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Big Game Forecast

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Keep the Axe, Bears!

**Stanford, like Cal, is unranked in all the polls. Sagarin rates Cal #33 (78.11 points) and Stanford #66 (71.21 points). This would put Cal a 4-point favorite by Sagarin's formula. The oddsmakers put Cal out as a 10-point favorite.**

Statistically, there is no real comparison between these two teams. Their records would indicate fairly evenly-matched opponents, but the stats say otherwise. [Stanford](#) has a fair-to-bad defense and a woeful offense. Cal has a fair defense and a fair-to-powerful offense.

Stanford has played just nine games to Cal's 12. In conference, Cal missed WSU but Stanford had to play them; Cal got [Arizona](#) but Stanford missed them. Even if we assume Cal would have lost to WSU and Stanford would have beaten Arizona, that would put Cal at 4-4 and Stanford at 3-5 in conference.

Out of conference, Cal's schedule was BY FAR tougher. Stanford has played just two non-conference games: SJSU at home and [BYU](#) on the road. Stanford would have lost to struggling BYU if not for a late interception.

Cal scores 31.4 points a game to Stanford's 18.1 ppg. Cal gives up 23 ppg to Stanford's 26.6 ppg. But let's look at that a little closer:

Cal has suffered no real blowouts. Largest margin of defeat was 14, to heavily favored [Kansas State](#) and to bowl-bound [Oregon State](#). Stanford, however, has suffered three real doozies: 23 points at [USC](#), 35 points at [Oregon](#), and 40 points at Oregon State (all bowl teams). One interesting fact jumps out upon further examination, however: Stanford is 3-1 at home, with their only loss by 10 points to heavily favored WSU. All their blowout losses have been on the road. They are a much different team at home than on the road. Stanford gives up just 19 ppg at home but 33 ppg on the road. Conversely, they score 26 ppg at home and just 12 ppg on the road. Part of that is schedule--their away conference games were all tough road games: UW, USC, Oregon, OSU. Their home games were SJSU, WSU, [UCLA](#), and ASU. WSU is the only tough opponent (UCLA has lost three straight after three very close victories).

Cal is also a better team at home. They are just 2-4 on the road (including the close call at [Illinois](#)), and they're 4-2 at home (including the near miss against [Colorado State](#)). They could easily be 5-1 at home and 1-5 on the road. The Bears score 34 ppg at home but just 24 ppg on the road. The defense is more even, giving up 20 ppg on the road but 19 ppg at home. That said, four of their road losses were by a touchdown or less, and one was in overtime. Also, Cal has improved steadily over the season while Stanford has been erratic. Cal's defense has given up 30 or more points on times, but they have held opponents under 24 in their last five games. Similarly, the Cal offense has scored 40 or more points in three of their last four games, eclipsing the 50 mark twice.

When looking at common opponents, UCLA is the aberration in the pattern. Here are the results by opponent:

UCLA: Stanford 7 point win at home; Cal 3 point loss in OT on the road

Oregon: Stanford 35-point loss on the road; Cal 3 point loss on the road

USC: Stanford 23-point loss on the road; Cal 3-point win in OT at home

ASU: Stanford 11-point win at home; Cal 28-point win on the road

OSU: Stanford 40-point loss on the road; Cal 14-point loss at home

UW: Stanford 11-point loss on the road; Cal 47-point win at home

UCLA is the only common opponent that Stanford did better against. In the other five matchups, Cal did better, often significantly better.

Overall, Stanford has scored 76 points fewer than their opponents, or 8.44 ppg less than opponents. Cal has scored 101 MORE points than opponents, or 8.42 points better than opponents.

If this game is played in Berkeley, there is no doubt that Cal would walk away on the good side of an old-fashioned blowout. But it's down on the farm, and Stanford is strangely a very different team at home this year, as shown by their record and points per game averages. That said, is there really any "home field" advantage for either team in this game? Stanford draws 38,000+ a home game, same as Cal. It's likely to be a 50-50 crowd (or more likely

a 38-38 crowd). In fact, it may be more blue than red because of Cal's big win over UW and Stanford's poor performance this season. Things are quiet on the Farm.

