

College Football

Pac-12's best RBs to be showcased this weekend

By ANNE M. PETERSON AP Sports Writer

EUGENE — Oregon coach Mark Helfrich, preparing the No. 13 Ducks for this weekend's game against No. 18 Utah, seemed less concerned about who the Utes would start at quarterback than he was about Devontae Booker.

Or rather, stopping Booker. "First and foremost, Devontae Booker," Helfrich said. "Whoever's in there (at quarterback), they play off Devontae Booker differently."

The Pac-12 is known as more of a conference of quarterbacks — last season's Heisman Trophy winner Marcus Mariota solidified the reputation — but a number of strong running backs have emerged three weeks into the season.

Saturday's game between the Ducks (2-1) and the Utes (3-0) features two of them: Booker and Oregon's Royce Freeman. Two more — Arizona's Nick Wilson and UCLA's Paul Perkins — will also be showcased on Saturday when the No. 9 Bruins (3-0) visit the No. 16 Wildcats (3-0).

Those four backs rank among the top 20 rushers (in total yards) at the FBS level, one shy of the five in that group that are from the SEC. One interesting note for the conference: Oregon State freshman quarterback Seth Collins ranks 40th nationally, with 294 rushing yards and two touchdowns. Collins is averaging 98 yards rushing per game, ranking him sixth in the Pac-12.

DEVONTAE BOOKER, Utah: Booker (5-foot-11, 212 pounds) made a splash as a junior college transfer to Utah last season, rushing for 1,512 yards and 10 touchdowns to earn first-team All-Pac-12 honors. This season he's averaging 115 yards with four touchdowns through three games. He ran for 156 yards and two touchdowns in the Utes' 45-24 victory over Fresno State last Saturday. He



AP Photo/Ryan Kang

Oregon running back Royce Freeman (21) runs with the ball during the second quarter against Georgia State, Saturday in Eugene.

also caught five passes for 56 yards. "He's got great balance, great vision. He can run inside, he can run outside. He's just a natural," coach Kyle Whittingham said before the start of the season. "Some guys have it with the ball in their hands. Some guys don't. He's got it."

ROYCE FREEMAN, Oregon: Freeman (5-foot-11, 230 pounds) was named the Pac-12 freshman of the year on offense last season after running for 1,365 yards and 18 touchdowns, school records for a freshman. This season, he ranks third in the conference with an average of 124.3 yards per game with five touchdowns. Whittingham added that Freeman and the Ducks' running game is what "makes them go."

PAUL PERKINS, UCLA: Perkins (5-foot-11, 210 pounds) ran for 219 yards in the Bruins' 24-23 victory over BYU last weekend, the most yards for a UCLA running back since Maurice Jones-Drew ran for 322 in 2006 against Washington. Overall, Perkins ranks second in the league behind Wilson, averaging 143 yards a game and 7.4 yards a carry. A junior, he's got three touchdowns. Stanford coach David Shaw said this week: "He's one of those guys

that flies under the radar, but as a football coach when you look at film, it's like, 'That guy's good.'"

NICK WILSON, Arizona: Wilson (5-foot-10, 190), currently leads the league with an average of 144.7 yards per game and five touchdowns. He is averaging seven yards per carry. The sophomore ran for 143 yards and two touchdowns during the Wildcats' 77-13 rout of Northern Arizona last weekend, resting after Arizona built a big lead. UCLA coach Jim Mora said: "We recruited him. Obviously, we didn't get him."

DEMARIO RICHARD, Arizona State: Richard (5-foot-10, 220 pounds) has emerged this season as a versatile offensive weapon for the Sun Devils, rushing for 294 yards and two touchdowns through three games, while catching eight passes for 178 yards and two more scores. Richard caught a pass from quarterback Mike Bercocci for a 93-yard touchdown in Arizona State's 34-10 victory over New Mexico last weekend. He finished with 151 receiving yards on four catches, a Sun Devils record for a running back. He also rushed for 104 yards.

Golf

Vote could reflect how players perceive FedEx Cup

Player of the Year vote brings much debate on who was the best in '15

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

ATLANTA — PGA Tour players might be voting on more than just their player of the year.

Depending on how the Tour Championship unfolds this week at East Lake, the vote could also be a referendum on how they view the FedEx Cup.

No one thought this would even be a contest a month ago when the most significant part of the golf schedule ended at the PGA Championship. Even with Jason Day finally breaking through for his first major title, this year was all about Jordan Spieth.

The 22-year-old Texan won the Masters and U.S. Open among his four PGA Tour titles. He missed the British Open playoff by one shot and played in the final group at Whistling Straits, where he was unable to make up a two-shot deficit against Day at the PGA Championship.

The only debate was where Spieth's season ranked in PGA Tour history.

But that was the last great moment for Spieth. And it was just the start for the 27-year-old Australian.

Day began to overpower players and courses. He set a major championship record to par (20 under) at Whistling Straits. He followed that with a six-shot victory at The Barclays, and then opened with rounds of 63-61 to blow away the field at Conway Farms for a six-shot victory in the BMW Championship.

That was his fifth win of the year — one more than Spieth — and Day went to No. 1 in the world ranking.

"I still think it's him," Day said on Sunday. "But I'm hoping that I can go and win next week and get people talking about it a lot more."

The ballots will be emailed to PGA Tour players on Sunday night after the Tour Championship following what amounts to the last campaign stop at East Lake.

A victory for Day would give him six wins and a major. To put that into context, only four other players over the last 40 years have won six times in one season on the PGA Tour — Tom Watson

(1980), Nick Price (1994), Vijay Singh (2004) and Tiger Woods (six times).

If he were to win, then it really would be a tale of two seasons.

Spieth dominated the important part of the year. Day thrived during the bonus time of the year.

The FedEx Cup is not hit-and-giggle. It starts with the top 125 players on the PGA Tour and, with the value of points quadrupled, whittles the field down to the top 30 at the Tour Championship who all have a mathematical shot at the \$10 million bonus. A vote for Day might indicate how much importance players put on the tour's postseason.

The whole debate starts with the assumption Day will win the Tour Championship, and the rate he's been going, that's not a stretch.

Rickie Fowler said his main criteria would be victories, though not just any title. "Majors. Majors are big," he said. "With what Jordan's done this year, it's pretty amazing. Jason is making his late charge, so he's not making it any easier on the voting side of it."

Henrik Stenson won't decide until after the Tour Championship, although the Swede did make one prediction that was fairly safe.

"Someone with the first letter of 'J' will win it," he said.

More than just the 30 players gathered at East Lake are voting. Ballots go to 200-plus members, some of whom didn't even keep their cards, much less find their way to New Jersey for the start of the FedEx Cup. Do they look at how Day closed the gap during the most lucrative time of the year — \$8.5 million purses against some of the strongest fields of the year in a chase for a \$10 million bonus — or what Spieth did during the four events that are the fabric of golf history?

Spieth was only the fourth player to capture the first two legs of the modern Grand Slam, and he was tied for the lead through 70 holes at St. Andrews until a bogey on No. 17. Only three other players in 58 years of stroke play at the PGA Championship finished more under par than Spieth at Whistling Straits. One of them happened to be Day.

Spieth already has clinched the money title even if Day were to win the Tour Championship. And while Day is not far behind, Spieth still has the lead in the Vardon Trophy for the lowest adjusted scoring average.

History would seem to favor Spieth.

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