SPORTS

Falk. The big-armed passer might

be the man who can lead coach

Mike Leach's offense into title

Oregon QB Dakota Prukop.

The Montana State transfer is the

favorite to follow Marcus Mariota

and Vernon Adams, but he has two

capable competitors for the job at

the controls of the Ducks' remark-

Marcel Yates. Rich Rodriguez is

rebuilding his defense with the

former Boise State coordinator, but

he could need more than one season

Arizona defensive coordinator

contention.

able offense.

to fix everything.

NEW FACES

College Football With no clear favorite, Pac-12 promises memorable fall race

By GREG BEACHAM Associated Press

LOS ANGELES - Stanford coach David Shaw only needed a few words to epitomize why his Cardinal are the Pac-12 football favorites this fall - and also why that distinction doesn't mean much.

"I think we have a chance to be a good team, but we're a team in flux," Shaw said after learning his Cardinal had won the preseason media poll.

The West Coast's top league is wide open heading into the fall, with a half-dozen legitimate title contenders and no overwhelming favorite. Every team has major questions at key positions, but nobody seems better prepared to answer them than the ever-resourceful Cardinal.

Stanford is the defending champion of the conference and the Rose Bowl, and running back Christian McCaffrey might be the nation's top player. It's still not enough to make them prohibitive favorites to repeat in a conference that could end up without a playoff representative again despite several quality teams.

Parity is the enemy of excellence, and the Pac-12 is full of teams with big positives and big question marks. Two-thirds of the league began training camps with uncertainty at quarterback, and the league doesn't appear to possess any dominant defenses.

It could be a recipe for tight

division races, memorable Saturday finishes and a crackerjack conference title game.

THE FAVORITES

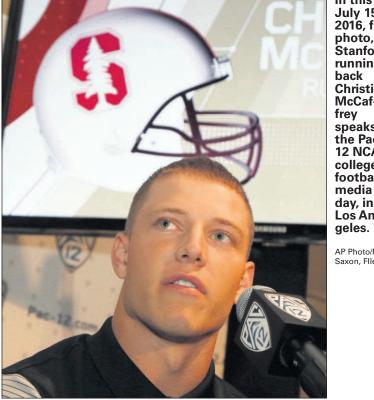
NORTH: Stanford has McCaffrey, but less than 10 other returning starters, including no tested quarterbacks. The Cardinal also must fight through a brutal schedule while fending off challenges from Oregon and Washington, who both could contend with just a few breaks. The Huskies are the popular pick to surge in their third season under Chris Petersen, while the Ducks always have enough talent despite no clear starting quarterback.

SOUTH: Although Utah is a serious contender, the division race could come down to the annual crosstown showdown between UCLA and USC at the Rose Bowl on Nov. 19. The Bruins had too many injuries on defense to contend last season, but quarterback Josh Rosen is ready to blossom into a national star. They could be ready to knock off the talented Trojans, who must play Alabama, Stanford and Utah away from home in September.

TOP PLAYERS

Christian Stanford RB McCaffrey. After one of the most spectacular individual seasons in conference history, the do-everything Heisman Trophy finalist is back to doing everything again.

UCLA QB Jake Rosen. A new offensive scheme should mean bigger plays and more chances for Chosen Rosen to shine.



USC WR JuJu Smith-Schuster. The Trojans' annual turmoil has obscured the career of the next brilliant pass-catcher in USC's long lineage, but he has a chance to get

everybody's attention this fall. Oregon RB Royce Freeman. After setting the Ducks' singleseason rushing record last year, he will shoulder a heavy load during a possible transition season.

In this July 15, 2016, file photo, Stanford running back Christian

McCaffrey speaks at the Pac-**12 NCAA** college football

> day, in Los Angeles.

AP Photo/Reed Saxon, Flle

Utah DL Lowell Lotulelei. The

consummate space-eating lineman

from a powerful football family

is back to clog lanes on one of the

The Huskies' preseason popularity

hinges partly on the gifted sopho-

more, who appears poised to break

Washington State QB Luke

out with an improved offense.

Washington QB Jake Browning.

nation's top defensive fronts.

USC coach Clay Helton. He's far from new, but the veteran assistant is in his first full season in charge of the Trojans, with a roster in flux and a sadistic schedule.

