

No. 1 Oregon dominates No. 20 Illinois in 38- 9 victory

The Ducks won their first game ranked No. 1 since 2010

By Lily Crane

On Nov. 18, 2012 Ducks fans left Autzen Stadium devastated, as No. 1 Oregon conceded a losing field goal to No. 13 Stanford in overtime. Twelve years later, the Ducks finally returned to Autzen as the highest-ranked team in the nation.

Oregon didn't fumble the opportunity this time to secure the 38-9 Top-25 win.

"We don't really care that we're number one," wide receiver Tez Johnson said about the team's mentality. "We just want to win football games."

The Ducks (8-0, 5-0 Big Ten) started the matchup against No. 20 Illinois (6-2, 3-2 Big Ten) hot right out of the gates. The first drive featured 52 total yards from tight end Kenyon Sadiq and running back Jordan James.

But quarterback Dillon Gabriel switched things up on the final play. Gabriel found Johnson open, dodging multiple defenders to reach the endzone.

"I saw the third guy before I made my first two moves," Johnson said. "Dillon played an unbelievable ball. I caught it, and just I was in space. Pretty much in space, that's where I play my game."

The offensive firepower continued. Justius Lowe received the second-straight receiving touchdown of more than 30 yards, giving Gabriel 100 passing yards on the first two drives alone.

"We've been waiting for that the whole year. Justius is one of those guys in the room that we all learn from," Johnson said. "Justius made plays today that were normal. He does it every day."

Gabriel helped his Heisman Trophy campaign with 291 passing yards and four total touchdowns on 69 percent completion. He also passed Timmy Chang for the second-most passing yards in Football Bowl Subdivision history and rose to second in all-time touchdown passes.

"I'm chasing wins," Gabriel said about his record-breaking performance. "I think you play a long career like I did and you realize a lot of things. I choose winning 100 percent of the time."

Johnson led all receivers with 102 yards and six receptions. Lowe tallied a career-high 51 yards to go along with his touchdown.

Oregon performed just as well on the defensive side of the field. Linebacker Teitum Tuioti set the tone with a 10-yard sack on the Illini's second play of the afternoon. Later in the first quarter, Tysheem Johnson intercepted the football at the Oregon 14-yard line.

“Matayo [Uiagalelei] and Teitum have played really consistent football for us this entire season,” head coach Dan Lanning said. “Certainly we've been asking a little bit more of them, because Jordan [Burch]’s been down, but they've done a good job of upholding that.”

The Fighting Illini entered the game 3-1 in Top-25 matchups this season — but were 3-12 when facing off against the No. 1 overall team all-time.

Illinois quarterback Luke Altmyer struggled against the Ducks' defense. He completed only 49 percent of his passes and recorded two interceptions, leading to a massive 35-3 deficit for his team heading into halftime.

Altmyer and Illinois looked sharper to begin the second half. A 44-yard throw to Zakhari Franklin put the ball in the red zone. Emar’rion Winston ultimately broke up a pass on 4th-and-2 to prevent an Illini touchdown.

Illinois rushed into the endzone at the end of the third quarter, while holding Oregon scoreless in the period.

A Gabriel deep pass ended up being picked off to start the final quarter. The Ducks weren't as clean as they were in the first half and only scored a field goal— but it was already too late for the Fighting Illini.

“I do feel like we had a little bit of a lull in the second half where we could have been a little bit cleaner, hurt ourselves with a couple of penalties that extended drives,” Lanning said. “But overall, pleased with our team's performance and I think we continue to see this team have growth and look for opportunities get better.”

Oregon heads to Ann Arbor, Michigan next weekend for another tough matchup. The Ducks are 4-1 all-time when facing the Wolverines on the road.