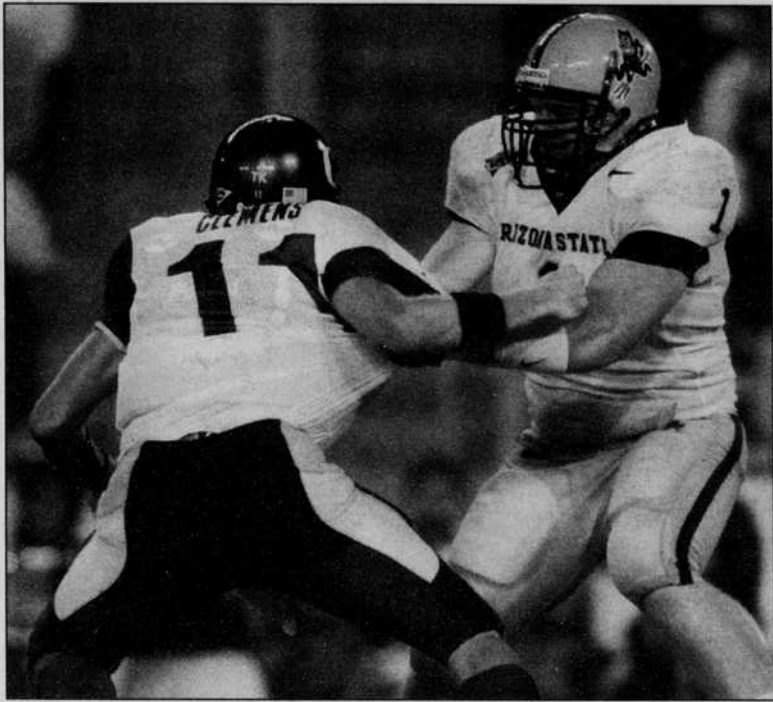


■ Pac-10



DANIELLE HICKEY | PHOTO EDITOR

Arizona State defensive tackle Jordan Hill (1) attempts to pull down quarterback Kellen Clemens (11) in Oregon's 28-13 loss to the Sun Devils.

Conference leader USC faces off with last-place Arizona

Top-ranked USC hosts Arizona and No. 5 California travels to Seattle to play Washington this week

BY SCOTT J. ADAMS
FREELANCE SPORTS REPORTER

The Pacific-10 Conference pits its front-runners against its last place teams this weekend as No. 1 Southern California begins its season-ending homestead against Arizona at the Coliseum in Los Angeles. The Trojans are looking to improve their winning streak to 19 games.

California, No. 5 in the nation and currently second in the conference, takes to the road this Saturday to battle Washington in Seattle.

No. 20 Arizona State aims to complete a flawless 2004 home-record as they face Washington State in Tempe, Ariz. The middle of the Pac-10 standings should receive a make-over after Saturday with a reduced number of ties and a more clear bowl picture. The Pac-10 could have as many as seven bowl berths or as few as four.

Washington State
(4-5 overall, 2-4 conference) at No. 20
Arizona State (7-2, 4-2)

This game features both of last week's Pac-10 Offensive Players of the Week in Arizona State senior quarterback Andrew Walter and Washington State junior tailback Jerome Harrison. Their teams are both coming off clutch victories last Saturday.

Going into this season, second-year Washington State head coach Bill Doba may not have expected losing four conference games and sitting in seventh place in the Pac-10 near the season's end. But close losses and the unfortunate season-ending injury of starting quarterback Josh Swogger have left Doba and his Cougars with nowhere to go but up in the conference standings with only two games remaining in their regular season schedule.

Washington State must find a way to contain Walter, who set the conference record for career touchdown passes in last week's 34-31 win over Stanford. Shutting down Arizona State's running game will

be a daunting task as well for the Cougars and will require continued strong efforts from junior linebacker Will Derting and junior defensive end Adam Braidwood. Braidwood has posted eight tackles for loss in the last three games.

At Tuesday's press conference, Arizona State head coach Dirk Koetter acknowledged the skillful defensive play of injury-laden Washington State.

"They're playing pretty darn well on defense," Koetter said. "I think coach (Bill) Doba is kind of down-playing their defense."

The Cougar offense has suffered injuries in the offensive tackle, tight end and tailback positions all season, but has still managed to put points on the board thanks to standout performances from wide receiver Jason Hill. In last week's 31-29 victory over UCLA, Harrison recorded 247 yards and a school-record 42 carries.

Last Saturday, Koetter gave a gameball to his freshman tailback Rudy Burgess, who demoralized Stanford's defense by rushing for 186 yards on 34 carries.

No. 5 California (8-1, 5-1) at Washington (1-8, 0-6,)

The Golden Bears of Cal sit alone in second place in the Pac-10 after last weekend's nail-biting 28-27 win over Oregon in Berkeley, Calif. Cal should have little trouble continuing its Rose Bowl campaign in Seattle this weekend, but must not take Washington lightly. The Huskies have played strong defense all season but have been plagued with an offense that isn't scoring a lot of points.

The Golden Bears feature the No. 5 offense in the nation, led by junior quarterback Aaron Rodgers, senior tailback J.J. Arrington and senior wide receiver Geoff McArthur. Moving the ball through the air may be difficult for Cal considering that Washington tops the conference in pass defense. Husky linebackers Joe Lobendahn, Evan Benjamin and Scott White rank

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