, Ducks fans rushed out of the stands. Oregon coach Chip Kelly needed four burly security guards to escort him through a tunnel and to safety.

As for Oregon quarterback Jeremiah Masoli, where were his offensive linemen to lead the way when he needed them? A key fourth down Masoli converted late in the game was nothing compared to getting off the field.

“It was too crazy,” Masoli said of the Ducks fans jumping all over him and throwing red roses around. “I had too many people around me. I couldn’t even see for about half the time ... Some guys were just punching me in the stomach. I don’t know why. Fans. Like just too excited or something.”

Masoli and the rest of the Ducks escaped their own fans without injury. Now, after defeating Oregon State 37-33 in the 113th Civil War, they really can start thinking about their Jan. 1 date with Ohio State in Pasadena, Calif.

“We accept,” deadpanned Kelly after the game when his seventh-ranked Ducks (10-2, 8-1), as outright Pac-10 champions, received their first Rose Bowl

invitation in 15 years.

There was Blazermania, when the Portland Trail Blazers won the 1977 NBA title. Other than that, it’s doubtful there’s ever been this much sports excitement in Oregon.

For the first time, the Civil War decided whether it would be the Ducks or the No. 13 Beavers heading to the Rose Bowl. The game certainly lived up to its billing.

The Ducks overcame a 30-21 third-quarter deficit. Then, after stopping Oregon State on fourth-and-15 at the Oregon 27 with 6:09 left while leading 37-33, they were able to run out the clock.

Oregon converted two fourth-down plays on the final drive. The big one was fourth-and-3 at the Oregon 33 with 3:29 left when Masoli, looking like he might get stopped, barreled over Beavers safety Lance Mitchell while going around right end and gained six yards.

“He’s the best quarterback in the country,” Kelly said.

Masoli threw for 201 yards and a touchdown and rushed for 40 yards. Running back LaMichael James ran for 166 yards and three touchdowns, including a 52-yard scamper down the left sideline that put the Ducks ahead for good at 34-33 with 1:20 left in the third quarter after they failed on a two-point

conversion.

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But James wasn't the running back Masoli and several other players said provided the much-needed spark Thursday. That would be none other than LeGarrette Blount, who in recent weeks has gotten more camera time standing on the sideline than any other player in college football.

Blount got what first was a suspension for the season after he slugged a Boise State player following a 19-8 loss in the Sept. 3 opener. The suspension eventually was shortened, and Blount was in uniform for an Nov. 14 game against Arizona State. But Blount didn't play a single down in that game or in Oregon's next outing against Arizona.

Then he suddenly trotted onto the field in the third quarter. Kelly said it wasn't planned, but that Blount had been working hard after returning as a fifth-string running back and that James was cramping up a bit.

"[Blount has] been through a lot," Kelly said. "I'm just proud of him. Real proud."

Kelly sure was proud when Blount, who carried nine times for 51 yards, barreled into the end zone from 12 yards out with 5:45 left in the third quarter to cut the deficit to 30-28 and give the Ducks the momentum that carried them to victory.

After the game, televised nationally by ESPN, Blount hardly looked like the same player who made ESPN's first Thursday telecast of the season end in ugly fashion. He held his baby in his arms (LeGarrette Blount Jr. was born in mid-September) and wore a big smile.

Blount said he felt good but didn't want to say much more. A school publicist said that Blount is expected to address the media about his season at a later time.

Maybe Blount will say something then about watering the bamboo. That's the mantra the Ducks have followed in Kelly's first season.

"You water the bamboo, and it starts out real slow, and it just keeps growing," James said.

Maybe it's better to ask Kelly what this all means.

"You water the bamboo in the first year and nothing happens," Kelly said. "You water the bamboo in the second year and nothing happens. You water it in the third year and nothing happens. You water it in the fourth year and it grows 90 feet. So that kind of analogy to our players is you have to just keep driving and it will pay off in the long run. It's good that they're listening."

Apparently, if you keep watering bamboo, it can turn into roses. Such was the case for the Ducks, who persevered throughout a cold night at Autzen.

The Ducks watched quarterback Sean Canfield lead Oregon State (8-4, 6-3) to a 23-21 halftime lead by completing 16 of 21 passes for 208 yards before holding him to 8-of-15 passing for 98 yards in the second half. The Ducks were 3-of-3 on fourth-down conversions in the second half.

“It’s a great feeling knowing that we’re outright Pac-10 champs,” said junior linebacker Casey Matthews. “We’re sending our seniors to the Rose Bowl.”

Some freshmen, sophomore and juniors will be joining them. All of Oregon’s players eventually made it through the mob scene at the end of the game, and then were handed green shirts adorned with a yellow “O” and the Rose Bowl logo.

“It was crazy,” James said. “I think I was out there for 20 minutes trying to get off the field. It was just insane.”

After all that time spending watering bamboo, 20 minutes is nothing.

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