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Guest Contributor
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Look at the statistics and listen to the coaches and you wonder how on earth Washington State is 0-3 in the conference. At 3-3 and with USC, ASU, and Oregon in their next three games, the Cougars must be looking at this week's game in Berkeley as an absolute must-win to salvage their season and their hopes of making it to a bowl game.

The Cougars come into town unranked and carrying a 3-game losing streak after going 3-0 non-conference and then 0-3 in the Pac-10. Cal is hanging on to a top-25 ranking by their fingernails but is still considered an 11-point favorite. Sagarin's ratings have Cal at #45 and WSU at #69, predicting a 7-point Bears victory.

This game will be closer than it seems, and don't think the 0-3 Cougars can't snatch a win this week. They have been on the doorstep of victory in all three of their conference games: Against [Oregon State](#) they led 30-16 at the half, only to give up four interceptions in the second half to lose by 11. Against [Stanford](#) the following week, the Cougars kept the game close and lost by just 3. Last week at home against [UCLA](#), they held a 17-point fourth-quarter lead, only to lose by three points in overtime.

The story of the Cougars so far has been an inability to play more than 45 minutes of football. But the 45 minutes they play has been pretty darn good.

Through the first three quarters of their Pac-10 games, the Cougars have outscored their opponents 72-51. In the fourth quarter, they have been outscored by 31 points. This should be good news for the Bears, who until recently owned the second half, in particular the fourth quarter. With the way this season has gone, however, the Bears will have to make sure they don't face a deficit in the final 15 minutes.

WSU is not, statistically speaking, awesome, but they are in the top half of the Pac-10 in all offensive categories and are fair on defense. The Cougars are #3 in the conference in scoring offense at 39.3 points per game. And although that stat is helped by some big numbers they hung on [Nevada](#) and [Grambling](#), they've scored 33 or more points on everyone but Stanford. They have the league's #3 rushing offense with 223 yards per game and a very solid 5.5 yards per carry. They are balanced with a passing offense that generates 282 yards per game and 7.9 yards per pass; the Cougars have scored 14 touchdowns through the air and 14 on the ground. Coach Tedford says the Cougars 'really spread the field out' and hit hard with the running game.

The Cougars also have given up only five sacks in six games. Their offensive line is not particularly large, but they get the job done. The Cougars' running back, [Jerome Harrison](#), has nine straight games of 100 yards rushing. He's gone over 200 in two straight games, and if last week's performance is any indication, he is probably looking for a third straight this week.

Where WSU falls down offensively is in turnovers. Their six fumbles and eight interceptions give them minus-six on the season, minus-one per game.

On defense, the Cougars are not strong. Statistically, they fall in the middle of the Pac-10 in all major categories. They give up 27.7 points per game, but the other statistical measures show them to be a pretty solid team. They give up only 122 rushing yards and 376 yards total each game, which are both close to the league leaders. They've given up 13 passing touchdowns and gotten just 5 interceptions, but their other statistics are right in the middle of the Pac. They do, however, lead the league in sacks by a large margin with 23 in 6 games (next is [USC](#) with 19 in 6 games).

The Bears, despite their two recent losses, still lead the Pac-10 in scoring defense and total defense. The Bears give up only 17.6 points per game while scoring 37.3, and they hold opponents to just 4.5 yards a play and 316 yards total offense per game. The Bears continue also to be the most efficient against the pass in the conference, allowing only four touchdowns, and getting nine interceptions while holding opponents to a 52.5% completion rate.

Cal's problem is on offense. The offensive stinker that happened last Saturday with five turnovers and a paltry 75 yards rushing was an aberration and also a tribute to Oregon State's outstanding linebackers; expect the Bears to get back on track with the running game this weekend, though that might

not help the passing game as much as we would hope. (Remember WSU's propensity to sack the QB.) Despite that stinker, Cal is still the league's second-best rushing offense behind USC, at 243 yards per game and 6.1 yards per carry. Passing offense is weak, however, at just 207 yards per game. Still, the Bears have 14 passing TDs to just 7 interceptions.

The big questions of the week for the Bears are these:

- Is the offensive line healthy enough to be unstoppable once again?
- Will the Bears protect the ball and stop the flood of turnovers?
- Will Cal play with the intensity necessary to beat a team that lost its last two games by three points and is in must-win mode? Especially in a televised night game?
- Will the campus install additional lighting for us old guys with failing vision to help when we're leaving the stadium?

With the intangibles set aside, I think the wounded Bears win this game six, maybe seven out of ten times. WSU may be a more complete team than Oregon State, and they are probably more dangerous than they appear on paper. And, in a way, the intangibles cancel each other out. Both teams are desperate for a win, and I think both teams will respond well, particularly on the defensive side of the ball.

I expect this game to be close and relatively low scoring (for a 2005 Pac-10 game, anyway). WSU may take an early lead, but the Bears will lead at halftime and at the end. Final score: Cal 24, WSU 20.

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