

Pac-10 begins to separate in this week's tilts

Four teams are tied for fourth place, with key match-ups clearing up a fuzzy conference race

Scott Archer
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It's past the time for Pacific-10 Conference teams to feel out new players and fall because of new mistakes. It is also time for teams to start separating themselves from the rest of the conference.

While USC and Washington State have dominated the league, much intrigue still remains in the Pac-10.

The Cougars and Trojans, both complete opposites in geography and culture, have risen to the top with hard-nosed defense and big-play offenses.

However, a few other teams, such as UCLA and Washington, have packed a few surprises.

UCLA (6-2 overall, 4-0 Pac 10) at Stanford (2-4, 0-4)

Few could have expected such a start from the Bruins this year. First-year head coach Karl Dorrell has the Bruins sitting at the top of the Pac-10 standings along with USC and Washington State.

The Bruins have used the unconventional two-quarterback rotation this year, but not by design. Incumbent starter Matt Moore has faced injuries this season but should get the start this weekend. It was with the Cardinal last year that Moore made his first collegiate start.

Stanford is coming off a humiliating performance against Oregon, and the outlook doesn't get much brighter for the Cardinal. Stanford jumped out to a 15-0 lead last year against the Bruins, only to be held to a field goal the rest of the game in an eventual 28-18 loss.

"We're obviously frustrated because we are playing hard as a team, and we expect that to continue," Stan-

ford head coach Buddy Teevens said. "Being off the road will be a plus. Coming back and seeing the home crowd will be great."

The Bruins are carrying a three-game win streak into the matchup, with special teams and the defense scoring five of the team's 21 touchdowns.

California (4-5, 2-2) at Arizona State (4-4, 1-3)

The scoreboard might blow up by the end of this game. Cal and Arizona State both thrive on throwing the ball and are not shy about doing just that. Cal is coming off a 42-14 smashing of Arizona and figures to continue where it left off.

For Cal, it has been running back Adimchinobe Echemandu that has carried the offensive load of late. He ranks second in the Pac-10 in rushing at 97.9 yards per game and is averaging 134-yards per game over the last five contests.

"We haven't run very many trick plays," California head coach Jeff

Tedford said. "We always go into games with four-to-five special plays. We just haven't had the opportunity to use them."

Meanwhile, Arizona State continues to be an offensive juggernaut, even receiving big plays from its kick return unit, which leads the conference with 24.9 yards per return.

The Sun Devils are almost automatic in the red zone. The team has capitalized on 16 of their last 17 trips into the red zone. Last year, Arizona State held a slim 38-35 third quarter lead when Cal scored the next 20 points to win the shootout, 55-38.

Arizona (1-7, 0-4) at Oregon State (5-3, 2-2)

This was going to be a matchup of two teams heading in opposite directions. Oregon State was going up while Arizona was on the down. But two consecutive losses by the Beavers has Oregon State on its heels.

"(The loss to Washington State last week) will play itself out during the

week, but I think our guys will respond well," Beaver head coach Mike Riley said. "There's a lot of pride in this group, so I suspect it will motivate us to come out and play better."

Arizona has had four games to get adjusted to its new coach, former defensive coordinator Mike Hankwitz, who is now serving on an interim basis.

The Wildcats lead the series 19-6-1, with the Beavers winning in decisive fashion, 38-3, last year. Oregon State's lauded running back Steven Jackson ran for 134 yards in that game.

As of late, Jackson hasn't been the Beavers' star. It has been senior James Newson, who has at least one catch in the last 32 games and is the leading receiver in the Pac-10. He is the only receiver to average more than 100 yards per game, with an average of 120.6 per contest.

Scott Archer is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

Cougars, Trojans meet in top game

Washington State and USC square off in the premier matchup in the Pac-10 this season on Saturday

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The race for the conference crown at this point in the season is between No. 3 USC (7-1 overall, 3-1 Pacific-10 Conference) and No. 6 Washington State (7-1, 4-0).

This is also the closest it comes to a conference championship game as the two teams will most likely present the toughest opponent for each other in the Pac-10 this season. They meet Saturday at 4 p.m. in Los Angeles.

