

Trojans, Palmer head midwest to face Wildcats

USC and revamped quarterback Carson Palmer will face their second test of the young season

Game of the week

By Hank Hager
Oregon Daily Emerald

No. 11 USC (2-0) at No. 25 Kansas State (3-0) 4 p.m., TBS

The big boys of the Pacific-10 Conference and the Big XII are set to do battle in one of the best early-season matchups of the year. The featured programs are on the rise after slipping in success.

The schools have met just once, last season, in a game that was anything but entertaining. Kansas State won the contest 10-6 behind a rushing attack that amassed 340 yards.

This season's version, though, is sure to be much different.

USC quarterback Carson Palmer has broken through the ranks of the overrated to become a potential Heisman Trophy candidate. In two wins over Auburn and Colorado, he has thrown for a 72 percent completion rate and has hit the turf via a sack just once.

"He is doing everything that he can and that generally follows the success of a team," USC head coach Pete Carroll said. "If we keep doing that, Carson is going to be recognized as one of the best players in America. He's talented enough to do that, talented enough to be a high first-round draft pick."

The Trojan defense has been even

better, allowing just 88.5 yards per game rushing and 82.5 yards passing. That's against Auburn and Colorado, two teams that are generally thought to have better-than-average offenses.

Kansas State, on the other hand, has been a surprise. The Wildcats have been perfect, albeit against Western Kentucky, Louisiana Monroe and Eastern Illinois. They've allowed just 16 points in the three games, an impressive feat no matter who the opponent is.

But USC will definitely be the first test for Kansas State.

"We haven't played anyone who is in the same hemisphere as USC so it's a little difficult to determine exactly where we are at this particular time," Kansas State head coach Bill Snyder said. "I do think that we have made some improvements — we have gotten a lot better in certain areas. I think we are playing relatively well, but not nearly the kind of football team that we need to be."

In the past, the Wildcats have shown to be adept at handling teams with bigger expectations. Their win against the Trojans last season was just one of those, as USC was expected to be one of the Pac-10's finest in 2001.

"They gave us all we could handle last year and we couldn't get the win," Carroll said. "We have great respect for the way they play and their style. This is a game that we are going to have a good feel for what we are all about. If we are fortunate to win, we will feel pretty good about this start of the season. We expect to have a very difficult matchup. We are looking forward to it."

Contact the sports reporter at hankhager@dailyemerald.com.

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