In other statistical analysis, we can largely say that the numbers do count at this point in the season because the two teams have faced six common opponents. The schedules are roughly similar because Cal faced K State while Stanford faced WSU, and Cal played Arizona and Illinois while Stanford lined up against [San Jose State](#) and BYU. So let's look:

Offensively, the Bears are a FAR SUPERIOR team to Stanford. The Cardinal are near last in all statistical categories in the Pac-10. They are 9th in scoring offense at just 18.1 ppg and 2.3 touchdowns per game. Similarly, they are 9th in rushing offense with just 106.3 yards per game and 1.1 rushing TDs per game. They average a league-worst 2.7 yards per carry.

Their passing offense is no better. Ninth again, they get just 180.1 yards per game and a league-worst 10.7 yards per catch and 5 yards per attempt. They get an average of one passing TD per game, again 9th in the league. They have given up 16 interceptions to just 9 touchdowns passing. Not good. Not good at all. Finally, their completion percentage of 46.7% just barely beats Arizona's 45.2% for 9th in the league. The Cardinal are last in pass efficiency.

Stanford is dead last in total offense at 286.4 yards per game. They are the ONLY Pac-10 team to average less than 4 yards per play. To put their yardage into perspective, [Geoff McArthur](#) and [Adimchinobe Echemandu](#) have combined for 2,477 yards from scrimmage in 12 games (206.4 yards per game). Stanford as a team has combined for 2,576 yards in 9 games (286.4 yards per game).

Stanford is not efficient on 3rd or 4th down, converting just 35.4% of 3rd downs (8th) and 20% of 4th downs (last). Additionally, they are 8th in getting sacked, at 2.8 sacks allowed per game. Not only that, but their 7.6 yards per getting-sacked average is 2nd worst in the league. Finally, Stanford achieves just 17 first downs per game, 8th in the league (the league average is 19.4 per game).

Cal, on the other hand, is a powerful offense. Fourth in the league in scoring offense (31.4 ppg), they average 4.0 TDs per game. Only USC has more TDs per game (a whopping 5.1). The bears are 2nd in the conference in rushing offense with 170.5 yards per game and 1.8 TDs rushing TDs per game. Their 4.4 yards per carry is second only to USC's 4.7, and no other team averages more than 3.5 yards per carry. Outstanding.

Cal's passing offense is less impressive. Just 7th in the conference at 246 yards per game, they average an impressive 1.9 passing TDs per game (4th best) and have an average 13.1 yards per catch (7.8 per attempt). On the other hand, Cal has the 2nd-fewest attempts per game; only Arizona has fewer pass attempts per game than the Bears. Also, Cal's passing attack is the second most efficient behind USC's; 59.4% completion is 2nd in the conference, and 23 TDs to just 7 interceptions is very impressive.

In total offense, the Bears are 3rd in the Pac-10 with 416.5 yards per game. This is 130 yards per game more than Stanford. Cal also boasts a 5.9 yards-per-play average, second only to USC's outstanding 6.6. The differences between these two offenses is astounding, and it keys off the power of the rushing offense's high yards per carry average.

Cal is good at avoiding sacks, 3rd in the conference at just 2.08 allowed per game and a league-best 5.24 yards per sack allowed. The Bears are efficient on 3rd downs, converting 39.9% of the time (2nd in the league). In addition, they have the 2nd-fewest 3rd down attempts per game at just 14 (league average is 15.5). Stanford has by far the most 3rd down attempts per game at 17.6. The Bears are also fairly efficient on 4th down, converting 45.5% of the time. The Bears have the 4th-most first downs per game (21.9).

On defense, stopping the rush is Stanford's strong spot, if they can be said to have a strong spot. Sixth in the conference in rushing defense, they allow only 113.2 yards per game and 3.6 yards per carry (also 6th best in the league). This, in fact, is the only major statistical category in which Stanford is better than Cal (the Bears are 7th at 136.8 yards per game allowed on the ground). They allowed SJSU only 9 yards rushing, and they pushed BYU backwards for -5 yards rushing. In the Pac-10, however, they average 145 yards given up rushing, which would bump them past Cal into 7th.

Their passing defense is atrocious, last in the league, worse even than Arizona. They average 300.9 yards per game and 2 passing TDs per game given up. Their yards per catch given up is not so bad at 12.7 (4th in the league), and yards per attempt (6.9) is 5th in the league. They do, however, face the highest number of attempts per game at 45 per game and have the league's 5th best completion percentage defense (opponents complete 52.8% of their passes). Only two other teams face more than 40 pass attempts per game. Is this due to their strong rushing defense or their weak passing defense?

