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 Cal - Texas Tech Preview

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 Guest Writer
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OVERALL RANKINGS:

Cal: # 4 AP, # 4 ESPN, # 5 BCS, # 3 Sagarin

TT: #23 AP, #21 ESPN, #22 BCS, #19 Sagarin

RECORDS

Cal: 10-1, 7-1 Pac-10

TT: 7-4, 5-3 Big 12

SCHEDULES:

Sagarin rates Cal's schedule the 16th most difficult.

Sagarin rates Tech's schedule the 15th most difficult.

Cal's only loss was to #1 [USC](#), 23-17. Had any number of wrong things gone right in that game, they'd have won (Lyman's injury, incomplete pass at the end, missed field goal, bad kicking game). Wins over bowl teams included [Oregon State](#), [UCLA](#), ASU, [Southern Miss](#). Three other Cal opponents just missed the bowl party by ending up 5-6: [Air Force](#), NMSU, and [Oregon](#).

[Texas Tech](#) lost to [Texas A&M](#) 32-25 OT, Texas 51-21, [Oklahoma](#) 28-13, and [New Mexico](#) 27-24. They beat OK State, [Baylor](#), K State, [Nebraska](#), [Kansas](#), [TCU](#), and [SMU](#). With a couple of breaks, Tech could easily be 9-2, with losses only to Oklahoma and Texas. Tech's bowl-bound opponents were OK State (win), A&M (loss), Texas (loss), Oklahoma (loss), New Mexico (loss). Only Nebraska, whom they beat 70-10, was on the cusp of a bowl at 5-6.

Overall, I would say that Tech played a strong schedule very well, but they missed out on a couple of wins they could have had. Cal played a similar schedule but did get those wins, in convincing fashion. And, just as the Bears had a scare against Oregon, Tech beat Kansas by only one point (31-30) after being down 30-11 at halftime.

STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE

Both teams have outstanding offenses scoring more than 35 points per game. Cal is a run-dominated offense, and Tech is a pass-dominated offense. There are differences in how they do it, however:

Cal has scored 26 points in every game but USC, and the Bears scored 40 or more six times. Only USC, ASU, Oregon, and USM held the Bears under 38 points. Their 37 points per game pretty much reflects their consistency. Tech, however, hung SEVENTY points on two different opponents: Nebraska and TCU. Otherwise, they tend to hover around 30 per game. They've been held to 25 points or fewer four times, but they've scored fewer than 21 only once (13 against Oklahoma). They, too, are very consistent.

Tech is a one-dimensional offense, but they are very good in that dimension. Although they've gained only 1,027 net yards rushing as a team, they have a phenomenal 389 yards per game passing (4,276 yards passing in 11 games). They have attempted 591 passes and have 31 passing TDs to 18 interceptions.

Such a pass-oriented offense begs a comparison to Oregon State or [Arizona State](#), two familiar one-dimensional offenses that Cal has faced. OSU has the most pass attempts in the Pac-1 at 487 (104 fewer than Tech). ASU has the most passing yards at 3,438 (312 per game). Tech gets more than 75 more yards passing PER GAME than the top Pac-10 team. Additionally, Tech has 203 first downs by the pass but only 62 on the ground. That's a lot of first downs (Cal has 246, not including by penalty).

Tech has rushed just 272 times to complement their 591 pass attempts. Cal has passed just 289 times to complement their 470 rushing attempts. The result: Cal is overall a more efficient offense, scoring more touchdowns (53 to Tech's 51), gaining more yards (5,442 to Tech's 5,303), having a higher completion percentage (67.5% to Tech's 65.5%), having higher average per pass attempt (8.9 yards per attempt to Tech's 7.2), having higher average yards per catch (13.2 yards to Tech's 11.0), better TD-to-interception ratio (Cal has 26 passing TDs and only 7 interceptions, to Tech's 31 passing TDs and 18 interceptions) and controlling the clock better (Cal has TOP of 32:47 to Tech's 29:42). Yet Cal has lost 10 fumbles while Tech has lost just five.

It should be noted, however, that Tech was much more balanced in their final two games than the rest of the season. In their final three games, they rushed for 158, 117, and 155 yards. In the last two games, they passed for only 294 and 281 yards, the only times they've been under 300. Tech passed for over 350 in all but one other game and for over 400 in six games. This balance came against two bowl-bound teams (A&M, loss; and OK State, win).

