

# Royce Freeman to compete immediately for Denver Broncos' starting running back job

By Gina Mizell  
The Denver Post  
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Royce Freeman had no idea the Broncos were interested in selecting him in the NFL draft. But the former Oregon star running back acknowledges he scoured various rosters leading up to the weekend in an effort to gauge which teams could be in the market for a running back.

The Broncos snagged Freeman in the third round and introduced him Saturday afternoon. Up next? Immediately challenging for the starting job after the Broncos released 1,000-yard rusher C.J. Anderson earlier this month.

"I am definitely coming in trying to compete," Freeman said. "That is definitely a big factor ... To contribute is definitely my No. 1 goal, however it may be."

Broncos coach Vance Joseph described Denver's position-group status as an open competition between Freeman, Devontae Booker and De'Angelo Henderson. The Broncos added depth Saturday by drafting Arkansas' David Williams in the seventh round and signing former Colorado star Phillip Lindsay as an undrafted free agent. And the physicality required to play the position means the Broncos will need two or three reliable running backs.

But Freeman is the flashy pickup after a decorated career at Oregon. The school's all-time leading rusher (5,621 career yards) with a 6-foot, 240-pound frame blends the size and power to churn forward in short-yardage and goal-line situations, as well as the speed to break long runs. Broncos general manager John Elway called Freeman a "big banger," while offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave lauded his "eye-popping production."

Yet outside concerns swirled about the multitude of carries — and hits — Freeman has already acquired. It reminds some of Montee Ball, whose Broncos career fizzled out after he put up massive numbers at Wisconsin.

Freeman and Elway stressed the big output highlights Freeman's durability and how he learned how to take care of his body and handle a heavy workload. And Freeman calls returning to Oregon for his senior season "one of the best decisions in my life, to be honest." He learned under new position coach Donte' Pimpleton who taught him about playing with a "violent tenacity."

"(He) always emphasized that we needed to go inflict pain on the defender, especially as a bigger back," Freeman said. "They are going to try to come at you, come at you low and come at you different in different directions and all kinds of ways."

"I feel like if I take it to them and put that on film, the team prior to playing us watches the film is going to think twice once in the game."

As Freeman made the media rounds inside the Broncos' indoor practice facility Saturday, he stopped just under Terrell Davis' Hall of Fame banner.

Achieving that level of success is a pipe dream now. But Freeman will begin his NFL career by immediately competing for Denver's starting job.

# NFL Draft Fantasy Reaction: Landing In Denver Makes Royce Freeman A Sleeper

By Dave Richard

CBS Denver

April 28, 2018

Royce Freeman grew up in San Diego, was a top-5 high school recruit in California, went to college at Oregon and now has a chance to be a starting running back in Denver.

The guy gets around the western half of the United States. He moves around a football field pretty impressively, too.

Freeman was the third-round choice of the Broncos, bringing a no-nonsense, physical style to their backfield. And if he plays anything like he did with the Ducks, he'll be an asset for your Fantasy team.

Perhaps the textbook definition of a workhorse, Freeman is one of four players in the history of the FBS to rush for over 5,000 yards and catch for over 800 yards in their career. He set an Oregon record with 1,836 yards as a sophomore in 2015, adding 19 touchdowns.

He got this done thanks to a punishing blend of power, patience, balance and lateral quickness that should work well when the Broncos use zone blocking. Not a burner or an elusive runner (only three carries of 30-plus yards last season), Freeman is the kind of guy who can create yards after contact and hang in there for a heavy workload.

Of course, being that kind of back is a double-edged sword. Oregon came to rely heavily on him and he had 1,027 touches in 51 games – 20.1 per game on average. When you're a thick back taking on that much work, injuries come with the territory. Freeman was no exception, battling right leg injuries in 2016 and right shoulder issues in 2017 that cost him a bowl game and his participation in the Senior Bowl.

Given that, the Broncos would be wise to manage Freeman's touches, but he might already be the best running back on their roster. After letting go of C.J. Anderson before the draft, all they had left was third-year disappointment Devontae Booker and second-year sleeper DeAngelo Henderson. If this is Freeman's competition, assume he'll be starting sooner than later – making him the only draft-worthy rusher in Mile High Country.

