

Sept. 13th, 2008: California vs. Maryland Game Notes

Maryland 35 California 27

Some thoughts on the game, in no particular order:

- Well I feel partly responsible for this mess since I picked the Terps to win 27-24 in my preseason Cal 2008 Football Preview.
- In my defense, all the signs of a trap were there despite facile protestations such as “but they lost to Middle Tennessee State!” or “did you see the beat down we put on Washington State?” or “in real life, a bear would kick a turtle’s ass.” The fact is that Washington State turns out to be terrible, certainly worse than Middle Tennessee State for you Sun Belt Conference aficionados, and these turtles were looking past the Blue Raiders to their national TV match-up with the Bears.
- Cal on the other hand encountered, if not quite a perfect storm, a major tropical depression’s worth of negative nuances. The game was in the Eastern Time Zone, where the Bears haven’t fared well (remember Knoxville, Tennessee?). The field was grass, a surface on which Cal had been 0-6 in regular season games since 2006. The heat and humidity spiked upwards on game day after a cooler, rainy Friday, apparently wilting unaccustomed blue and gold fans and players alike. The noon local start translated into 9am Pacific, and the Bears did not really begin playing well until about 3 hours later. And finally, the notorious homer ACC referees made their presence felt.
- Let’s just get this out of the way. Down 21-6 late in the first half, a booming 63 yard punt by Bryan Anger was downed at the Maryland 1 yard line. On first down, terp running back Da’Rel Scott, who otherwise torched the Bears for 87 yards and 2 touchdowns, was stuffed a full yard short of the goal line for what should have been a safety. Derrick Hill officially got the tackle but the entire Cal defensive front got a push and Scott was pinned behind his own offensive lineman, who himself was behind the goal line. With Cal fans and players signaling safety and looking around in disbelief, officials spotted the ball a full yard *past* the goal line at the Maryland 1, which was the original line of scrimmage. 2nd and 10 yards to go.
- Now here’s what should have happened after the officiating “mistake”. Tedford challenges the play, the booth reviews it and calls the indisputable safety, and Cal gets the ball back on the free kick with nearly 2 minutes left and 2 time outs in hand (no time out would have been lost since the challenge would have been upheld). Instead, officials went over to Tedford and assured him that the play was being reviewed (it wasn’t) and so no separate challenge could be made. Tedford made the apparent mistake of just calling one of his time outs so that the review could occur, which should not have been necessary – a challenge would suffice. No review actually occurred, and Maryland proceeded to run the ball for a 1 yard gain on 2nd down. Cal was forced to burn its other time out and after the eventual Maryland punt began its drive on the Maryland 46 with 39 seconds left and no time outs in hand, when there should have been 1:40+ and 2 time outs left. Of

course, Riley hurriedly drove the Bears drove to the Maryland 8, then threw two incompletes but could not go for it on 3rd down because there was no more time. The resulting field goal attempt by Seawright hit the upright and Cal came away with zero points. So with the properly challenged safety call, it would have been 2, and possibly 5 or 9 extra points for the Bears before the half.

- Of course, if all that had happened, the second half may have played out differently, and perhaps the Cal comeback would never have happened if Maryland didn't go into the "prevent" defense. Several other bad calls and no-calls occurred, including a phantom facemask call on Rulon Davis (all facemasks are 15 yards this year), but also a missed holding call on Cal's left tackle Chet Teofilo who was repeatedly beaten inside and out the whole afternoon, primarily by outside linebacker Moise Fokou (2 sacks). So it's wrong to blame the loss on the officiating. It's just bullshit, that's all. The "non-review" of the "non-safety."
- Ultimately, the game came down to the domination in the trenches that was hinted at in the previous point. The Terps beat the Bears to the punch on both sides of the ball for 3 quarters, opening up holes for Scott and backup Davin Meggett (son of former NY Giant back) to combine for a total of 169 yards on 32 carries and 3 touchdowns. Maryland's defensive line and MLB Dave Philistin stopped the previously prolific Jahvid Best to the tune of 10 rushes for 25 yards (Vereen had 23 yards on 5 carries). The overall defensive performance was punctuated by a huge, marginally early hit by Terp corner Kevin Barnes on a swing pass that caused Best to lie on the ground lose his cookies on national television.



