

Nov. 11th, 2006: UCLA vs. California Game Notes

-- written by contributing author James Cha

Despite being just 1 point above the season average score, Cal had perhaps its most efficient game offensively as the Golden Bears moved the with a scalpel-like precision down the field. Unfortunately, the Bruins nearly did the same in the first half. Fortunately for Cal, they brought their big guns to the knife fight in the second half and delivered the proverbial results. The notes:

- Cal showed its methodical, nearly clinical offense for what may have been first time this season. Though there have been other “clock-eater” drives this season, notably versus Oregon, none have had the balance of precision ball possession passes and runs this game had. Indeed, before this game, arguments could be made that Cal had problems with consistency in the short passing game.
- Gunslinger: Nate Longshore exemplified that point as he went 20 of 24 for 266 yards and 3 TDs. That’s a fantastic 217.68 Pass Efficiency Rating for those without calculators, his highest of the year. What was really encouraging was his accuracy on short out and hitch throws, which he had struggled with earlier in the year. Completing these kind of passes drove him from being around a 60+% completion rate to a 83% completion rate, as he has had the deep touch all year, which has become his calling card. This improvement was the key to Cal’s offense becoming really efficient.
- That’s not to say Cal won without big plays. As alluded to earlier, a well known big gun, DeSean Jackson again delivered yet another ESPN moment on an electric 72 yard punt return in the 3rd quarter. Nate Longshore again showed his accuracy on deep throws with his perfectly thrown 44 yard TD strike to Robert Jordan on a deep corner route.
- Despite only 14 pts in the first half, Bear Offense never punted during the opening period. The Bear drives were:
 - 79yards in 12 plays resulting in a TD
 - 43yards in 7 plays resulting in a missed FG
 - 76 yards in 7 plays resulting in a TD
 - 27 yards in 5 plays resulting in a fumble on a sack of Nate Longshore.
- So why didn’t Cal have more possession in first half? Because UCLA had 218 yards offensively in the first half en route to a 516 yard game (which actually topped Cal’s 433 yards for the game) but they had, per usual, converting those yards into actual points. Patrick Cowan was on top of his game in the first half with 11 of 16 for 175 yards passing with no touchdowns and one key late interception to Desmond Bishop near the goal-line. For the most part, however, he threw laser-guided passes even on the move and recognized blitzes like he was in the Cal defensive huddle in this half. As a matter of fact, Cowan scored on a QB sneak in which he ran right inside of the outside blitzing Zack Follett. Even

his numbers for are deceiving as he really only missed on 3 passes in the first half. The second half would be a different story. More on that a bit later.

- How about that young mister Jordan? Robert Jordan had perhaps the best night as a Bear as he caught 5 passes for 89 yards and 2 touchdowns. It was more proof that Cal receiver corps does not just consist of Jackson. The 44 yard strike showcased the flat-out-speed that he also possesses as he scorched UCLA free safety, Dennis Keyes with his afterburner exhaust. There was a good yard or two separation between the two as Jordan caught the easy six. Covering this receiving corps will be a true quandary for opposing defensive coordinators.
- The fact that I've come this far without talking about Marshawn Lynch at all in the Cal romp (and it was a romp despite the final score, more on that in a bit) should tell you how far Cal has come from its preseason misconception that the RB position will have to carry the load for Cal to win. Despite carrying for "only" 81 yards on 20 carries and a TD (he also had 4 catches for 45 yards and a TD), he flashed his usual electric elusiveness and power. The prime example of this elusiveness was shown in the first TD of the second half, where Lynch caught a middle screen (perfect adjust against the blitz over the middle) then proceeded to evade and elude 9 Bruin defenders en route to the end zone. His subsequent TD carry displayed the power he is capable of as he dragged a linebacker into the endzone after breaking another tackle at the line of scrimmage. He was also instrumental as a play action decoy, as exemplified by the 44 yard TD play to Robert Jordan which initiated with the play action to Lynch.
- Daymeion Hughes continued his inexorable march towards the Thorpe award as he baited another QB into throwing to his side. In the play, Hughes read the QB's eyes and came off his man but did not step in front until Cowan had committed to throwing the ball. He then snatched the ball became the RB and returned the ball 19 yards weaving through the UCLA-offensive-players-turned-would-be-tacklers. He also had 3 passes broken up in the game. Hughes leads the nation with 8 interceptions on the year.
- Unfortunately 'Donte' might have been the sole highlight of the defense. Anemic pass rush compounded by ineffective blitzing (0 sacks for the night) was made even worse by a porous defense against the rush. UCLA RB Markey, like Cowan, had a near career night as he carried 20 times for 136 yards (6.8 yards per carry) and a touchdown. Even when defense managed to get the Bruins to a fourth down, resulting UCLA conversion attempt resulted in a 70 yard touchdown run for the Bruins. In the end, defense played just well enough in the third quarter (2 3-and outs for the Bruins and the interception) for the win. After going 11 of 16 for 175 yards in the first half, Cowan went cold in the 3rd quarter as he went 4 for 9 with an interception. For the game Cowan was 22 of 40 for 329 yards and 2 interceptions. UCLA as a team rushed 34 times for 187 yards and 3 TDs. It was their highest average (5.5 yards per carry) of the season.
- The game was over when.... Marshawn Lynch bulled his way into the endzone on the drive succeeding the interception by Hughes, making the score 35-10 with 10:50 to go in the 4th quarter. Though the Bruins would score twice more in the