Both teams are efficient on 3rd down (Cal 45.5%, Tech 47%) and 4th down (Cal 55.6%, Tech 41%). Tech, despite their number of pass attempts, has been sacked only 26 times (Cal has been sacked 22 times). Yet they also suffer a lot of penalties (102 on the year to Cal's 66).

Tech has outscored opponents in the 4th quarter 133-73 this year, with deficits in that quarter against only Texas and New Mexico (UNM came back from 24-21 at the end of the 3rd quarter to win by 3, in the only game in which TT did not score in the 4th, their 2nd game of the season). Similarly, Cal has outscored opponents 127-27 in the 4th quarter and 210-46 in the second half. The first halves for both teams are much less lopsided: Tech gets outscored 145-139 in the first half while Cal holds an edge of 200-101.

This is going to be a battle of two VERY good offenses. Both teams improve throughout the game, so no lead appears safe, and this could be a very exciting game. (Not quite the Insight.com Bowl fireworks we saw last year, but exciting.) I think Cal has the edge in the second half because of the power running game. They have more of an ability to control the clock and dictate tempo. Tech does not really have that option. If Tech builds a decent lead, however, the Bears will have to mix it up and rely on the depleted receiving crew to gain some yards.

The real question then is, how do the defenses match up against the offenses?

DEFENSIVE

Cal holds a strong statistical advantage over the Red Raiders on defense. The Bears give up only 13.4 points per game and have shut out two teams. Only three teams have scored more than 16 points against the Bears (USC 23, UCLA 28, and Oregon 27), and no team has yet scored 30.

The Bears shut out the Pac-10's top passing attack (ASU) and held the Pac-10's second-best passing attack (OSU) to just 7 points and zero passing TDs. Although Cal allows a relatively high 12.9 yards per catch, they hold opponents to just 49.7% completions, so they hold opponents to a low 6.4 yards per attempt. Cal has allowed only 14 passing TDs and collected 10 interceptions.

Tech, meanwhile, gives up 25.7 points per game. They've held four opponents under 18 points, but they've also given up 30 or more four times (including 51 to Texas). All their bowl-bound opponents scored 27 or more except OK State in their final game (just 15 points).

It's hard to see any real patterns leaping out from the stats to determine what type of game plan can consistently defeat the Red Raiders. Oklahoma, Texas, and A&M (all Tech losses) had strong rushing days against Tech, though so did SMU, K State, Baylor, and OK State (all Tech wins). Oklahoma stuck Tech for 221 yards rushing on 40 carries, and Texas pounded them for 351 yards and 5 rushing TDs on 71 carries. Tech has held just two opponents under 150 yards rushing (both wins).

Overall, however, the matchup favors the Bears. Tech gives up 172 yards per game rushing and 4.2 yards per carry, both of which would be in the bottom three of the Pac-10. In passing defense, they are more stingy, statistically similar to the Bears: They allow about 50% pass completion, a low 5.7 yards per pass attempt, 11.3 yards per catch, and have allowed just 12 passing TDs while collecting 10 interceptions. Their pass defense of 175 yards per game would be best in the Pac-10. Statistically, their defense is probably closest to Oregon State's in the Pac-10, except OSU has a slightly better rushing defense.

Cal's defense, however, has done very well against pass-oriented offenses. Cal held ASU to 238 yards passing and zero points, and they held OSU to 211 yards passing while collecting two interceptions. They gave up their worst defensive games, however, to more balanced teams that hurt them through the air: UCLA whacked the Bears for 299 yards passing and 4 TDs while Oregon also got 4 TDs but only 211 yards passing. [Washington](#) and Southern Miss both hit the Bears for more than 300 yards passing but scored only 14 points through the air combined. I think this phenomenon is a side effect of the Bears relying so much on their safeties--two of Cal's three leading tacklers are Gutierrez and Giordano. Against balanced or run-oriented teams, these guys have their minds more on the line of scrimmage, looking for a ball carrier, slowing their reactions to the pass. Against one-dimensional, passing offenses, they look for the pass first and break up plays.

In terms of yards, Cal's pass defense is not outstanding. Yet here again they are tremendously efficient. They give up 213 yards per game passing, but they are one of only two Pac-10 teams holding opponents under 50% completion, and they have 10 interceptions against 14 TDs allowed. Considering 8 of those TDs were to Oregon and UCLA and 2 more were to USC, they are pretty good overall.

