

Uniting a divided state

In my opinion | Still on his feet

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My uncle, Brad Smith, was an offensive guard for Oregon from 1983 to 1986. His freshman season produced what was, up until Thursday, the most singularly memorable Civil War in the history of the rivalry.

Eleven fumbles. Four missed field goals. Zero total points. One exercise in futility so poignant it has been brought to the attention of the masses every year since.

Uncle Brad was up in the Autzen Stadium stands on Thursday, enduring the bitter cold and watching Oregon pile up 489 yards of offense en route to a thrilling 37-33 victory over Oregon State. He is making plans to attend the Rose Bowl as I write this column, excited about the possibility of the Ducks achieving heights inconceivable during his playing days.

My younger brother, Trevor, attends Oregon State University. A freshman majoring in electrical and computer engineering, he was in the stands on Thursday night, enduring the bitter cold and soaking in the scene, even though his team, his school, was defeated. Meeting up after the game, he had one thing to say to me: "I'm going to the Rose Bowl game."

Understand that Trevor has supported the Ducks from his earliest days, but decided on attending Oregon State to pursue his desired major. My cousin Hannah, as a contrast, was raised a die-hard, orange-and-black-bleeding Oregon State fan before picking a college. She's now a freshman at Oregon, proudly sporting green and yellow.

I come from an all-too-familiar split household: My mother is an Oregon graduate, while my father lived in Corvallis for many years and briefly attended Oregon State. Growing up, my brothers and I have always supported the Ducks. The divide extends well into the extended family, with many graduates of each school on both sides and many more that support the Ducks or the Beavers that have sought higher education elsewhere.

Fittingly, The Register-Guard reported on Saturday that the game achieved a Nielsen rating of 4.2, compared to an average of 2.7 for most ESPN Thursday night college football games. In the Portland metropolitan area, the Civil War's market rating was 26.49, the highest known figure for an ESPN telecast since 2001 and the third highest-rated telecast of any kind. Numbers one and two were the Super Bowl and the Super Bowl Kickoff pre-game show.

Thursday night's Civil War felt like the Super Bowl, and the numbers back it up.

Oregon's contest against Ohio State on Jan. 1 in the Rose Bowl is yet another Super Bowl for a team that has



Jack Hunter

Duck fans stormed the field after Oregon beat Oregon State to earn a trip to the Rose Bowl. It's been a while for Oregon, with the last Rose Bowl appearance coming in 1995 and the last win there in 1917.

approached every game this season as such. To date, the Ducks have done well for themselves winning the day and the bamboo has successfully been watered. The latter phrase, explained by many Oregon players in the locker room after the game, appears to be gaining traction.

“If you water bamboo in the first year, nothing happens,” Kelly said in the post-game news conference. “If you water it in the second year, nothing happens. If you water it in the third year, nothing happens. If you water it in the fourth year, it grows 90 feet in six weeks.”

“That kind of analogy to our players is that you have to keep driving, keep paying, and it will pay off in the long run. And that’s what those guys understand.”

The entire state of Oregon sees the long-run payoff in a potential Rose Bowl victory. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the state of Oregon appears to be uniting behind its Civil War winner that took all.

Ohio State is an extremely difficult matchup for the Ducks. The Buckeyes’ defense ranks fifth in the nation, as does their rush defense. Sophomore quarterback Terrelle Pryor is an athletic game-changer who is figuring out the nuances of the position with every snap; Oregon is thankful to catch him at a lower point along his developmental curve. Running backs Brandon Saine and Dan Herron will test an Oregon defense that has been beaten up by more physical opponents.

Duck fans have kept the faith all year, and Beavers fans are interested in the secondary effects of a potential Rose Bowl victory for Oregon. I wouldn’t dream of expecting fans of the two schools to begin holding hands and singing “Kumbaya” at this point, but I see a day — the first of January, to be precise — where Ducks and Beavers alike sit down to watch a game with one goal in mind.

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