



CU freshman corner Kenneth Crawley breaks up a pass against UCLA.

Photo Courtesy: Associated Press



Brooks: Embree's Advice To Freshmen - Hang Tough

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BOULDER - Early last Saturday evening Jon Embree approached Kenneth Crawley in a Los Angeles Coliseum parking lot where Colorado's team buses were waiting to shuttle the Buffs to LAX.

Crawley, a CU freshman cornerback, probably felt like he already had encountered a greyhound. Southern California receiver Robert Woods caught eight passes for 132 yards and a school-record four touchdowns - a pair of them over Crawley - in the Trojans' 50-6 win.

Embree pulled Crawley aside before he boarded his bus for a conversation that the second-year CU coach has had more than once this season with a first-year player. Crawley, of Washington, D.C., has designs on being an NFL corner, and Embree told him, "You just got a dose served to you. You were going against a top ten pick at receiver and maybe the top pick in the draft (Matt Barkley) at quarterback - that's what it looks like.

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"You've got two choices: you can mope and feel sorry for yourself - but nobody else will - or that can be impetus to come out and work that much harder, work on your technique and continue to improve and understand you're going to be that guy."

"That guy" is a corner who is good enough to make teams throw to the other side for fear of interceptions, having passes routinely broken up, or making the quarterback hold the ball and get sacked.

Crawley and fellow freshman corner Yuri Wright, said Embree, have that capability. But Embree also knew that playing the two first-year corners "would be a baptism by fire - and that's OK." He said Greg Henderson, who started last at corner as a freshman, "had some moments that affected the outcomes of some games. I look at him this year when he's been in there . . . he's played really well."

Henderson, after returning from an ankle sprain, is a markedly better tackler this season. But not so much last season - and Crawley and Wright are experiencing that painful first-year learning curve as well. Henderson also has progressed with his aggression, said Embree, and his overall ability to be in position to make plays is better.

"But he's had 845 snaps to get to (that point)," Embree said, laughing. "I'm sure Crawley's on that page, and now that Yuri's back (from a concussion) he'll be on that page. It's part of the deal; they're going to make some plays and they're going to have days like (Saturday)."

Senior safety Ray Polk cited the difficulty of playing as a freshman, noting that as an upperclassman, "You just stay with those guys and tell them the things they need to hear at the time. They've been working hard and will continue to improve a lot."

His post-game advice to Crawley was "keep your head up, you've got three years after this. It's great that you came in and were a starter for us; we needed it. But you can't expect to come into a program and be a shut-down corner automatically. A lot of these things take time. It's a skill and you have to sharpen that skill. If he keeps his head up and keeps pushing through it, he's going to be a great player by the time he's done here, along with the rest of the freshmen."

The realization that freshmen are prone to mistakes and occasionally getting burned didn't just occur to Embree. "It is what it is, but they'll be better for it and we'll be better for it," he said. "But I see a lot of improvement in a lot of places and in a lot of our players. My mindset and focus is to keep on getting that improvement."

He has stated on several occasions that disappointment over this season's downward turn is acceptable, but discouragement is not. The number of players who "continue to improve, who keep working hard and showing up and keep doing it - that by far outnumbers anyone who may be discouraged," he said. "The guys who travel have been awesome."

Monday's brief practice, Embree said, "was really good . . . and it's translating to a certain extent to games in bits and pieces. It's getting to where it's who we are all the time - and that's that consistency we just don't have. Part of it is you've got to have a guy like Paul Richardson who can make a play . . . part of it is growing up."

One of the lessons this young team is learning, Embree noted, is that games are lengthy and early mistakes must be dismissed. He also said some of his players haven't learned the necessity of going all-out all the time, citing a screen play against USC that was thwarted by a tackler who came from the far side of the field. The tackler should have been blocked by a Buff who might have believed his man was too far away to make a play.

"That's the difference," Embree said. "It's all part of the maturation process, all part of understanding what your role is and what your effort should be . . . when you're playing a team like USC or Oregon, those issues magnify themselves if you don't play like that."

The Buffs (1-6, 1-3 Pac-12) play at No. 2 Oregon (7-0, 4-0) on Saturday (1 p.m. MDT, Pac-12 Network). The Ducks are 47-point favorites.

