

Rivalry For The Ages

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EUGENE – Looking around the overflowing crowd at Autzen Stadium, a sea of greens and yellows but one section crowded with purple; you can almost taste the hostility. Any true Oregon Duck football fan will tell you, with ferocity, just who their team's rival is: the Washington Huskies. A game that can make or break a fan's season, this is a rivalry that dates back over a century and has little likelihood of changing any time soon.

As important and well known as this rivalry is to the city of Eugene, the reasons behind it are less familiar.

The first indication that a contest was underway was during Gilmore Dobie's undefeated reign as head coach of UW from 1908 – 1917. During the 1916 season both Washington and Oregon had gone unbeaten, playing a scoreless game between each other. The first Pacific Coast Conference championship was awarded to the Huskies over the Web Feet, however Oregon was awarded the bid to the 1917 Rose Bowl, defeating Pennsylvania 14-0.¹

Tension between the teams seemed to simmer down until 1948, the Ducks had the great Norm Van Brocklin leading their team, and Oregon had tied with the California Golden Bears for the PCC title. To break the tie, each school in the conference casted their vote for either Cal or Oregon. Logically, fans assumed the California schools would vote for the Bears and the Northwest schools would vote in favor of Oregon.

In an unexpected twist of fate, any hopes of Oregon's bid to the Rose Bowl were cut short when Washington instead chose Cal, allegedly roping the University of Montana to follow suit. The Bears earned the bid, and Van Brocklin never got his chance to play in a Rose Bowl.

The deal seemed to be sealed from there on, with decades of historical plays and animosity between players and fans:

- In '62, Washington fans rushed the field during a game, tackling Larry Hill in the end zone to keep him from catching the winning touchdown.
- The infamous pick-six by Kenny Wheaton in '94 took away the win from the Huskies and sent the Ducks to their first Rose Bowl in 37 years.
- UW's mascot received so many death threats in '98 he was briefly banned from traveling to Autzen Stadium.
- The following year, Oregon fans repeatedly threw dog biscuits, urine and feces on Husky players, according to a UW staff.²

Eugene native Justin Herbert began his career two years ago when he was named as Oregon's true freshman quarterback against Washington. Losing his first two match-ups with the Huskies, today he was able to bring home the victory for Eugene, breaking the Huskies two-win streak against Oregon and adding one more tally under the Ducks.

"It worked out well for us. The game went into overtime and this time we finished the job," said Head Coach Mario Cristobal.

The record between the two schools still falls in UW's favor at 60-46-5, but the strong recruiting classes and quality players on the field for the Ducks has revitalized the balance of this rivalry, and next year could be anyone's game.

¹ <https://www.4malamute.com/borderwar.html>

² [Smith]. Smith, Shelley, "Oregon-Washington: 'We know they hate us,'" 20 April 2001. Special to ESPN.com.