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STACK UP: OREGON AND TEXAS



Texas senior quarterback Case McCoy (6) hands the ball off to junior running back Malcolm Brown (28). The Texas Longhorns will play the No. 10 Oregon Ducks at the Valero Alamo Bowl Dec. 30.

No. 10 Oregon and Texas will meet in the Valero Alamo Bowl on Dec. 30 in San Antonio, Texas. The Longhorns are the defending Alamo Bowl champions after defeating Oregon State 31-27 in last year's game. Both Oregon and Texas were highly ranked in the preseason (Oregon 3, Texas 15) but failed to make BCS appearances after losing a combined six games this season. The meeting will be the first between the two teams since the 2000 Holiday Bowl.

Here's how the two teams stack up:

OFFENSE

Oregon ➔ The Ducks' scoring cooled down in the last two games of the regular season but they still averaged 46.8 points per game on the year, good for third best in the country. Running back Byron Marshall missed most of the team's final two games with a foot injury but may return for the Alamo Bowl. If not, the two-headed attack of De'Anthony Thomas and Thomas Tyner will carry the load in the running game. Quarterback Marcus Mariota threw four interceptions to end the season but still finished with the nation's sixth-best QB rating (167.96). Receivers Josh Huff and Bralon Addison combined for 1,878 yards and 18 touchdowns on 113 catches to lead the Ducks.

Texas ➔ The Longhorns were largely unimpressive offensively this season, ranking in the bottom half of the Big 12 in passing and

scoring offense. Starting running back Johnathan Gray was out for the year when he injured his Achilles against West Virginia, so junior Malcolm Brown will get the majority of the touches. Senior quarterback Case McCoy ranked in the middle of the conference in passing and ended up even in touchdowns and interceptions with 11 of each. Senior wideout Mike Davis led the receiving corps with 715 yards and eight scores.

Advantage: Oregon

DEFENSE

Oregon ➔ The Ducks' run defense was exposed by opponents late in the season but they still held ball carriers to 3.8 yards per carry. Oregon had a turnover margin of +9, recovering 12 fumbles and forcing 15 interceptions, lead by Terrance Mitchell with five. Oregon struggled defensively on third downs, though. It allowed opponents to convert 40.85 percent of third downs, 11th in the Pac-12. Juniors Derrick Malone and Tony Washington led the team in tackles (102) and sacks (7.5), respectively.

Texas ➔ The Longhorns' rush defense was mediocre this season, allowing opposing rushers 4.29 yards per carry and 21 touchdowns. They were much better defending the pass, holding quarterbacks to a low completion percentage (56) and only 12 passing touchdowns. They led the Big 12 in sacks with 37, 12 of which were courtesy of Jackson Jeffcoat, tied for third in the nation. Jeffcoat also recorded 18 tackles for loss

and was joined up front by fellow lineman Cedric Reed, who added 12 sacks and 15.5 tackles for loss.

Advantage: Texas

SPECIAL TEAMS

Oregon ➔ Addison and Thomas give Oregon a scary return team, one that combines to average nearly 20 yards per return with three scores. A Rodney Hardrick return of a blocked kick gives the Ducks four special teams touchdowns this season. Alejandro Maldonado and Matt Wogan have both faltered at place kicker, but Wogan was named the starter late in the season and has connected on four of five attempts. Maldonado has been Oregon's punter and averages 40 yards per punt in 38 attempts.

Texas ➔ Texas has two capable punt returners in Daje Johnson and Jaxon Shipley, who average 10.75 and 13.5 yards per return, respectively. Johnson was also the team's primary kick returner and took a punt to the house for the Longhorns' only special teams touchdown. Senior Anthony Fera handled place kicking and punting duties for Texas and was reliable, hitting 20 of 22 field goal tries and averaging 40.57 yards per punt.

Advantage: Oregon

BY MADISON GUERNSEY, @GUERNSEYMD

THE BOWL SEASON IS UPON US. Use this handy guide to make sure you don't miss the best games of winter break.

GAME TIME.



It's the most wonderful time of the year.

