

## Aug. 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008: MSU vs. California Game Notes

Cal 38            Michigan State 31

Some thoughts on the game, in no particular order.

- I could not stop smiling all day, before, during, and after the game. IT'S FOOTBALL SEASON!! Roll the F' On You Bears.
- Kevin Riley's the quarterback. 'Nuff said.
- The game itself was both sloppy and exciting, with lots of young Bears asserting themselves for the first time, and also making key mistakes that let Michigan State keep it close.
- They key to beating the Spartans, in my opinion, was stopping their running game and their best player RB Javon Ringer. Cal gets an "A-" in this department. Ringer carried the ball 27 of the 31 times Michigan State ran the ball and gained 81 yards (3 yards per carry). The 4 carries by other players netted 0 yards. Given that Ringer had 1,447 yards on 5.9 ypc last season, and that the Cal run defense was lousy for a lot of the same season, this is a huge step. In fact, Cal only gave up one big running play all game (Ringer's second TD). To get an A+, the Bears need to force fumbles and not allow red zone scoring on the ground, but it's a great start.
- So full credit goes not only to Cal's linebackers who dominated the defensive statistics, but also to starting nose tackle Derrick Hill, the key player for stopping the run in the 3-4 defense. Only a blueshirt sophomore, Hill manned up and handled the double teams in the center of the MSU line without giving much ground, freeing the backers from being blocked by offensive guards. He only ended up with one tackle, but he may have been the defensive MVP. With Mika Kane hurting for the game, true freshman Kendrick Payne and blueshirt soph Mike Costanzo got some run as well. It's hard to believe, but due to the 3-4, and the fact that the Bears are solid at linebacker, these interior defensive linemen may be the key to a successful season for Cal.
- Ok, how about some guys that did fill up the stat sheet. Sophomore Jahvid Best: 24 rushes for 111 yards, 1 TD, 5 catches for 63 yards, and 4 kickoff returns for 103 yards. It's been a long time since any Bear had 277 all purpose yards. And his backup, blueshirt frosh Shane Vereen iced the game with a back-breaking 81 yard touchdown run, finishing with 101 yards on 9 carries to go with 4 catches for 16 yards. The future is very very bright.
- But again, the MVP of the offensive backfield may have been a guy with lesser stats. Fullback Will Ta'ufou did have a short touchdown reception on a beautifully-disguised play, but his consistent, crushing kick-out blocks were just as important to Cal's success on the ground as Best and Vereen's speed. To see a classic Cal running play under Tedford executed to perfection, take a look at Vereen's long TD run where Cal's blueshirt frosh right tackle Mitchell Schwartz leads up to block out talented OLB Greg Jones (leading tackler, and Ta'ufou

kicked out strong safety Otis Wiley (honorable mention All Big-10) to spring Vereen through a gaping hole off tackle.



Kim Komenich / The Chronicle

- Backed by a strong rushing attack, Riley did a great job managing the game, realizing that he did not need to take too many risks with such green receivers. In his last 3 games (Oregon State, Air Force, Michigan State), Riley has now gone 53-77 (69%) for 765 yards (10 yards per attempt) with 7 touchdowns, 1 interception, and 2 rushing touchdowns.
- On the few occasions that Cal quarterbacks did go long, they had the most success with the more veteran receivers: blueshirt junior tight end Cameron Morrah (5 catches, 93 yards, 1 TD) and 6<sup>th</sup> year senior Sean Young (4 catches, 81 yards). Morrah is emerging as a major mismatch for linebackers now that he appears to know the offense and is putting his speed to good use. And Young, a Berkeley native, is a great story, after having been injured most of his career and fighting his way up the depth chart after being granted the sixth year.
- Cal's other receivers didn't fare as well. Blueshirt senior LaReyelle Cunningham did have a short catch, but he also dropped a Riley third down pass in the first quarter. They Bears' youngsters were shut out. Marvin Jones is just a true freshman and just working his way into the offense with only a couple reps, and blueshirt freshman Michael Calvin also has an excuse, a turf toe injury that also limited him to just a few snaps. Verran Tucker did not get in the game and Jeremy Ross also never had a ball thrown to him. But most glaring was Nyan

Boateng who dropped 2 key balls, both on third down. All the athleticism and moves in the world won't make you a good receiver if you can't catch the ball. Let's hope Boateng and the others come back with a vengeance.