REINHARDTS RETURN TO EUGENE: Former CU tight end Ed Reinhardt, a teammate of Embree's on the 1984 Buffs squad, will attend Saturday's game at Autzen Stadium with his father.

Reinhardt suffered a blood clot on his brain in CU's 27-20 loss to Oregon on Sept. 15, 1984. With the help of Ed, Sr., he has battled to return to an active life.

The Reinhardts decided this summer to make another trip to Eugene - they've visited several times since '84 - to see the Buffs play the Ducks. Embree, who also played in the '84 game, said if the trip is meaningful to the Reinhardts it is no less so for him.

"Ed is a huge reason for what I am today," Embree said. "He was a guy who always drove me, a guy I competed against. If I wanted to be all-league or all-state or whatever (Embree played at Cherry Creek, Reinhardt at Heritage), he was the guy I had to beat out."

Embree said that thought drove him during summer workouts: "I couldn't stop at 10 of anything knowing Ed was doing 11 or 12 . . . it was that kind of relationship."

Embree and Reinhardt only played together for just over a season, but said, "I think we could have done a lot of great things if he wouldn't have been injured."

Oregon, Autzen Stadium and the Ducks fan base remain special for Embree, the Reinhardts and college football, said Embree: "That program has always held a unique place in my heart . . . it'll be good for him to be back there and be around those people. I think they're tremendous fans, that's why it's a hard place to play. They're classy, respectful; it's just a unique environment.

"But they've always been like that. It's not something that just happened . . . it'll be good having him and his father up there."

HOBBS CITES FIRST-YEAR PROGRESS: Tight end Vincent Hobbs caught a career-best four passes for 51 yards against the Trojans. He said last weekend's game was the first where things began to "slow down" for him: "At first it was really fast . . . but once you get used to it, it gets slower. I'm progressing at it goes."

CU suffered six turnovers (three interceptions, three lost fumbles) at USC, which Hobbs said was indicative of how the Buffs have self-destructed this season: "We shoot ourselves in the foot, the other team doesn't beat us, I don't think. The film speaks for us. We play these good teams and they do us the way they do - that doesn't mean anything. If you look at the film we shoot ourselves in the foot. If we don't do that we can upset a lot of these teams we play."

THE STATE OF CU'S QBS: Quarterback Jordan Webb threw a season-high three interceptions at USC but will remain the starter this week. Embree said backup Connor Wood, who played sparingly last Saturday, has "got to keep coming, keep improving and get consistency. There are things he needs to get better at to get more playing time."

Embree credited Webb's mental toughness in coming back from those three picks, saying Webb "really could have gone in the tank" afterward. "He was trying to make plays, and I understand it to a certain extent. We did a lot in that game to try and make plays - double passes, throw-back passes . . . trust me, we're trying offensively to create because we don't have a Paul Richardson (injured), we don't have anyone like that on that side of the ball who can be that explosive."

Embree said he wasn't "slamming" the skill position players that are available, rather he was stating facts.

BUFF BITS: Polk, who suffered a high ankle sprain in the first quarter of the opener, returned against USC but admitted he was rusty. He also said he wasn't sure if his ankle would return to 100 percent this season. "It's just something you have to work around," he said . . . Hobbs said he grew up an Oregon fan. "Playing them is a great

experience for me," he said. "Hopefully it will be a breakout game and one of the best games we play." He also professed a love for the Ducks' uniforms: "Dude (Phil Knight) that created Nike went there, so you know I'm hoping the Nike uniforms are as great as they look (on TV)." Embree on his team's offensive mistakes against USC: "Some of it is the guy was just better than him on that play . . . that was a very good team with a lot of future NFL players." Offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy and Embree are in agreement that the O-line played its best game of the season last weekend. Said Embree: "They set a standard of how they need to play consistently. If they can play like that consistently we'll continue to move the ball and have success."

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SHOW MENU



Football: Ray Polk feels CU Buffs can turn the corner

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Ray Polk isn't blind to what has gone on at Colorado, or what the Buffaloes face in the coming weeks. Quite the opposite, in fact.

A senior safety, Polk has put his heart into the Colorado football program for five seasons, only to see the Buffs struggle mightily on game day.

