

July 26, 2007

Phil,

I picked up your tome of knowledge for the 1st time before your interview with Orson and Peter last night, and I have never been more impressed with a sports "magazine" (sorry for slandering it like that.) I think my dog nearly choked on the stats and information wafting out of it. And your interview was one of the most impressive displays of sports knowledge I've ever heard. I'm guessing you don't have a network job because it would take away from your time watching football, right?

Keep up the excellent work. As long as you keep putting out the preview every year, I'll keep picking it up.

Ben Dawson

Ben,

Thanks for picking up the magazine this year. I did 11 radio shows on Tuesday the 17th but the one I had the most fun on was the EDSBS interview. I appreciate all your kind comments and you are correct I could not work for a network as I already work close to 100 hours per week during football and never seem to have enough time at that!

Thanks for writing,
Phil

First let me say, you have the only magazine I purchase for CFB and think you do a great job – thanks!

Now, I have some concerns on your strength of schedule. I am first a foremost a CFB fan, I watch 12 hours every Saturday since I was 8...my team is LSU, but take pride in watching all teams and conferences. As you probably know, LSU's coach called out the Pac 10 and USC on the route to the national title. This made me anxious to see how you rated these schedules and what the methodology was and I believe there are some discrepancies in there.

1. If I'm understanding you correctly, you use your rankings of the teams for you SOS rank (which I agree w/), but looking at who USC plays and where they rank doesn't add up. The PAC 10's second rated team is Oregon at 18th...and is the HIGHEST rated team USC plays. On the other hand, LSU plays 4 teams in your top 17 (FL, VT, SC, AL) ...yes, most are at home, but is there a better chance to lose @ home to a good SEC team or on the road @ a bad PAC 10 team?

2. The PAC 10 fills the top of the SOS rankings and I realize they have scheduled good out of conf teams, but they still get to play each other for the majority of their season...again, not sure how this makes any sense when the PAC 10 – is it Notre Dame that is boosting all these schedules?

3. I believe you have shown the SEC has been the toughest for 3 of the last 6 years, which has been obvious. Now, I do realize that you do not use empirical evidence for the SOS rankings, but I would think it would stand to reason teams playing in that conf. would also have some of the toughest schedules ..especially teams that have a top 10 team on the line up as well – LSU vs VT

I know you take into account home/away venues (which is correct), but then why wasn't LSU's schedule one of the toughest last year with games @ TN, AU, AR, and FL?

I believe you are pretty much spot on w/ your analysis, but having a hard time wrapping my head around the above questions – any help is greatly appreciated

Thanks
Scott

Scott,

I appreciate the question. I answered this one in depth in my July 10th News and Notes and here was my analysis of the two schedules. [Http://www.philsteele.com/online/July10th.pdf](http://www.philsteele.com/online/July10th.pdf)
Thanks for writing,
Phil

P.S. The schedule question will be a moot point if the two meet for the national title game since it is in the Superdome you know your Tigers will have the crowd edge!

Phil--

I have one question regarding a prediction you've made. I don't ask to try to belittle what you're saying, because I know better from my history of reading your magazines, but instead because I'm having trouble figuring out what you're seeing...

How do you see Memphis making such a jump this year? They have new coordinators on both sides of the ball and their running game is still a major question mark.

As far as Minnesota goes, I couldn't agree more. I picked them tenth in the league because of all the changes, the fact that they just kicked their best defensive player off the team, and I'd pick them 11th if I had any faith in Indiana being able to put it all together after losing Hep.

*Bruce Ciskie
Program Director
WDSM-AM/WGEE-AM
Sports Director
Midwest Communications - Duluth
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Bruce,

Thanks for the comments about the regionals.

With Memphis I will start by saying this years Memphis team is NOT last years Memphis team. I made the exact same statement LAST YEAR! I did a lot of radio shows in Memphis last year during the summer and they ridiculed me for picking a team that had 3 straight winning years and THREE straight bowls in LAST place in the CUSA East. Memphis fans were convinced they would once again contend for the CUSA East title.