Stanford is 9th in total defense at 414 yards per game, 5.4 yards per play. In scoring defense, Stanford is 6th, giving up 3.4 TDs per game and 26.6 points per game overall.

Stanford gives up a lot of first downs (20.3 per game, league average is 18.9) and has very few sacks (2.22 per game, though their yards per sack is highest in the conference (7.65 yards per sack).

Cal's defense is similar but slightly better. The Bears' passing defense is 5th in the conference at 242.6 yards per game (56 yards better than Stanford). They give up an average of 13.1 yards per catch (5th) and 7.3 yards per attempt (7th). Cal has the 3rd worst opponent completion percentage--opponents complete 55.8% of their passes.

Against the rush, the Bears are 7th at 136.8 yards per game (23 ypg worse than the Cardinal). That's 3.7 yards per attempt, also 7th in the league. In total defense, the Bears again give up a lot of yards per play--5.4 yards per play, same as Stanford. They give up 379.4 yards per game, only 35 yards a game better than Stanford. Similarly, they are 5th in the conference in scoring defense, giving up 23 ppg and 2.9 TDs per game.

The Bears give up 19.9 first downs a game, 7th in the league, but they are good at getting sacks. They have 2.9 sacks per game and a high per-sack average of 7.51 yards per sack (second behind Stanford). The Bears are not great at stopping 3rd or 4th down conversions. Cal is also not good at forcing opponents into third-down situations (opponents attempted just 14.4 third downs a game against the bears, the lowest total in the league). It is probably not a stretch to say that the Bears, who give up a lot of first downs, are allowing teams to get that 10th yard on first or 2nd down a lot of the

time.

The Bears are also superior in the red zone on both sides of the ball. On offense, Cal has climbed to 2nd after being near the bottom of the Pac in their first few games. They now convert on 92% of their chances, with 50% of those being touchdowns. Stanford converts on just 74% of their chances, with about 55% being touchdowns. The Cardinal have 31 chances in 9 games (3.4 per game), while Cal has 45 chances in 12 games (3.75 per game).

Turnover margin is not really a factor. The Bears are +5 on the season, and Stanford is +1. Stanford is excellent at forcing and recovering fumbles, but they suck at giving up interceptions. (This is not to say that turnovers will not be a factor in the game; Cal gets interceptions and Stanford throws them, while the Bears have had a few fumbles and Stanford is great at grabbing them.)

All this adds up to a fairly similar defense for both teams, but a hugely stronger offense for Cal. Add in the home/away factor, and the stats are closer, but still pretty weighted in favor of the Bears. In addition, the Bears do all the little things that win games--sacks, third down efficiency on offense, red zone efficiency.

The only other real difference between the teams is kickoff coverage. Stanford is excellent in this department, best in the league. This is odd, though, as the unit doesn't get much work... Stanford has had just 36 kickoffs (26 returned for just 13.8 yards per return). the Bears have had 75 kickoffs (41 returned for 20.2 yards per return). It's hard to read much into this, however--it may mean that Stanford's kicker can't kick deep, so the returns are short but field position is not great, or it may mean that the coverage team is fast and awesome. Most of Cal's kickoffs seem to end up around the 20-25 yard line, so it appears the kickoff coverage is adequate and Fredrickson is doing a good job here.

All in all, if we do not consider the Big Game's X Factor, the Bears win this game 19 times out of 20. Stanford is a reasonably good team at home but has yet to beat a good offense at home. Cal is not great on the road, but the offense is on a tear and does well in pressure situations, and they NEED this game even more than they needed the UW game. The Cal defense has been solid--not great, but solid and improving--over the past five games, and they've kept the team in position to win in all five games (UCLA and Oregon were the losses).

I am certain the Bears will hold Stanford under 24 points. I THINK the Bears will hold them under 18 points. I also think the Cal offense will face a determined Stanford defense, but the Bears will also be determined and explosive. I expect the Bears to score many points.

At the risk of sounding like I'm woofing, I am going to predict that Cal keeps the Axe and becomes bowl-eligible with a dominating performance, winning 31 to 17.

Go Bears!  
Give 'em the Axe!

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