Fantasy Football often comes down to opportunities over talent. This is one such case. Freeman wasn't close to being the best running back in the draft but he's not bad, and should bring the boom to the Denver run game. He's absolutely the kind of running back you want to target past 75th overall. Probably a bit more desirable in non-PPR than PPR, so target him there. He'll also receive first-round consideration in rookie-only drafts.

# How he fits: Third-round pick Royce Freeman

By Andrew Mason  
DenverBroncos.com  
April 27, 2018

In what is likely to be a feisty running back competition, Royce Freeman's advantage could rest in his durability and across-the-board consistency.

Some running backs' skill sets are unbalanced. Some operate well in space, but aren't as effective between the tackles. Some are more effective as a pass receiver than as an every-down runner. Some have terrific straight-line speed, but don't have great vision; some are the opposite.

Freeman, on the other hand, is solid across the board. In addition to being perhaps the most durable running back in college football, amassing 1,026 touches over the last three years, he was effective in the passing game at Oregon, averaging 10.3 yards per reception over the course of his career. He runs with between-the-tackles power and open-field speed.

All that gives him a chance to distinguish himself in what could be a wide-open competition between Freeman, Devontae Booker and De'Angelo Henderson.

"It's going to be open, obviously, with [Booker] and De'Angelo," Head Coach Vance Joseph said. "You've got to have two or three backs anyways, so it's always going to be open competition. It takes two or three guys to have a solid backfield."

Freeman could also be a primary option in short-yardage situations.

"He's a big back with speed," Joseph said. "When we get down there in the red zone and we want to run the football, he's a nice option. When you're third-and-one, fourth-and-one, he's a great option."

But Freeman wants more than situational work.

"I want to be out there on first down and second down and third down," Freeman said. "That's part of my asset as the running back."

His quickness numbers are outstanding, especially for a back of his size. His three-cone drill time of 6.90 seconds ranked third among running backs at the Scouting Combine, trailing only Northwestern's Justin Jackson and Fordham's Chase Edmonds -- both of whom are more than 20 pounds lighter than the 229-pound Freeman.

All that stands as evidence that Freeman is not a situational back, but one who could be an every-down, bell-cow runner who blends sufficient speed, agility and power.

# Royce Freeman goes to the Broncos, and he might be the best RB value in the whole draft

By Richard Johnson

SB Nation

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The value of Royce Freeman lies in what you think about a running back, and the perilous future inevitable to one of the most dispensable positions on a football team. Freeman's biggest calling card is also his biggest detriment, but the Denver Broncos felt comfortable enough with him to take him in the third round anyway.

Based on an advanced statistical system meant to show a player's pro ceiling based on his college numbers, Freeman has a good chance to be this draft class' best NFL back.

Derrius Guice and Royce Freeman are probably the safest bets.

Despite battling injury in 2017, Guice's career marginal efficiency was third among these prospects, and one of the guys above him was NC State's Jaylen Samuels, whom we'll discuss in a moment. Guice was on the higher end of the explosiveness scale, though his vertical jump blurs that picture.

It's the same story with Freeman, who wasn't as explosive and didn't wow with his explosiveness exercises at the combine.

Explosiveness is secondary to efficiency, though, and of this year's prospects, Guice and Freeman are perhaps the most likely to approach a marginal efficiency of zero.

He was incredibly productive at Oregon in a career in which he broke the Pac-12's touchdown record. In fact, from the second he stepped on the field in Eugene he was toting the rock often and was delivering consistent returns as a rusher and has shown he can also get the job done catching the ball out of the backfield. But that's the problem, he's been logging tough miles on his tires since his freshman year. Take a look at his total touches number and how it stayed high throughout his career.

There's also the conversation about the types of miles that Freeman has on his tires. Despite the connotation of Oregon's offense, Freeman isn't the guy that runs around you. His most effective running style is north/south. He is driving type of runner with a really good lower body. His thighs move like pistons to propel him up the field in a hurry, and there's little in the way of probing in his running style. He knows where he's gonna go, and he's gonna get there whether you're in his way or not. That means he's more apt to draw harder contact from bigger bodies.

You've heard about the 'ol magic number for a running back, right? When any back turns 30 those returns start diminishing quickly. The miles catch up to you and many careers go south. It's one of the reasons that running backs have seen their value in the draft diminish, and many argued that the Giants shouldn't have taken Saquon Barkley No. 2 despite how breathtaking of an athlete he is.

