



Sept. 8th, 2007: California @ Colorado State Game Notes

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

- As an aside, congratulations to Stanford for helping the Pac-10 to a 7-0 record this Saturday. They had a bye.
- A win is a win is a win. This was an ugly game for the Bears. Still, they overcame an underrated Colorado State team, high altitude, nagging injuries, several missed opportunities, and some questionable officiating to get the victory. It was the kind of game that Cal might have lost a couple years ago.
- Blueshirt Freshman running back James Montgomery got his first carries as a Cal Bear, scoring a touchdown and garnering two huge first downs late, when the Rams knew a run was coming, to allow the Bears to run out the clock, up by 6. Justin Forsett (13 carries, 59 yards, 1 TD) did not play much in the second half, but there are conflicting reasons given for Forsett's absence: missing a key block and an injury (stinger). Both may be true. In his place, Montgomery totalled 43 yards on 9 carries along with the score and key first downs. Forsett's missed block appeared to occur early in the fourth quarter when Forsett failed to recognize and pick up a blitz that forced Longshore into a near interception, although the blitz was actually offsides on that play.
- Cal's other feature back, true Freshman Jahvid Best, had another Best-like day with 73 yards on just 2 carries, including a spectacular 64 yard touchdown in which he showed both his breathtaking speed and his ability to break tackles. Watching the replay it's sort of funny because Best actually runs into Desean Jackson and knocks him on his ass about 10 yards downfield - the closest he comes to being tackled. In 2 games, Best has rushed 6 times for 119 yards, good for a modest 19.8 yards per carry. While that average is likely to decline substantially as the budding star gets more play, Best certainly seems like the real deal. He also had 3 receptions for 20 yards, including a couple for key third down conversions.
- It was weakside linebacker Anthony Felder's biggest game as a Golden Bear: a team-high 13 tackles, 2 sacks, and a critical forced fumble on CSU quarterback Caleb Hanie. In 2005 as a true Freshman, Felder made the Freshman All Pac-10 team along with teammate Zack Follett, but had a relatively unproductive, injury-plagued 2006 campaign. This year, Felder leads the team so far with 22 total tackles.
- Kudos also goes to Sophomore DE/DT Tyson Alualu who had the first two sacks of his career, including one for 10 yards on the first play of the second half. Another young D-lineman, Derek Hill, who had been sidelined most of camp and the first game with back spasms, grabbed his first career interception near Cal's own goal-line to help thwart a CSU drive (Follett applied pressure on CSU QB Caleb Hanie to force the floating throw). Hill also had 2 tackles. On the other hand, with DT Mika Kane not making the trip due to injury, his replacement Cody Jones did not have a good day with only 1 tackle to show on the stat sheet. True

Freshman defensive end Cameron Jordan did impress in limited duty - half a sack and several key tackles.

- Overall, however, the defense had a schizophrenic day, looking dominant for one and a half quarters, but looking overmatched and surrendering bushels of yards throughout the first half as well as the last few minutes of the game. Admittedly, some of the yards and one of the scores the Rams got late was against second stringers that Tedford and defensive coordinator Bob Gregory decided to put in with 5 minutes left and the Bears ahead 34-14.
- A couple 2nd-team guys who had tough outings were backup Freshman corners Darian Hagan and Chris Conte. Hagan in particular allowed CSU deep threat Damon Morton to get past him on a sideline fly pattern with under 4 minutes left for a 66 yard reception to bring the score to 34-21.
- Blueshirt Sophomore rover Marcus Ezeff, after a strong showing against Tennessee while backing up Bernard Hicks, started in place of the injured Hicks and also had a mixed day. Ezeff did total 7 tackles, but was covering CSU backup receiver George Hill who made a spectacular 44 yard catch on a bomb along the sideline with a couple minutes left that led to the Rams' final touchdown. To be fair, Ezeff had decent position and Hill just made an amazing play. Ezeff also was the defender whose low tackle on a pass play ended the season for star Colorado State tight end Kory Sperry (3 touchdowns against Colorado in his first game) during the first half of this game. It was a clean play, especially since defensive backs like Ezeff must usually go low to take down bigger players like Sperry (6'6" 260), who was extended to try to catch a high throw. However, the result was very unfortunate. The hope is that since this was during the first three games of the season, Sperry, a Senior, can get another year of eligibility, so the Bears should see him again when the Rams visit Memorial next year.
- Normally you would not read one of these reports without hearing about Desean Jackson by now. And Jackson did thrill the Bear fans on hand and watching on TV, taking an end around and cutting up the middle for 73 yard run and the Bears' first touchdown. However Jackson, who finished with 2 runs for 78 yards, 5 catches for 39 yards, and 2 punt returns for 24 yards, actually had a sub-par game by his standards with 2 key drops and a fumble after a catch that he had to give ground in order to retrieve, losing the first down. One of the drops was a slight overthrow by Longshore that would have been a touchdown on a slant pattern to the streaking Jackson. Jackson did have 2 punt returns for 24 yards, both up the middle, and helped induce one short shank from the Colorado State punter.
- Nate Longshore consistently overthrew his receivers throughout the game, with several near misses on potential big pass plays preventing the Bears from breaking the game open. On one hand, one could say that the thin air and gusty winds made this tough to avoid. On the other hand, one could say that Nate is a veteran now, and the Bears will need him to excel in all kinds of hostile conditions to reach their goals this year. Unfortunately in this game, when Nate did make a big 4th down completion on a crossing pattern that Hawkins took for a

long touchdown, right tackle Mike Tepper missed a key block and was forced to hold his man, bringing the play back and forcing a punt.

- Zack Follett had a big hit and pressured the quarterback into an interception, but was occasionally out of position as the Bears struggled to stop the Rams' methodical offense. Follett's backup at "Sam" linebacker, blueshirt Senior Justin Moye, did get a leaping interception and athletic runback, to go with a nice open field tackle for loss on a screen pass
- Backup blueshirt Sophomore tight end Cameron Morrah continued to show flashes of brilliance with a leaping catch of a high Longshore throw on a seam pattern down to the 2 yard line to set up Forsett's touchdown run. The rangy Morrah landed on his back and was slow getting up, but it appeared to be just that the wind was knocked out of him.
- Colorado State is a much better team than it seems, though they will be worse without Sperry. Amazingly, they have now dropped nine games in a row with two close losses this season and seven to close last season when they were missing star running back Kyle Bell (102 yards and 2 touchdowns against Cal) for the entire season. They may well lose two more at Houston (one of the top teams in Conference USA this year) and at TCU, but could easily win 6 of their last 8 to make a bowl in 2007.
- At the beginning of the season, Louisiana Tech was the only true blowout (victory by more than 3 TDs) that I predicted in my preview. I'm a little nervous about that prediction this weekend since the La. Tech. Bulldogs are playing with passion, winning their first game and nearly upsetting an explosive, ranked Hawaii team and Colt Brennan last week before losing in overtime. Cal can still blow out this team if they play well, but if not it could be a dogfight since Tech does have some weapons, including QB Zac Champion and RB Patrick Jackson and an active defensive front.
- Get out there and support the Bears this Saturday. 3:30pm start at Memorial.

Go Bears!!!