

Sept. 29th, 2007: California @ Oregon Game Notes

Some thoughts on the Oregon game, in no particular order:

- THIS WAS CAL'S BIGGEST ROAD WIN IN A DECADE OR MORE.
- The Ducks with their high-flying offense, frenzied crowd, Autzen stadium magic with ESPN College GameDay in attendance, the bookies making them the favorites, and with an injured Nate Longshore ultimately could not overcome a gritty, determined, and talented bunch of Cal Bears.
- From the Oregonian:
(<http://www.oregonlive.com/ducksfootball/oregonian/index.ssf?base/sports/1191120951250880.xml&coll=7&thispage=1>): EUGENE -- California coach Jeff Tedford said he didn't think he could put Saturday's win at Autzen Stadium into words. Looking around, he didn't have to. Golden Bears wide receiver Robert Jordan stood atop the wall behind the west end zone, directing Cal's band in a run through its fight song. Offensive lineman Mike Tepper, all 6-foot-7, 308 pounds of him, ran around the field looking for a certain ESPN analyst who earlier in the day had donned a Ducks head. "Where's Corso?" Tepper said. "Corsooooo!"
- Big-time players make big plays in big games. On Saturday, Cal's Desean Jackson, Justin Forsett, Nate Longshore, and even Marcus Ezeff proved that they are indeed big-time football players.
- Cal fans have been waiting for Desean Jackson to explode back into the college football limelight, and Jackson delivered in a huge way, taking over the game in the second half and finishing with 11 receptions for 161 yards and two spectacular touchdowns.
- After being held to a couple short catches in the first half, Jackson was the beneficiary of an improved running game (more on that later) in the second half, as Oregon was forced to single cover the star receiver with talented but young Sophomore corner Walter Thurmond. Thurmond was pressing up on Jackson, playing his first move, so Jackson began his barrage by faking the slant inside (a move that completely turned Thurmond around) and easing outside for an easy post-corner pattern and a touchdown. On Cal's next drive, Thurmond again bit when Jackson sold the short sideline pattern and then spun past him deep (out-and-up) for another beautifully delivered completion from Longshore. The second touchdown actually came on the previously faked short sideline pattern, with the now gun-shy Thurmond playing back, but Desean paused then sped down the sideline for a 31 yard touchdown, leaving Thurmond grasping air, giving the Bears their first lead of the game 24-17.
- Ironically, some trash talk from fellow receiver Lavelle Hawkins, who had a quiet game despite a critical long third down catch late in the contest, appears to have inspired Jackson prior to the game. Hawkins told Desean that he never shows up in big games, and was obviously very happy to be proven wrong when interviewed after the game.

- It should be mentioned here that all these spectacular double-moves (post-corner, out-and-up) are not possible without stellar offensive line protection. Tedford and Cal offensive coordinator Jim Michalczyk made several good calls, keeping backs and tight ends at the line in “maximum protection” to give Longshore time to throw against the Ducks’ second-half blitzes, and trusting in the remaining one or two receivers in the pattern to make plays. Oregon finished the game with 1 sack for 4 yards. Longshore delivered, finishing the game 28 for 43 with 285 yards and 2 touchdowns, no interceptions. In fact the Bears had zero turnovers the entire game despite the hostile Autzen crowd.
- Unfortunately, Longshore was hurt on a low late hit after he threw the ball in the fourth quarter, one that easily could have been called a personal foul in light of the borderline personal foul on rover Marcus Ezeff in the first half (more on that later). After coming out for a play, Longshore went back in but clearly could not put weight on his right foot and the Bears did not throw another pass for the rest of the game. Of course, Oregon capitalized on this by selling out to stop the run with 8 or 9 defenders near the line of scrimmage, and the Ducks were able to force Bear punts that fueled their final comeback attempt.
- And what about Justin Forsett? After a slow first half, Forsett set the table for Cal’s offensive fireworks with his typical quick bursts behind a rejuvenated offensive line push. Despite playing through nagging injuries, the steady Forsett carried the ball 23 times for 101 yards, scored two touchdowns, and tacked on 13 receiving yards ... and did not fumble once. Forsett may be Cal’s MVP after 5 games, with 585 rushing yards and leading all Pac-10 players with 9 touchdowns. Forsett may not have the jaw-dropping talent of Marshawn Lynch, but his consistency, quick burst, and increased strength due to an intense off-season training regimen have made him into an excellent back in his own right.
- And then there was the redemption of Marcus Ezeff. The Sophomore rover was flagged on a borderline late hit call in the first half against big Oregon running back Jonathan Stewart. Ezeff made the defensive play of the Jeff Tedford era to terminate Oregon’s final desperate drive to tie the game with 16 seconds left just when it looked as if the Ducks were sure to tie the game and force overtime. Despite getting illegally picked on the play (to be fair referees seldom call offensive pass interference so late in the game), Ezeff recovered to catch up to the receiver, Cameron Colvin, who’s seventh catch of the game was a short hitch along the sideline. Colvin looked to have a clear path to the pylon but Ezeff slammed into him at the last minute, jarring the ball loose just inches shy of the goal-line as the Oregon wide-out extended himself. Colvin fumbled the ball in-bounds, as replays confirmed, into the end zone and out for a touchback and a monumental Cal win. The hit, pictured below is now immortalized as one of the seminal plays in Bear history.
- After waiting for the referees to finally make the call on the field, and much longer for the replay officials to confirm what everyone on the stadium knew, the Cal bench and fan section erupted to celebrate the win, and a jubilant Ezeff ran