This is the wager of the NFL Draft at running back in the most distilled sense. Can a team get the maximum value out of a player before father time catches up. Freeman should be productive in the NFL, but for how long?

# 2018 NFL Draft Profile: Royce Freeman one of draft's most versatile backs

By Justin Dottavio

Fansided

February 21, 2018

Royce Freeman came to Oregon from Imperial High School in California as a composite four-star recruit per 247 Sports and a five-star running back in the 247 Sports rankings. Freeman had an immediate impact in Mark Helfrich's zone scheme offense starting nine games as a true freshman in Oregon's College Football Playoff National Championship runner-up season in 2014.

Freeman accumulated 5,621 yards on 5.9 yards per carry with 60 rushing touchdowns over his four year college career. He holds the Pac 12 record in rushing touchdowns and is second in conference history in career rushing yards. Freeman played in the College Football Playoff National Championship Game in 2014, and led the Ducks to three bowl games in four seasons in Eugene.

## Strengths

Freeman is 5-foot-11, 235 pounds and can break off big runs while also being an solid receiver out of the backfield. Freeman's draft status will be determined by his 40 yard dash time, and how healthy the scouts feel he is after four years of starting duty. Freeman has caught seventy-nine passes over his four year career which gives him the versatility other backs in the draft don't have. Freeman bounced back well after a banged up 2016 to average six yards per carry for Willie Taggart's Ducks in 2017.

## Weaknesses

Freeman's troubles are his extensive injury history. Freeman missed games and had poor performances for the 4-8 Ducks in 2016 which led to Mark Helfrich's firing. He also has four years of college experience with a lot of milage on his body already, which scouts will see as a negative. He's carried the ball 947 times over four years and played in fifty-one games.

It was probably a good idea for Freeman to sit out of the bowl game after proving he did bounce back from his off 2016 season. Now it will come down to do the NFL GM's and scouts feel a 235 pound running back has enough burst to carry the football in the speed-centric NFL or if he's just another Ron Dayne clone.

## Draft Expectations

Walter Football has Freeman going between rounds 3-4 and that seems accurate. He lacks the top end speed of Saquon Barkley or Sony Michel. However, if Freeman does test well in the 40 yard dash and the Pro Shuttle he could climb up draft boards from being around the 10th rated running back in the NFL Draft to the sixth or seventh. I can see the Pittsburgh Steelers liking his hard-nose style of play, and power running backs have worked there in the past like Le'Veon Bell and Jerome Bettis.

Projection: Fourth round

# Freeman makes Maxwell Award Semifinal list

By Luke Easterling

Draft Wire

October 30, 2017

Royce Freeman's senior season to date is one of the best in the country, according to one of the top college football awards.

The Maxwell Football Club announced their 2017 semifinalists for the 81st Maxwell Award for the Collegiate Player of the Year, and Freeman was included on the list.

Freeman is one of eight running backs to make the cut and one of four players from the Pac-12 (Arizona QB Khalil Tate, Stanford RB Bryce Love, and USC QB Sam Darnold).

Freeman has rushed for 1,096 yards and 10 touchdowns this season and is the 14th player in college football history with 5,242 career rushing yards. He's second all-time in Pac-12 career rushing and recently surpassed former Duck LaMichael James as the school's all-time rushing leader.

This past weekend, Freeman produced his sixth game with 100 or more yards rushing this season when he ran for 139 yards on 20 carries against Utah.

# Oregon RB Royce Freeman quietly producing one of greatest careers

By Eric Yates

Oregon Die Hards

October 29, 2017

Oregon's Royce Freeman has been overshadowed his entire career. Coming into college as part of a loaded running back class can do that.

LSU's Leonard Fournette was a highlight factory and one of the faces of the sport in his three years in Baton Rouge. Stanford's Christian McCaffrey was an all-purpose marvel and record-setting Heisman finalist. Florida State's Dalvin Cook thrived on big plays, giving him the reputation of a "can-score-from-anywhere" dynamo. Georgia's Nick Chubb was viewed by many as college football's next great back before tearing up his left knee in 2015. Even Oklahoma's Samaje Perine stole headlines by breaking the FBS single-game rushing record with 427 yards in 2014.