I saw a team that had just 11 returning starters and one that had benefitted from a powerful rush attack with DeAngelo Williams and a mobile QB and now was making the drastic change to a pass based offense. I also took into account they were coming off a season in which they benefitted from +7 in turnovers and FOUR NET CLOSE WINS. They could easily have been a 2-10 team in 2005!

This year they are a MUCH more experienced team with 16 returning starters. The 2006 defense was hurt badly when Joe Lee Dunn was let go early in the year and Tommy West decided to switch to his own style of defense with personnel set up for Dunn's type of defense. In one 7 game stretch they allowed less than 35 points only once and that was vs a punchless Sun Belt team. The D started to adjust the last 3 games however yielding 20 and 19 points in regulation to the potent offenses of Houston (33.0 ppg) and UTEP (27.3 ppg) with both having veteran senior QB's. The defense is in much better shape this year. QB Martin Hankins is now in his 2nd year of the new offense and even in last years 2-10 season he rushed for 910 yards. Those two have my #2 set of WR's and #3 Oline in the CUSA to work with and will be potent.

An improved team and they face my #119 schedule this year and the only two games I list them an underdog in this year are at UCF and at S Mississippi. Most of the games vs their level of foes in the CUSA are at home and I expect them to be the first team in NCAA history to go from double digit losses to double digit wins! Tommy West is still the head man and has had this team in bowls 3 of the last 4 years vs tougher schedules than he will face this season!

Thanks for writing,

Phil

You say in your team write-up that Miss St is on your improved list but I do not see them on page 19? What am I missing here?

Thanks,
Vinny

Vinny,

Great question and I am very happy to see that you read the magazine so completely. Since the magazine is written by one person (myself) I do different sections at different time. I need to finish the Phil's Forecast write ups and conference forecasts about a week before I finish off the individual articles. When writing Miss St I was anticipating them making my most improved list. As it turns out when I finished going thru the teams they missed out by 1 as they were #23 on the list. I really appreciate how closely you read the magazine!

Thanks for writing,
Phil

I note that you, alone of the current Stassen tracked predictors, has rated South Carolina in the top 25 (#13!) and conversely you alone have omitted California, ironically average #13 by all the others. I also note that you deviate from the pack more times than other predictors. This is good, if you are correct. I've read your historical examples of how many times you've been proven correct. There are of course times when you will not be correct. I will especially track these two schools as my own personal indicator of the value of your research.

Robert E. Byrd

Robert,

Those will be two schools to watch this year. I feel South Carolina with 10 starters back on defense might just be the best team in the SEC East this year but since they play Georgia on the road and I expect the top SEC East team to have 2 conference losses due to the tough schedules in the NCAA's toughest division, I have them tying for 1st. California is just as talented as the other contenders for 2nd place in the Pac 10 along with UCLA (20 returning starters), Oregon (1 of most improved teams in NCAA, and Arizona St but unfortunately they have to play all three of them on the road and take on USC at home. That is why I have them lower than most at 5th in the Pac 10.

Thanks for Serving our Country!

Phil

Phil,

First off, I want to say how impressed I am with your publication every year. I used to buy 4-6 different publications every year and now buy just one...yours. For the price, it is unbeatable and the information you include simply blows the others away. I always look for your magazine every June and am like a kid at Christmas when I see it. Keep up the great work.

My question is about the Bowling Green Falcons. I am a huge BG football fan and have had season tickets since 1996 in the Gary Blackney days. I read in the BG preview you think QB Anthony Turner is going to have a much improved season in 2007. A lot of the BG faithful are not sure about AT. Why do you think AT is gonna have a break out year in 2007? Tyler Sheehan is pushing pretty hard for the starting gig and Coach Brandon said he won't name a starter until the season opener at Minnesota.

Last year BG stumbled to a 4-8 finish and I think that was simply a hiccup. I expect BG to contend for the East and MAC title in 2007.

Thanks for your time and a killer preseason magazine!