On the ground, the Bears have allowed just four rushing TDs TOTAL, and only one in the past EIGHT GAMES (Southern Miss scored that one). They have not had a game where they gave up two rushing TDs. Between the first quarter of the Oregon State game and the 4th quarter of the USM game, Cal did not allow one single rushing touchdown. In addition, they've held four opponents to fewer than 50 yards rushing, including their last two games. JJ Arrington had more yards rushing against Southern Miss (261) than Cal's last three opponents did combined (131) and if that bogus penalty hadn't been called, you could have throw in Oregon's total as well to make it the last four opponents.

PERSONNEL

Tech's O line is big, averaging nearly 310 pounds. They have a very big center at 300 pounds. The LT, LG, and C are all seniors, and the RT is a junior (RG is a big sophomore, 324 pounds). I have no doubt these guys are great at pass blocking. They've given up only 26 sacks on nearly 600 passing

attempts. It's no wonder that QB [Sonny Cumbie](#) is the nation's leading passer. Cal's D line is no bunch of little guys, though, averaging 285 with two 300-pounders in Alexander and Sverchek, and speedy Riddle the small fry at 250 pounds.

On the other side, Cal's O line is similarly large, averaging 312 pounds (only pipsqueak [Marvin Philip](#), at 280, brings the average down... without him, the others are a beefy 320 pounds). Additionally, with the exception of [Jonathan Giesel](#) who missed one game midseason, this starting five has been together all eleven games. (To those looking to next year, Giesel is the only senior on the starting front five). Tech's D line is quite small: The four down linemen average just 282, and that average is brought up significantly by their big right DT, sophomore [Ken Scott](#), at 315 pounds. Tech's linebackers are about the same size as Cal's. I am expecting the Bears to do a lot of running right up the middle and off tackle, take it right at these guys.

Tech has one tall corner (6'0") and one short one (5'10"), with a couple of 6'2" backups. They're generally a tall lot, and the Bears are without any real tall receivers. In fact, I don't think the Bears have any experienced receivers left over 6' tall. Lyman was the tallest at 6'4", Gray next at 6'3", and McArthur next at 6'1". Makonnen is 6'0". Toler (will he play?) is 6'2". DeSa and Jordan are just 5'11". So the height advantage goes to the Red Raiders. Rodgers will really have to be on his game if the Bears are to have much passing attack, or the young receivers will have to be very solid. (Both, really.)

On the other side, Tech's receivers are all tall. Their depth chart shows five receivers over 6', with two over 6'6". In addition, 6'0" [Trey Haverty](#) was named to the Sports Illustrated's All-America 2nd team... and he is only the 2nd-leading receiver on his team. 6'4" Jerrett Hicks was named to the AP All-Conference team first team for the Big 12. At 6-foot-four, you're always open.

The Cal defense will have its work cut out for it against this O line, this QB, and this receiving corps. The Bears have shown a strong ability to shut down pass-oriented teams, though, and to keep them out of the end zone. Similarly, the Tech defense will have a full day trying to contain Arrington and Lynch. The Raiders have shown an ability to give up big rushing days (see Texas, 5 TDs and 300+ yards), but they've also given up a lot of real estate while winning games, too.

PREDICTION

This has all the makings of a very interesting game. I think the Bears will prevail, but Tech is no pushover even though they're just 7-4 and #22. They are just a few breaks away from 9-2 and probably a top-15 ranking. I have no fear that Cal will underestimate them, however, and the Bears will come ready to beat up a team that both Oklahoma and Texas dominated. Cal has a lot to prove in this game, and the motivation should be strong.

The game will turn on how well Cal's defense can control Tech's passing attack, and whether the Cal offense can get the running game into "utter domination" mode without any real receiving threat. I think the Tech defense will step up and put up a good fight, but they will not be able to contain the Cal running attack in the second half. I think the Bears will again start slow, and the game will be very close at halftime. Then Cal will take over, as they have done all season. Tech will make a run back at it in the 4th quarter, but Cal's running game will control the outcome.

I think this game has less scoring than one might figure. I expect Cal to score at least 25, probably closer to 35, and I think they will hold Tech to the low 20s. I think the final ends up Cal 34, Tech 24.

Go Bears!
Pete.

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