

College Football

Alabama, Washington arrive in Atlanta

By JOHN ZENOR
Associated Press

ATLANTA — No. 1 Alabama and coach Nick Saban are the closest the College Football Playoff has to seasoned veterans.

The fourth-ranked Washington Huskies are new on the scene. Both teams have arrived in Atlanta to resume preparation for Saturday's Peach Bowl semifinal game at the Georgia Dome.

The Crimson Tide (13-0) is 3 for 3 in making the playoffs so far, winning it all last season and falling to eventual champion Ohio State two years ago.

"What I've learned about this game is the mind-set of: Is this a bowl game or is this a playoff game, which I think every player has to decide for himself, every coach has to decide for himself," Saban said Monday. "Because we are trying to create a balance for everyone in our organization because it is a playoff game."

Despite Saban's past lamentations that the playoff format has diminished the importance of bowl games for some, there's no denying the different level of stakes for this one.

The pecking order for the game is clear, too.



Washington football coach Chris Petersen talks with the media during a Peach Bowl NCAA college football press conference, Monday, Dec. 26, 2016, in Atlanta.

Vasha Hunt /AL.com via AP

Alabama had a quick flight from the next state over. The Huskies (12-1) flew some 2,500 miles to arrive Sunday night as two-touch-down underdogs, the biggest spread of any of this week's bowl games. Washington coach Chris Petersen is no stranger to being the underdog, or to pulling off upsets going back to his days at Boise State.

Unlike Alabama, Petersen's Huskies are in an unfamiliar spot. But he doesn't think this team has been affected by big-game hype so far this season.

"There'd be a certain game that we played that, 'This is going to be a big game, the biggest one of the season,'" Petersen said. "We would just kind of chuckle and say,

'It doesn't matter who we play. That next game is always the most important game.'

"I think that's been one of the beauties of this team. They've been very focused all season long."

The Pac-12 champions bring a high-powered offense led by quarterback Jake Browning against the nation's top defense, which helped power the Tide to an SEC championship at the same stadium four weeks before the semifinal matchup.

Saban said there was a "significant difference" in how well the team prepared last season compared to two years ago.

A wealth of big-game experience has taught him, and presumably the team's veterans, not to adopt the

mentality either that they have to play over their heads or get too relaxed with the attitude that, "I'm not going to let the situation affect me."

Saban wants this players and coaches to just be themselves.

"The field is going to be 53 yards wide and 100 yards deep," Saban said. "I don't think they're changing any of that. They're not changing the markings on the field."

"What you have to do to execute well, whether it's block properly, tackle properly, catch the ball, throw the ball. Those things really aren't going to change. I know from a fan's perspective, the significance of these types of games create tremendous emotions and anxiety. But as competitors and players we're hopeful that that doesn't happen."

Petersen wants his players to enjoy the visit to Atlanta during their down time, like any other road trip.

"Even when we travel just in a normal away game, we always want them to enjoy and appreciate the moment," he said. "We want them to appreciate the different venues and different hostile environments we go into."

"That's part of this whole thing, this college football, the pageantry. There's nothing like it. Pro football's not like it. It's just different."

PAC-12: Oregon's slow start nothing to be alarmed about

Continued from 1B

Alford has gone from having people call for his job to leading a team being predicted to make a Final Four run.

"I've got a really good group of guys to coach, they're a pretty good basketball team right now," Alford said. "We're trying to become a great basketball team, and that's a process. That's a journey."

UCLA (13-0) were good early and caught national attention with a road win over then-top-ranked Kentucky on Dec. 3. The Bruins also have wins over Texas A&M, Michigan and Ohio State, and their victory over Western Michigan on Dec. 21 finished off their first undefeated non-conference season since 1994-95.

UCLA will be the favorite when the Pac-12 season starts Wednesday, but the Bruins have a long way to go and a lot of good teams to get through if they want

to win the conference title.

The Pac-12 has three other ranked teams, including undefeated No. 23 Southern California, and every team but one has a winning record.