GO FALCONS!!!!!!!
Michael Wherley

Michael,

I agree with you that last season was a hiccup for the Falcons and despite their 3-5 record in the MAC last year they outgained league foes by 21.6 ypg which is more indictive of a 5-3 team. It was their first losing season in 6 years. The team averaged 36.6 ppg in Brandons 1st 4 years but just 19.5 ppg last year. The defense allowed just 318.5 ypg on the season which was their best since 2001! They have 15 returning starters and have them tying for 2nd in the MAC East. Sometimes people just look at the final record of a team when they look at how good they were last year but if you watch BG football then you know they could easily have beaten Miami Ohio if not for a missed FG (in the mud) on the last play and had some other tough losses like vs Temple when they had a 27-12 FD edge. I was also impressed with the way they held up vs Ohio St for 3Q's. Turner is a near VHT (PS#34) and I expect him to have a big August and take command of the job and have by far his best year this season. In my upcoming July 31 Weekly Notes I will go over the magazine race for this years Accuracy Title and note that BG is a key team for me this year as Street and Smith has pegged them 6th in the East and CBS Sportsline and Lindy's have them pegged for 5th so I will be rooting for the Falcons as well.

Thanks for writing,
Phil

For the past six years, I've purchased your magazine and found it to be an invaluable tool throughout the College Football season. I love all of its info, and it has come in quite handy as an "argument-settler".

I'm a little embarrassed to say that I only this year caught on to your offensive and defensive YPP stats. When I read the article in this year's magazine, I initially thought that the team I follow the closest, the Wisconsin Badgers, would typically do well in this category. When the Badgers are at their best, they limit turnovers, are efficient in red-zone offense and defense, and don't tend to hurt themselves with penalties. They also play a fair amount of bend-don't-break D, especially when they have a lead (although that was probably more true when Kevin Cosgrove was the DC).

My question is, how much do efficient YPP numbers correlate with a team's experience level? I would think that a senior-laden team would tend to be more efficient than a team made up of underclassmen. In eyeballing UW's YPP stats over the last decade this seems to be the case, but I haven't looked at all of Div IA. I would also think that in a case where a senior-laden team has poor YPP numbers, they would probably not be due for a improvement the next year. By the same token, if a relatively young team has great YPP numbers, it would seem that they may not be due for a dropoff the next year. I guess it might be a little tricky to truly correlate this as experience can be a little tough to quantify.

In 1998 (a year that was eerily similar to 2006 in respect to UW's opponents and results), the Badgers had great Offensive and Defensive YPP#'s. They also had very similar personnel losses going into '99 as they do this year. While their record did in fact decline in '99, many would argue that a Rose Bowl victory and a #4 final ranking was not a step down. I would love to hear your thoughts, and keep up the great work!

Sincerely,
Carter Aune
Waukesha, WI

P.S. Thank you for not putting anyone from Notre Dame on your Big Ten cover this year.

Carter,

The experience level of each team and the YPP for that season is something I will research this year. In the next few weeks on this site I will be posting a returning lettermen and

starters analysis for the upcoming season. I will have many new factors involved with it and see rate each teams experience level this year in a chart that will be different from page 311 of the magazine but probably include page 311's factors. I will not be able to do the last 10 years YPP analysis (and record as well) until after the season but will have it up on the site during the offseason this year. Make sure you check back for that experience chart which should be up by the start of August!

Thanks for writing,
Phil

Hey Phil!

I really enjoy the depth of coverage in your magazine. Keep up the good work! You and your staffers do a great job.

Since no one in your Q/A articles seems to be interested in the Pac-10 outside USC, I decided to whip up some questions for you.

I'm of the opinion the Pac is awfully balanced in the middle this year and finally returning to early decade form with California, Oregon, Oregon State, and UCLA not being seperated by much. I am admittedly an Oregon fan, but am most interested in what you think of the Oregon State Beavers this year as they are the lowest ranked of the four in your projected standings. I know the schedule is difficult, but do you feel they could make a charge towards the top of the standings?

