

Oct. 7th, 2006: Oregon vs. California Game Notes

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

- NICE. This was without question the biggest home win for Cal since the triple overtime classic against USC in 2003. This victory was absolutely huge, and everybody knows it, from the sell-out crowd, to Oregon's players and coach, to the national TV audience on ABC.
- Speaking of that sell-out crowd, 72,516 strong, it was the first time in over half a century that Memorial Stadium has been sold out other than many Big Games and 3 match-ups against USC (1977, 1979, and 2005). This was by far the most raucous this season: the atmosphere was electric, the noise was thunderous, and the Bears fed off it, much like the Tennessee Volunteers did against Cal in Knoxville earlier this season. Nice work people. Now let's keep it rolling to close out the home season against Washington, UCLA, and Stanford.
- Junior Rover Brandon Hampton picked off Oregon quarterback Dennis Dixon on the Ducks' first offensive play of the game, setting up a short Cal drive for a score. The already loud crowd erupted and the big turnover emphatically set the tone for the entire night. Hampton, a former walk-on, has been a steady force in both pass coverage and run support for the Bears all season since earning starting honors and replacing a graduated four-year starter in Donnie McCleskey. Hampton's blend of quickness, instincts, and physicality, in spite of his 5'10" 185 pound frame, reminds me of former Cal defensive back Eric Zomalt.
- Nate Longshore had another multi-touchdown game and now has 17 touchdowns for the year. He appeared in command the entire game and received stellar pass-blocking from his offensive line, never being sacked, and seldom being hurried, unlike in Cal's previous contest against Oregon State. After 6 games, it's hard not to come to the conclusion that the cheerful blueshirt Sophomore is the best quarterback in the Pac-10. Cal fans can only dream of what might have happened if Longshore had not broken his leg in the first game last season. Longshore himself is philosophical after enduring both the injury, and more importantly, the recent passing away of his father.
- After rushing for 50 yards on 7 carries a nice reception for 23 more yards, Marshawn Lynch left the game with a leg injury and did not return. Apparently, doctors did clear Lynch to play in the second half, but looking at the lopsided score, the always humble running back suggested that his backup, Justin Forsett be given the chance to shine, saying "they don't need me". Lynch is listed as day-to-day for Cal's game next week against Washington State. Meanwhile Forsett carried the load admirably for the Bears, to the tune of 163 yards on 27 carries and the Bears' last score, along with 2 catches for 19 yards. I have been a bit tough on Forsett in my game reviews, saying that talented third-stringer Marcus O'Keith's downhill running style was more suited to the current Cal offensive line's less dominant run-blocking. I still like O'Keith, but Forsett packed a punch