It should be fun to watch. Here's a few things to look for:

TROJANS RISE: USC had modest expectations after following a five-win season with an NCAA Tournament berth last season. Coach Andy Enfield's high-flying crew has blown those away. The Trojans (11-0), picked seventh in the Pac-12 preseason poll, have their first 11-game winning streak since opening the 1971 season 16-0, when they finished 24-2. USC's strength of schedule isn't exactly a gauntlet of power teams — its best win was over Texas A&M — which is why the Trojans have made slow progress in the AP Top 25. Still, until someone beats

them, don't doubt the Trojans.

SLOW-STARING DUCKS: Oregon opened the season with two losses in its first four games, prompting questions of what's wrong with the Ducks? Nothing, really. Oregon typically starts slow under coach Dana Altman and the Ducks were without leading scorer Dillon Brooks for the first three games after offseason foot surgery. Since losing to Georgetown in the opening round of the Maui Invitational, the Ducks have won nine straight and moved up to No. 20 in the AP Top 25. Oregon is loaded with talent and will certainly make a run at repeating as Pac-12 champion.

ARIZONA'S DEPTH: The Wildcats took a hit when Terrance Ferguson, the marquee name in Sean Miller's latest recruiting class, opted to play overseas instead of Tucson. Forward Ray Smith was forced to retire after tearing an ACL for the third time during an exhibition game and point guard

Parker Jackson Cartwright sprained his right ankle in the seventh game of the season. Despite being down to seven scholarship players, the 18th-ranked Wildcats (11-2) have continued to find ways to win behind their freshmen trio of Lauri Markkanen, Kobi Simmons and Rawle Alkins. Jackson-Cartwright appears to be ahead of schedule, too, so Arizona should only get better.

FULTZ'S IMPACT: Markelle Fultz arrived at Washington as the most highly-touted recruit in program history. The do-everything point guard has lived up to the hype, leading the Huskies with 22.4 points per game while shooting 49 percent from the field and 48 percent from 3-point range. He also averages 6.6 rebounds and 6.3 assists. Fultz hasn't been able to carry Washington by himself, though. The Huskies lost to Yale at home early in the season, had a four-game losing streak and will enter Pac-12 play at 7-5.

COUGARS: Leach says he would cut players who boycotted

Continued from 1B

coach Tracy Claeys said Monday. "At the same time you want them to have fun and enjoy the things that are here. As a staff we just ask that when we're on football time, and those three or four hours a day, that they concentrate and do their best to prepare for the game. ... They've done a good job of separating that from the trips that we have been able to do as a team."

Here are some things to watch when the Golden Gophers play in their first California bowl game since the 1962 Rose Bowl:

TALL TASK: Among the 10 Minnesota players suspended were starting defensive backs KiAnte Hardin and Antoine Winfield Jr., and key backup Antonio Shenault. Claeys will have to rotate in new players who will face Washington State's Air Raid offense led by Falk, who completed 71 percent of his passes in throwing for 4,204 yards and 37 touchdowns. "You

get a little younger and with the challenges comes opportunities for kids," Claeys said. "They've done a great job of preparing and obviously the staff just keeps preaching that we're going to work to their strengths and if you're going to go down at least you're playing to kids' strength. The worst thing we could do is ask a bunch of kids to do something they're not capable of. We have enough kids. They've worked hard and prepared hard and I'm excited to see them play."

LEACH'S TAKE: During the short-lived Minnesota boycott, Washington State coach Mike Leach said that if any of his players ever boycotted for whatever reason, he would cut them. Asked Monday to elaborate, he said: "I would. I'm not going to elaborate



Minnesota Gophers (8-4)



Washington St. Cougars (8-4)

- Today, 4 p.m.
- at San Diego, Calif.
- TV: ESPN

on it because in this setting it's just all about me trying to contradict something that Minnesota did and that's up to Minnesota how they handled that situation, and ultimately if I have a boycott I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. That's essentially how I would handle it so you can elaborate from there."

FALK TALK: Leach said Falk will be back for his senior season rather than entering the NFL draft. Asked if this would be Falk's last game, and what he has meant to the program, Leach said: "Won't be his last game. We will see what the last game does mean to the program and all the milestone stuff."