quarter, including the 70 yard run on the 4th and inches play, the outcome was never really in doubt after this point. Some may argue it was over when Jackson returned the punt 72 yards to put Cal up 28-10, which is....

- The Signature Play of the Game: The 72 yard punt returned for the TD by DeSean Jackson in the third quarter. The absolutely scintillating run by DJax was no surprise, as we've seen it before (see Oregon, and to a lesser extent, the Arizona State game) and were fully prepared to see #1 take it to the house every time we see him touch the ball. However, the monster, clock-cleaning, amnesia-inducing block by Thomas Decoud was perhaps the most violent, devastating, ferocious, and the best hit/block I've seen all year... by anyone. Both Decoud and Bosworth, the hapless bruin recipient, were knocked instantly unconscious at the moment of impact, and though there were some tense moments as they were being tended to, both ultimately got off the mat (Bosworth twice) and walked off to their respective corners. The word on Bosworth is a concussion and a stinger. Decoud is fine and no worse for the wear according to sources. Words can't do this play justice this so here it is:
 - [YouTube of The Return and The Block](#)
- For their efforts, Nate Longshore and DeSean Jackson were named Pac-10 Players of the Week for the Offense and Special Teams respectively. It's the third such honor for Nate Longshore, who may be well on his way for Pac-10 Player of the Year award. No other player has won it more than once this year. It's the fifth such for Cal, who have won fully 50% of the Offensive Pac-10 player of the Week awards thus far, Marshawn Lynch and Justin Forsett winning the remaining two. Daymeion Hughes was also mentioned as a Pac-10 Defensive player of the week nominee.
- DeSean Jackson's punt returned for TD is his 3rd of the year, tying the Pac-10 season record, and is the 4th in his young career, which is the Cal record. A truly dynamic player, he is also a dark horse candidate for the Bilitnikoff award, given to the nation's best wide receiver. The favorite for that award is Calvin Johnson of Georgia Tech.
- Longshore on his QB scramble of 21 yards... "I dabble in the running game." "Yes, I've been working on that, I was even thinking about going for more yards, but I could just hear coach Tedford yelling at me in my mind so I stepped out."
- Decoud on The Hit... "After the hit, I was dazed and lying there. I didn't know (DeSean) had scored until I made it back to the sidelines. I saw he was excited, so I put one and one together. I would have been surprised if he hadn't scored. He is a great returner, and he can take it to the house at any time. If he gets a good block, he should be able to do what he does best."
- Alamar on The Return... "I'll take Jackson against a punter in the open field, anytime."
- Hughes on The Pick... "They tried to run a route behind me. Usually when they put somebody in front of you, there is somebody on top of you, behind you. So I just kind of sloughed off my man and went for the ball." And why they throw to

his side... "Basically I'm lined up on their go-to guy, so they're forced to throw at me. That's the way our defense works."

- The crowd on Saturday was 72,516, the second sell out of the season and just the 5th for any opponent other than Stanford since the 50's. As the attendance figures climb ever higher for Cal, you've got to wonder if the seat number reduction during the renovation of Memorial is such a good idea. We may end up sending the visiting section to the hinterlands as USC has done. This should not be a problem for The Big Game however... at least not this year.

Go Bears!!!