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**UW, like Cal, is unranked in both polls. Sagarin says Cal is #42 and UW is #56, predicting a Cal victory by roughly 6.5 points including the 3 point home advantage; Sagarin also says Cal has played the 14th-toughest schedule this year; UW has played the 56th-toughest.**

Sagarin rates 5-6 Cal as the 4th strongest team in the Pac-10 above four teams with .500 records or better. UW is 8th in the conference ahead of only ASU and [Arizona](#)... though the #3 through #8 teams are close together (#37-56) and there is a big drop between UW and ASU, and a huge gulf between ASU (#67) and U of A (#101).

Like [Oregon](#), UW has been inconsistent this year. They blew out Oregon and [Oregon State](#) but got killed by [UCLA](#) and [USC](#), and they lost to Arizona and [Nevada](#). If their record is a repeatable pattern, it's likely they will blow out Cal this week--their last five games were thus:

- big loss to Nevada (home)
- big win over @ Oregon State
- big loss to USC (home)
- big win over Oregon (home)
- big loss @ Arizona

(I categorize the last one as "big" because the Huskies were favored by 16+.)

Statistically, UW looks like the slightly better team. They are third in the conference in pass offense (279 ypg) and total offense (412 ypg) and fifth in scoring offense (27.8 ppg). Their rushing offense is 6th (132 ypg). Their pass efficiency is high (123.7, 5th). They match up well against the Bears who are 9th in pass efficiency defense, 8th in total defense (387 ypg), 8th in rushing defense (146 ypg) and 5th in passing defense (241 ypg). The Bears are just 6th in scoring defense, giving up 24.5 points per game.

UW is -3 in turnovers with 10 interceptions versus 11 passing TDs and 10 fumbles lost. They also tend to give up more sacks than average, but not dramatically so.

UW has a tremendous number of first downs, with an amazing number of them (32) by penalty. UW also has the highest ranking in opponent penalties and is the third least-penalized team in the Pac. (Cal is still the least penalized.) They are also best in the league in 3rd-down conversion (43%) and third in the league in 4th-down conversion (50%).

UW's statistical offensive weakness is red zone productivity--they are just 7th at 73.8% scoring (31 of 42 chances, 22 of them TDs). They have had four turnovers in the red zone; only UCLA and WSU have more (which may show that that stat is not too meaningful).

The Huskies' leading rusher, TB [Rich Alexis](#) (4th in the Pac-10 with 566 rushing yards), remains out with a tear in his thigh. He missed both the Oregon win and the Arizona loss. Against Arizona, the Huskies rushed for just 101 yards on 35 carries. Against Oregon, they rushed for 261 yards on 41 carries; in that game, they had two 100-yard rushers ([Shelton Sampson](#) and [Kenny James](#)).

UW appears to go the way of their running game. In their five losses, here's how they ran:

- 7 yards on 24 attempts vs [Ohio State](#) (0.29 yards per carry)
- 77 yards on 31 attempts vs UCLA (2.5 ypc)
- 110 yards on 48 attempts vs Nevada (2.29 ypc)
- 87 yards on 32 carries vs USC (2.72 ypc)
- 101 yards on 35 carries vs Arizona (2.89 ypc)

In their wins, here's how they ran:

- 195 yards on 52 carries vs [Indiana](#) (3.75 ypc)
- 231 yards on 49 carries vs [Idaho](#) (4.71 ypc)
- 165 yards on 40 carries vs [Stanford](#) (4.13 ypc)
- 89 yards on 37 carries vs OSU (2.41 ypc)

261 yards on 41 carries vs Oregon (6.37 ypc)

With the exception of the Oregon State game, when they are held under 3 yards per carry, they lose. Clearly, when their running game is working well, they stick with it and tend to win. They average 44 rushing attempts in their wins and just 34 attempts in their losses. In the red zone, 14 of their 22 TDs are by the run; just 8 are by the pass. This is clearly a running team that perhaps can not count on their passing game to pull out a victory when they're behind.