- And finally the offensive line. Has coach Michalczyk ever put together a bad O-line? Blueshirt freshman right tackle Mitchell Schwartz got the start in his first collegiate game and played well. It was also left guard Chris Guarnero's first start and one of left tackle Chet Teofilo's first as well. Along with the veteran Norris Malele and captain Alex Mack, they all played well, opening up holes for Best and Vereen, allowing only one sack, and committing only a single five yard penalty all game. My favorite quote is from senior Michigan State strong safety Otis Wiley.

*"I don't really know what was going on. They were just pounding us."*

- So much for the Pac-10 not being able to deal with smash-mouth Big Ten football. In Wiley's defense, he did intercept Longshore twice, the first of which was a fantastic play, and the second of which he took for a touchdown. But overall, Cal's offense overwhelmed Wiley and his teammates.
- Cal's deep linebacker corps made the plays they needed, led by the finally healthy Anthony Felder (12 tackles, 1 for loss) and Zack Follett (8 tackles, 1.5 for loss). The most impressive play was when Follett came through unblocked to slam Ringer for a 4 yard loss an instant after the handoff.
- All that being said, there were no sacks. The Bears hurried and hit Spartan QB Hoyer on several occasions, and that was critical in forcing 28 incomplete passes (to only 20 completions). But no sacks. We want sacks. In the 3-4 scheme, defensive ends Rulon Davis and especially Tyson Alualu were very active getting after Hoyer, certainly an improvement from last year. Still... they, and outside linebackers Follett and Eddie Young, need to sack the quarterback.
- Syd'Quan Thompson had a great day, rarely being beat, and gathering 5 tackles, 3 passes broken up, and an interception to end a Spartan threat to close the first half. Squid has come a long way since the debacle of his first game at Tennessee. Meanwhile, Cal's opposite corner had his first start against Michigan State, and it was much more of a roller coaster ride.
- After sitting on the bench behind Chris Conte last year, blueshirt soph Darian Hagan got his first start and impressed with his athleticism, if not with his consistency. Hagan was burned on a few occasions (as was Conte in a backup role), including a long would-be touchdown pass from Hoyer to Mark Dell that was overturned when replays showed the ball was trapped against the ground. But Hagan himself had a couple near big plays, first with a spectacular interception on a post pattern that was ruled a catch by the receiver when Dell managed to get his hands on the ball over Hagan's to establish simultaneous possession. Hagan also was a victim of the "trap" ruling when another seeming interception was overturned. Hoyer threw for 321 yards to keep the Spartans in the game, much of it on Hagan and Conte, but in my opinion, Cal has found its second cornerback. This was Hagan's first start, and he will only get better.

- Even the kicking game was interesting, which is not always good. In this case, the good included a couple booming, high-altitude punts by Bryan Anger, whose reputation preceded him. These were 56 and 59 yard rockets that forced Wiley (the return man) back 15 yards but still had the soaring height to force fair catches. Then Anger's next punt was blocked as he mishandled a hard snap from Nick Sundberg and had to run back to gather the ball. At that point he may have been better falling on the ball, but he tried to kick it, and may have been injured when the ball was blocked. And Anger did have a somewhat less impressive 56 yarder with the roll later in the game, followed by a shanked 21 yarder. Hopefully Anger will be ready to go by Saturday, and the #19 Anger jersey will be on shelves soon.
- On the flip side, 2<sup>nd</sup> string safety Brett Johnson blocked a punt, 2<sup>nd</sup> string linebacker Charles Johnson kept it alive, and 2<sup>nd</sup> string defensive back Bryant Nnabuife scooped it up along the sideline and scored Cal's first touchdown of the season. Unfortunately, the rest of the special teams performance was pretty dismal as newbie kickoff "specialist" Giorgio Tavecchio failed to impress and coverage was very loose, allowing great Michigan State field position after kickoffs for much of the game. Frosh kicker David Seawright at least held his own in his first collegiate game after earning the start over veteran Jordan Kay (the starter last year), hitting all 5 extra points and a 26 yard field goal, and taking the last couple kickoffs, which were about the same as Tavecchio's but covered much better. Nothing spectacular, but he did not embarrass himself either.



- What else, what else... cool halftime show featuring music from The Who by the Cal Band, followed by some pretty spectacular high-altitude, smoke-trailing parachute landings on the field by the boys from the US Army.
- Only one more thing to say: 6-0 in the gold jerseys, baby!
- Go Bears!!