Saturday appears to be another long day for CU (1-6, 1-3 Pac-12) as it visits No. 2 Oregon (7-0, 4-0). Colorado is allowing 42.6 points per game. Oregon averages 51.0 points per game and hasn't scored fewer than 42 in 10 straight games.

Yet, Polk is a Buffalo at heart and he is not about to concede defeat, no matter how long the odds appear to be.

"What chance do I actually think that we have?" Polk said. "I think if we can do this, if we can execute the game plan, I think we have a chance of beating these guys and I think that every week. I really do.

"(Oregon has) a complicated scheme, it's a great offense, they have great players. But it's just football. It's not rocket science. It's not like you're asking somebody to do something they've never done before. If we can come together as a team and we can do what these coaches are telling us, we can do some great things this year, but we have to be able to do that as players."

As CU has suffered through a miserable season, Buffs supporters have directed their anger in a lot of directions. As usual when teams struggle, fans want coaches to be fired. That's not the answer, Polk said.

"The coaches know what they're doing," Polk said.

The change, the Buffs say, needs to come from the players, and that change isn't going to happen quickly. That is, in part, because the Buffs are relying on so many players that still have just seven games of college experience. They don't feel over-matched physically, but don't always feel comfortable, either.

"We feel that we're overwhelmed sometimes, but we get through it as a team," freshman tight end Vincent Hobbs said. "All the freshmen I think we pick each other up. We're progressing to make a better stride with getting used to this game."

With youth comes mistakes, although it's not only the young players making mistakes. As a team, the Buffs need more precision and discipline, Polk said.

"There's been a lot of mistakes this year," Polk said. "We've made a lot as players, but we're learning a lot from it, at the same time. It's hard to watch sometimes and it's hard to be that person making mistakes. I made mistakes this past game and it's hard. You've just got to keep your head up and you've got to think, 'OK, every mistake is an opportunity to learn something new.'"

He talked about his high school team at Brophy Prep in Scottsdale, Ariz. He said it was a program that wasn't very good in the past, "but we were disciplined and we played assignment football and we won two state titles."

Becoming disciplined and mistake-free will happen, Polk said. He has been impressed with the talent level in the

freshman class, but said the game is not going to come to them right away.

That's why Saturday's game looks like such a daunting task for the young Buffaloes. Even head coach Jon Embree laughed a bit when asked about the recipe for success against Oregon, knowing that even veteran, highly-regarded teams struggle against the Ducks.

"Everyone, I think, has the same plan," he said. "You want to go in there, you want to control the ball and eat the clock and you say all that, but it doesn't work out that way.

"You have to play error free on your side and then you have to force them into some mistakes and hopefully that's enough to be able to win."

Polk had hoped CU would already be at that point of playing error free ball. He came to Colorado in 2008, when the program was struggling to regain its past glory. Four years, two head coaches and 39 losses later, the Buffs are still trying to figure it out.

"I came here to take this program back to where it was, a dynasty," he said. "If there's one thing that I've learned, it just takes time. It really does."

With five games left in his career, Polk knows fans are unhappy. He and his teammates are unhappy, too. He also knows these next five games could be crucial in the development of a freshman class that he believes to be better than any freshman class he's been around -- including his own.

"This is such a talented freshman class that came in here," Polk said. "They're going to be football players, but we just need to help them along the way.

"It sucks because I know my college career is almost over. At the same time, you look toward the positives and you look toward maybe one day I can be sitting on the couch on Saturday and see the CU Buffaloes beat a top ranked team or be in a bowl game or be in the national championship. I want that."

Follow Brian on Twitter: @BrianHowell33.

Senior safety not 100-percent healthy as team prepares for No. 2 Oregon

By Brian Howell, Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Buffzone.com

Ray Polk isn't completely healthy, but at this point, the Colorado senior safety doesn't care.

He wants to be on the field and he needs to be on the field, he said.

"There's no other place I'd rather be," he said Tuesday at CU's weekly press conference. "I'm out there with my brothers, people I've spent four years with here, five years even. It's definitely where I fit best."

Polk missed five games in a row with a high ankle sprain before returning last Saturday in CU's 50-6 loss at Southern Cal.

