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■ Pac-10 preview

Conference teams gear up for season-opening games

Top-ranked USC travels to Hawaii, while the rest of the Pacific-10 challenges non-BCS leagues in first game

BY SCOTT J. ADAMS
SPORTS REPORTER

This is it: week one. Pacific-10 Conference football kicks off the 2005 season this weekend with non-conference games being played Sept. 1-3. Half the Pac-10 teams are on the road for their openers, including Oregon and No. 1 USC.

No. 1 USC at Hawaii

Hawaii's biggest weapon, former quarterback Tommy Chang, who set the NCAA career passing yardage record at 17,070, is gone. Meanwhile, USC's weapons — last year's Heisman Trophy winner, quarterback Matt Leinart, and running back/kick returner Reggie Bush — return in full force.

The game has potential to be far from a cake walk for USC, who lost former offensive coordinator Norm Chow to the Tennessee Titans of the National Football League. Should Leinart and the Trojans struggle early, Hawaii will use its home-field advantage to full strength.

Arizona at Utah

The Wildcats travel to Salt Lake City to face two-time defending Mountain West Conference champion Utah, which has not lost a game since Oct. 25, 2003. The Utes enter this game without former head coach Urban Meyer or Heisman Trophy finalist turned first round NFL draft pick Alex Smith.

First-year head coach Kyle Whittingham plans on keeping an option package for his offense to utilize sophomore quarterback Brian Johnson's foot speed. The Utah defense is still strong and should be able to compensate for the offense's growing pains.

The Wildcats, under second-year head coach Mike Stoops, are led by sophomore quarterback Richard Kovalcheck, who went from fourth string to starter last season. Senior tailback Mike Bell returns to lead the offense.

No. 20 Arizona State vs. Temple

The departure of Andrew Walter

may not be as harming for the Arizona State offense as expected with the success junior quarterback Sam Keller had in last year's Sun Bowl. Arizona State's offense is built to let Keller have a breakout season thanks to a veteran offensive line and two returning starters at wide receiver.

Temple is without a definitive starting quarterback going into week one. Seniors Mike McGann and Jake Hendy have competed all summer for the starting job. Temple's defense may not be very threatening to the Sun Devils, but senior defensive end Mike Mendenhall is a superb pass rusher and would be an honors candidate if Temple was in a conference. Arizona State head coach Dirk Koetter will make it a point to keep him accounted for on every play.

No. 19 California vs. Sacramento State

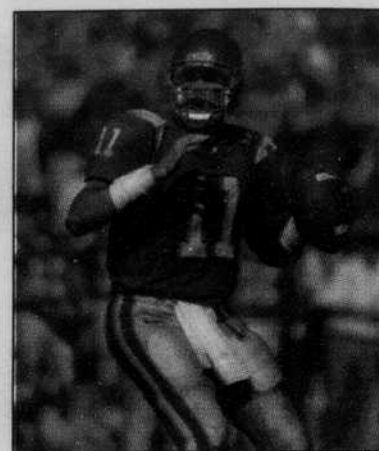
Sophomore tailback Marshawn Lynch, who averaged 8.8 yards per carry in his freshman year, leads Cal into week one alongside a starting quarterback to be named later by head coach Jeff Tedford. The job will either go to junior Joseph Ayoo or freshman Nate Longshore. Both should see action against Sacramento State.

Oregon State vs. Portland State

Oregon State opens its first game at its newly raised Reser Stadium against Portland State from the Big Sky Conference. Head coach Mike Riley will likely use both sophomore Ryan Gunderson and junior UCLA transfer Matt Moore at quarterback, a position both have vied for since spring football.

UCLA at San Diego State

Third-year head coach Karl Dorrell is in a make-or-break year at UCLA, having started his career with two non-winning seasons. His offense and defense are loaded with talent such as seniors linebacker Spencer Havner and tight end Mercedes Lewis. San Diego State head coach Tom Craft and the Aztecs will try to catch the Bruins



COURTESY

USC quarterback Matt Leinart, the defending Heisman Trophy winner, guides the two-time defending national champion Trojans at Hawaii Sept. 3.

sleeping early to stay in the game late.

Washington vs. Air Force

Tyrone Willingham begins his career at neutral Qwest Field as head coach of the Huskies, who managed a program-low one win last year. Washington returns nine starters on defense and an overhauled offense led by junior tailback Kenny James. Air Force head coach Fisher DeBerry hopes to get out of Seattle with a win and has the offense to do it. Sophomore quarterback Shaun Carney of the Falcons had an excellent freshman year and shouldn't fail to impress this year.

Washington State vs. Idaho

Cougar head coach Bill Doba decided on Aug. 23 that he will go with sophomore Alex Brink to start at quarterback against the Vandals. Doba was pleased with how well Brink ran the offense at practice.

"He just made less mistakes," Doba said. "He was more aware of the offense and did the little things, like throwing the ball on time."

The Cougar spread offense should have no problem scoring on Idaho, but may have problems stopping the Vandal offense led by senior quarterback Michael Harrington. Mistakes should be the only thing stopping Washington State this weekend.

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