

Arizona claws back into race

By Bob Baum
The Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz.— Despite all that's gone wrong, Arizona finds itself in the thick of the Pac-10 football race. The Wildcats (5-2) have the best overall record of any team in the conference.

If Pac-10 leader Stanford stumbles, Arizona could find itself with its first Rose Bowl berth in the school's history. Such a goal seemed far out of reach after the Wildcats opened their season by being routed 41-7 by Penn State, then lost their Pac-10 opener at home, 50-22, to Stanford.

Since then, Arizona has won three straight, including two conference games. None of the wins was all that impressive, but in the down-and-out Pac-10, with no team ranked in the Top 25, it's enough to move Arizona back into a contender's role.

While Stanford leads the league at 4-0, four teams are 2-1 — Arizona, Arizona State, California and Washington.

Stanford has consecutive road games the next three weeks against Southern California, Washington and Arizona State.

"They've got a tough, tough road coming up," Arizona coach Dick Tomey said Tuesday. "If they can go through that, then

more power to them. But I would suspect that all of the bullets have not been shot at this point. I think it's going to get crazy."

In order to stay in contention, the Wildcats probably can't afford another loss. Arizona is home against Oregon on Saturday night.

"It's the most important game I've ever played," Wildcats center Bruce Wiggins said. "If we're talking about going to the Rose Bowl, we need to win this game."

As well as the following games against UCLA, Washington, Oregon State and Arizona State.

Tomey said his team's performance in its last Pac-10 game, a 31-24 victory over USC two weeks ago, won't be good enough.

"As I said to them the other day, if we play like we did against USC we'll probably be about 2-3 in our last five," Tomey said. "We need to play better, because you have to assume that everybody is going to get better. If we're not getting better, we're not competitive. The focus is on making an enormous improvement this week. The team that wins this whole thing will be the team that improves the most from today to the end of the season."

Improved play from the offensive line has helped Arizona finally get its running game in gear.

The Wildcats rushed for 396 yards in last week's 34-21 non-conference victory over UTEP, its highest total since 1981. Trung Canidate was named Pac-10 offensive player of the week after rushing for 202 yards in 27 carries, including a 60-yard touchdown run. It was the eighth time in his career that he's had a scoring run of 60 yards or more.

The improved ground game has helped all aspects of the team's play.

"When you're out there running the ball, the defensive line is sitting down drinking water and getting some rest," Wiggins said.

Tomey wasn't tipping his hand on who would get the most playing time at quarterback. Keith Smith, who had edged out Ortege Jenkins going into last week, went out with bruised ribs on the fifth play of the UTEP game. Jenkins rallied the team from a 14-0 deficit. He had a 52-yard run to set up one touchdown and was 10-of-17 for 113 yards and a touchdown.

"We'll just see what happens this week," Tomey said. "We have all the options in the world, and we'd just like to keep it that way. That's not the biggest decision we have."

Pac-10 notes

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ceiver.

A big Big Game

The Bay Area's "Big Game" may actually be big this season, worth more than its usual local bragging rights.

Maybe. Stanford is the only remaining unbeaten team in Pac-10 play. Never mind that in nonconference play, the Cardinal's record stands at 0-2.

Its two losses have come against Texas and San Jose State, which was blown out by Rice one week after the Spartans dumped Stanford. The Cardinal ranks 110th out of 114 Division 1-A teams in total defense and is allowing opponents more than 454 yards per game.

It's too bad for the rest of the Pac-10 that neither Stanford's weak defense nor its dismal non-conference results at all taint the

Cardinal's run for the Rose Bowl. "We're in a good position now," said Stanford receiver Troy Walters to a local paper. "Things are looking rosy."

The situation is looking far from bleak for the Card's Bay Area rival, California. At least not as long as the Golden Bears are on defense.

Last Saturday, Cal held UCLA scoreless, marking the first time since Sept. 24, 1994, that the Bruins had been shut out. It's been the Bears' defense that made possible Cal's four-way tie for second place in the Pac-10. The Bears' lead the conference in total defense, rushing defense and sacks.

Really though, the defensive has to be good, to make up for the Bears' completely unimposing offense, which averages just more than 16 points, nearly 140 passing yards and 252 total yards per game — all worst in the Pac-10.

Miriam Swanson is the assistant sports editor for the Emerald.

X-Country

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and the severity of the condition was unknown at press time.

Three times an All-American?

Two-time All-American Steve Fein further enhanced his chances at a third with his second consecutive individual title, winning the Pre-NCAAs with a time of 24 minutes, 6 seconds.

"I'm real pleased with the way the season is going," Fein said. "My goal coming in was to be in the top 5

at the national meet, and so far I've been able to get off to a great start."

Fein, who followed coach Martin Smith to Oregon from Wisconsin, credits Smith with Oregon's success.

"Coach Smith brought in the right guys and has this program going in the right direction," Fein said. "He's a great strategic teacher of cross country and is going to get Oregon back at the top where it belongs."

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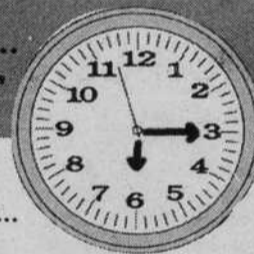
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