

Oct. 13th, 2007: Oregon State @ California Game Notes

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

- Well there was another epic college football game on Saturday. There were several parallels to the classic the Bears played at Autzen to beat the Ducks a couple weeks back. Only this time Cal and Cal fans found themselves on the other side. The painful side.
- It was a truly beautiful day in Berkeley, one of those crisp but sunny bay area days that occur after a little rain. But the pre-game news was ominous for the Bears. Nate Longshore's ankle, injured on a borderline late hit by an Oregon defender in the previous game, was still not sufficiently healed for him to play despite the extra bye week to rest it. So blueshirt Freshman Kevin Riley was named the starter minutes before game-time.
- Riley looked very shaky at the start, and of course again on the very last play. But in between he showed several glimpses of talent and leadership that bode very well for the future. Everyone will remember his gaffe with 14 seconds left on the clock that cost Cal a chance to send the game into overtime, but ultimately when your quarterback goes 20 for 34 with 294 yards, 2 touchdowns, and 1 tipped interception against a good Oregon State defense, yet you give up 31 points to a previously one-dimensional Oregon State offense and lose, it should be clear that young Kevin Riley was hardly the primary problem.
- Ok, ok, so what was the "gaffe"? If you've been living on another planet, Riley had led the Bears from a 31-21 deficit to being down 31-28 with 14 seconds left and the ball 1st and 10 at the Beaver 12 yard line with no time outs. Naturally, Tedford elected to take one, maybe two shots at the end zone and a win before settling for a short field goal attempt which would almost certainly lead to overtime. The key in this situation is that the quarterback must make sure the result of the play stops the clock: i.e. an incomplection, a touchdown, or (much less likely) the ball carrier running out of bounds. In other words, throw it into the end zone and if no one is open, throw it out of the end zone. Under no circumstances take a sack or scramble in the middle of the field. But with the ball on the right hash mark, Riley stepped right, looked, then scramble left past the line of scrimmage and was tackled in the middle of the field by an OSU linebacker for a 2 yard gain.
- At this point the game looked essentially over, though Riley may have had a last ditch chance to spike the ball with his offense on the field before the clock ticked down to zero. On the replay, you can see the referee holding his hands out, *imploing* Riley to give him the ball so he can set it for such an attempted spike attempt. In fact, if Riley had thrown him the ball, then immediately spiked it without everyone being set, Cal would have incurred an illegal procedure penalty but the clock would have stopped, allowing the field goal unit to come on for a slightly longer but still medium range kick to tie the game. (In the pros such a penalty would run time off the clock, but apparently not in college). But Riley

inexplicably got up from the tackle, ignored the referee that was waiting for the ball as well as his teammates that were getting ready to line back up, sprinted towards the sidelines and tossed the ball in the general direction of the *back* judge, 15 yards behind the line of scrimmage. The field goal unit attempted to rush on to the field, but it would have required at least 10 more seconds than were available to get properly set. Oregon State head coach Riley and his players began celebrating as soon as they saw what was happening, and a crowd of sixty thousand plus Cal fans sat in stunned silence as the Beavers completed their upset of the No. 2 ranked Bears.

- It still appears a 50-50 proposition whether Longshore's ankle will be sufficiently recovered to play this coming Saturday against the UCLA Bruins or whether Riley will make his first road start. Both have practiced this week, though Longshore is still showing the effects of his injury.
- The Oregon State game was not without Cal heroes. Bear fans were treated to one of the most gutsy and prolific efforts ever by a wide receiver wearing Blue and Gold in Memorial Stadium. Lavelle Hawkins hauled in 9 receptions for 192 yards and 2 touchdowns, bailing out his Freshman quarterback on numerous occasions with great receptions in traffic and heroic runs after catch. His second score came on third down off a post pattern followed by a jaw-dropping burst of speed past OSU defensive back Al Afalava who appeared to have the angle on Hawkins down the right sideline. It brought Cal to within a field goal but The Hawk was not done. He made a sliding catch on a low slant throw from Riley for a key first down as Cal got the ball back and began a last desperate drive from their own 6 yard line. On the next series, he caught the ball 14 yards downfield on a 4th and 17, then bulled past several Beaver defenders for a 20 yard gain and a critical first down, saving the game for the moment. Hawkins showed amazing speed and resiliency after taking several huge hits over the middle and was a true Bear hero.