As you mentioned in your magazine a lot of things went right for the Beavers last year and their record may be a little deceptive, but the line units in my opinion are definitely better than average with mounds of experiences, Sammie Stroughter is one of the most dynamic receivers/playmakers in the Pac-10, and Bernard is a solid, dependable back. I'm not as high on the back seven as most are but surely it doesn't look like there are any huge holes. Of course I have yet to mention the quarterback situation which is of utmost importance in the Pac. I'm especially interested in what you think of Canfield and Moevao, who will win the job, and ease of transition into Langsdorf and Riley's offensive system.

My second group of questions is about the UCLA Bruins. I was surprised when you stated the Bruins may be favored in their first 11 games and could very well be playing USC in an epic showdown to end the regular season. I have a few pressing concerns about their offense and a few lesser ones concerning their stellar defense.

I like Ben Olson at quarterback (assuming he stays the starter) and Cowan is a solid, experienced backup. The problem I have here is with the skill players. Everett, Cowan, Paulson, and Breazell form a solid receiving corps and Markey is a dependable back but I guess I don't see a big time play maker in the group. Breazell could be that guy and I've heard good things about Terrence Austin but in a conference returning so many solid quarterbacks and higher caliber skill players I really question the ability of the Bruins to win the couple shootouts they'll have to in a conference as offensively dependent of the Pac.

That leads me to the defense, which was a force at times (particularly the USC game) but they also had four games where they allowed 404 yards or more and are losing Justin Hickman. With the ten starters returning they are certainly one of the best defensively in the conference (I believe they're a solid #2) but I can't imagine them not losing Hickman's presence a bit. I don't doubt Davis' abilities at the other end but replacing 12 sacks may be a bit of a chore as Christian Taylor was second with 4. A couple other random findings: UCLA joins the group of Arizona, Washington State, and Stanford as the only teams out gained in conference play each of the last three years...While they earn your #2 rank in experience, the Pac-10 has five other teams in your top 24 which doesn't include Washington, Arizona, and Stanford (teams you don't expect to make much noise in the Pac-10 race). That's by far the most of any conference.

I personally think they'll finish around 8-4. I'm a bit skeptical of the Bruins. I just find myself asking where they would be if they didn't beat the Trojans last year. But I take your rankings much more seriously than anyone else's so there has to be something to it. I've looked through all the statistics you've presented in your magazine pretty closely, I'm just a little bit more interested in the intuition

behind your peggings of OSU and UCLA in the Pac.

Again, thanks for all your work and I look forward to your response!

Brock

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

PS (no pun intended!): I'm wondering how your staffers earned their positions. I'm a college student at LSU right now and there's not much that I'm interested in more than college football and would love to make a career of it in some form or fashion. I'm a journalism major. Figure I may as well ask, can't hurt. Thanks!

Brock,

You have some very detailed questions and I can appreciate the work that went into your questions. I am always looking for hard working, caring, detail oriented folks that love football to help us work on the magazine so send your resume to Ralph@PhilSteele.com. Now onto your questions and since your querie is so lengthy I will answer them in random order.

I did not really notice that UCLA was one of 4 Pac 10 teams that had been outgained in Pac 10 play each of the last 3 years. They were 5-4 in the Pac 10 last year and outgained by just 6 ypg something you can find on page 133 of my magazine. I do feel this is Dorrels most complete team with 20 returning starters and just 12 lettermen lost. As you point out they looked GREAT on defense vs USC but allowed 404 plus in 4 other games. This is a team that is capable of being 11-0 when they host USC but also one that is capable of having as many as 5 losses. They face my 5th toughest rated schedule and games that could go the other way include, at Utah, at Oregon St, California, at Wash St, at Arizone and home vs Oregon. It will be an interesting year for Bruin fans. I see on the website preseason.stassen.com that UCLA is generally picked for 2nd or 3rd in the Pac 10 this year and I have them tied for 2nd. This is one of those teams where turnovers and injury fortune (good or bad) will have a large effect on their season.