- against the Duck's front seven that I have not previously seen much from the Junior back from Texas, to go with his usual quick burst and elusiveness.
- The player that got tangled with Lynch's legs to cause the injury was Oregon defensive back Patrick Chung who was headed firmly towards the turf after a devastating stiff-arm from #10. The picture was apparently featured in the L.A. Times and shows, among other things, just what an amazing athlete Lynch is, especially considering that he has been playing through nagging ankle injuries throughout this season.
 - At the start of the game, both Lynch and Forsett struggled a bit as Cal's offensive line was stalemated by the Ducks' pressure defense near the line of scrimmage. Every defense the Bears have faced has tried this, and as usual, deep passes over the middle by Nate Longshore, along with persistence in the running game, led to bigger and bigger holes as the contest wore on. By the end, Forsett was running through gaping holes in the defense opened by the big Bear blockers. Still, Cal has work to do this year in attempting to recapture the dominant run-blocking of the 2004 and 2005 teams, even though the pass-blocking has been quite good.
 - Only at Cal: Recent Nobel Laureate George F. Smoot (Physics) walked onto the field with the Cal captains, was introduced to the crowd, and led a resounding cheer as a national TV audience watched his home football team crush a highly-ranked opponent. As a Physics major long ago myself at Cal, this was peculiarly heartwarming for me. Do they give Nobel prizes in amateur sports writing? Never mind.
 - Desean Jackson now has a touchdown catch in 8 straight games (leading active streak nationally) dating back to last year's Big Game, with 11 touchdown catches and 2 punt returns for a score over that stretch. Scary, scary stuff. Jackson only had two catches against Oregon. The first was a 36 yard deep post on which the speedy receiver's initial sharp feint to the outside sent Oregon corner Jarious Byrd stumbling down for a face-full of turf. The second was on a streak on which Jackson just outran the DB and made a spectacular fingertip catch on a slightly overthrown bomb by Longshore for a 41 yard gain. And of course, the punt return: Desean went right, then swept left, then back around right, receiving several crushing blocks and gliding past Duck defenders that seemed almost motionless by comparison. The play made ESPN's top-10 plays and officially turned the game into a rout (28-3). Jackson now has 18 touchdowns in 17 career games.
 - On the same punt return, Oregon tight end Dante Rosario leapt in the air and kicked a kneeling Cal player (who had just made a block) in the head/neck area. It was not an accident, as Rosario clearly did not attempt to retract his foot to avoid contact, and in fact followed through with a kick in one of the dirtiest plays I have ever seen in person. The officials threw a flag, but it was apparently for a mistaken illegal block call on the Bears, the most generous explanation since it is inexplicable that the infraction would be disregarded had the officials actually seen it, and the flag was picked up. Several Cal coaches were emphatically signaling for Rosario to be thrown out of the game, and Tedford was so incensed

that he physically re-enacted the posture of the victim and the kicking motion between some prolonged shouting at the referees. Surprisingly (or perhaps not), Rosario was *not* benched by Oregon head coach Mike Belotti, and in fact returned to catch a long pass on a fake field goal on the Ducks' subsequent drive.

- Speaking of the fake field goal, it was Oregon's sole big offensive play of the first half, and led to their only touchdown just before intermission. Rosario left the huddle at a sprint, as if he was about to run off the field, leaving only 10 men in the huddle instead of 11. This went mostly unnoticed by Cal's kick defense team, though Daymeion 'Donte' Hughes initially went to follow Rosario, then appeared to be called back. Ducks backup quarterback Brady Leaf, acting as the holder for the field goal, straightened up and fired a long pass down the left sideline to a completely uncovered Rosario, who was bumped out of bounds just short of the goal-line by the late pursuing Bears. Overall, it was a very well-executed fake, and USC ran an identical fake field goal play against Washington the same day for a touchdown. It's time for special teams coach Pete Alamar to have his squad ready for such fakes as Cal often seems to fall victim (flashback to the UCLA game last year and the Bruin fake punt for which Cal only had 10 defenders on the field). It was particularly frustrating because Cal was not even set up to go for a field goal block on the Oregon play, so what other purpose was the defensive formation supposed to achieve other than preventing a first down? Of course, the performance on special teams was balanced out by Jackson's scintillating return, but the latter was more individual brilliance than great coaching (caveat: avoiding illegal blocks on that convoluted play *was* arguably a result of good coaching).
- Sophomore linebacker Zach Follett delivered several crushing hits to establish a strong Cal defensive effort against the usually unstoppable Oregon attack. With the Bears leading 14-3, Follett blitzed past the Ducks' right tackle to pummel Dixon for a big sack, only to have the play 'cancelled' because of confusion regarding the play clock by one of the officials. The physical linebacker then delivered a devastating shot to separate the aforementioned Dante Rosario from the ball on a short curl pass shortly after Rosario's vicious cheap shot described above.
- And let's not ignore the stellar job done by Cal's defense overall when matched up with what is still considered one of the top offenses in college football. Defensive coordinator Bob Gregory, whom many have criticized for his seemingly passive "containment" approach, switched the Bears to a 3-4 defense, with only Brandon Mebane anchoring the middle of the line and outside linebackers Follett and Pimentel occasionally blitzing to supply additional pressure. The short, rhythm passing game of the Ducks, so deadly against Oklahoma and Arizona State, never got into full swing against the resulting crowd of Bear linebackers clogging the middle and the flats, and Oregon could never come close to matching Cal's prolific evening on offense.
- All-American corner Daymeion 'Donte' Hughes had a seemingly quiet game for the Bears, but did manage to hold down the primary Duck receiving threat, the 6'5" Jaison Williams, for most of the game. Typically, Cal has kept their corners

