

## Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006: Portland State vs. California Game Notes

Some thoughts on the Portland State game, in no particular order:

- It was a spectacular day to watch football in Strawberry Canyon, but it's hard to believe that the late-arriving crowd actually totaled the 60,000+ announced. The Bears need more fans, and louder, in the house to get them over the hump against the Sun Devils.
- Speaking of loud, the two biggest cheers during the fourth quarter. The first was when Steve Levy emerged to handle mop up duties (Ayoob played the third quarter to much more muted applause). The second came, ironically, on a failed 4<sup>th</sup> and long conversion that Tedford attempted so as not to rub it in with a late field goal. Fourth-string walk-on tailback Bryan Schutte, who showed some ability on several plays (albeit during garbage time), made a one-handed tip of a Levy swing pass and somehow managed to juggle and control the ball, all while advancing about 10 yards and avoiding shots from Viking defenders, ending up just short of the 1<sup>st</sup> down marker.
- Yes, you can tell it was a game against a D1-AA team, when Bryan Schutte is the headliner in any game recap.
- A big cheer also went up when the 1 point come-from-behind Oregon victory over Oklahoma was announced, though of course the folks in the stadium were not aware of the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the end of that game.
- Marshawn Lynch did not start the game at either RB or KR due to a minor ankle sprain. Tedford later indicated a rule that not practicing on Thursday generally means not starting on Sunday. Lynch also did not play the second half, only carrying the ball 6 times ... for 112 yards! Most of those yards came on a long, disjointed 71 yard touchdown run to make it 28-3, as well as a 23 yard scamper to Portland State's 5 yard line on the Bears' first drive. Good – Tedford needs Lynch at full strength for the Pac-10 schedule.
- Portland State is by no means a terrible team – in particular with a tough defensive line that gave D1-A New Mexico fits in a 17-6 Viking win at Albuquerque. PSU probably looked a little worse because Cal defenders knocked out the top two Viking quarterbacks in the first quarter. DE Nu'u Tafisi pounded starter Sawyer Smith just after the ball was released, and later, backup signal caller Tygue Howland was scrambling away from LB Greg Van Hoesen when LB Mickey Pimentel blasted him for a sack. Hopefully both kids are ok. Both plays occurred on rollouts to the left side and both could have been avoided if the two quarterbacks got rid of the ball a bit sooner instead of getting greedy. Third stringer Rob Freeman came in and actually played well
- On the other hand Daymeion 'Dante' Hughes had an easy pick-6 on an errant throw by the first PSU backup, Tygue Howland. Hughes may be the only Bear All-American that is truly living up to his billing with 3 interceptions already.

Lynch and Mebane, the other two heavily hyped players on the Cal squad, have played well, but not quite up to All-American standards. On the other hand, Hughes did get beat for a touchdown on a fade by Viking receiver Tremayne Kirkland, with a perfect throw from Freeman.

