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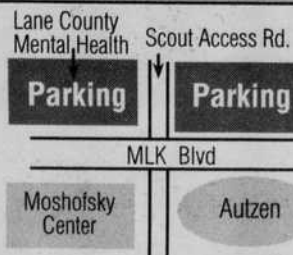
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Game of the week

Oregon State faces another tough test in California

OSU will attempt to contain quarterback Aaron Rodgers and the rest of the Cal offense Saturday

BY SCOTT J. ADAMS
 FREELANCE REPORTER

After a 1-3 start, Oregon State's squad may seem an unworthy team to be featured in this week's game of the week. Believe it or not, however, Oregon State may very well be the best 1-3 team in the nation.

All three Beaver losses this season were suffered on the road and came at the hands of Boise State, who holds the longest winning streak in the nation, undefeated Arizona State and, of course, the co-defending national champions LSU. This week, all three teams found their way into the AP Top 25. Oregon State head coach Mike Riley feels his team has played well, regardless of its record.

"We've played some awfully good football but we shoot ourselves in the foot," said Riley. "We've just got to get those things straightened out, and we can play good ball."

Saturday the Beavers take on undefeated Cal (2-0) in a much-needed home game for Oregon State, which is trying to even its conference record after last week's loss to Arizona State. Although the Golden Bears have not played in two weeks thanks to Hurricane Ivan, they entered this week ranked 10th in the nation.

On paper, these two teams appear similar regardless of records. The real determining factor in this game will be the play of both defenses in shutting down their opposing offenses. Cal's junior quarterback Aaron Rodgers leads the Pacific-10 Conference in QB rating (192.2) and has a solid corps of receivers at his disposal, including seniors Chase Lyman and Garrett Cross. The Beaver secondary, led by senior

safety Mitch Meeuwse and sophomore safety Sabby Piscitelli, who leads the conference with three interceptions, may find itself on the short-end of mismatches early and often. Despite this, Cal head coach Jeff Tedford feels the Beaver secondary is capable of keeping any passing attack at bay.

"They get up in your face and challenge you," said Tedford. "Their corners are fast, and good technicians. Their safeties can run, they do a nice job of covering."

The Beaver defense may be the best prepared they can be for Rodgers after facing talented quarterback Andrew Walter in Saturday's loss to Arizona State.

Aside from passing, the Beaver defense has the Cal offensive backfield to worry about. Cal tailback and All-Pac-10-hopeful J.J. Arrington is second in the conference in rushing yards (358) and runs behind a seasoned offensive line laden with upper-classmen. Statistically, Cal's rushing attack will be the most difficult running game that Oregon State has faced all season. Riley hopes to limit Arrington and force Cal to the air early in the game.

"That's going to be our big challenge," said Riley. "Not letting them establish a running game ... and play pass defense. With an offense like this, it's easier said than done."

Conversely, the Cal defense has its work cut out for it as they face senior quarterback Derek Anderson who leads the conference in passing yards (1300). Tedford feels that Anderson poses a threat to any team he faces.

"If (Anderson) gets hot, he can make it a long day for you," said

Tedford. "He is very talented."

On the receiving end of most of Anderson's throws is junior flanker Mike Hass who tops the Pac-10 in receiving yards (575). One of the reasons why the Beavers have racked up so many passing yards is that their rushing game is next to obsolete. The Beavers will need a solid game out of their running backs if they hope to upset the Golden Bears. As well, they must limit their penalties. They currently lead the conference in both penalties (77), and penalty yards (335).

Look for Oregon State to contain Arrington by maintaining a balanced defense with seven to eight men in the box ready to guard the run. The Beavers will need the defensive line, anchored by senior defensive end Bill Swancutt, to shut down Arrington and force him to run inside. The backbone of Oregon State's defense has been its team speed: the Beavers will need it this week to compensate for any mismatches it faces.

The Golden Bears have many offensive weapons and a formidable defense. Arrington has yet to face a defense that challenges him and Rodgers cannot seem to stop finding open receivers. Cal is more than capable of putting points on the board, but must contain Anderson, who threw two touchdowns and ran for another against them last season.

You can expect a high-scoring game in Corvallis on Saturday if both offenses play their best. For Cal, this game marks its conference opener and is another opportunity to prove the team's legitimacy to the nation. For Oregon State, this is a must-win game in a loosening conference race. A loss this week can only grant a claim as the best 1-4 team in the nation.

Scott J. Adams is a freelance reporter for the Daily Emerald.

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