

WEEK FIFTEEN
UTAH vs OREGON

No. 13 Oregon ends No. 5 Utah's playoff hopes with 37-15 win

SANTA CLARA, Calif. -- The one constant all season for Utah was the ability to control the trenches against any opponent. With a possible playoff berth and first Pac-12 title in school history on the line, the Utes more than met their match against Oregon.

CJ Verdell ran for 208 yards and broke open the game with two long touchdown runs in the fourth quarter, and No. 13 Oregon spoiled No. 5 Utah's playoff hopes with a 37-15 victory in the Pac-12 championship game Friday night.

"Unfortunately we came up short tonight," coach Kyle Whittingham said. "Disappointing thing is we lost in the one area we've been undefeated this year: line of scrimmage. We didn't win the line of scrimmage for the first time all season, which is, like I say, disappointing. Surprising really."

The Utes (11-2, No. 5 CFP) came into the game hoping to make a case for one of the four playoff spots with a conference title but instead got overmatched by Oregon (11-2, No. 13 CFP) and lost their second straight Pac-12 championship game.

Utah held 11 of 12 opponents to less than 100 yards rushing and led the nation by allowing 56.3 yards rushing per game, prompting plenty of pregame talk about how the Utes' physical dominance could be the determining factor.

The Ducks took that personally and responded. "Definitely put a little chip on our shoulders," Verdell said. "We try not to focus on the outside noise too much. Hearing they're the most physical team in the Pac-12 made us want to come out here and work even harder."

The Utes fell into a 20-0 hole in the first half and then gave up a 70-yard TD run to Verdell after cutting the deficit to 23-15, paving the way for the winner of the Big 12 title game between Oklahoma and Baylor to get into the playoff as long as No. 1 LSU beats No. 4 Georgia for the SEC championship.

"We didn't really think far ahead but it's obvious what was at stake, more than just the Rose Bowl," left tackle Darrin Paulo said. "It's disappointing. I can't really wrap my head around it right now. We knew that Oregon was a good team and we knew that we can't overlook them so we didn't look beyond that but we knew, everyone knew, what was at stake besides the Rose Bowl."

The Utes got back into the game with TD passes from Tyler Huntley to Zack Moss and Samson Nacua in the third quarter to cut the deficit to 23-15.

Utah then drove into Oregon territory before Huntley was sacked by Keyvon Thibodeaux on second down, leading to a punt on fourth-and-4 from the 40.

Verdell struck with his big run five plays later and added a 31-yard score later in the fourth against the nation's top-ranked run defense to put the game out of reach.

That gave quarterback Justin Herbert and the rest of the senior class a Rose Bowl berth after starting their careers with a 4-8 mark in 2016.

"It's validation," coach Mario Cristobal said. "It's validation for all that they've done. I don't know if anyone here has been through a 4-8 season. I've been through one of those. It's about as horrible and miserable as it gets. It causes some people to break down, some people to quit, some people to leave. Then there's a core that just puts their foot in the ground and says, 'We're going to change things.'"

The Ducks sent the tone early when they stuffed Moss for no gain on two short-yardage attempts from the Oregon 33 on the opening drive. Oregon drove down and took the lead for good on Verdell's 3-yard run.

The Utes kept making more mistakes and the Ducks only added to the lead. After forcing a three and out, Oregon got a field goal on the next drive, then blocked a punt after Utah committed a false start on fourth-and-1 before Brady Breeze intercepted a pass in the end zone.

Oregon then struck on a 45-yard strike from Herbert to Johnny Johnson III and led 20-0 at the break.

THE TAKEAWAY

Utah: The Utes were seeking their biggest win since joining the Pac-12 in 2011. Instead, they had a second straight disappointing performance in the conference title game after losing 10-3 to Washington last year. Now instead of a playoff berth or even a spot in the Rose Bowl, the Utes must hope to stay high enough in the playoff rankings to get into a New Year's Six game.

Oregon: The victory left as many questions for the Ducks as answers. Had Oregon not blown a 21-6 second-half lead to Auburn in the opener or come out flat in a 31-28 loss at Arizona State two weeks ago, the Ducks could have been the team with a case for a playoff berth. Instead they will have to settle for the Rose Bowl.

FOURTH DOWN DECISION

After getting stopped on three fourth and shorts and committing a false start to squander another chance, Whittingham opted to punt on fourth down in Oregon territory with less than 10 minutes to play. The Utes pinned the Ducks at the 10 but the move backfired when Oregon drove the length of the field thanks to Verdell's long run.

