

Oct. 4th, 2008: ASU vs. California Game Notes

California 24 Arizona State 14

Some thoughts on the game, in no particular order:

- "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us; we were all going directly to Heaven, we were all going the other way."
-- Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities
- If you are a fan of hard-nosed defense and were concerned about Arizona State's diversified attack on Saturday, if you wanted the Bears to shut down Keegan Herring and Dimitri Nance after the two combined for 181 yards and 3 touchdowns in Tempe last year, if you wanted to put the hurt on the cocky, trash-talking Rudy Carpenter you were overjoyed at the performance turned in by Bob Gregory's oft-criticized unit. As one of the criticizers, I will say that hands down, it was Cal's defense that got us this enormous league win, with banner performances galore by numerous veterans and newcomers alike.
- On the other hand, if you think Cal's offense is too predictable, and that quality opponents seem to adjust to it in the second half (3 first downs after halftime), or even if you just think that Kevin Riley probably should be the Bears' starting quarterback despite a decent showing by Nate Longshore, and you are wondering how Cal hopes to ever compete with top notch teams, then maybe you too are wallowing in the winter of Cal Football despair. And you've got a whole extra week of wallowing in front of you with the second bye week.
- The bottom line is that Cal ground out a bruising, offensively ugly, ten point win over a team that was one of the favorites to challenge USC for the Pac-10 crown at the start of the season.
- So let's start with the positives: namely, the defense and a couple aspects of special teams.
 - Sophomore defensive end Cameron Jordan was voted the Pac-10 defensive player of the week in his first start filling in the injured Rulon Davis. Jordan was ubiquitous against both the pass and the run, garnering 8 tackles, 3 for loss, 2 sacks, and a forced fumble. The 6'4" 290 pound Jordan looked like a man among boys as teams shifted the double-team that used to go Davis' way over to Tyson Alualu.
 - Syd'Quan Thompson and Darian Hagan are beginning to make a case for being the best cornerback tandem in the league. Squid is certainly playing at an All Pac-10 level with an amazing 4 more pass breakups on Saturday. So with more passes coming in his direction so as to avoid Thompson, Hagan is beginning to shine as well, with a beautiful pass break-up on

third down to kill a Sun Devil drive, a great solo tackle for loss in outside run support that saved prevented a good gain, and a fumble recovery. Even the much maligned Chris Conte got a nice interception playing nickel back, though he was also flagged for PI and also burned on a couple other occasions.

- Freshman punter Bryan Anger earned Pac-10 Special Teams player of the week as he returned to form with his soaring kicks rising above the stadium rim. Anger's punts, averaging 47.4 yards with mostly good hang time, were as follows:
 - 44 yards (fair catch) to pin ASU at their 10 yard line
 - 43 yards (downed by Cal) to pin ASU at their 2 yard line
 - 48 yards (fair catch) to the ASU 22
 - 36 yards (returned 32 yards) – his only really bad punt, though it looked like ASU's Kyle Williams signaled for a fair catch before taking off, throwing off Bear coverage men.
 - 50 yards (3 yard return) to the ASU 36
 - *** 72 yards (downed by Cal) to pin ASU at their 5 yard line
 - 39 yards (returned 22 yards) to the ASU 16



- Zack Follett had been waiting for a year to exact his revenge on jerky ASU quarterback Rudy Carpenter after Carpenter repeatedly taunted him during last season's Sun Devil victory at Tempe, and Follett's family was

verbally and physically abused by ASU fans. Follett was wired with a mike before the game and was even heard to say as he was warming up, “Comin’ for Carpenter all day, all day ... there he is, 1-2, Carpenter ... about to get the business, the Pain Train’s comin’ today baby ... unleash the Pain Train Eddie Young [low-fives Eddie Young]”.

- True to his word, Follett annihilated Carpenter in the fourth quarter off an inside move as shown (imminently) in the photo above, injuring the Sun Devil senior who was seen leaving the stadium on crutches. The play was a huge one also because it came on third down with a few minutes left, and the resulting fumble was recovered by ASU but after a big loss, forcing the Devils to punt rather than go for it even though they were down by 10.
 - After the game, Follett said “He would say, ‘Zack you’re so close, Zack you’re so close.’ He called me by my first name like we were best friends. He’s been in my mind-set for a while. Thank lord I finally got him.”
 - Here’s how Cameron Jordan described the play: “I had a [offensive] tackle stood up, I saw Zack make contact and I might literally have stopped playing and just watched. I told the offensive lineman ‘your quarterback just died’. If you guys could have seen the pain, his face when he got hit, it was the funniest thing in the world.”
- Another young player who came into his own against Arizona State was blueshirt freshman safety Sean Cattouse (pronounced ka-TOOSE). His inexperience caused him to take a bad angle on ASU’s first touchdown, a slant pass that Kyle Williams broke across the field, but Cattouse quickly hit his stride, downing an Anger punt at the 2, then later coming off his man to help on another receiver and making a spectacular leaping interception to prevent a would-be touchdown bomb. The tall, rangy DB from Chicago also turned in a pass-breakup and 2 tackles in backup duty, showing great promise for the future.
 - And finally kickoffs... after a dismal showing by Seawright and Kay against Colorado State, the Italian Stallion Giorgio Tavecchio returned to kickoff duties for the first time since the Michigan State game and turned in a decent performance, helped by good coverage by his teammates ... the performance is only really noteworthy because the Bears had been so bad in this area:
 - Kickoff to the ASU 7, returned to the ASU 19
 - Kickoff to the ASU 17, returned 0 yards to the ASU 17
 - Kickoff to the ASU 8, returned 22 yards to the ASU 30
 - Kickoff to the ASU 6, returned 21 yards to the ASU 27
 - Kickoff to the ASU 7, returned 25 yards to the ASU 32