"I'm getting to the point where I don't think that my ankle is going to get to 100 percent, but it's just something you have to work around," he said. "I was sitting out (Arizona State on Oct. 11) and I was thinking maybe one more week will help it a lot. That week went by and I'm kind of at that point where it's just something I'm going to have to play with. I've played through injuries before. It's just another obstacle to overcome."

Younger players have said all year they missed Polk's leadership and his knowledge in getting people lined up. Polk had seven tackles, but said presence on the field didn't have the impact he wanted it to have. .

"That's something I have to fall back into," he said. "It was great to be out there, but at the same time I have things I need to work on. It's been since Colorado State (on Sept. 1) that I've played. I need to work on being able to get people in the right position and I need to work on some individual things myself."

This week won't be any easier. Polk, tight end Vincent Hobbs and head coach Jon Embree all talked about the daunting task the Buffaloes (1-6, 1-3 Pac-12) face against No. 2 Oregon (7-0, 4-0) at Autzen Stadium in Eugene, Ore.

"It's, without a doubt, going to be a great challenge, but one we're looking forward to," Embree said.

Embree praised Oregon's high-octane offense but said he was more impressed with the Ducks' defense. That's a bad combination for a CU team that has allowed 42.6 points per game on defense and hasn't scored a touchdown on offense in six quarters.

"You have to play error free on your side and then you have to force them into some mistakes and hopefully that's enough to be able to win," Embree said.

Notable

CU is making its first trip to the state of Oregon since 1986. Since 2005, only two BCS teams have allowed more points per game over a full season than CU is allowing this year: Kansas in 2011 (43.8) and Washington State in 2008 (43.8). This season, Baylor is allowing 44.0 points per game. CU has lost nine straight against ranked opponents, and 19 straight road games against ranked opponents.

Follow Brian on Twitter: @BrianHowell33.

Not just the quarterback at fault for Buffs' struggling offense

By John Henderson *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — The venom lacing the dark gray clouds hovering over the Colorado football program is starting to center over one position. Having so many areas to target on a punchless offense, fans have concentrated their verbal lightning bolts on football's one lightning rod.

The quarterback.

Junior Jordan Webb is used to it. After all, he started last year for a 2-10 Kansas team so pitiful it got coach Turner Gill axed after only his second year. Webb has struggled of late. He's 127-of-228 (.557) for 1,351 yards with eight touchdowns and seven interceptions. His 110.91 efficiency rating is 11th in the Pac-12.

But much as in his days at Kansas, he has faced the same problem here in another second-year rebuilding project: He's not alone.

Webb's job security came under scrutiny after he threw three interceptions and fumbled in Saturday's 50-6 loss at 11th-ranked Southern California. He has kept the starting job because coach Jon Embree doesn't want to give sophomore Connor Wood his first college start Saturday at No. 2 Oregon (7-0, 4-0 Pac-12) at Autzen Stadium, the modern Northwest version of the Roman Colosseum.

Also, every week Embree sees how many leaks are in his offense. An octopus couldn't plug all the holes.

"Sometimes it's your receivers," Embree said Tuesday. "Sometimes it's the back. It's part of the deal at quarterback: You got all the credit and all the blame."

The 6-foot-1 Webb has had the misfortune of quarterbacking two teams during massive rebuilding projects. Surrounding him is a true freshman tailback who's a converted high school fullback, freshman and sophomore possession receivers and a converted defensive end in his first full year at tight end.

So Colorado (1-6, 1-3) slumps into Oregon ranked last in the Pac-12 in scoring (18.7 points per game), turnover margin (minus-1.67 per game) and pass efficiency (108.3), and is 10th in total offense (330.7 yards per game). They are last nationally among FBS teams in sacks allowed with 4.6.

The defense, sporting the worst statistics in school history, is plagued with missed assignments, particularly in its young secondary. The offense is also having embarrassing misfires.

"Some of it is youth," Embree said. "Some of it is just a guy was better than him on that play."

Yes, USC could keep an NFL scouting office busy for two weeks. With so little margin for error, Colorado's six turnovers Saturday made the margin as thin as the goalpost Colorado rarely saw.

"We feel we're overwhelmed sometimes," said backup freshman tight end Vincent Hobbs, who had four catches Saturday. "All the freshmen pick each other up, when we need it. I know me, I make probably the most mistakes of all of us freshmen, especially on the offensive side of the ball."

