

## Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008: CSU vs. California Game Notes

California 42      Colorado State 7

Some thoughts on the game, in no particular order:

- How weary we grow of mere five touchdown victories. Only those who didn't watch the game and just glanced at the final score were really impressed.
- To be honest, there's a lot that was annoying and unfortunate in Cal's 42-7 rout of an overmatched Ram squad, but let's talk about the good stuff first: the defense. After sleepwalking through the first quarter against Maryland and giving up 3 early touchdowns, it was time for a change. The coaching staff apparently used the worst possible adjective in football when telling the players how they played: "soft". It looks like they touched a nerve.
  - Cal's linebackers put the zip back into the 3-4 by dominating Colorado State while the game mattered. The pressure was ubiquitous and went far beyond the 38 tackles, 6 tackles loss, 1 sack, and 2 quarterback hurries that the top six LBs in the rotation racked up before being subbed out later in the game: Zack Follett, Worrell Williams, Anthony Felder, Eddie Young, Mike Mohamed, and Devin Bishop. They met Ram power backs Gartrell Johnson and Kyle Bell squarely at the point of attack, holding them to less than 4 yards a carry, and overwhelmed quarterback Billy Farris for nearly 3 quarters until he was taken out.
  - The defensive line also played well despite a key loss at halftime (see below). Their two sacks, one by backup DE Keith Browner and another shared by DEs Tyson Alualu and Rulon Davis, did not tell the whole story in terms of how this unit controlled the line of scrimmage. This dominance allowed the linebackers to make their plays, which is how the oft-criticized Bob Gregory "read" defensive scheme is supposed to work in theory. Question is, will it work against a good offense? Colorado State wasn't the best test, and the line even got a rare treat with a pick when Cam Jordan dropped back on a zone blitz and leaped to snag an ill-advised floater of a halfback option pass near the Cal goal-line.
  - Defensive back play was a little more mixed, but highlighted by the performance of Cal's two starting corners, Syd'Quan Thompson and Darian Hagan who both shone. Hagan got an interception, Thompson got a sack, and both were excellent in coverage and run-support (a big improvement for Hagan in this latter area since Maryland). Squid also earned Pac-10 Special Teams player of the year with a spinning, sweeping 73 yard punt return touchdown that put the game away in the third quarter. Brett Johnson also got his first start at free safety and an easy pick six (his second interception of the year) to go with 6 tackles. Rover Marcus Ezeff had a quieter game, and backup corner Chris Conte got burned deep despite also getting a couple pass breakups and gathering 8 tackles over the course of the game.

- Ok, so now the bad news, starting with injuries. This was a Pyrrhic victory in many ways.
  - Most prominently, RB Jahvid Best is out for at least the Arizona State game (Cal has another bye after that) due to the ugly third quarter dislocation/hyperextension that occurred on the play pictured below. Best has really been hit with some unusual injuries during his two years with the Bears, and this one must have been obvious because the Ram defender in the picture who made the tackle immediately signaled to the trainers when he got up while looking at Best with concern. Of course, it also appeared Best was yelling in pain on the TV replay. With both X-rays and MRI apparently negative, hopefully Jahvid can recover in time for the road game at Arizona on Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>.



- Best did manage to 85 yards rushing on 11 carries, darting through large holes produced by the offensive line, along with 27 receiving yards and one kickoff return for 46 yards to open the game.
- Starting against ASU will be Best's backup, Shane Vereen, who is averaging 8 yards per carry this season and picked up 80 yards on 12 carries to go with 19 receiving yards against Colorado State. Unfortunately, both Best and Vereen also had fumbles with each snuffed out promising drives short of paydirt.
- Third stringer Tracy Slocum now becomes first off the bench and also looked good against the overmatched Rams with 35 yards on 4 carries. If either Vereen or Slocum gets injured, look for either walk-on Peter Geurts (DNP against CSU, 6 carries for 44 yards vs. WSU) to step in or for coaches to burn the blueshirt of true frosh Covaughn Deboskie.
- But perhaps as disturbing as Best missing a game or two is losing starting DE Rulon Davis to an apparent broken foot injury on the final play of the first half. Colorado State had called a running play around midfield and

managed to signal a timeout with a second left on the clock though most of the Cal team had headed across the field for the tunnel because time appeared to have expired. Davis got hurt on the ensuing pass rush and incomplete Hail Mary and is expected to miss at least six weeks. On multiple occasions, Mike Pawlawski, the television color described Davis as the most dominant player on the field for the Bears, so he will certainly be missed, much as he was during Cal's long slide during the second half of last year. In his absence, Cameron Jordan will step into the starting defensive end role opposite Tyson Alualu, while Keith Browner and Ernest Owusu will back them up.