- Nate Longshore got the start over Kevin Riley and had a mixed day, playing well enough to win. His stats look pretty good with 198 yards, 3 touchdowns, 1 interception on 17-28 passing, only one sack surrendered. And overall he managed the game fairly well to the conservative game-plan Tedford and crew settled on once it was apparent that Cal's defense was playing well. Nevertheless, Longshore misfired on several throws, and failed to see wide open receivers on more than one occasion (e.g. early missed a sure TD to a wide open Tad Smith over the middle and instead threw it out of bounds, forcing the Bears to settle for a field goal). Even a couple of the touchdowns were not particularly well-thrown, with the best being a flag route to Morrah who had screened off the defender. All that being said, Longshore stayed mentally tough after taking a lot of abuse and accepting his pre-season demotion with grace.
- And to be fair, Kevin Riley has had many of the same problems, and frankly, I think as of this moment at least, it's actually pretty close as to who gives Cal the better chance to win, as Riley has appeared to be over-thinking things in the pocket. But I would still go with Riley, and ultimately, even if they were even, Riley has a far higher upside, and playing him should ultimately pay off for future games and seasons. Ultimately, Riley only has 1 interception all year, and it could be argued that the only way to overcome the mental hurdles for the young kid is just to let him play.
- Longshore's interception on an attempted screen pass was ugly, but it looked even worse than it was. One problem with Longshore seems to be that he doesn't have quick reactions when he sees something he doesn't expect (though he did throw the ball away quickly under pressure a couple times). In this case, the screen was set up for Shane Vereen, but Vereen was held up by a couple linemen from getting to the proper spot for the pass. The problem was that Longshore appeared to mechanically throw the ball to the spot anyway, and it went right into the chest of ASU linebacker Mike Nixon, who rumbled down the field for 25 yards before Nate managed to tackle him.
- Let's talk a little about attendance: 58,302. Pretty good by pre-Tedford standards, but the lowest figure this year. Frankly, for Homecoming, with a big game against a tough opponent, Cal fans can do better. I think one of the reasons for the somewhat lower figure was the threat of showers. Now many of us could not make it anyway because we were not in the bay area, we have small infants etc. etc., and I'm fine with those folks. But for those people that explicitly did not show up to the game only because they were worried about a few raindrops, we need to stop proving the adage that Pac-10 fans are soft. If you can make it to the game, make it. Buy a poncho if you have to. This is California, we don't have ice storms or hurricanes, so weather should seldom be an excuse. As it turned out, the rain stopped right around game-time and it ended up being a beautiful day.



- Props to LaReylle Cunningham for his first touchdown catch since 2005 (from Joe Ayoob in the comeback win against WSU), and to Nyan Boateng (pictured above) for his second this season. Cameron Morrah also chipped in with his fourth touchdown of the season. These three are becoming the go-to receivers for Cal quarterbacks, though it would be nice to see the further development of Michael Calvin (nagging injuries) and Verran Tucker (missed fall camp).
- Shane Vereen, starting at tailback for the injured Jahvid Best, took the full workload and Tracy Slocum did not get any carries for some reason. Vereen had a couple decent runs but no long gainers, and finished with 93 yards on 27 carries (3.4 ypc) along with 51 yards on 5 catches.
- After some initial Bear offensive successes, ASU mostly held Longshore, Vereen, et al. in check for two and a half quarters. Fortunately, the Bear defense was up to the challenge of holding on to the lead, but 3 first downs and 67 total yards in the second half is just not going to cut it. Over the last two games, and perhaps even a longer period, I have noticed the Bears falling into predictable patterns out of certain formations. I'll leave it at that since this is a publicly-available document, just in case some opponent hasn't figured it out yet. In the second half, ASU seemed to make the adjustment and were ready for the plays that Cal ran.
- Against the tough spread offense of Arizona, Cal's defense is unlikely to dominate, so the Bears will need to score some points. In my opinion, this will absolutely require offensive coordinator Frank Cignetti to mix things up just a little bit so that the hometown Arizona defense can't key off formation-based patterns as the Sun Devils appeared to do in the second half.
- Go Bears! Enjoy the bye-week then beat the Wildcats!