It was tough picking Oregon St at 6th in the Pac 10 but most of that came down to the fact they had some good fortune to finish 10-4 last year and have a tough schedule and an inexperienced QB. They did lead the Pac 10 in sacks last year and return players that accounted for 41 of the 47 sacks! They also have 16 returning starters and only 13 lettermen lost. They did benefit from 4 net close wins last year and teams that had that good fortune have a weaker record 86% of the time the next year! They also draw FIVE Pac 10 road games in Arizona St, California, USC, Wash St and Oregon and could be a dog in all 5 of those games! I am projecting Canfield as the starter and he more resembles Derek Anderson (#1 carrer passer) as he is 6'4" 225 but Lyle Moreno who is 5'11" more resemble their #2 career leading passer Jonathan Smith. A solid Beaver squad but they probably wont match last years 10 win total.

I appreciate your questions on the Pac 10!

Thanks for writing,

Phil

First off I would like to say how amazing your magazine is, I'm a huge college football fan mostly because my father is from Omaha, Nebraska. I have been getting your magazine for a couple of years now in Canada and I was wondering with your free offer of being able to get the free NFL preview if it is available to me in Canada? And I must say after reading your section this year on what you do all year I turned to my soon to be wife that I would die to have a job like you. To cover a sport that you love and get paid to look into all these teams and watch there games. I do that now but I dont get paid for it. Your an idol to me Mr. Steele.

From your biggest fan North of the Border,

Gian Martinson

Glan,

Thank you for the kind words!! Yes, even though the shipping is extra to Canada we will include the NFL Preview magazine if you fill in the coupon from any of my College magazines.

Just to let you know we will get the pro magazine back from the printers sometime late next week so they will ship out shortly after that.

Thanks for writing,
Phil

Hi Phil,

You have Oregon and UCLA tied for second in the Pac10, and you say that UCLA could be unbeaten when they meet USC in the final game of the season. You also have USC favored to win the National Title, so they must beat UCLA (and Oregon). If UCLA is unbeaten, that means they beat Oregon. That leaves Oregon with two losses in league. UCLA only has one league loss at that point, which means they aren't tied with Oregon. Am I missing something, or is the UCLA/Oregon game just too close to call and that's why you called for the UCLA/Oregon tie?

And if you think UCLA might suffer a second loss, who > do you think will be the team that beats them?

Thanks for all your hard work during the offseason.

*Alan Capps
Sacramento, CA*

Alan,

I wrote about possibilities with UCLA in the previous question. I was torn on who to pick 2nd in the Pac 10 and opted for the tie.

Thanks for writing,
Phil

Hi Phil,

Do teams in a conference with two divisions and a championship game (Big12, SEC) have any kind of advantage over teams that don't? (Pac10, Big10)

Randall,

On the contrary I think the teams that do not play a title game have the best shot at going unbeaten and a better chance of appearing in the national title game. Not only do the SEC and Big 12 have to play an additional game at a neutral site vs a division champion but sometimes their game the week before the title game becomes less significant. Last year Arkansas had the SEC West wrapped up but their berth in a BCS bowl would come down to who won the SEC title game the next week vs Florida. LSU was playing its final game of the regular season and basically had a scheduling edge over the Hogs and managed to win on the road. The Florida/Florida St game many times becomes far more meaningful for the team NOT playing in their conference title game the next week as the team playing in the title game has their BCS bowl berth on the line the NEXT week and a win or loss in the game prior means nothing unless that team is unbeaten.

The Big 12 would have had 2 more teams in the National Title game if not for losses in the Big 12 title game. In 1996 Nebraska had a clear shot to the national title game wrapped up but Texas upset them 37-27 as 3 TD underdogs! In 1998 Kansas St was IN the national title game as all they had to do was beat Texas A&M but they lost and went to the Alamo bowl. I feel schools that do not play in a conference with a title game have an edge at getting to the title game.

Thanks for writing,
Phil