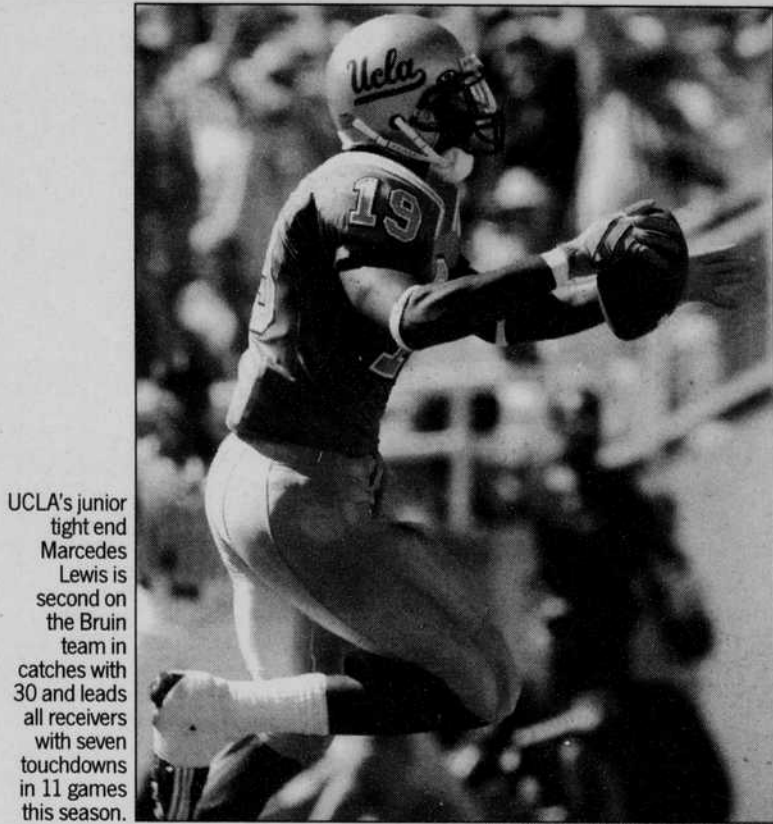




UCLA's junior tight end Mercedes Lewis is second on the Bruin team in catches with 30 and leads all receivers with seven touchdowns in 11 games this season.

COURTESY | UCLA ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT

UCLA ventures to Las Vegas Bowl to tackle Wyoming

The Bruins are coming off of a near-upset of USC to face the Cowboys for the first time in history

BY PAUL THOMPSON
COPY EDITOR

For the first time ever, UCLA (6-5 overall, 4-4 Pacific-10 Conference) and Wyoming (6-5, 3-4 Mountain West Conference) will face off on the football field in the 2004 Las Vegas Bowl Dec. 23 at 6:45 p.m.

It will be the Bruins' third straight postseason appearance and their fifth since 1997. The Cowboys will make their first bowl appearance since a 52-17 loss to Kansas State in the 1993 Copper Bowl.

"We hit the jackpot," second-year Wyoming head coach Joe Glenn mused. "We are really excited about going to the Las Vegas Bowl. It is a

tremendous reward for the season we had."

Wyoming will be making its second visit of the season to Sam Boyd Stadium after defeating UNLV 53-45 in triple overtime Nov. 6. The trip to Sin City will be UCLA's first since defeating New Mexico 27-13 in the 2002 Las Vegas Bowl.

"It's my understanding that the players enjoyed their experience in 2002," UCLA head coach Karl Dorrell said, "and we are looking forward to the trip and the contest against Wyoming."

The Bruins bring a strong ground attack to face a Wyoming defense that ranked only sixth in the Mountain West Conference in protecting the run.

UCLA's rushing offense, led by sophomore Maurice Drew, ranks second in the Pac-10 and 24th nationally with an average of 190.3 yards per game.

While the 5-foot-8, 198-pound Drew's 939 yards are tops on the team, he has accounted for less than half of the Bruins' ground game. Senior Manual White and true freshman Chris Markey both contributed to UCLA's potent running game. White accounted for 794 yards of the team's 2,341, while Markey pitched in another 343.

The Bruins will also look for junior tight end Mercedes Lewis who has caught seven touchdowns this year, tops among receivers.

Whether Wyoming wins or loses may be attributed to the level of productivity of its offense. During its six wins, the Cowboy offense has averaged 39.5 points per game, while managing only 11.4 during its five losses.

ASU: Purdue looks to prove itself with win

Continued from page 10B

been open outside is the emergence of freshman tight end Zach Miller to take away some of the defensive pressure. The Phoenix native has caught 51 passes this season for 524 yards and six touchdowns en route to being named the Pac-10 Freshman of the Year — the first Sun Devil to do so since defensive end Terrell Suggs in 1996.

While the state of the Sun Devil passing game is in question, Purdue's aerial attack is anything but. Led by senior quarterback Kyle Orton, the Boilermakers (7-4, 4-4 Big 10 Conference) are tops in the Big 10 in passing and scoring offense, averaging 324.8 yards and 32.5 points per game, respectively.

Orton's top target is Taylor Stubblefield, who has tallied 82 receptions for 1,014 yards and a whopping 15 touchdowns. The senior duo was one of the main reasons Purdue was ranked as high as No. 5 in the nation after starting the season 5-0. However, from that point on, the Boilermakers didn't seem to catch a break. They lost their next four games by a combined 10 points, ending any hope of obtaining a BCS bowl bid.



DANIELLE HICKEY | PHOTO EDITOR

Junior wide receiver Derek Hagan is a key component in Arizona State's conference-leading passing offense. He averages 6.73 receptions and 97.9 yards per game.

Purdue rebounded from its losing streak nicely, though, winning its last two games. The Boilermakers edged Ohio State 24-17 and destroyed Indiana 63-24.

Despite the rough losing streak, Purdue head coach Joe Tiller said he's just happy to be going to a bowl.

"It's certainly exciting for us to be going to the Sun Bowl and being back around our friends in El Paso," Tiller said. "It seems like we've developed some good relationships and friendships there. It's something we look forward to."

While Purdue won't be facing the likes of Southern California or

Oklahoma, Tiller added that the Boilermakers will still have the chance to show they're a quality team.

"It's one of the few bowls that the matchup is one that you're going to draw an excellent opponent," Tiller said. "We are going to face the No. 3 Pac-10 team. If you can be successful in the game, the football world recognizes that you've accomplished something."

This will be the third trip to the Sun Bowl in four years for Purdue. The Boilermakers lost to Washington State 33-27 in 2001 and defeated Washington 34-24 a year later.

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