FALK TALK PART II: Minnesota is impressed with Falk. "Not many people complete over 70 percent of the footballs they throw,"

Claeys said. "He's extremely accurate, knows where he's going with the ball. They do a great job of attacking the different space and the different zones. It will take a great effort, and part of that when it comes to it, is that hopefully they're having a little bit of an off day and whether that's through drops, or whatever. But it's hard to rely on him to be inaccurate because he's done such a good job all year long."

ZOO NEWS: During a visit to the San Diego Zoo, WSU wide receiver Gabe Marks and guard Cody O'Connell were asked what animal resembles Leach the most. O'Connell went with a lion because it's the king of the jungle, and Marks went with a koala. "I think we're going to play Cody O'Connell more this game than we are Gabe Marks," Leach said. "I haven't given it a great deal of thought. I'll go ahead and defer to the brains of those two guys. From a personal standpoint let's stick with O'Connell."

SCOREBOARD

Local Slate

BOYS' PREP BASKETBALL

Today

Dallas at Hermiston, canceled
lone at Nixyaawii, 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday

Dallas at Pendleton, Noon
TBD at Helix (Helix Holiday Classic), 1 p.m.
Condon/Wheeler vs. Elktion (at McKenzie/1A Hoops Classic), 1 p.m.
Arlington at Country Christian, 4:30 p.m.
Umatilla vs. Kennedy (at Salem Academy/Crusader New Year's Invite), 5:30 p.m.

Thursday

Heppner vs. Mac-Hi (at Irrigon Invitation-al), 1:30 p.m.
Helix vs. TBD (Helix Holiday Classic), 2:30 p.m.
South Wasco at Echo (Bounc'n Cancer), 4:30 p.m.
Pendleton at Putnam, 5 p.m.
Condon/Wheeler vs. TBD (at McKenzie/1A Hoops Classic), 5 p.m.
lone at Riverside, 5:30 p.m.
Waitsburg (WA) at Irrigon (Irrigon Invita-tional), 6 p.m.
Arlington vs. Jordan Valley (at Country Christian/C.C. Invite), 6 p.m.
Hermiston at Silverton, 7 p.m.
Umatilla vs. TBD (at Salem Academy/Cru-sader New Year's Invite), 7 p.m.
Weston-McEwen vs. TBD (at Pendleton Convention Center/Les Schwab Tourney), 7 p.m.
Nixyaawii vs. South Wasco (at Echo/Bounc'n Cancer), 7:30 p.m.

Friday

Pendleton at Silverton, 1 p.m.
Heppner vs. Waitsburg (WA) (at Irrigon Invitational), 1:30 p.m.
Nixyaawii vs. Dufur (at Echo/Bounc'n Cancer), 4:30 p.m.
Condon/Wheeler vs. TBD (at McKen-zie/1A Hoops Classic), 5 p.m.
Stevenson (WA) at Riverside, 5:30 p.m.
Dufur at Echo (Bounc'n Cancer), 6 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Irrigon (Irrigon Invitational), 6 p.m.
Weston-McEwen vs. TBD (at Pendleton Convention Center/Les Schwab Tourney), 7 p.m.
Umatilla vs. TBD (at Salem Academy/Cru-sader New Year's Invite), 7 p.m.
Dufur at Echo (Bounc'n Cancer), 7:30 p.m.

GIRLS' PREP BASKETBALL

Today

lone at Nixyaawii, 6 p.m.
Hermiston vs. Hillsboro (at Lake Oswego/

PREP WRESTLING

Thursday

Willamina/Falls City at Pendleton, 5 p.m.

Friday

Hermiston at The Clash XV (at Rochester,

Nike Interstate Shootout), 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday

Condon/Wheeler vs. Elktion (at McKen-zie/1A Hoops Classic), 11 a.m.
Helix vs. TBD (Helix Holiday Classic), 1 p.m.
Arlington at Country Christian, 3 p.m.
Umatilla vs. Coquille (at Salem Academy/Crusader New Year's Invite), 7 p.m.
Pendleton at Bend (Summit Holiday Tournament), 7:45 p.m.
Hermiston vs. TBD (at Lake Oswego/Nike Interstate Shootout), TBD