- Speaking of that, I was very impressed with Kirkland. He only had 24 yards receiving and in fact filled in at quarterback a bit with the injuries, but looked to have enough talent to start alongside Desean Jackson for Cal. He made a tremendous catch down the sidelines as well that was just out of bounds, as well as throwing a long touchdown to PSU's other receiver Brendan Ferrigno for the Vikings' other score. As was well publicized, Ferrigno is the son of Cal wide receivers coach Dan Ferrigno. As you would expect then, Ferrigno provided a post-game quote that should warm the hearts of the blue and gold faithful: "Cal is ... just fast at every position. A couple teams might have a couple fast guys but they are just fast all over. Cal is a great team."
- In light of the low quality, tired attempts at "zaniness", and recent woes across the bay for the Stanford "band", I'd like to express my appreciation for the Cal Marching Band, as well as for the the Alumni Band that joined them at halftime on Saturday. They are clearly fun-loving (just watch the tubas), but they also make a concerted effort to put on an entertaining show and play good music. It was the Beatles this time. Now at halftime, I am normally chatting with friends, discussing football, checking scores, heading to the facilities, getting a drink, and so on. Thus I have not tended to be as visibly supportive of the band as I probably should have, often not even not even noticing what they were doing. I happened to stay for the halftime show this past Saturday to watch it all with my girlfriend, and we both loved it. Cal Band Great!!
- Brandon Mebane did collect another sack in this game, but he and his line-mates will be severely tested for the first time since Tennessee against a powerful Arizona State attack.
- Against PSU's defensive line, while Lynch, O'Keith, and even Schutte flourished, Justin Forsett had another tough game, rushing for 11 yards on 11 carries. The effort was certainly there, and Forsett did contribute 3 receptions on screen passes for 48 yards, but was not able to break through the Viking line or outrun the pursuit to the sideline.
- Marcus O'Keith: It's hard to question Tedford and running back coach Ron Gould, given Cal's record of rushing success, but it's also hard not to feel that Marcus O'Keith should back up Marshawn Lynch, ahead of the admittedly lightning quick and talented Justin Forsett. Last season, with the right side of Cal's line opening huge holes against some weak defenses, Forsett flourished, with monster games starting against New Mexico State, and as a backup against UCLA, for example. He was certainly quicker through the initial hole or cutback lane than Lynch. But against tougher defensive lines, and especially with the departure of O'Callahan, Philip, and Merz from the Bear front five, the giant holes are mostly gone and hitting the gap quickly is no longer garnering 8 yards per carry as it did previously. O'Keith seems to be better suited to the north-

south, downhill running required when line play does not greatly favor the offensive team. Moreover (like Forsett) O'Keith just seems to be a good football player with a nose for the right play. Right now O'Keith certainly looks to be both a better runner and receiver given the existing situation in the trenches for Cal. I am sure Tedford and Gould have their reasons, however and my full support is behind Lynch, O'Keith, and Forsett all having great years.

- It does look like O'Keith will now be the primary kickoff return man instead of Lynch.
- More "Tepp that Ass" shirts on display. I love it! Tepper got his first start and played fairly well, with just a couple lapses against the aforementioned good Portland State D-line. The Bears need Tepper to keep improving with Andrew Cameron still questionable, and Scott Smith now out for 2-4 weeks with a knee injury. Mike Gibson also played decently at the other tackle, despite being the victim of a *very* questionable holding call (I did not realize just how bad that call was until I got back to my Tivo).
- It's been a mixed year for Cal's secondary. Hughes as played well, and so, for the most part has rover Brandon Hampton. Free safety Decoud has showed range and made some key tackles, but also appears to have been out of position on some key plays. Backup safeties Bernard Hicks and Marcus Ezeff got extensive playing time against PSU, as did backup corner Randy Bundy (not sure if backup corner Robert Peele played, after a good play at the end of the Minnesota game). But the key is talented but recently oft-toasted starting corner Syd'quan Thompson. Thompson has been 'right there' on some huge plays, rather than trailing far behind or out of the picture. But at this level, you need to make the tackle, pass deflection, or interception, and Thompson hasn't quite managed to do those in three long plays by Tennessee and one again against PSU. On a trick play, Viking receiver Tremayne Kirkland took a pitch and rolled right to throw long to fellow receiver Brendan Ferrigno, and again, Thompson, despite being right there, did not make the play as Ferrigno out-jumped him for the touchdown. Arizona State comes in with a deep receiving corps, despite a possible nagging injury to one of their stars, Rudy Burgess, and the Bear defensive backs will have an enormous challenge on their hands.
- I always love watching Cal play, but the opportunity cost was missing a plethora of phenomenal college football games elsewhere in the country. There's only so many I could Tivo... The flip side is that this coming week is lighter in terms of marquee match-ups. Cal's performance against ASU will be *very* high visibility – mostly in the sense the Bears will completely drop off everyone's radar if they lose (that Tennessee loss hurt bad).
- This is a big one coming up against Arizona State, people. Get to the game early and make yourself heard. Let's make Memorial rock for this top-25 match-up!

Go Bears!