



January 1, 1996

Attendance — 58,214

Colorado 38, Oregon 6

The Cotton Bowl Classic unveiled a whole new look for its 60th anniversary celebration. For the first time since 1940, the game featured two teams from outside the Southwest Conference.

A changing environment in college sports brought about the formation of the new Big 12 Conference, a league comprised of institutions from the powerful Big Eight Conference and four long-time members of the soon-to-be dismantled SWC. With the Big 12 serving as its anchor conference of the future, the Classic looked toward the West Coast to establish partnerships with the storied Pacific-10 Conference and the explosive Western Athletic Conference.

Kicking off this new era at the Cotton Bowl was national power Colorado. The seventh-ranked Buffaloes earned their way to Dallas with a thrilling come-from-behind victory over Kansas State in the regular-season finale. It marked Colorado's fifth New Year's Day bowl appearance in seven seasons, and the Buffs headed for Texas in search of a third consecutive post-season victory.

From the Pac-10 came Oregon, a rising program that was beginning to reap the benefits of back-to-back New Year's Day bowl appearances. A trip to the Cotton Bowl Classic in their 100th season of college football was perceived to be the consummate ending to a two-year run that produced a Rose Bowl berth the previous season and the Ducks' first conference title in 37 years.

Both teams finished the 1996 campaign with identical 9-2-0 records. In the Big Eight's final season, Colorado forced the conference's first-ever three-way tie for second place. Oregon, ranked 12th, came within a half-game of winning the Pac-10 championship for the second year in a row. But, as game time neared, the favorite's role belonged to Colorado. Coach Rick Neuheisel's Buffaloes possessed big play potential on offense, complemented by a youthful, but talented defense. Yet, early in the first quarter, it was Oregon...not Colorado, that took control of the game.

Speedy tailback Ricky Whittle got things rolling for the Ducks, returning the opening kickoff 63 yards to the Colorado 26-yard line. Within minutes, Oregon quarterback Tony Graziani had moved the Ducks to inside the 10. But, Oregon's drive stalled on the eight and first-year head coach Mike Bellotti turned to freshman place kicker Joshua Smith to post the game's first score. Smith's 25-yard field goal was good and the Ducks owned an early 3-0 lead.

Colorado no sooner had the ball back when inside linebacker Rich Ruhl intercepted a John Hessler pass at the Buffaloes' 46. The Ducks charged back onto the field, determined to convert this turnover into a touchdown. But, after reaching the 16, Oregon's offense again failed to cash in, and was forced to settle for another field goal from Smith.

These two series set the offensive tone the rest of the day for the Ducks. In the first half, Oregon's average starting point was its own 49. Still, the Ducks couldn't take advantage of the many opportunities handed to them by their defense. To go with Whittle's kickoff return, Oregon intercepted a pass, recovered a fumble and stopped Colorado on downs at midfield, all in the first quarter. However, the end result was a tenuous 6-0 edge.

Finally, the struggling Buff offense came alive, and Hessler, Colorado's sophomore quarterback, produced the spark that ultimately ignited Neuheisel's high octane assault. On third and 19, Hessler hooked up with receiver James Kidd for a 62-yard pass play that reached the Oregon one. Seconds later, on the first play of the second quarter, Hessler ended the 80-yard drive himself, carrying around right end for the touchdown that pushed the Buffs in front, 7-6.

Oregon fired back after a short punt gave the Ducks excellent field position at the Colorado 49. Poised to take the lead, Graziani again maneuvered his team back into scoring position, driving to the nine-yard line. Then came the game's pivotal play. On second down, Graziani looked for his tight end, Josh Wilcox. Colorado blitzed linebacker Matt Russell up the middle and Wilcox headed for the spot vacated by Russell.

Realizing that Wilcox was covered, Graziani turned back to Whittle, his second option. The pass was off target and Colorado's Marcus Washington, a freshman free safety who was making only his second start of the season, was in perfect position. Washington picked off Graziani's pass, quickly cut to the left sideline and sailed 95 yards for a Colorado touchdown. In a matter of seconds, the momentum had turned and the Ducks were left staring at a 13-6 deficit.