ON THE HOT SEAT

Sonny Dykes, California. No coach in the Pac-12 is in imminent trouble as the season begins, but Dykes certainly could use a strong year after Jared Goff's departure to solidify his rebuilding program with the Golden Bears.

Mike MacIntyre, Colorado. Likewise, the Buffaloes coach's rebuilding project probably would benefit greatly from a .500 season - or heck, even three Pac-12 victories in the same season for the first time since 2007.

PICKS

North: Stanford. South: UCLA. League champion: Stanford.

On day Mariners option Walker, Iwakuma tosses gem to beat Tigers

By TIM BOOTH Associated Press

MLB

SEATTLE — Hisashi Iwakuma threw seven shutout innings for his seventh win in his last eight starts, Mike Zunino and Kyle Seager both had RBI singles off Michael Fulmer in the second inning and the Seattle Mariners beat the Detroit Tigers 3-0 on Monday night in the opener of a key three-game series.

Seattle won its fourth straight and moved within 2 1/2 games of Detroit and Boston for the second wild

card in the American League thanks to another gem from Iwakuma. The right-hander allowed five hits and struck out eight, running his streak of scoreless innings at Safeco Field to 21 1/3.

In his only other start this season against Detroit in June, Iwakuma (13-7) failed to make it through the fifth inning, giving up five runs on 11 hits.

The performance by Iwakuma offset another solid start from Fulmer. The Tigers rising star threw seven innings and allowed only



two hits while striking out six. Three of Seattle's five hits off Fulmer (9-3) came in the second inning when the Mariners took an early lead. The rookie suffered his first loss since June 17 — also the last time the Tigers lost when he started.

And for a change, the runs for Seattle didn't come via the long ball.

Nelson Cruz led off the second with a double and scored when Seager rolled a ground ball behind Detroit's defensive shift and into center field. Seager moved into scoring position when Leonys Martin walked with one out and scored as Zunino was strong enough to dump a broken-bat single over third baseman Casey McGehee and into left field.

Seattle added a run in the eighth when Nori Aoki doubled with two outs and scored on Guillermo Heredia's RBI single.

Iwakuma did the rest. He retired 12 of the final 13 batters he faced, including striking out the side in the fourth. Iwakuma has developed into the ace of Seattle's staff this year, throwing at least seven innings in eight of his past 14 starts.

Newly acquired Arquimedes Caminero pitched a perfect eighth in his Seattle debut and rookie Edwin Diaz pitched the ninth for his fifth save.

ROSTER SHUFFLE

Tigers: Left-hander Daniel Norris was recalled from Triple-A Toledo and

will start on Tuesday night. The Tigers placed righthander Bruce Rondon on the paternity list to clear the roster spot for Norris.

Mariners: Starter Taijuan Walker was optioned to Triple-A Tacoma to open a roster spot for Caminero. Walker was roughed up for six runs in four innings in his last start. Ariel Miranda will take his spot in Seattle's rotation.

UP NEXT

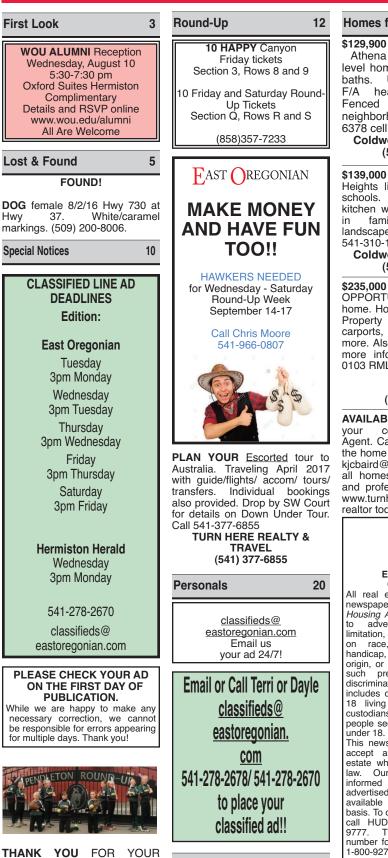
Mariners: Wade LeBlanc (1-0) makes his sixth start since being acquired.



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