While Embree admits Webb has made some "bonehead plays," the QB is also the best option Embree has. Wood, a transfer from Texas, is not ready.

"Connor's got to keep coming," Embree said. "He's got to keep improving. He's got to keep getting consistency with some things. I'm not going to be specific, but there are some things he needs to get better at and improve to keep getting more playing time."

The good news? CU's offensive line had its best game of the season at USC, one in which Embree said, "They set a standard on how they need to play consistently." And Webb has been through tough times before.

However, the losses are starting to mount.

"Because I'm older," he said, "you just kind of get tired of it."

Footnote. Former Colorado tight end Ed Reinhardt Jr., will attend Saturday's game on the same field where a hit left him in a month-long coma with a brain clot to the brain in 1984.

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Struggling to move

A look at Colorado's offense and where it ranks nationally, and in the Pac-12:

Total offense: 330.7 yards per game (102th nationally, 10th Pac-12)

Rushing offense: 109.7 yards per game (106th, ninth)

Pass efficiency: 108.3 (111th, 12th)

Passing: 221.0 yards per game (73rd, seventh)

Scoring offense: 18.7 points per game (110th, 12th)

Sacks allowed: 4.6 per game (120th, 12th)

Former Buffs TE Ed Reinhardt Jr. to return to Oregon field

By John Henderson *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Ed Reinhardt Jr. will attend Colorado's game at Oregon on the same field where he almost died after a hit in 1984.

The former Buffs tight end fell into a coma for more than a month after the seemingly average hit caused a blood clot on the brain. He nearly died but through years of rehab has returned to lead an active life of speaking engagements and continued rehab as he still has partial paralysis on one side of his body.

The appearance will mean a lot to Colorado coach Jon Embree. He and Reinhardt were roommates on the road that season and both were tight ends from the same high school conference in Colorado. Reinhardt played for Heritage High in Littleton and Embree played for Cherry Creek High in Englewood.

"It means a lot," Embree said during his Tuesday news conference. "Obviously we have a unique relationship going all the way back to high school. Ed's a huge reason, a huge part of why I am what I am today. He was a guy that always drove me. He was a guy I always competed against. I knew if I wanted to be all-league or all-state or whatever, that was the guy I had to beat out. No matter what I did, running in the summer, lifting, whatever, he was the guy I was thinking about. If I did 10, in my mind, 'Well, Ed probably did 11 so I got to find a way to get 12.'

"Then actually getting up here playing together it was special. It wasn't a long time. It was just a year and two games. I think we could've done a lot of great things if he wouldn't have been injured. We really fed off each other and complemented each other so for him to go back to the people of Oregon, that program has always held a unique place in my heart just because of what they did for him and his family. It'll be good for him to be back there around those people."



Posted on Wed, Oct. 24, 2012

Colorado faces tall task in clash with No. 2 Oregon

By Sports Network
The Sports Network

The nation's second-highest scoring team puts its perfect record on the line once more, as the second-ranked Oregon Ducks play host to the Colorado Buffaloes this Saturday in Pac-12 Conference action.

Colorado has fallen on hard times these last few years, and the team's current 1-6 record is certainly indicative of that fact. The Buffaloes' lone win of the season was a 35-34 decision at Washington State on Sept. 22, and the team has lost three in a row since. The most recent outing at USC last Saturday resulted in an embarrassing 50-6 setback, and with tough bouts against Oregon, Stanford, Arizona, Washington and Utah left, securing more than that one, lonely victory won't be easy.

Oregon is at the other end of the success spectrum, having won each of its first seven games and scoring no fewer than 41 points in any one of them. The Ducks, who despite posting one dominating win after another, actually dropped a spot in the most recent BCS rankings, from No. 3 to No. 4, so they are expected to play with a renewed sense of purpose as they stare down the toughest part of their schedule. Following this contest, Oregon will take on USC, California, Stanford and Oregon State, and if things go according to plan, perhaps a rematch with the Trojans in the Pac-12 Championship Game.

The all-time series between these two teams is tied at 8-8, and Oregon has won the last two meetings, including a 45-2 triumph at Colorado last season.