along the sidelines pointing towards his cheering family in the stands and shouting in triumph.

- But it was a game of twists and turns long before “The Hit”. Besides Ezeff’s first half late hit, another critical and controversial call was a very questionable missed field goal to start the second half where Jordan Kay’s 33 yard field goal appeared to travel just over and possibly inside the left upright, but both officials looked at each other and slowly signaled “no good.”
- Cal’s defense came up with two huge interceptions of Oregon quarterback Dennis Dixon when it was needed most in the fourth quarter. They were Dixon’s first two interceptions of the season. Anthony Felder set up the Bears’ final touchdown by coming off his zone drop and picking off an errant throw on a seam pattern deep in Duck territory. Then with a couple minutes left, Cal’s Hawaiian combo on the defensive line teamed up for another crucial interception: defensive tackle Mika Kane broke off his rush to bat a Dixon throw in the air to the side, and defensive end Tyson Alualu made an athletic play for a man his size to come up with the ball in on the fly. This gave the Bears and the injured Longshore three more downs which, despite the fact that Oregon stuffed three straight runs that they knew were coming, consumed the three remaining Duck timeouts for their final drive.
- Three more Cal defenders that deserve a mention: Mike Mohamed (8 tackles) filling in for Zach Follett for the second straight game, Worrell Williams (9 tackles) with a somewhat improved game at “Mike” linebacker, DT Cody Jones with 3 tackles for loss, and the always solid free safety, Thomas Decoud, containing the prolific Duck offensive machine on several occasions in the first half with big play-preventing tackles in the secondary while the Bears were still struggling to stay in the game on offense.
- Cal finally won a game with their “all-white” road jerseys after several consecutive crushing losses in big games in the same uniforms, starting with the 2004 showdown against USC in the Coliseum and ending with the heartbreaker at Arizona last year.
- Fullback Zack Smith is not the devastating run blocker that the injured Will Ta’ufo’ou is, but performed admirably filling in with good second half blocking to go with a key rush and reception.
- The ranks of the injured go beyond Longshore and Ta’ufo’ou. Safety Robert Peele was carted off after a second half injury and is out for several games, and both Forsett and Hawkins came up gimpy and will need at least the bye week to rest up.
- Cal now has a gigantic target on its back for every opponent. Being one of the top five teams in the country, every team will give the Bears their best shot. The last few crazy weeks of college football have shown how critical emotion and luck are to the game since talent levels are really not that disparate, especially in the Pac-10 conference. It’s going to be a tough ride the rest of the way, starting with Oregon State, their star back Bernard, stingy front seven on defense, and excellent

kicker Serna, but this is exactly what we all wanted as Cal fans. It's time to step up and give this team your absolute unqualified support. They are far from perfect but are truly a Cal team we can all be proud of.

- Cal fans will remember this one for a long time. Just so we don't forget, here's a picture of "The Hit."



Albany Democrat-Herald / Mark Ylen via AP

Go Bears!!!