All the while, Freeman's nondescript style allowed him to fly under the radar and amass more rushing yards through his first two years than everyone in that group.

Even this season, Freeman's exploits are not being appreciated.

Penn State's Saquon Barkley is putting together a potential Heisman-winning campaign. Stanford's Bryce Love is picking up yardage and scoring long TDs at a jaw-dropping rate. On Freeman's own team, the main storyline has been Oregon's struggles after losing quarterback Justin Herbert to a broken collarbone.

Still, Freeman is just going about his business.

He started the season outside the top 100 on the NCAA's all-time rushing list. Two games ago, he broke the all-time rushing record for Oregon. After picking up 139 yards against Utah on Saturday, giving him 1,096 this season, Freeman now sits at No. 14 on the list with 5,242 career yards.

And he's not done.

If Freeman continues to run for his average of 121 yards per game, by the end of the 2017 season (including a bowl game) Freeman will sit at No. 7 all time. Run even better than that (he's gone over 121 yards six times in nine games this season) and he has a chance to climb even higher.

Next up on the list of great tailbacks he will leave in his wake: Georgia legend Herschel Walker. Two spots after that, it is LaDainian Tomlinson, one of the best backs to play the game. Who else is in Freeman's sights? Archie Griffin. Yes, the two-time Heisman winner.

Think about that.

The shame in all of this is that very few, outside of fans and media in the Pac-12, have noticed.

Call it East Coast bias. Call it not being labeled as “explosive” and not showing up on SportsCenter Top 10 highlight lists. Call it hiding in relative obscurity. Early in his career, Freeman played second fiddle to Ducks legend Marcus Mariota. Call it not being a part of the national conversation last season when Oregon imploded under Mark Helfrich. Call it anything you want.

But, at the end of the day, take a look back at what the unheralded senior from Imperial, Calif., has done in his four years in Eugene and call it what it truly is:

One of the greatest careers for a running back in the history of the sport.

# Oregon Ducks RB Royce Freeman could chase down LaMichael James' career rushing record at UCLA

By Ryan Thorburn  
The Register Guard  
October 19, 2017

Not many players have been able to catch LaMichael James from behind.

It is taking longer than originally planned for Royce Freeman, but Oregon's star running back has a chance to run down James' career rushing record against UCLA on Saturday at the Rose Bowl (1 p.m., Pac-12 Networks).

Freeman needs 140 yards to eclipse the 5,082 rushing yards James accumulated with the Ducks in Chip Kelly's offense during three electrifying seasons (2009-11).

The Bruins' defense ranks 128th in rushing defense (313 yards per game) out of 129 FBS teams.

"It's definitely an after-the-season sort of thing, just congratulate everyone that's helped me get to that point," Freeman said when asked if he would celebrate becoming Oregon's all-time leading rusher. "It's something, if I do reach that benchmark, that I'll be grateful for."

Freeman finished with 945 yards and nine touchdowns — subpar statistics by his lofty standards — during an injury-plagued 2016 campaign.

After weighing the pros and cons of entering the NFL draft, Freeman decided to return for his senior season to play for coach Willie Taggart and running backs coach Donte Pimpleton.

Taggart coached Heisman Trophy runner up Toby Gerhart at Stanford.

Marlon Mack, South Florida's star running back last season, was a fourth-round pick who is being groomed by the Indianapolis Colts to replace Frank Gore.

In Taggart's Gulf Coast offense, Freeman has rushed for 797 yards and 10 touchdowns in six games this season.

During last week's 49-7 loss at Stanford, Freeman was a bright spot on a sputtering offense with 143 yards rushing.

"Just the way the season is going we're just focused on getting back on track," Freeman said. "We've got to get focused on doing the little things and just improving, putting a better performance out there on Saturdays."

Freeman is currently tied with James for the Oregon record for most 100-yard games (26) and needs 133 yards to break James' record for all-purpose yards (5,869).

As a sophomore in 2015, Freeman broke James' single-season rushing record with 1,836 yards and earned all-American honors.

Freeman was the featured back in 2014 as a true freshman, helping the Ducks get to the inaugural College Football Playoff title game with 1,365 rushing yards and 18 touchdowns.