Colorado, which has now lost 19 straight road games against ranked opponents, is clearly the worst team in the Pac-12, ranking last in both scoring offense (18.7 ppg) and scoring defense (42.6 ppg). Even with all their woes, the Buffs have gotten decent quarterback play at times from Jordan Webb, as he has completed more than half of his passes for 1,351 yards, eight TDs and seven interceptions. That is of course when he is standing upright, as he has been sacked a whopping 31 times. CU's top running back is Christian Powell, but he has amassed just 350 yards, and the team as a whole has just eight rushing TDs to its credit. Nelson Spruce paces the receivers with 28 catches for 307 yards and a pair of scores.

Last week against USC, Webb had a particularly rough go of it, throwing three interceptions and suffering five sacks. Powell tallied 56 yards on 14 carries, but the Colorado offense as a whole managed just 103 yards on the ground while turning the ball over a staggering six times. All that despite easily winning the time of possession battle (37:10-22:50).

Defensively, the Buffaloes have had all kinds of trouble against the pass this year, yielding an average of 316.6 ypg, which has them ranked 117th in the nation heading into the week. As a result, foes are basically scoring at will and that was certainly the case last week at USC, as the Trojans scored just 50 seconds into the game on a 55-yard pass play and never looked back en route to the easy win. When the dust had settled, the Buffs gave up 458 total yards, including 340 through the air, and the Trojans scored all seven of their TDs via the pass.

The CU defense has come up with only three interceptions, and only nine takeaways this entire season. DE Chidera Uzo-Diribe has logged six of the team's 14 sacks.

In the face of mounting pressure to turn things around, Colorado head coach Jon Embree is trying to instill a sense of pride in his embattled squad.

"We've got to see what's wrong and get it fixed. We're young, but we're going to have to grow up and compete. The one thing you can't say about this team is, 'They don't compete.'"

As mentioned in the opening, Oregon is one of the top offensive teams in the nation, sporting a scoring average of 51.0 ppg, which to give some perspective -- Arizona is the second-highest scoring team in the league at 39.1 ppg. Freshman QB Marcus Mariota has been every bit as good as advertised coming into

the season as he has hit the mark on 68.3 percent of his passes for 1,347 yards, 16 TDs and only five interceptions. A total of 17 different players have caught at least one pass this year, with De'Anthony Thomas leading the way with 23 grabs for 209 yards and three scores. Colt Lyster has made the most of his 12 catches by finding the end zone four times. As for the Ducks' rushing attack, it is spearheaded by Kenjon Barner with his 870 yards and 12 TDs. The Ducks are far-and-away the top rushing team in the Pac-12, and fourth-best nationally (317.1 ypg).

While not quite up to par on the defensive side of the ball, Oregon isn't terrible there, but opponents have garnered some success, particularly in the passing game where they average 230.6 ypg and have scored 10 of their 16 offensive TDs. Oregon is the league's best team when it comes to red-zone defense, permitting just 15 scores (nine TDs, six FGs) in 28 opportunities (.536).

DE Dion Jordan and DT Taylor Hart each have five sacks, the team checking in with 22 QB takedowns to this point, while four guys have multiple picks, led by CB Avery Patterson with three.

The Ducks were last in action on Thursday, Oct. 18 at Arizona State, and extinguished the Sun Devils in a 43-21 final. Oregon was down 7-0 early, but scored the next 43 points, all in the first half, to take control of the game. ASU scored a pair of TDs in the fourth quarter, but by then the Ducks had piled up 406 yards on the ground as both Barner and Mariota went over the 100-yard mark, with 143 and 135, respectively. Barner scored three TDs, Mariota one, as the team averaged nearly seven yards per carry. Mariota, who also caught a TD pass in the onslaught, went 9-of-12 passing for just 46 yards with a score.

Meanwhile, the Oregon defense was doing quite a job in holding a team that scores just shy of 40 ppg on average well below that number, allowing 408 total yards while coming up with four interceptions and five sacks, two of which were credited to Jordan.

Oregon head coach Chip Kelly liked what he saw from his team once they fell behind at Arizona State last time out.

"Obviously, the interceptions with our defense gave other opportunities to get on the short field. We feed off of each other. Obviously, weathering a little bit of storm is not the way you want to start and we allowed their crowd to get into it a little bit. I think our kids just didn't blink and that's what I love about this group."

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