"I would have bet the house that our defense would have been able to get a stop," Whittingham said. "Number one run defense in the country. Had a lot of confidence in them at that point. They just creased us on one. That was something we couldn't recover from."

THIBODEAUX'S DAY

Thibodeaux came into the season as one of the most heralded recruits in the country and delivered on the biggest stage he's played on so far. He had 2 1/2 of Oregon's six sacks and also blocked a punt.

"I'm going to continue to get better," he said. "You could say it's only up from here, as long as I keep putting in the work, should see good results."

Final	1	2	3	4	T
UTAH	0	0	15	0	15
ORE	10	10	3	14	37

Scoring Summary -----

	UTAH	ORE
FIRST QUARTER		
ORE TD 8:00 CJ Verdell 3 Yd Run (Camden Lewis Kick)		7
9 plays, 67 yards, 3:43	0	
ORE FG 4:17 Camden Lewis 23 Yd Field Goal		10
6 plays, 56 yards, 2:43	0	
SECOND QUARTER		
ORE TD 11:02 Johnny Johnson III 45 Yd pass from Justin Herbert (Camden Lewis Kick)		17
3 plays, 70 yards, 1:10	0	
ORE FG 4:56 Camden Lewis 30 Yd Field Goal		20
10 plays, 57 yards, 4:03	0	
THIRD QUARTER		
UTAH TD 10:52 Zack Moss 24 Yd pass from Tyler Huntley (Jadon Redding Kick)		20
6 plays, 53 yards, 2:27	7	
ORE FG 4:56 Camden Lewis 25 Yd Field Goal		23
8 plays, 43 yards, 2:49	7	
UTAH TD 1:13 Samson Nacua 25 Yd pass from Tyler Huntley (Tyler Huntley Pass to Samson Nacua for Two-Point Conversion)		23
7 plays, 75 yards, 3:43	15	
FOURTH QUARTER		
ORE TD 7:09 CJ Verdell 70 Yd Run (Camden Lewis Kick)		30
5 plays, 90 yards, 2:19	15	
ORE TD 2:33 CJ Verdell 31 Yd Run (Camden Lewis Kick)		37
2 plays, 35 yards, 0:49	15	

	UTAH	ORE
Team Stats		
First Downs	18	19
Passes for First	8	7
Rushes for First	7	10
Penalties for First	3	2
Third Down Efficiency	4-14	4-14
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-4	1-1
Total Yards	309	432
Total Plays	64	67
Avg Gain Per Play	4.8	6.4
Net Yards Rushing	116	239
Rushes	35	41
Yards Per Rush	3.3	5.8
Net Yards Passing	193	193
Comp-Att	17-29	14-26
Yards Per Pass	6.7	7.4
Times Sacked	6	1
Yds Lost To Sacks	-40	-14
Interceptions	2	0
Punts	6	6
Punt Average	33.0	50.2
Penalties	8	12
Penalty Yards	48	95
Fumbles	0	1
Fumbles Lost	0	0
Time of Poss	30:40	29:20

Individual Stats

RUSHING							
	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG		
UTAH							
Zack Moss	19	113	5.9	0	42		
Tyler Huntley	14	2	0.1	0	18		
Derrick Vickers	1	1	1.0	0	1		
Jaylen Dixon	1	0	0.0	0	0		
OREGON							
CJ Verdell	18	208	11.6	3	70		
Cyrus Habibi-Likio	9	27	3.0	0	10		
Justin Herbert	7	20	2.9	0	13		
Travis Dye	3	13	4.3	0	8		
Penei Sewell	1	1	1.0	0	1		
Team	3	-30	-10.0	0	0		
PASSING							
	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
UTAH							
Tyler Huntley	17	29	193	6.7	2	2	18.9
OREGON							
Justin Herbert	14	26	193	7.4	1	0	50.4
RECEIVING							
	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG		
UTAH							
Zack Moss	4	57	14.3	1	24		
Samson Nacua	2	39	19.5	1	25		
Brant Kuithe	2	22	11.0	0	20		
Jaylen Dixon	1	20	20.0	0	20		
Demari Simpkins	2	19	9.5	0	10		
Solomon Enis	2	16	8.0	0	11		
Cole Fotheringham	2	16	8.0	0	10		
Derrick Vickers	1	3	3.0	0	3		
Devin Brumfield	1	1	1.0	0	1		
OREGON							
Johnny Johnson III	6	87	14.5	1	45		
Juwan Johnson	2	52	26.0	0	50		
Jaylon Redd	3	35	11.7	0	15		
Bryan Addison	2	14	7.0	0	9		
Hunter Kampmoyer	1	5	5.0	0	5		