The second half opened with tailback Herchell Troutman's 55-yard romp over right tackle.

Troutman's run moved Colorado to the Oregon nine and set up Hessler's two-yard scoring pass to tight end Matt Lepsis in the back of the end zone. The margin ballooned to 20-6.

Oregon then fumbled away three consecutive possessions, handing the Buffs the football on the Ducks' 29-, 23- and 17-yard lines. Colorado turned two of the three turnovers into 12 points, and by the start of the final period, the Buffaloes had stormed to a commanding 32-6 lead.

So much for Colorado's "rebuilding year." After sending 10 seniors into the NFL the previous season, 1995 turned out to be one of the Buffs' most successful football campaigns ever: 10 wins, a Top 5 national ranking, and a third consecutive bowl victory. Even if he tried, head coach Rick Neuheisel couldn't have dreamed of a better ending for his rookie season.

GAME SUMMARY



Oregon	6	0	0	0	-	6
Colorado	0	13	19	6	-	38

First Quarter

Oregon-Joshua Smith 25 FG, 12:53, 18 yards in 6 plays following opening kickoff
Oregon-Smith 33 FG, 8:33, 39 yards in 6 plays following interception by Rich Ruhl.

Second Quarter:

Colorado-John Hessler 1 run (Neil Voskeritchian kick), 14:56, 80 yards in 6 plays following punt
Colorado-Marcus Washington 95 interception return (Voskeritchian kick fail), 6:31

Third Quarter:

Colorado-Matt Lepsis 2 pass from Hessler (Voskeritchian kick), 13:37, 64 yards in 4 plays following kickoff
Colorado-Herchell Troutman 6 run (bobbled PAT snap and run by Voskeritchian failed), 8:40, 23 yards in 6 plays following fumble recovery by Donnell Leomiti
Colorado-Phil Savoy 12 pass from Hessler (Voskeritchian kick blocked by Bryant Jackson), 5:42, 17 yards in 3 plays following fumble recovery by Greg Jones

Fourth Quarter:

Colorado-Ayyub Abdul-Rahmaan 5 run (Voskeritchian kick blocked by Jackson), 1:11, 65 yards in 10 plays following punt

OUTSTANDING PLAYERS

Marcus Washington, Colorado
Herchell Troutman, Colorado

COACHES

Mike Bellotti, Oregon
Rick Neuheisel, Colorado

WEATHER

Rain, 45 degrees

GAME STATISTICS

TEAM STATS	Oregon	CU
First Downs	16	16
Rushing	9	9
Passing	7	4
Penalty	0	3
Rushes-Net Yards	29-105	41-170
Net Yards Passing	162	143
Passes	21-44-2	12-27-2
Total Plays	73	68
Total Net Yards	267	313
Fumbles-Lost	4-3	2-1
Penalties-Yards	8-67	6-41
Punts-Average	5-38.4	4-28.5

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

PUNTING

Oregon - Bidwell 5-38.4.
Colorado - Mitchell 4-28.5.

RUSHING

Oregon - Whittle 12-50, Parker 3-43, Jelks 3-14, Graziani 11-(-2).
Colorado - Troutman 13-100, Henry 7-38, Barnes 5-25, Savoy 1-13, Abdul-Rahmaan 4-3, Hessler 11-(-9).

PASSING

Oregon - Graziani 19-37-2, 113 yards; Smith 2-6-0, 49 yards; Parker 0-1-0.
Colorado - Hessler 11-26-2, 115 yards; Mitchell 1-1-0, 28 yards.

RECEIVING

Oregon - Hodge 2-33, McLemore 3-26, Jelks 2-21, Whittle 4-18, Griffin 2-17, Wilcox 2-17, Anderson 1-16, Spence 2-9, Parker 2-8, Ricketts 1-(-3).
Colorado - Savoy 3-29, Kidd 2-73, Black 1-28, Carruth 1-11, Troutman 1-4, Anderson 1-2, Lepsis 1-2, Henry 2-(-6).