

College Football

Washington relishes underdog role against No. 1 Alabama

By PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

Peach Bowl



#4 Washington Huskies
(12-1)



#1 Alabama Crimson Tide
(13-0)

- Saturday, Noon
- at Georgia Dome, Atlanta
- TV: ESPN

ATLANTA — Overlooked in the College Football Playoff, the Washington Huskies know what's expected of them. One-and-done against mighty Alabama.

Actually, after spending a few days in Atlanta, they sort of understand the logic.

Now on Eastern time, some of the Huskies tried to stay up late watching Boise State — coach Chris Petersen's former school — play in the Cactus Bowl.

"It's been 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning when some of these games have been on," moaned Washington cornerback Kevin King. "I wouldn't be up every day watching them. When you're playing those later games, everybody out here (on the East Coast) is asleep. Maybe they don't know about West Coast football. But everybody will be watching come Saturday."

That's when fourth-seeded Washington (12-1) takes on No. 1 and heavily favored Alabama (13-0) in the Peach Bowl semifinal game.

The Tide opened as an 11-point pick, and the line has since climbed to 14 points. The Huskies are by far the biggest underdog in the three-year history of the playoff; in fact, it's the

largest spread for a game that will go toward determining the national champion since the launch of the Bowl Championship Series — a one-game matchup between the two highest-ranked teams — back in 1998.

Having reveled in the underdog role all year long, Washington hopes to use the double-digit odds as further incentive to shock Alabama, and the rest of the nation.

"We won this many games for a reason," said Sidney Jones, another Huskies defensive back. "Not many teams could do this."

Washington can certainly appreciate what a difficult journey this has been.

A national powerhouse under Don James, the Huskies spent much of the past two decades trying to rediscover their swagger. They burned through five coaches and managed just one major bowl appearance, a Rose Bowl victory at the end of the 2000 season. When things were



Washington cheers after the CSX train gives them a toot during Washington's Peach Bowl practice window, Wednesday, Dec. 28, 2016, at Georgia State's football facility in Atlanta, Ga.

especially grim, Washington endured six straight losing seasons — including an 0-12 debacle in 2008.

Enter Petersen, who took over in 2014 after transforming Boise State into the little school that could compete with the big boys. The turnaround took a while — the Huskies went 8-6 in his inaugural season and limped to a 7-6 mark a year ago — but it all fell into place this season.

Respect took even longer. When the first CFP rankings came out at the beginning of November, Washington was 8-0 but stuck at No. 5 — behind a one-loss Texas A&M team. For Petersen, that played right into the us-against-the-world mindset that worked so well at Boise State.

"A lot of the guys were angry and stuff," remembered Budda Baker, the Huskies' star safety. "They

were like, 'How can you put this team ahead of us? We're undefeated,' and all that type of stuff. But coach Pete came in, had a team meeting and just talked about how that's exactly the way we like it."

It all worked out in the end, of course. Even after a loss at home to Southern Cal, the Huskies claimed their playoff spot with an impressive win over Washington State to close the regular season and a blowout

of Colorado in the Pac-12 championship game.

Now, they're outsiders again.

Alabama is the defending national champion and in the playoff for the third year in a row. The other semifinal will match Ohio State, which won it all two years ago, against Clemson, last season's runner-up, in the Fiesta Bowl.

"Nobody's thinking about Washington," Baker said, actually not sounding all that worked up about the perceived slight. Petersen "always talks about that type of stuff. Let all the media and everyone else talk about the other team. You work on what you need to work on."

Besides, the odds-makers won't have any say in the outcome of the game.

If it's any consolation to the Huskies, the underdog prevailed in half of the games over the first two years of the playoff — including Ohio State against nine-point favorite Alabama in the inaugural semifinals.

"I'm just glad we can still play the game at the end of the day," offensive guard Jake Eldrenkamp quipped. "If it was up to the media, I don't think we'd have a chance. The nice thing about football is once you start the game, everything is equal on the playing field."



In this Tuesday, Aug. 30, 2016 file photo, Ana Ivanovic of Serbia serves during the first round of the U.S. Open tennis tournament in New York.

Tennis

Former No. 1 Ana Ivanovic retires at 29

Associated Press

LONDON — Ana Ivanovic retired from tennis at age 29 Wednesday, ending a career in which she was ranked No. 1 in 2008 but can no longer play at the highest level because of injuries.

In a live broadcast on Facebook, Ivanovic said "it was a difficult decision, but there is so much to celebrate." The Serb won 15 tour titles, including the 2008

French Open, and is now ranked No. 63.

"It's been well-known that I've been hampered by injuries. ... I can only play if I can perform up to my own high standards and I can no longer do that," she said. "So it's time to move on."

Ivanovic became a UNICEF national ambassador for Serbia in 2007 and says that position will figure in her plans.

"I will become an ambas-

sador of sport and healthy life. I will also explore opportunities in business, beauty and fashion among other endeavors," she said on her Facebook page. "I will also have more time for my philanthropic activities with my work with UNICEF. I've lived my dreams and I really hope to help others do so as well."

A finalist at Roland Garros in 2007 and the Australian Open in 2008, Ivanovic lost in the first round of this year's

U.S. Open to 89th-ranked Denisa Allertova of the Czech Republic. It was her second consecutive exit in the first round at Flushing Meadows.

Ivanovic announced a week later she would take the rest of the season off because of wrist and toe injuries, saying she had a recurring wrist injury and would also have surgery on a toe she broke at the Australian Open in January 2015.

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