Thursday

Heppner vs. Mac-Hi (at Irrigon Invitation-al), Noon
Helix vs. TBD (Helix Holiday Classic), 1 p.m.
Condon/Wheeler vs. TBD (at McKen-zie/1A Hoops Classic), 3 p.m.
South Wasco at Echo (Bounc'n Cancer), 3 p.m.
lone at Riverside, 4 p.m.
Arlington vs. Jordan Valley (at Country Christian/C.C. Invite), 4:30 p.m.
Waitsburg (WA) at Irrigon (Irrigon Invita-tional), 6 p.m.
Nixyaawii vs. South Wasco (at Echo/Bounc'n Cancer), 6 p.m.
Umatilla vs. TBD (at Salem Academy/Cru-sader New Year's Invite), 7 p.m.
Weston-McEwen vs. TBD (at Pendleton Convention Center/Les Schwab Tourney), TBD
Hermiston vs. TBD (at Lake Oswego/Nike Interstate Shootout), TBD
Pendleton vs. TBD (at Summit/Summit Holiday Tournament), TBD

Friday

Heppner vs. Waitsburg (WA) (at Irrigon Invitational), Noon
Condon/Wheeler vs. TBD (at McKen-zie/1A Hoops Classic), 3 p.m.
Nixyaawii vs. Dufur (at Echo/Bounc'n Cancer), 3 p.m.
Stevenson (WA) at Riverside, 4 p.m.
Dufur at Echo (Bounc'n Cancer), 6 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Irrigon (Irrigon Invitational), 6 p.m.
Umatilla vs. TBD (at Salem Academy/Cru-sader New Year's Invite), 7 p.m.
Weston-McEwen vs. TBD (at Pendleton Convention Center/Les Schwab Tourney), TBD
Hermiston vs. TBD (at Lake Oswego/Nike Interstate Shootout), TBD
Pendleton vs. TBD (at Summit/Summit Holiday Tournament), TBD

MEN'S COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Friday

Eastern Oregon at Northwest, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday

Eastern Oregon at The Evergreen State, 7:30 p.m.

WOMEN'S COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Friday

Eastern Oregon at Northwest, 5:30 p.m.

Saturday

Eastern Oregon at The Evergreen State, 5:30 p.m.

Minnesota 7 8 0 .467 289 297
Chicago 3 12 0 .200 269 361

West

W L T Pct PF PA
y-Seattle 9 5 1 .633 329 269
Arizona 6 8 1 .433 374 356
Los Angeles 11 0 .267 218 350
San Francisco 2 13 0 .133 286 455

x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division

Thursday's Games

Philadelphia 24, N.Y. Giants 19

Saturday's Games

New England 41, N.Y. Jets 3
Jacksonville 38, Tennessee 17
Washington 41, Chicago 21
Green Bay 38, Indianapolis 25
Atlanta 20, San Diego 17
Cleveland 33, Carolina 16
Miami 34, Buffalo 31, OT
Oakland 33, Indianapolis 25
New Orleans 31, Tampa Bay 24
San Francisco 22, Los Angeles 21
Arizona 34, Seattle 31
Houston 12, Cincinnati 10

Sunday's Games

Pittsburgh 31, Baltimore 27
Kansas City 33, Denver 10

Monday's Games

Dallas 42, Detroit 21

Sunday, Jan. 1

New England at Miami, 10 a.m.
Caroline at Pittsburgh, 10 a.m.
Cleveland at Tampa Bay, 10 a.m.
Dallas at Philadelphia, 10 a.m.
Houston at Tennessee, 10 a.m.
Buffalo at N.Y. Jets, 10 a.m.
Chicago at Minnesota, 10 a.m.
Baltimore at Cincinnati, 10 a.m.
Jacksonville at Indianapolis, 10 a.m.
Seattle at San Francisco, 1:25 p.m.
New Orleans at Atlanta, 1:25 p.m.
Kansas City at San Diego, 1:25 p.m.
Arizona at Los Angeles, 1:25 p.m.
Oakland at Denver, 1:25 p.m.
N.Y. Giants at Washington, 1:25 p.m.
Green Bay at Detroit, 5:30 p.m.