"I just count my blessings," said Freeman, whose next touchdown will give him the school record for total touchdowns (59). "Durability plays a huge part in that, and the fact that I've been able to be durable for that amount of time will be a great thing.

"Just the trainers keeping me healthy and putting me back together during this time has been amazing."

Burmeister will get start against UCLA

Justin Herbert is back on the field as a very limited practice participant and Taylor Alie is listed first at quarterback on Oregon's alphabetical depth chart.

But coach Willie Taggart said before Wednesday's practice that Braxton Burmeister will start for the Ducks against UCLA on Saturday at the Rose Bowl.

The true freshman has struggled in two starts since Herbert suffered a fractured collarbone. Burmeister threw four interceptions and lost two fumbles during consecutive losses to Washington State and Stanford.

"We're not asking him to be Tom Brady or anybody," Taggart said. "I wish he was. But we just need him to run our offense and more importantly just take care of the football.

"If there's one thing I would like for Braxton to do it's take care of the football. And everything else will take care of itself."

Burmeister has completed 19 of 36 passes (52.8 percent) for 172 yards with a passing touchdown and a rushing touchdown since burning his redshirt in the fourth quarter against California.

Alie will be available off the bench again after completing 2 of 5 passes for 10 yards against Stanford with the 49-7 loss already cemented.

"We've been fans of each other going into fall camp," Alie, a fifth-year senior, said of his relationship with Burmeister. "Especially being a seasoned vet, there's times when there's good days and bad days. So we just try to keep each other in a good light and pick each other up when we're down."

Herbert isn't the only offensive standout who hasn't been cleared to play against the Bruins.

Left tackle Tyrell Crosby, right guard Jake Pisarcik and running back Tony Brooks-James are still going through concussion protocol after being injured against Stanford.

"We just practice with the guys we have and prepare them and get ready to roll," Taggart said. "When the doctors tell us those guys are ready to roll, we'll fit them in there. If not, we'll keep rolling."

# Royce Freeman breaks Oregon all-time rushing TD record in first half against Arizona State

By Andrew Greif  
The Oregonian  
September 23, 2017

Royce Freeman broke LaMichael James' school record for rushing touchdowns in the first half Saturday against Arizona State, when his 12-yard run gave him his 54th score on the ground of his career.

The touchdown was Freeman's 10th this season and added to the senior's remarkable start to the season. (He had nine touchdowns all last season.) He entered Saturday's Pac-12 opener against the Sun Devils leading the country in touchdowns scored and is the active leader among all rushers for touchdowns scored.

Freeman's 12-yard touchdown run with 31 seconds left in the second quarter also tied James for most total touchdowns in UO history, with 58.

The score cut Arizona State's lead to 17-14. Freeman finished the half with 60 rushing yards on nine carries. Should Freeman reach 100 yards, it will be his 26th career 100-yard game -- tying James for the school record.

# Freeman has been running free

By Ryan Thorburn  
The Register-Guard  
September 20, 2017

Royce Freeman is back in the national spotlight.

And there will still be room for Kani Benoit and other veteran running backs to shine in Willie Taggart's offense when No. 24 Oregon faces Arizona State in the Pac-12 opener on Saturday at Sun Devil Stadium (7 p.m., Pac-12 Networks).

Through three games, Freeman is second in the Pac-12 in rushing (153.3 ypg) and leads the nation with nine rushing touchdowns.

"The biggest thing is figuring out a way to ... I don't know if you can ever shut down a guy as good as Freeman," Arizona State coach Todd Graham said, "but make sure you get that under control and don't give up cheap ones. That's the key."

During the Ducks' 49-13 win at Wyoming, the 6-foot, 238-pound Freeman bulldozed his way to 157 yards rushing and three touchdowns and caught a 50-yard screen pass on a third-and-10.

Freeman opted to return to play for the new coaching staff instead of leaving for the NFL after grinding through injuries on last year's 4-8 team.

"I'm very happy about my decision," Freeman said on an episode of "The Drive," which will air on the Pac-12 Networks at 5 p.m. on Thursday. "We have a great team this year. Me coming back, I wanted to be a part of it."

Freeman is tied with LaMichael James for the most career rushing touchdowns (53) in Oregon history. The senior ranks second all-time in the Pac-12 and has a chance to break the mark held by Oregon State's Ken Simonton (59).

