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Pac-10 enters heart of season

■ The Pac-10 slate for this week includes several matchups that could impact the final standings

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

Now it gets interesting.

As the Pacific-10 Conference season reaches its midpoint, the players have been separated from the benchwarmers, the contenders have been separated from the pretenders and some teams are still on the fence.

What's the only way to find out who will emerge from the rubble as the conference-leading titans battle it out? Play football.

UCLA will head to Stanford, and the Bruins will have the national rankings to motivate them. Oregon heads to Washington State in desperate need of a win to keep Fiesta Bowl hopes alive. Washington, which can ill afford another loss, goes to the desert to face a dangerous Arizona State team.

In other words, it's just another Saturday in the Pac-10.

Washington at Arizona State

The Huskies (5-1 overall, 3-1 Pac-

10) can't seem to pull away from a Pac-10 team. California almost toppled Washington, before running back Rich Alexis scored with five minutes left. USC almost toppled the Huskies in Seattle before Washington kicker John Anderson's last-minute field goal sailed through the uprights. Arizona almost upset Washington last weekend, before quarterback Cody Pickett ran in for a last-minute score.

This week, the Huskies travel to Tempe to take on the Arizona State Sun Devils (4-2, 1-2). Arizona State fell hard to both Stanford and USC on the road earlier this season before blowing out Oregon State in Tempe last weekend. The Sun Devils have beat up on competition at home this season, winning all four times in Tempe by an average margin of 31 points.

USC at Arizona

Five years ago, Trojans-Wildcats might have been a good matchup. But this season has only highlighted the negative aspects of once-great programs at USC (2-5, 1-3) and Arizona (3-4, 0-4).

USC has had better chances to win than Arizona this season. The Trojans

fell inches short of beating Oregon (losing 24-22), Kansas State (10-6), Stanford (21-16) and Washington (27-24). USC has the Pac-10's second-best passer in junior Carson Palmer, and its defense has been stingy at times.

Arizona has not been so fortunate. In head coach John Mackovic's first season, the Wildcats have not come close to beating a Pac-10 team except Washington last weekend. Arizona lost by a combined 97 points to three teams: Oregon, Oregon State and Washington State.

California at Oregon State

The 2001 season has gone from a daydream to a nightmare for the Beavers, and now Oregon State (2-4, 1-3) can only afford one more loss before a bowl berth slips through their fingers like a Jonathan Smith fumble.

But if Oregon State is bad this season, California (0-6, 0-4) is worse. Much worse. The Golden Bears put together one complete game — against Washington — but couldn't put the Huskies away. As head coach Tom Holmoe counts the days until his firing, Cal can only hope to spoil another team's season, because the Bears are done in 2001.

Cardinal offense to meet big Bruin 'D'

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

When Stanford upset then-No. 5 Oregon in Eugene last weekend, the Cardinal had a grand ol' time beating the Ducks.

Onside kicks, blocked punts and two-point conversions were just some of the wild and wacky plays offered up by Stanford in its 49-42 win.

But this week, the Cardinal will meet a wall. A decidedly blue and gold wall.

The UCLA defense is ranked 15th nationally overall, and fifth nationally in scoring defense. What could happen when a team that gives up

only 12 points per game meets a team that scores more than 39? Only time will tell.

UCLA will have some major factors when it travels to Palo Alto to face Stanford on Saturday. Cardinal quarterback Randy Fasani, ranked 10th nationally in pass efficiency, will miss the game because of a knee injury he suffered at Oregon. The Bruins will also be fueled by this week's Bowl Championship rankings, which place UCLA third in the nation.

Bruin head coach Bob Toledo said his team will try not to bring the expectations from the rankings into Saturday's matchup.

"This BCS stuff, it doesn't really matter right now," Toledo said. "There is a lot of football to be played. Everybody has this guy matched up against that guy — there is too much football to be played."

Stanford will have some factors in its corner as well. The Cardinal's running back tandem of Brian Allen and Kerry Carter will try to work the same magic that they brought into Autzen Stadium, where the duo combined for 111 yards and four touchdowns against the Ducks.

UCLA and Stanford will square off at 12:30 p.m. Saturday in Palo Alto. The game will be televised on ABC.

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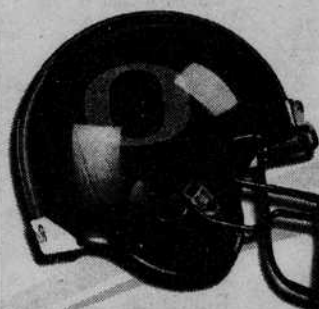
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