

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON



VS.



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

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GAME DAY

his TURN

ANDREW GREIF | SPORTS EDITOR

Jeremiah Johnson believes he has an idea to cure Oregon's quarterback woes. Give him the ball.

"I don't want to put a set number on yards," the typically unabashed senior running back said, "but hopefully with God's graces it'll be in the thousands or even higher."

Johnson will be on the sideline in full uniform for the first time since tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee against Washington State on Oct. 10 last season, barely six games into the season and what looked like a breakout year ahead of him. All told, he still ranked fourth on the team with 360 yards rushing on 54 attempts, with a higher yards-per-carry average than that of Jonathan Stewart, Dennis Dixon and Andre Crenshaw.

Rested and ready, he hopes this season will be his not-so-coming-out-party. His coach agrees.

"I don't think Jeremiah is going to sneak up on anybody," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "In some regards, Jeremiah was the dominant back in several of the games he played in with Jonathan last year."

But for all the promise he showed last year before the injury, this season is the first time Johnson is the featured back in his own backfield since his junior year of high school. At Los Angeles' Dorsey High, Johnson split time at half-back during his senior year, yet still managed to rush for 1,615 yards and 18 touchdowns. Sharing time with good friend and classmate Jonathan Stewart at Oregon has left Johnson with one career start before today, yet his ability to capitalize on his playing time gave the Ducks a consistently healthy second option.

Until Washington State that is, when he crumbled to the turf with a season-ending ACL tear after scoring two touchdowns the first two times he touched the ball. When Stewart jumped to the NFL in January, the path to the starting job seemed reserved for Johnson through his rehabilitation — but even that wasn't a shoe-in after a strong spring by junior college transfer LaGarrette Blount.

However, even Blount, a 6-foot-2, 240 pound running back composed of sheer toughness, knows it's Johnson's time to be on top of the depth chart.

"Without a doubt he'll be the premier back here," said Blount, who came to Eugene from East Mississippi

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Jeremiah Johnson
hopes to build on
an abbreviated
2007 season as
Oregon's featured
running back

JAROD OPPERMAN | PHOTO EDITOR

INSIDE

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GAME PREVIEW

In an uncommon fashion (night game against a Pacific-10 Conference opponent), Oregon opens the season seeking to hold off the Huskies and QB Jake Locker.

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AROUND THE PAC-10

UCLA faces No. 18 Tennessee; USC, with Mark Sanchez in tow, travels to Virginia; Cal QB Kevin Riley named starter against Michigan St.

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IN MY OPINION

Another torn ACL for Nathan Costa is unfortunate, but Andrew Greif believes the support system and leadership will stand strong in spite of his preseason injury.

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BEHIND ENEMY LINES

What must Tyrone Willingham do to save his job as UW head coach? A competitive performance against Oregon would be an ideal start.