

Nothing compares to Florida football



JACK ATTACK

JACK CLIFFORD

Not only will the outcome of Florida's ballot recounts decide our next president, it seems, but the state is almost certain to determine a more coveted prize: college football's national champion.

Yeah, the Sunshine State may be whacked when it comes to politics, but throw a pigskin in the mix and everything is status quo. Just check out the Bowl Championship Series rankings: Following No. 1 Oklahoma are, in order, Miami, Florida State and Florida.

And Vice President Al Gore thought he had assembled a strong contingent of heavy-hitters to battle for the top spot. Florida always seems to bring on the big guns when the stakes are high.

Of course, in-state rivalries are in vogue this weekend all across the country. Clemson and South Carolina battle it out in the Southeast, with Auburn and Alabama feudin' in the deep South. Western Michigan and Eastern Michigan tie one on in middle America, while Texas Christian and Texas El-Paso go mano-a-mano in the Southwest.

Closer to home, UCLA and USC play for pride in California, but Washington will perhaps be playing for a bit more against Washington State in Pullman.

Of course, Oregon can put to rest any Husky hopes of having a rosy day with a win against Oregon State.

None of those games, however, can match the hype of Florida State versus Florida. This game offers more melodrama than an Aaron Spelling marathon on Fox.

The coaches dislike each other, for starters. Florida State's Bobby Bowden jokingly asked for God's forgiveness the other day when he told reporters that he and Gator coach Steve Spurrier have a good relationship - the implication being that ol' Bobby broke a commandment by telling a whopper.

Speaking of starters, Florida State signal-caller Chris Weinke is a front-runner for the Heisman Trophy, while Spurrier will rotate his two quarterbacks, redshirt freshman Rex Grossman and senior Jesse Palmer. This is interesting if you know the two coaches' styles: Bowden puts trust in the individual, while Spurrier believes it's his system that produces victories, so the individual is irrelevant. (Not surprising, Bowden is considered a legend, even by Florida fans, while Spurrier is pretty much seen as a jerk throughout the state.)

Plus, there's the amusing history between the two schools. In 1905, the Florida Legislature reorganized its higher education system and established two state institutions, the University of Florida and the Florida State College for Women. Forty-one years later, both schools went co-educational, but it took the threat of legal action by then-Florida Gov. Leroy Collin in 1958 to force Florida onto the field to play Florida State. Florida officials didn't want to open up the possibility of losing to the "all-girls" school.

Nowadays, both teams could agree to play in Victoria's Secret lingerie and the fans would still foam at the mouth the week leading up to the game.

Here in Eugene, and up in Corvallis, the frenzy for the Civil War is beginning to reach a fevered pitch, to be sure, thanks to the added bonus of a Rose Bowl berth on the line. But until the two teams play with these sorts of stakes year in and year out - and

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