

Which matchups will decide championship?

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DALLAS — The first College Football Playoff national championship game between Oregon and Ohio State will be all about the O — as in offense.

The Ducks rank second in the nation in yards per play (7.39) and points per game (47.2). The Buckeyes rank sixth in yards per play (7.03) and fifth in points (45.0).

It could come down to the team that manages to force a few field-goal attempts. Or maybe the first team to 50?

Here are the matchups that could decide who wins the title.

OREGON'S DECEPTION vs. OHIO STATE'S DISCIPLINE

The Ducks run on passing downs and pass on running downs a lot, taking advantage of where the matchups are in their favor and QB Marcus Mariota's now-you-see-it-now-you-don't ball handling.

"He's extremely gifted in terms of riding the fake out," said Michigan State coach Mark Dantonio, who faced both teams this season. "You can see a couple times in the film where our guys are sitting right there and eyes on the ball, eyes on him and we lose him."

The Oregon offense strains a defense's discipline and forces defenders to make difficult decisions. Is it a run or a pass? Play the quarterback or the running back? Attack the quick passes and screens at the line of scrimmage or all short stuff and take away the deep ball?

Freaky athletic Ohio State LB Darron Lee could allow the Buckeyes to stick with their regular 4-3 alignment instead of going with extra defensive backs when Oregon uses three or four receivers. Theoretically, that should help Ohio State stop the run, but the Ducks will test the sophomore's discipline. He is one of several talented but inexperienced linebackers and



In this Sept. 6 photo, Ohio State lineman Joey Bosa (97) and linebacker Raekwon McMillian (5) chase Virginia Tech receiver Isaiah Ford (1) in Columbus, Ohio.

safeties the Buckeyes play.

As for Lee, Oregon would like to have him covering receivers such as Byron Marshall and Dwayne Stanford (advantage: Oregon) instead of being blocked by them (advantage: Ohio State).

OHIO STATE'S DEFENSIVE LINE vs. OREGON'S OFFENSIVE LINE

The Buckeyes' defensive line looks like an NFL line.

"Three of the four guys that they play with up front are going to play on Sundays," said Rutgers coach Kyle Flood, whose team was among the many the Buckeyes overwhelmed this year. "Most teams have one. If you have two you are really good up front. They have three."

All-America DE Joey Bosa headlines the group, but DTs Michael Bennett and Adolphus Washington are also future high-round draft picks. DE Steve Miller, who had a pick 6 against Alabama, is no slouch, either.

Oregon's offensive line has two players who received All-America honors in center Hroniss Grasu (second team) and tackle Jake Fisher (third team). Oregon ranks 67th in the nation in sacks allowed per game (2.07), but 12 came in two early season games. Ohio State's defense is 12th in sacks per game (3.07).

have taken advantage of Jones' arm by going deep more than they did with J.T. Barrett, who was lost for the season to an ankle injury against Michigan.

Jones' 30 completions against Alabama and Wisconsin have averaged 16.7 yards, and he has hooked up with speedy WR Devin Smith for four touchdowns, all covering at least 39 yards.

Ohio State will attack Oregon cornerbacks Troy Hill, Chris Seisay and Dior Mathis.

The Ducks have allowed 44 passes of at least 20 yards this season, which ranks 91st in the nation. Oregon has been especially vulnerable on intermediate throws in the middle of the field. Those throws often come with a higher degree of difficulty.

Oregon can't afford to play far off the line to stop Ohio State's deep throws because the Buckeyes are run first, and RB Ezekiel Elliott has been unstoppable lately with 450 yards rushing in the last two games against the highly ranked defenses of Alabama and Wisconsin.

TURNOVERS vs. TAKEAWAYS

Turnovers are hard to predict, but with stops likely hard to come by, takeaways are like service breaks in a back-and-forth game.

The Ducks don't play great defense, but they force lots of turnovers, and after they take it away the offense usually scores. And scores.

Oregon has 30 takeaways (10th in the country) and 154 points scored off those turnovers.

And no team protects the ball better than the Ducks. Oregon has turned the ball over 10 times, including only three interceptions.

Ohio State has 32 takeaways, including 24 interceptions (fourth in the nation). The Buckeyes have a very good plus-10 turnover margin. Oregon is plus-20.

PREDICTION: OREGON 43-38.



BRIEFLY

Governors wager beer, food in bet

SALEM (AP) — Nuts, beer, cheese and lasagna are up for grabs in the friendly wager between the governors of Oregon and Ohio, whose flagship universities compete in the college football championship next week.

A spokesman for Gov. John Kitzhaber says the Oregon Democrat is wagering a six-pack of Total Domination IPA from Ninkasi Brewing in Eugene. He's also offering a box of hazelnuts, which Oregonians call filberts, and 5 pounds of Tillamook cheese.

Republican Gov. John Kasich of Ohio is offering beer from Columbus

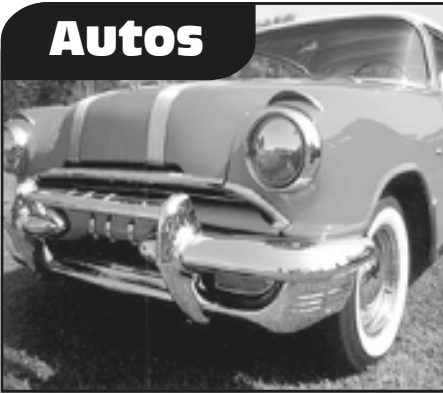
Brewing Company and a tray of the governor's favorite lasagna from Monte Carlo Italian Kitchen in his hometown. He'll also throw in some buckeyes — the chocolate and peanut butter candies, not the poisonous nuts.

Ducks favored, now by only 6

DALLAS (AP) — Oregon, first listed as a 7-point favorite over Ohio State by the Glantz-Culver line in Monday's national championship game, is now favored by just 6 points.

Oregon was established as a 7-point favorite largely off its 59-20 dismantling of defending national champion Florida State.

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