on the same side of the field regardless of which receivers line up on which side of the offensive formation. Against Oregon, however, Hughes followed Williams around. The massive and fast Williams did get away with an uncalled push-off against Hughes for a 4th quarter garbage time touchdown off a Dixon scramble, but for the most part, another tall receiver, Jordan Kent, became Dixon's primary target and the Ducks never truly got untracked.

- Perhaps Longshore's best throw of the night was deep to wide-out Robert Jordan on a streak pattern in the second half. The long bomb nestled right into Jordan's outstretched hands, only to bounce away, to the loud groans of the Cal faithful and Jordan's own evident exasperation with himself. But as has been typical in offensive coordinator Mike Dunbar's play-calling, the Bears soon went back to Jordan near the goal-line on a pass in the flat that the receiver cut back into the end zone for his second touchdown of the season.
- Tight end Craig Stevens was also a big part of the Cal offense, catching two slant passes for critical gains to go along with a mis-direction corner pattern for a 1 yard touchdown and the Bears' first score. Belotti grudgingly admitted that the Bears executed a good run fake left while Stevens leaked out to the right corner, stating that it was the same play often used by the Ducks as well. Stevens, known for his powerful blocking in the Cal ground game, can become another key element in loosening run-defenses indirectly if he becomes a pass-catching threat as well.
- Defensive leader and middle linebacker Desmond Bishop led the Bears with 8 unassisted tackles and a diving interception on a tipped Dixon pass to Rosario, while explosive outside linebacker Mikey Pimentel chipped in with another sack and also shifted out to use his speed effectively in coverage on several occasions. Cal fans should enjoy the play of these two impressive Seniors for the remainder of the season before they move on to showcase their skills on Sundays.
- I never noticed until this game that Jeff Tedford's son, Taylor, is in uniform on the sidelines. He is listed as a true Freshman quarterback for the Bears: http://calbears.cstv.com/sports/m-footbl/mtt/tedford_taylor00.html. Good to see the kid "stay at home."
- Another trap game looms for Cal against Washington State. Tedford should remind his troops that, though it has little relevance to the upcoming game, that the Bears have not won in Pullman since 1979 – a 10 game home winning streak for the Cougars against Cal in the remote Palouse. Last season at Memorial, Washington State nearly beat the Bears with the deadly combination of quarterback Alex Brink and his dangerous receivers, notably Jason Hill who had 6 catches for 240 yards and 3 long touchdowns. Joe Ayoob finally threw late touchdowns to LaReylle Cunningham and Lavelle Hawkins to pull out a 42-38 victory.
- This year, both Brink and Hill are back for the Cougs, along with greatly improved wide-out Michael Bumpus, and for a change, WSU has a defense. So the Bears will be facing a fairly tough opponent, but ultimately, this is a

dangerous game only if Cal doesn't play to their full potential. Unfortunately, however, after such a momentous victory against the Ducks, such a let down is certainly a distinct possibility, especially if Lynch does not play. Come on, Bears - it's time to fire up and end another streak. There appears to be no television for this contest, but tune in on your radio or stand by next week for, we hope, news of another big-time Cal victory.

- Cal took a big step on Saturday. The nation witnessed not only a statement win against a top opponent, but also how "right" Memorial Stadium looks for a big-time football game, with a huge and vociferous partisan crowd and the beautiful backdrop of Strawberry Canyon. I think we're on to something, folks.

Go Bears!!!