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SPORTS |

Who's winning it all at the Rose Bowl?

By Ryan Clark and James MacKay
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Longhorns' defense enough to stymie Southern Cal, hook the hardware

They have the last two Heisman Trophy winners, tons of fans and their logo on my door. However, they do not have my support for the national championship.

Now that may come as a surprise, but when it comes down to it, the University of Southern California will not win a third consecutive national title.

Saying that USC has not been the dominant team in the last few years would be stupid, but looking at the way they played some games this year, betting against USC is not that bad of a choice. The Trojans had to come back for a few consecutive weeks to keep their national title chances intact, whereas Texas did not.

One could make the argument that Texas is just a team that drops 70 on schools that recruit off the farms of the Great Plains, but let's be honest: This is probably the most focused Texas team anyone has seen in a very, very long time. The past few years, it's been the same story with the Longhorns – great team, just one bad game against Oklahoma.

This year there were no bad games against Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Colorado or anyone else you can think of. Granted there were times the team looked shaky, but what team doesn't?

When you have a team in Texas, who in their second game, is playing a top-five team in Ohio State at the Horseshoe and beats them, then that is saying something. Although USC had great competition in Notre Dame, Oregon and UCLA, the fact remains that outside of Notre Dame, none of those teams can really compete for a national title.

Looking at the Big 12, you could make the same argument, but here is the difference: Texas plays in a conference that has a higher number of teams going to bowl games compared to the Pac-10.

Even with all of the stats, here is one more before I lead to the real reason why Texas will be victorious.

Texas is fourth in team defense as they have given up only 14.6 points per game. The only team USC has seen that comes remotely close to that kind of number was the University of California with 20.6.

That is almost a touchdown.

That can decide a game.

Although the Trojans have the kind of offense that can outscore anyone, so does Texas. Just ask every team they have played this year. Also, the Longhorns lead the nation in points and are a few teams above USC in time of possession category.

Finally, the reason why Texas will win is simple.

It has been the reason they have won all year – no one really knows about players outside of Vince Young. It has been guys like Rodrigue Wright, the Griffin Twins and Michael Huff, the best defensive back in the game, that have made Texas so dominant. Young does provide the flash and dash that makes Texas fun to watch but in the end, it's guys like Wright and Huff that do the job. Outside of Darnell Bing, who else can you say that about on the Trojans' defense?

Exactly, you can't.

So although the interlocked SC logo does look good on my door, here is something else that may almost be a better read than this column – 'University of Texas, 2005 National Champions.'

Trojans' balanced attack will beat Texas, claim third-straight title

On Jan. 4, 2006 we will watch the USC Trojans secure their spot as one of the greatest collegiate dynasties of all time. The Trojans are looking to win their third straight National Championship at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California against the Texas Longhorns. USC has dominated college football since their reign began in 2003. They come into this game winning their past 34 games, outscoring their opponents 600-256 this season, and are carrying the 2004 and 2005 Heisman Trophy winners in Matt Leinart and Reggie Bush.

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The National Championship in college football is very different than any other college sport. In hockey and basketball, who will be in the championship is somewhat spontaneous because of a lengthy single-elimination playoff that eventually leads to a national title game. In football, however, the national title game is decided almost a month in advance.

As for USC, they have dealt with this burden for the past two years and have dominated at game time. This year is no different; they have arguably one of the best running backs college football has ever seen in Reggie Bush. And they carry the best pocket quarterback in all of college football, Matt Leinart. There are so many weapons to this Trojan team; it is hard to calculate all of them.

USC head coach and former New England Patriots head coach Pete Carroll has led this team to glory. Carroll is in his fifth year coaching USC with a 42-9 record and only one of his losses has been by more than a touchdown. There are so many weapons to this Trojan team; it is hard to calculate all of them.

Leinart is currently carrying an incredible 158.3 quarterback rating with 65.0 percent completions and a 27-7 touchdown/interception ratio. His ability to stay in the pocket with USC's overpowering offensive line makes opposing defenses cringe.

USC's running game is probably more impressive than their passing game. Running backs Reggie Bush and LenDale White have combined for over 2,800 yards rushing and have totaled 36 touchdowns. Bush averages 138.2 yards per game while White averages 98.2 per game.

Leinart's great statistics can only be made possible with great receivers. Sophomore wide receiver Dwayne Jarrett leads USC in receiving with 81 receptions for 1,153 yards and has recorded 15 touchdowns. Junior Steve Smith isn't far behind with 57 receptions for 928 yards and five touchdowns.

USC is all about offense, this is how they win games. Their defense is ranked 27th in all of Division 1-A while their offense is ranked second.

USC has an overwhelming home field advantage for this game. Obviously, the Rose Bowl will have plenty of Longhorn faithful at the game but USC definitely has the advantage. Pasadena is just a short drive from the USC so you can be assured that you'll be seeing plenty of maroon and yellow on Jan. 4.

In the end, USC's dominant offense will overpower Texas's great defense. I haven't seen one team that has even come close to stopping Reggie Bush.

There are so many reliable options for their offensive attack, I can't see Texas beating the two-time defending champs in their home state. I think Texas quarterback Vince Young will have a brilliant game, but USC will be too much.

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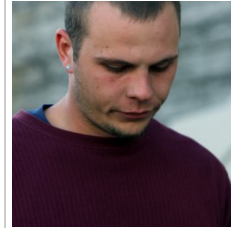
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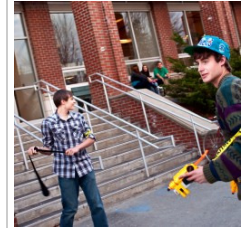
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