- So who was the goat? Well fans will of course point to Riley's brain cramp on the last play, but I think two key areas of the game in which the underrated but somewhat inferior Oregon State team managed to outplay their Bear opponents: pass rush and special teams.
- Playing against OSU's Sean Canfield, the most erratic quarterback in the Pac-10 coming into the game, Cal's front seven was able to muster only minimal pressure throughout the game. Watching the replay showed that Cal did blitz a linebacker occasionally, and the Beavers quite often happened to call screen plays on those downs that predictably resulted in good gains. The only sack occurred when a scrambling Canfield ran almost straight into Cal DT Matt Malele coming off a block for Malele's first career unassisted sack. Frosh DE Cameron Jordan got one quarterback hurry and that was it. Nothing else. Nada. So Canfield, who had thrown 13 interceptions so far, was not responsible for a single turnover, and actually seemed to gain confidence as he led OSU's ball control offense. On the 2 point conversion after OSU's final touchdown, Canfield was comfortable enough rolling out to make a little fake as if he was going to run it in that froze Cal free safety Thomas Decoud before throwing it to the receiver Decoud had been covering in the corner of the end zone. It's hard to blame Decoud for this play, but no way would you expect a green, rattled quarterback to make such a savvy play at crunch time unless he was in his zone, a place he should have never been allowed to reach. We knew at the beginning of the season that pass rush was Cal's Achilles' Heel, and the Bears paid for it on Saturday.
- Special Teams also let the Bears down with the notable exception of Senior punter Andrew Larson with an eye-popping 55.8 yard average on 4 punts. Jordan Kay missed a field goal, Jahvid Best ran into his own man for a crucial fumble on a kickoff return after the Beavers had gone up by 7 mid-way through the fourth quarter, and a disastrous squib-kick at the end of the first half was fielded by an OSU up-man to allow All-American kicker Alexis Serna to boot a 52 yard field goal, making the score 14-13 Cal at halftime instead of 14-10 (and of course 3 points was the final margin). OSU's punt and kick coverage was excellent and Cal's was shaky, and the resulting "invisible" yards helped overcome a 478-339 Cal edge in yards from scrimmage.
- As for turnovers, in addition to Best's fumble, Justin Forsett coughed up the ball for the first time this season, and Riley had a ball tipped at the line of scrimmage by Beaver DE Slade Norris who had eluded normally reliable Cal left tackle Mike Gibson on an inside move. Another OSU defensive end, Butler, made a nice catch and move down the sideline to set up another of OSU's field goals.
- Other than Longshore's injury, several other injuries also plagued the Bears. One of the team's leading tacklers, rover Marcus Ezeff (the fumble-forcing hero at the end of the Oregon game) missed the OSU game due to a practice injury, kicker Tom Schneider has now been pronounced out for the season, and defensive end Rulon Davis is still out for a few games with a foot injury (which doesn't help the pass rush). Even bruising fullback Will Ta'ufou, after sitting out the last couple weeks with a PCL injury, did not seem to be playing at full strength out there.

- All that being said, give props to the Beavers. They always seem to play their best when they come into Memorial (4 straight wins in Berkeley), and Saturday was no exception. Their emotional leaders, running back Yvenson Bernard (33 carries, 110 yards, 8 catches 53 yards, 2 TDs on goal-line dives) and linebacker Alan Darlin (14 tackles, 1 sack, 1 fumble forced and recovered on Forsett) played their hearts out.
- Other than the fumble, Forsett did have another strong afternoon with 150 yards on 28 carries and a touchdown, but was unable to punch the ball in on four straight carries down at the OSU 2 yard line. After turning the ball over on downs, the Bears forced a punt and soon punched it in, but you could see the goal-line stand fire up the OSU sidelines and give them confidence that they would win the game.
- Receiver Desean Jackson was held to a paltry 5 yards on 4 catches, but Robert Jordan (5 catches, 68 yards) did tie a Cal record with a reception in his 36th straight game, capped by 37 yard fly pattern from Riley to get the Bears close with seconds left in the game. On the play Jordan had gotten behind the defense, but he stumbled as he lunged for the ball and injured his shoulder. Cal fans can only wonder what would have happened had Jordan been able to run through the ball and streak down the sideline for a score. Instead, Riley's infamous play occurred two plays later.
- There are tons of uncertainties going into the Cal-UCLA game in Pasadena this Saturday, including who the starting quarterback will be for *both* teams. It will be either Longshore or Riley for the Bears and either 2nd stringer Pat Cowan (a good QB) or walk-on 3rd stringer McLeod Bethel-Thompson (not a good QB) for the Bruins, who despite two embarrassing out of conference drubbings at the hands of Utah and Notre Dame, are undefeated in the Pac-10.
- Ok, Cal lost. LET'S FORGET ABOUT BEING RANKINGS WHORES FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. This is a huge game for Cal's Pac-10 hopes, and it could go either way. These days, Cal and UCLA are bitter rivals on the field and on the recruiting trail, and it hurts big time that despite some very close calls, Tedford has never won a game anywhere in southern California. This must change. Now.

Go Bears!!!