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Sunrise Edition

**HEADLINE:** Lucky Ducks should be humble

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EUGENE -- There is no conclusive video evidence to support this theory, but we should probably consider the possibility that some Oklahoma player opened an umbrella indoors Saturday. Or spilled salt on the team training table. Or broke the mirror in the visiting locker room before kickoff.

Unlucky bunch, those Sooners.

Say it at your own risk today, though.

Because during Oregon's 34-33 victory at Autzen Stadium, the Ducks adapted, overcame and did just about everything necessary to start the season 3-0. The rest was provided by human error.

If we're going to have a group catharsis here, we need to acknowledge that Mr. Magoo must have been working the video replay booth. If they're going to use instant replay and slow down the games and leave players and coaches and fans standing around, they'd better start getting it right.

The onside kick in the final 72 seconds that was awarded to the Ducks? If you were watching on television from your sofa, you saw it touch Oregon's Brian Paysinger before it traveled 10 yards. Your spouse saw it. Your children saw it. The family dog probably saw it. So did anyone in the stadium who looked up at the giant video monitor.

Yet, inside the stadium, which happens to be the only place it counts, it was, "After further review, there is conclusive evidence the receiving team touched the ball . . ." and then, a whole lot of pandemonium.

Same goes for two plays later, with the replay showing a throw by Dennis Dixon that resulted in a pass interference penalty against Oklahoma being tipped at the line of scrimmage. While the officials were reviewing that play, looking for the tip that would nullify the penalty, Dixon wandered to the Oregon sideline, where his coach asked, "Was it tipped, Dennis?"

The answer: "Yes, sir."

Then, it went: "After further review, there was no conclusive evidence . . ." and two plays later, the Ducks seized the lead on a 23-yard touchdown pass to Paysinger. Suddenly, hundreds of ticket holders who had left the stadium with Oregon trailing by two scores were scurrying back through the turnstiles, pleading with security guards to let them re-enter the stadium.

There also was an illegal-formation penalty that wiped out a Sooners touchdown pass. And the next time you think you're having an unlucky spell, consider that on the final play of the first half, Oregon kicker Paul Martinez's 48-yard field goal attempt bonked off the crossbar, carried up in the air and tumbled through the uprights --- good.

For Oregon, the day was the equivalent of finding paper money in the back pocket of an old pair of jeans. For Oklahoma, you figured the team bus carrying the sad bunch of sorry-luck losers would get a flat tire on the way to the Eugene Airport.

Still, as golfer Gary Player likes to say: "The harder I practice, the luckier I get."

The Ducks did a lot right. They scored 14 points in the final 1:12. They blocked the Sooners' game-winning field goal attempt.

Oregon's players seized opportunity by the throat, gripped it, clutched it to their chests and made it theirs while eight security guards circled around the goal posts to be sure nobody who stormed the field tore them down.

In the middle of that sea of celebrating students, someone cried out, "We're No. 1." And the chorus soon carried across thousands until everyone was shouting it.

Even Dixon, the quarterback, who was in the middle of that swarming sea hugging his girlfriend, stopped to raise his index finger toward the sky. While he did it, she got clunked on the forehead by an errant elbow from another student, and I'm just hoping the message there wasn't lost.

It's an open week for the Ducks. This is probably a good time for a film suggestion to keep the kiddies focused, so let's make it "The Devil's Advocate."

In that movie, the John Milton character played by the actor Al Pacino says: *"Don't get too cocky my boy. No matter how good you are, don't ever let them see you coming. That's the gaffe my friend. You gotta keep yourself small. Innocuous. Be the little guy. You know, the nerd . . . the leper . . . (bleep)-kickin' surfer. Look at me.*

*"Underestimated from Day One. You'd never think I was a master of the universe, now would ya?"*

You don't become master of the Bowl Championship Series by proclaiming yourself the best team in the country on your open week. You do it by avoiding turnovers (the Ducks had four against Oklahoma) during the game. You do it by remembering to avoid meddling with what is working (after a touchdown and two field goal attempts on the first four Oregon drives, coach Mike Bellotti inexplicably interrupted the rhythm by inserting backup Brady Leaf for the team's fifth series). And you do it by playing effective run defense (Oregon allowed 211 rushing yards to Adrian Peterson).

Oregon sits nine victories from playing in the national championship game. The Ducks, innocuous, underestimated, yet still capable of 501 yards in total offense, should be happy keeping it quiet and flying under the radar.

Said Dixon: "I always think we have a chance to win."

The lucky dog.

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