

Max Forer holds the line for Oregon in BCS title game

By Ashley Zeldin, Contributing Writer | PUBLISHED Jan 5, 2011 | Sports

The offensive line doesn't deflect potentially game-winning passes or snag interceptions, throw precision passes to receivers who race into the end zone or take handoffs and run through defenses for the score.



The offensive line is not a glamour position. The offensive line protects the quarterback and opens holes for running backs.

The offensive line is the perfect place for Max Forer.

“My personality is to protect people,” Forer said. “The way we [offensive linemen] are, the way we’re built, our job is to protect. We sacrifice as much as anyone, that’s our job. It’s a fulfilling job for me.”

Forer, 22, a Santa Monica High School graduate and senior at the University of Oregon, is about to go out on top. His two-time Pacific-10 Conference champion Oregon Ducks, No. 2 in the Bowl Championship Series (BCS), will face off against the top-ranked Auburn Tigers during the biggest showdown of the bowl season — the BCS National Championship Game in Glendale, Ariz. on Jan. 10.

“The offensive line sacrifices the most because they get absolutely no return on the glory,” said Forer, paraphrasing former NFL coach Tony Dungy, who spoke to

the Ducks earlier this year. “Everyone else gets stats, but the only return they get is winning. For the offensive line, their success is the team’s success.

“Someone has to do it, and it might as well be me,” Forer said.

On Jan. 1, 2010, the walk-on center for then-seventh-ranked Oregon snapped the football to and blocked for former quarterback Jeremiah Masoli, who burst into the end zone for a 17-16 lead in the 96th Rose Bowl.

Forer, a fan of his father Jeffrey’s alma mater, UCLA, had long dreamed of playing in the Rose Bowl.

“I did exactly what I was trained to do,” said Forer, who took the field for that go-ahead drive in the third quarter, replacing starting center and roommate Jordan Holmes.

Oregon offensive line coach Steve Greatwood said Forer has considerable experience at this level, which was evident in last year’s Rose Bowl.

“We finished off the drive, and we ended up getting a touchdown out of it,” Greatwood said. “That kind of reliability and dependability is crucial to that position.”

Ohio State came back to win the Granddaddy of Them All, 26-17.

But the No. 2 Ducks haven’t lost since.

Indeed, 12 wins later, the BCS National Championship showdown with Auburn looms. This BCS title game is a first for both teams.

“If, God forbid, something happens to Jordan in this game, the national championship, I will be ready again,” Forer said.

Division II and III programs were interested in Forer out of Santa Monica High School, but he wasn't about to give up on his dream of playing Division I football, specifically in the Pac-10, the conference of his beloved Bruins.

He approached Kermit Cannon, the youth athletic trainer for the Santa Monica school district for the past 18 years, to train him one-on-one.

“He had a real desire to play football, so he found me. I looked at him, and my first impression was, ‘Easier said than done,’ ” Cannon admitted. “I said, ‘OK, I’ll work with you, one-on-one, no charge.’ I just wanted to see what kind of heart he had.

“He had more heart than almost anyone I’ve ever trained,” he said.

Cannon, a track star at Culver City High School in the 1980s, worked alongside Forer as his training partner, just as he had done with current Carolina Panther Geoff Schwartz, who played right tackle at Oregon out of Palisades High School.

“I can’t say enough about his work ethic,” Cannon said of Forer. “He got after it. He was focused. I’d think, ‘I hope this kid quits, ’cause I’m tired!’ ”

And when Ducks defensive backs coach John Neal, recruiter for the Southern California region, gave Forer the opportunity to walk on, Forer’s dream came true.

“When I first saw him, I thought, ‘I don’t think this kid’s gonna make it past the first week of fall camp,’ ” Greatwood said. “He’s persevered and hung in there and got himself ready to play technically and mentally and physically.”

Forer acknowledges that, at 6-foot-3, 275 pounds, he’s undersized for an offensive lineman; teammate Mark Asper is 6-foot-7, 325 pounds.

“While I might be smaller, I have to make up ground in other categories. Since I’m not gonna be the strongest and biggest, I might as well be the fastest and most technical,” said Forer, whose times this winter in the short shuttle and L-runs were the second-fastest among Oregon’s offensive linemen.

Even as a back-up, Forer faced constant competition from scholarship players gunning for his spot on the two-deep. Sometimes it was tough on Forer mentally to get through practices.

Forer’s Jewish faith sustained him through times of trial.

“I remembered the teachings of my rabbis, how to overcome all odds and become successful,” said Forer, a member of Leo Baeck Temple.

During his time in Eugene, Ore., Forer says he found a solid Jewish base with his campus Hillel.

He also forged a bond with fellow Jew and offensive lineman Schwartz; the two went to temple and observed holidays together until Schwartz departed for the NFL following the 2007 season.

“It’s tough to be a Jewish athlete, so it was good to have a companion,” Forer said.

And his roommates — Holmes, offensive tackle Bo Thran and backup quarterback Nate Costa — don’t mind the mezuzah on their door.

“My Jewish faith is definitely a component of why I’ve become who I am,” Forer said.

Four years of hard work paid off on Aug. 11, when head coach Chip Kelly announced that Forer was one of four walk-ons to earn a scholarship.

“Once I began the journey and set to work so hard, to actually have it pay off with such a reward, that was one of the most fulfilling things I could hope for,” Forer said.

But Forer knows that his future is not in football. He’s planning to take the LSAT and apply to law school, following in the footsteps of his father, who played football at UCLA in the late 1970s before becoming an attorney.

“I hate to see it end,” said trainer Cannon, who saved money this past year to fly up to Eugene for Senior Day in November, Forer’s last home game.

For now, Forer is proud to be a part of Oregon’s rise to the heights of college football.

“To say I’m on a team that’s been the best in the Pac-10 for the last two years and is going to the national championship, it’s surreal,” Forer said. “To come home and I’m on top, the team’s on top, it’s a feeling I’ll never forget.”