- The above actually appears on a third party college football site as an animated gif showing green fluid splashing out of Best's mouth right after the above speech bubble appears. I figured I'd save readers the boot visual. Especially since I really like Best a lot and had a chance to shake hands with his dad after the game. Fortunately, there did not appear to be any long term injury.

- Kevin Riley was not sharp until the final 10 minutes or so of the game, overthrowing several receivers, and getting (understandably) rattled by the pressure that the Terrapins were able to apply, particularly from Teofilo's left edge (Riley's blind side). Still in the final 10 minutes, as Maryland dropped into the much-maligned prevent defense and the refs decided to stop calling holding on Teofilo, Riley regained his magic touch, throwing for 3 touchdowns and nearly 300 yards in one quarter.
- While this amazing 10 minutes of passing offense from the Bears came against a soft defense and ultimately achieved nothing, it provided reason for hope that Riley is back in rhythm, and that some of Cal's unproven young receivers are finally ready to step up:
 - LaReyelle Cunningham led the show with a career high 138 yards on 7 catches, consistently finding seams in the zone
 - Blueshirt frosh Michael Calvin finally appeared to be recovering from the turf toe that has limited him and showed flashes of what the hype is about with some touch catches and runs, totaling 69 yards on 5 catches
 - Nyan Boateng had a solid day both receiving and blocking, racking up 64 yards on 4 catches, including a spectacular leaping grab on a deep floating pass that Riley lofted after spinning left and scrambling for his life.
 - Tight end Cameron Morrah continued his solid campaign 5 catches for 49 yards and his second touchdown of the season on a slant.
 - Big reserve tight end Tad Smith made his first two catches of the season, including a leaping 9 yard touchdown catch over the middle.
 - Jahvid Best didn't let his ground woes or the big hit stop him from making some nifty catches and runs: 5 for 65 yards.
 - Heralded true freshman Marvin Jones made his first catch as a Bear along the sidelines for 8 yards.
 - JC transfer Verran Tucker made his first reception with Cal count, hauling in the Bears' final touchdown on a 10 yard cross.
- On defense, Cal looked lackluster and a step slow for most of the afternoon despite putting together 4 sacks. Four players stood out for their good play but the rest was fairly forgettable:
 - Zack Follett never seems to disappoint. Big hits, tipped balls, 5 tackles, 1 sack, 1 forced fumble, 1 fumble recovered, 1 pass broken up, all in a days work for #56.
 - Tyson Alualu continued to be the most productive defensive lineman for the Bears, racking up 8 tackles including 1 sack.
 - On the other end, Rulon Davis may have had his best statistical day, though he still was not dominant as he has the potential to be: 6 tackles, 2 for loss, 1 sack, 1 forced fumble.

- Syd'Quan Thompson had the unenviable job of guarding star Maryland receiver Darrius Heyward-Bey. He did an admirable job with the exception of a perfectly thrown post pattern just out of reach and hauled in by the Terp wide-out for a 27 yard touchdown strike and a 28-6 lead. Squid also 6 tackles, a sack on a corner blitz, and a pass defensed.
- This was a an absolutely huge win for Maryland. Their fan base was down in the dumps coming into the game and was suddenly on fire after the game started and things started going the Terrapins' way. In fact, those fans went through the same roller coaster last year as Maryland had both inexplicable losses and wins over then top ten teams to show at the end of the campaign.
- Overall College Park was both nice in terms of the greenery and brick architecture, and a bit shoddy in terms of the run-down shops and bars you might expect from a DC or Baltimore burb. Most of the Terp fans were nice enough, perhaps because they were already conceding a loss before the game, though the usual few got annoyingly feisty once they figured out that they could beat Cal. By comparison, I'll take the Knoxville Tennessee game-day experience any day.
- Cal has a bye to lick its wounds and address the glaring deficiencies that Maryland exposed in the trenches and in the passing game. The Colorado State game has suddenly gone from an easy win where the real enemy was complacency to an absolute must-win. Bottom line is that while losses like this suck, they are not the end of the world provided this young Cal squad shakes off the ghosts of 2007 and reacts with resilience.
- Enjoy the bye week and Go Bears!!