"The level of physicality that he brings to the offense, certainly it makes you different," co-offensive coordinator Mario Cristobal said. "All of those guys have kind of bought into being a physical offense and getting downhill. He leads the charge."

Freeman was No. 4 on Sports Illustrated's list of the top Heisman Trophy candidates of the week.

Benoit is putting up his own eye-opening numbers. The senior from Phoenix enters his homecoming trip with 162 yards rushing and six touchdowns on only 16 attempts.

"I'm playing loose," Benoit explained. "A lot of times last year and years before I was kind of tight, just not wanting to make mistakes. But with this coaching staff you can play so freely. You don't have to worry about getting yanked and stuff like that."

"So that's what I like the most is being able to play free and wanting you to make plays. That's why they recruited us, to make plays, so that's what I've been able to do."

Freeman finished with a career-high 30 carries to loosen up the Cowboys. Benoit had eight carries for 48 yards and two touchdowns.

Oregon leads the nation with 18 rushing touchdowns.

“It’s really fun to watch,” said Justin Herbert, who passed for 251 yards and added 30 net yards on the ground. “Sometimes I hand the ball off and I don’t really carry out my fake, I just watch Royce run. He’s an incredible running back and he’s so much fun to have.”

The Ducks also unleashed Taj Griffin for the first time this season. The versatile skill player had six carries for 35 yards and caught a 20-yard touchdown pass from Herbert.

Griffin, now healthy after recovering from a torn ACL in 2016, can help fill the void until Charles Nelson returns from an ankle injury. The Ducks’ leading wide receiver was not at practice Tuesday during the 20-minute portion open to the media.

“Taj has a skill set that we’re trying to continue to grow with him,” co-offensive coordinator Marcus Arroyo said. “I think every week he’s done a great job of getting a little bit better. We’ve put him in a position that he’s been in in the past, and we’re excited to see him develop.

“He’s an explosive player and we’re excited that he had some of the touches he had last week.”

If all that isn’t enough for Graham to think about on defense, Tony Brooks-James — who has been relatively quiet since retuning the opening kickoff for a 100-yard touchdown against Southern Utah — rushed for 132 yards and a touchdown on nine carries (14.7 yards per) last year against the Sun Devils.

Herbert tied the Oregon record for passing yards in a game (489) and set the program record for total yards from scrimmage (512) during the 54-35 win over Arizona State at Autzen Stadium.

“Right now they have the most productive running back, one of the most productive all-purpose yard guys. I think the whole key is stopping (Freeman),” Graham said. “Their quarterback is very efficient. They have great team speed. The strength of their team has been on offense, but their defensive is playing well.”

The Ducks (3-0) are 15 1/2-point favorites to extend their winning streak to 11 games over the Sun Devils (1-2).

“The sense of urgency has got to go up,” Cristobal said. “We’re in conference play, and this is a whole different animal. Everybody has hope and life and everybody’s fired up to get this thing done. We’ve got to do our part to make sure we’ve got the right mindset.”

# Oregon Ducks: Royce Freeman gaining on Ken Simonton's Pac-12 record

By Peter Martini  
Statesman Journal  
September 16, 2017

Royce Freeman has had quite a career for Oregon, and he is moving up on a key Pac-12 career list.

With his three touchdowns Saturday, Sept. 16, in the Ducks' 49-13 victory at Wyoming, Freeman now ranks second all-time in the conference with 53 rushing touchdowns, tied with former Oregon great LaMichael James.

Freeman now only trails a popular player for the Ducks' rival: Oregon State's Ken Simonton.

From 1998 to 2001, Simonton rushed for 59 touchdowns for the Beavers, which still ranks No. 1 all time in Pac-12 history.

Freeman has nine regular-season games left this season, plus possibly a bowl game, to set the record.

So far this season, Freeman has scored nine rushing touchdowns, so he is on pace to shatter the all-time record.

Although, it should be noted that James scored his 53 touchdowns in just three seasons.

Freeman was on the fence about returning to the Ducks after last season's 4-8 record. But after Willie Taggart took over the program, Freeman decided to come back to finish his degree and try to end his Ducks career on a high note.

Oregon just wrapped up a 3-0 trip through its nonconference schedule. The Ducks open Pac-12 play at 7 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 23, at Arizona State.