- The offensive line was not spared either despite some good luck until now. That luck ran out as starting left guard Chris Guarnero did not play and is reportedly out for the season with a torn tendon in his big toe requiring surgery. Mark Boskovich played reasonably well in Guarnero's absence, but this is problematic because of the lack of depth at both guard and center, where Guarnero was also the backup to Alex Mack. Justin Cheadle and Matt Summers-Gavin are backups at guard and my best guess is that walk-on Richard Fisher is second string now at center.
- The good news at offensive line is that they opened huge holes for Cal runners all day and were strong in pass protection (no sacks surrendered – a big turnaround from Maryland). The left/right tackle switch appeared to work well as blueshirt freshman sensation Mitchell Schwartz had another good game with the exception of a lone holding penalty at the key left tackle spot. Chet Teofilo appeared to do far better at the right tackle spot than he did in his meltdown against Maryland on the left. Of course, things are always easier against weak competition.
- In an effort to postpone talking about some of the glaring non-injury negatives from the game, let me just say as a happily married man that our cheerleaders look pretty good when they don the “victory gold” jerseys as they did during the halftime show. I'm thinking they should keep that in the repertoire. Please?
- So finally we get to what had most Cal fans annoyed during the game about the actual play on the field: the erratic quarterback play and the abject failure on kickoffs.
  - I don't know what to make of Kevin Riley. The best I can say is that he is a very streaky, rhythm player. He was off on some easy throws against Colorado State, and had a couple more dropped, including a would-be long touchdown bomb to Sean Young. Riley did throw a touchdown to Boateng on an 11 yard slant (Boateng's first score as a Bear) near the end of the first half, and to his credit, he avoided interceptions and sacks, but overall he looked way off.
  - My personal wish is that Cignetti would call more designed rollouts for Riley who sometimes seems to throw better when he gets his feet moving and juices flowing. Also, since the Cal ground game was clicking for the most part, why not some play-action passes? There weren't many while Riley was in there that I noticed.

- Nate Longshore was subbed in with the Bears leading 28-0 in the third quarter, despite having just the one offensive touchdown to Boateng. This could be spun as Tedford putting in his backups, but it appears this was at least partially a “real” replacement. Ironically, Cignetti did call some designed rollouts for Longshore, but as usual, Nate looked best when he had time in the pocket, gathering 100 yards on 9 for 13 passing to go with 2 touchdowns. The first was a brilliant audible and seam pattern to wide-out Jeremy Ross slicing through the CSU zone (Ross’ first catch and touchdown as a Bear), while the second was a misdirection throwback pass to Cameron Morrah for an easy score and the rangy tight end’s team-leading third touchdown catch of the season.
  - Tedford has stated that Riley missed too many open receivers and has indicated that both quarterbacks will get plenty of snaps prior to the game against Arizona State. I’m still guessing Riley starts, though Tedford may have an uncharacteristically quick hook if the sophomore continues to struggle.
  - Finally, the Bears hooked three kickoffs out of bounds (2 by Seawright and 1 by Kay), giving CSU drive starts at the 40 – a miserable, unacceptable performance. Kickoff coverage was actually good for a change, holding the Rams inside their 30 yard-line when given the chance despite fairly shallow kicks. This has got to be mental – any college kicker should be able to blast the ball 60 yards in the air (from the 40 to the 10) without it going out of bounds most of the time. The true goal should be to kick it 75 yards and force touchbacks. This will come back to haunt the Bears during league play if not rectified.
  - Seawright also had a 41 yard field goal blocked due to low trajectory. Nevertheless, special teams was carried by Syd’Quan Thompson’s aforementioned punt return touchdown and in a quirky coincidence, backup defensive back Bryant Nnabuife got his second touchdown off a blocked punt in as many home games this season – he did the same thing against Michigan State, and in both games, it was the first touchdown of the contest.
- So the Bears scuffled quite a bit despite the score. Nevertheless, you can tell this is a fairly deep and talented team. It’s just young and/or underperforming in a few areas. Fortunately, the defense appears to have recovered from the nightmare in College Park and regained its aggressiveness.
  - Next Saturday is a huge test against a well-coached Arizona State team that is better than their two losses indicate, and who will be gunning for their first win in Memorial in over a decade. Get out there and enjoy!
  - Go Bears! Beat the Sun Devils!