

Sept. 6th, 2008: California vs. WSU Game Notes

Cal 66 Washington State 3



Some thoughts on the game, in no particular order:

- I've never quite seen a game like this. Cal was by far the better team, but also capitalized on a string of breaks that *all* seemed to go the Bears' way. The result was the biggest margin of defeat in Washington State history and Cal's biggest margin of victory against any opponent since a 72-3 win over Washington in 1921. And all this happened on the road in the distant Palouse where Cal's 21-3 win in 2006 was the Bears' first there since the 70s. (Thanks to Aunursa, a poster on <http://bearinsider.com> for compiling a list of this and other firsts).
- Speaking of firsts, Jahvid Best's touchdown runs of 80 and 86 yards were the first time Cal has ever had 2 80+ yard runs in one game. But it goes way beyond that. It was also the first time Cal has ever had 2 80+ yard runs in *one season*. Counting Shane Vereen's 81 yard touchdown run against Michigan State, Cal now has 3 runs of 80+ yards in 2 games this season. And while Vereen's 4th quarter 81 yard run against the Spartans helped ice the game, ironically so did Best's 80 yard run on the opening play from scrimmage against the Cougars. It was basically over after that.
- Nevertheless, the story of the game may have been Cal's defense. While Cal accumulated 505 yards of total offense in 64 plays, the Bear D limited Wazzu to a paltry 167 yards on 65 plays, just over 3 yards a play. This included 57 yards net rushing on 35 attempts. Cal got good pressure on Cougar quarterback Gary

Rogers and his backups, and Zack Follett and true frosh Mychal Kendricks logged the first sacks of the season. But more importantly, the pass pressure was the key to causing the 4 interceptions collected by Bear defensive backs that wiped out any hope Washington State had of getting into the end zone.

- 2 of those picks were by Syd'Quan Thompson, now a junior and Cal's best corner. Thompson had 108 yards worth of interception return yardage, another Cal record, but ironically never scored. Squid is already taking quite a bit of heat from his teammates for running out of gas on his 90 yard return and being tackled by Cougar running back Chris Ivory at the 5 yard line. Of course, the next play was yet another Jahvid Best touchdown so it had no effect on the final score. Blueshirt senior free safety Bernard Hicks also recorded a diving interception, and his backup, blueshirt soph Brett Johnson got his first career pick in the second half.
- On balance, Cal special teams had a slightly better day than a week ago. The highlight was a blocked field goal that was returned by Zack Follett for his first career touchdown. Upon review, though Bear defensive end Rulon Davis was given credit for the block, it appeared that the low kick first skipped off the top of one of the Cougars' helmets before hitting Davis' arm and bouncing outside straight to Follett. Overall, kickoff coverage was far better than against Michigan State, with one exception, a broken-play 68 yard return back across the field by Ivory. Bryan Anger did seem to be suffering a bit from his injury as his punting was passable but missing the booming distance we heard about in practice and seen in the Michigan State game. Freshman kicker David Seawright continues to put up enviable fantasy football numbers (12 points on 9 extra points and one 37 yard field goal) without necessarily being all that impressive while doing so.
- By the end of the game, the 500 or so Cal fans in the section at the corner of the end zone made up half the remaining population in the stadium. An enterprising cameraman spent the entire second half lining up different shots of Cal fans as gap-filler, and with about a minute and a half left on the clock, my friend Chris and I were front and center for a few seconds so we could act like jackasses for the TV broadcast. Well, I'm speaking for myself. Chris looked admirably cool.
- Speaking of me and Chris, it was (most likely) a once-in-a-lifetime day with an epic 11 hour round trip drive to/from Portland to get to Pullman, which is truly in the middle of nowhere, closer to Moscow Idaho than anything else. Kudos to Chris for taking the wheel the entire way despite my half-hearted offers to sub in. And kudos to both our wives for being so tolerant.
- We had a great time talking with both Cal and mostly very nice Wazzu fans, with the only negative being the beer poured all over Chris' car when we got back and a beer cup tucked prominently under his wiper blade. It was great that the game was in early September while the weather was nice. I have now seen Cal play at every Pac-10 stadium (technically, though the game in Tucson was not against Arizona, but the 1990 Copper Bowl against Wyoming). Well worth it, though next time, if there is a next time, I think I'm flying to Spokane to shorten the drive.

- So it must be noted that Kevin Riley did not have a good game, and Cal receivers were only mediocre at best, though their efforts were not needed this week. Riley did not throw a pick, but did fumble once and only had 51 yards passing on 6 for 14, with 1 touchdown to Sean Young and a 27 yard rush for a score on a broken play. Riley consistently overthrew receivers and never seemed sharp.
- Among the receivers, the most impressive was actually Nyan Boateng, who got the first receptions of his career: 4 for 44 yards, all from Nate Longshore in the second half. Boateng also looked good blocking for Cal's running game. It was also good to see Nate get some confidence back. Third and fourth string running backs Tracy Slocum and Peter Geurts got plenty of time, with Slocum scoring his first career touchdown. Even blueshirt freshman Brock Mansion got into the act at the end, getting his first career completion to backup fullback Zach Smith and scoring Cal's final touchdown on a QB dive.
- The right side of Cal's offensive line continues to dominate, with blueshirt freshman right tackle Mitchell Schwartz showing signs of being a star and blueshirt senior right guard Norris Malele playing consistently well to go along with All-America candidate Alex Mack at center. Combined with the crushing blocks of fullback Will Ta'ufo'ou, the entire line is doing a good job at opening huge holes with some regularity in the running game, while protecting the quarterback well (0 sacks vs. WSU, 1 sack vs. MSU).
- Overall, it was great to get so many players into the game and rest the starters before the long upcoming flight to Maryland and the noon Eastern (9am Pacific) start time. The Terps have not played well to start the season and my Preview prediction of them beating Cal 27-24 is looking a bit unwarranted, but this is still a potential trap for the Bears. Maryland is far more talented than they have looked. They have a great young back in Da'rel Scott and one of the best receivers in college football in Darrius Heyward-Bey. This is a "circle the wagons" game for them, and if the Bears come out expecting another Wazzu, they are going to be surprised.
- That being said, Cal is looking great, the trees and critters on them are down, and life is good.
- Go Bears!!