

GAME OF THE YEAR

By Brett Williams
Oregon Daily Emerald

Anyone who thought Florida State would fall apart after scandal surrounded its best player earlier this season, think again. The Seminoles are right back where many experts picked them to be, playing for the national championship.

Florida State (11-0, 8-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) has perhaps its biggest challenge of the season when it meets Virginia Tech (11-0, 7-0) in the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 4 in New Orleans.

The suspension of former Heisman Trophy front runner Peter Warrick — stemming from charges by Tallahassee police that he bought a large quantity of clothing well below the stores' set prices — left many wondering if the Seminoles could survive without one of the most explosive players in the nation.

But Florida State continued to win without Warrick. Despite the fact Warrick appeared rusty after his return, the Seminoles staked claim to the No. 1 ranking by closing out their season with convincing triumphs. No game was bigger than the Seminoles' 30-23 win against archrival Florida in their final regular-season game.

The Hokies wrapped up their Cinderella season with a 38-14 victory over No. 20 Boston College. The win against the Golden Eagles guaranteed Virginia Tech's spot in New Orleans.

Nebraska, with one loss, had a shot at the game with a Hokies loss and/or two impressive wins of its own. The Cornhuskers now,

however, have to play second fiddle after barely beating Colorado.

Virginia Tech head coach Frank Beamer was impressed with his team's composure.

"I think one thing you can say is our football team never quit playing," said Beamer, in an interview with the Hokie Huddler. "We just kept playing, and there is something about this team that is right. Hopefully it's something right for this team to be playing in New Orleans for the national championship."

Virginia Tech has shown dominance on both sides of the ball. Redshirt-freshman quarterback Michael Vick had his way with Big East secondaries all season, including his four-touchdown, 290-yard performance against Boston College.

The Hokies' stingy defense has accounted for two shutouts, including a 62-0 drubbing of Syracuse.

But Virginia Tech has yet to face an offense as potent as Florida State's. Seminoles quarterback Chris Weinke miraculously recovered from a spinal injury that sidelined him much of last season to throw for 3,103 yards, an average of 272 per game.

The Warrick factor may prove to be too much for the Hokies. He has the ability to burn a secondary catching the ball (he averages better than 103 yards receiving per game), using his arm strength (he threw for a 35-yard touchdown) or when he returns punts (his 75-yard touchdown return is the Seminoles' lone special team's score this season).

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