Defensively, the Huskies are also pretty strong. They're 5th in scoring defense (24.3 ppg), 3rd in pass defense (230 ypg), 5th in total defense (359 ypg) and 7th in rushing defense (129 ypg). This is again a good matchup for them if Echemandu is hobbled--he is day-to-day with an ankle sprain and could be a serious problem for them if he were healthy. In addition, Cal's offensive line is nicked up, so the running game may not be as powerful as it has been.

UW has given up 14 passing TDs but collected 11 interceptions--not great, but not bad either. They are 5th in pass defense efficiency, allowing opponents to complete 51.6% of their passes at 7.5 yards per attempt (on the high side). Cal, meanwhile, is #2 in passing efficiency--20 TDs to just 7 interceptions, 59.4% completion. UW has given up 32 touchdowns, 14 by pass, 14 by rush, and 4 by other (I presume defensive TDs, but it's not in the stats I'm looking at).

This game will showcase the league's only two (current) 1,000-yard receivers in [Reggie Williams](#) and [Geoff McArthur](#). Williams has 78 receptions in 10 games, 8 TDs, and 1,027 yards receiving; McArthur has 63 receptions in 11 games, 7 TDs, and 1,079 yards. Both are juniors. Williams has had stellar games in all but the Nevada (loss) and Oregon State (win) games and is 2nd nationally in receiving yards per game. As good as Williams is, he will get his yards and maybe even TDs, but he will not be the key to the game.

I think the Huskies are a team Cal can pass against, and if Echemandu can be productive, or if O'Keith and Arrington can fill in credibly, then the Bears will have some offensive success. The absolute key to this game is going to be Cal's run defense. If the Bears can stop UW's running game, then they will win. If they can not stop the Huskies' rush, then they will lose. I actually do think it's that simple. If it's close, then perhaps it comes down to special teams...

UW is not great in KO returns, but they are best in the Pac in punt returns at 11.4 yards per return. They've scored one TD on a punt return. Cal is 2nd in the league with 10.7 yards per return, and the Bears have returned two punts for TDs. Both UW and Cal are similar on punting and punt coverage, with a slight edge to the Huskies. On field goals, UW has hit only 59%, Cal only 55%. Fredrickson has been improving over the past few games, however, so the edge in field goal kicking might go to the Bears. Fredrickson is one of only three Pac-10 kickers with 100% PAT kicking (UW has missed three PAT kicks).

In the intangibles, I think neither team has an advantage. Cal MUST win to keep their bowl hopes and hopes for a winning season alive. UW still has some wiggle room, but they host WSU next week, and they don't want that game to be a must-win. It's likely that whoever wins this game will end up in the Las Vegas Bowl on Christmas Eve. The whole Gilbertson thing doesn't mean anything to any of the players on either side and is more of an amusing sidelight. More important is last year's Cal victory, which the Huskies will be hungry to avenge. But the Bears are at home after two tough road games and will have motivation of their own.

Overall, I think this game remains close, and I am bitterly disappointed in the networks for not seeing what a great matchup this is going to be. ASU at WSU? USC at Arizona? Boring by the third quarter. UW at Cal? Exciting to the finish, possibly into overtime. Bigger markets than ASU/WSU. I don't get it except that TBS maybe just wanted to go to the nationally-ranked team for a nationally-televised game. Too bad.

I expect the Huskies to bring a boatload of fans to the game and possibly out-yell the Cal fans. They average nearly twice as many fans at home (71,000+) as the Bears do (38,000+). This may not have an effect on the game, though, as anything will be better for the Bears than what they had to endure in Oregon last week--that stadium looked raucous.

I think this game will be close. I think the Huskies will be able to get right around 3 yards per carry, but it won't be quite enough to do in the Bears, who will hang tough in the red zone. The Bears will be able to pass against the Huskies, and the running game will be just enough to keep the passing game productive. I think this game goes into overtime, and the Bears win on a Fredrickson kick and a Cal defensive stop (possibly a turnover). First overtime Cal 31, Huskies 28, TBS 0.

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