USC is coming off a 43-23 pounding of Washington, while Washington State, thanks to a few late penalties on the Beavers, pulled out a 36-30 victory over Oregon State.

If records are any indication, then USC should dominate. The series is much in favor of the Trojans with Washington State having won only

eight of the 62 matchups between the schools.

This same game last year decided who would be heading to the Rose Bowl, and it may do the same this year. However, this time, the loser may be the team heading to the Rose Bowl, while the winner — if still unbeaten — may have a shot at the national championship.

Washington State needed an overtime field goal to beat the Trojans, 30-27, a year ago. USC's defense, ranked No. 1 at the time, gave up 516 yards of total offense to the Cougars.

Washington State has won 10 of its last 11 Pac-10 road games, including the last six straight. The Cougars allowed seven turnovers against Oregon State, yet still lead the Pac-10 in turnover margin at plus-12.

The Trojans are riding a few streaks of their own, with victories in 12 straight home games and 15 of its last 16 games overall. The Trojans are also 7-0 in November under third-year head coach Pete Carroll.

Scott Archer is a freelance sports reporter for the Emerald.

Cowboys, OU headline week

The Sooners and Cowboys meet in an in-state rivalry game with bowl implications

By Dick Weiss
New York Daily News (KRT)

RALEIGH, N.C. — Oklahoma is considered the best college football team in the country.

On Saturday, when the top-ranked Sooners (8-0, 4-0) play Oklahoma State (7-1, 3-1) in Norman, we'll find out if they are the best team in the state.

Oklahoma State is no longer lurking in the background in the Big 12 South. Les Miles' Cowboys, who defeated Texas A&M, 38-10, at College Station Saturday, won their seventh straight game for the first time since 1997. They should have confidence heading into this showdown. The Cowboys have two straight victories over their bitter in-state rival, including a 38-28 win last year in Stillwater, when Rashaun Woods — the best big-play receiver in the conference — caught three TD passes.

OSU fans — who began chanting, "Beat OU, beat OU" — can't wait for what should be the biggest game in

this series since 1988.

"We're not scared of them," linebacker Paul Duren said.

Woods, who caught two more TD passes as the Cowboys gave A&M its worst loss in 20 years, is almost impossible to defend in single coverage when OSU is running the ball like it did against the Aggies. Senior tailback Tatum Bell became the third player in school history to record consecutive 1,000-yard seasons when he ran wild for 196 yards and three touchdowns.

Then there is efficient senior quarterback Josh Fields, who looked sharp against the Aggies, throwing for 208 yards. "They're a three-headed monster," OU defensive coordinator Mike Stoops said.

The Sooners warmed up for OSU by defeating Colorado, 34-20, in Boulder Saturday. But they fumbled three times, allowed the Buffs to get back into the game on a fake punt and fake field goal and didn't put the game away until quarterback Jason White — the front-runner for the Heisman Trophy — hit wide receiver Mark Clayton with a 59-yard TD pass with 1:59 to play. White came out of the game more battered than usual as the Buffs sacked him

twice, hit him several times and left him with a scratched right eye that briefly blurred his vision.

OU-OSU is not the only defining game Saturday. Second-ranked Miami (8-0), the only other unbeaten team from a BCS conference, will travel to Virginia Tech (6-1), where the 'Canes have only won once during their Big East stay. Surging Southern California (7-1) plays host to Washington State (7-1) in a game between two top 10 teams that should go a long way toward who represents the Pac-10 in the BCS.

Michigan State (7-1), the only unbeaten team in the Big Ten, meets preseason favorite Michigan (7-2) in East Lansing. SEC preseason favorite Georgia (7-1) plays dangerous Florida (5-3) in Jacksonville. Big 12 North leader Nebraska (7-1) plays at Texas (6-2). Defending national champion Ohio State (7-1) is at Penn State (2-6) and Florida State (7-1) will travel to Notre Dame (2-5).

When the dust settles, we should have a better idea who will play for the national title.

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