NCAA

Bowl Game Lineup

Saturday, Dec. 24

Hawaii Bowl

Honolulu
Hawaii 52, Middle Tennessee 35

Monday, Dec. 26

St. Petersburg (Fla.) Bowl
Mississippi 31, Miami (OH) 16

Quick Lane Bowl

Detroit

Boston College 36, Maryland 30

Independence Bowl

Shreveport, La.
NC State 41, Vanderbilt 17

Today

Army (7-5) vs. North Texas (5-7), 9 a.m. (ESPN)

Military Bowl

Annapolis, MD
Wake Forest (6-6) vs. Temple (10-3), 12:30 p.m. (ESPN)

Holiday Bowl

San Diego
Minnesota (8-4) vs. Washington State (8-4), 4 p.m. (ESPN)

Cactus Bowl

Phoenix
Boise State (10-2) vs. Baylor (6-6), 7:15 p.m. (ESPN)

Basketball

NBA

Sunday's Games

Boston 119, New York 114
Cleveland 109, Golden State 108
San Antonio 119, Chicago 100
Oklahoma City 112, Minnesota 100
L.A. Lakers 111, L.A. Clippers 102

Monday's Games

Orlando 112, Memphis 102
Washington 107, Milwaukee 102
Brooklyn 120, Charlotte 118
Detroit 106, Cleveland 90
Houston 131, Indiana 85
Chicago 131, Phoenix 115
Minnesota 104, Atlanta 90
New Orleans 111, Dallas 104
Toronto 95, Portland 91
Denver 106, L.A. Clippers 102
Sacramento 102, Philadelphia 100

Today's Games

Memphis at Boston, 4:30 p.m.
Oklahoma City at Miami, 4:30 p.m.
Houston at Dallas, 5:30 p.m.
Utah at L.A. Lakers, 7:30 p.m.

NCAA

Men's Top 25

USA Today Top 25 Poll

The top 25 teams in the USA Today men's college basketball poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, records through Dec. 25, points based on 25 points for a first-place vote through one point for a 25th-place vote and previous ranking:

Record

Pts

Pvs

1. Villanova (27) 12-0 771 1
2. UCLA (2) 13-0 736 2

3. Kansas (1) 11-1 695 3
4. Baylor 12-0 656 6
5. Duke (1) 12-1 641 4
6. Gonzaga 12-0 600 7
7. Louisville 11-1 560 11
8. Kentucky 10-2 537 8
9. Creighton 12-0 531 9
10. North Carolina 11-2 522 8
11. Virginia 10-1 454 10
12. West Virginia 11-1 438 12
13. Butler 11-1 397 12
14. Wisconsin 11-2 347 14
15. Purdue 11-2 331 15
16. Indiana 10-2 285 16
17. Xavier 10-2 277 17
18. Arizona 11-2 232 18
19. Saint Mary's 10-1 214 19
20. Florida State 12-1 161 22
21. Oregon 11-2 148 21
22. Southern Cal 13-0 136 25
23. Cincinnati 10-2 93 23
24. Notre Dame 10-2 92 24
25. South Carolina 9-2 57 20

Others receiving votes: Florida 37, Maryland 33, Arkansas 27, Oklahoma State 12, Miami 13, California 7, Minnesota 7, TCU 7, Seton Hall 4, Virginia Tech 4, Nevada 3, Colorado 2, Middle Tennessee 1, New Mexico State 1, UNC-Wilmington 1.

Monday's Games

No games scheduled

Today's Games

No. 14 Wisconsin vs. Rutgers, 4 p.m.

Women's Top 25

Monday's Games

No games scheduled

Today's Games

No. 2 Notre Dame at Chattanooga, 3:30 p.m.
No. 9 Washington vs. Washington St., 7 p.m.
No. 16 Texas vs. Kent State, 4 p.m.
No. 22 Oregon State vs. Arkansas-Pine Bluff, 6 p.m.

Hockey

NHL

Monday's Games

No games scheduled

Today's Games

Today at N.Y. Rangers, 4 p.m.
Washington at N.Y. Islanders, 4 p.m.
Pittsburgh at New Jersey, 4 p.m.
Boston at Columbus, 4 p.m.
Buffalo at Detroit, 4:30 p.m.
Minnesota at Nashville, 5 p.m.
Winnipeg at Chicago, 5:30 p.m.
Dallas at Arizona, 6 p.m.
Calgary at Colorado, 6 p.m.
San Jose at Anaheim, 7 p.m.