With Christmas coming quicker than De'Anthony Thomas on a football field, the college bowl season is the perfect entertainment to sustain everyone over winter break.

This year's slate of games has the makings of classics with dramatic finishes as high-octane offenses and smash-mouth defenses battle head-to-head in the last season of the BCS era.

Will it be the last time we see Johnny Football suit up in a college uniform?

Will the SEC's run of seven consecutive national championships end or will Auburn pull off one of the greatest turnaround seasons in college football history?

Will Oregon right the ship after struggling to end the season?

Many story lines and many questions highlight this year's bowl games.

HERE'S HOW TO BEST SPEND YOUR WINTER BREAK WATCHING COLLEGE FOOTBALL:

🏆 Saturday, Dec. 21

Las Vegas Bowl – Las Vegas, Nev. – ABC, 12:30 p.m.

Fresno State (11-1) vs. **USC (9-4)**: The bowl season begins with Derek Carr, one of the top quarterbacks in the nation, as he leads the Bulldogs offense against true freshman Su'a Cravens and a revamped Trojans defense.

Other Games:

Washington State (6-6) vs. Colorado State (7-6) – Albuquerque, N.M.

Buffalo (8-4) vs. **San Diego State (7-5)** – Boise, Idaho

Tulane (7-5) vs. **Louisiana-Lafayette (8-4)** – New Orleans, La.

🏆 Monday, Dec. 23

Beef 'O' Brady's Bowl – St. Petersburg, Fla. – ESPN, 11 a.m.

East Carolina (9-3) vs. Ohio (7-5): East Carolina boasts the 10th-best passing offense in the nation while Ohio has lost three of its last four games.

🏆 Tuesday, Dec. 24

Hawaii Bowl – Honolulu, Hawaii – ESPN, 5 p.m.

Oregon State (6-6) vs. Boise State (8-4): The Beavers bring the best quarterback-wide receiver duo in the country across the Pacific Ocean to battle a Boise State team that just saw its coach leave for Washington.

🏆 Thursday, Dec. 26

Poinsettia Bowl – San Diego, Calif. – ESPN, 6:30 p.m.

Utah State (8-5) vs. Northern Illinois (12-1): Northern Illinois, one win away from a BCS bowl before losing the regular season finale, is led by Heisman finalist Jordan Lynch as the Huskies battle Utah State and its stifling defense (17.3 points per game).

Other Games:

Pittsburgh (6-6) vs. **Bowling Green (10-3)** – Detroit, Mich.

🏆 Friday, Dec. 27

Fight Hunger Bowl – San Francisco, Calif. – ESPN, 6:30 p.m.

BYU (8-4) vs. **Washington (8-4)**: In a game where

two top-15 rushing offenses collide head-to-head, the deciding factor will be Washington senior quarterback Keith Price's performance and his decision making against BYU's stout defense.

Other Games:

Syracuse (6-6) vs. **Minnesota (8-5)** – Houston, Texas

Marshall (9-4) vs. Maryland (7-5) – Annapolis, Md.

🏆 Saturday, Dec. 28

Russell Athletic Bowl – Orlando, Fla. – ESPN, 3:45 p.m.

Miami (9-3) vs. **Louisville (11-1)**: A good game by Louisville quarterback Teddy Bridgewater could vault him to frontrunner status to be the No. 1 overall pick in next year's NFL draft. Miami is looking to regroup after winning just two of its final five games.

Other Games:

Rutgers (6-6) vs. **Notre Dame (8-4)** – Bronx, N.Y.

Cincinnati (9-3) vs. **North Carolina (6-6)** – Charlotte, N.C.

Michigan (7-5) vs. Kansas State (7-5) – Tempe, Ariz.

🏆 Monday, Dec. 30

Holiday Bowl – San Diego, Calif. – ESPN, 7:15 p.m.

Arizona State (10-3) vs. Texas Tech (7-5): Taylor Kelly leads a Sun Devil team that has won seven of its last eight while Texas Tech has lost five in a row after winning its first seven games under first-year head coach Kliff Kingsbury.

Other Games:

Middle Tennessee (8-4) vs. **Navy (7-4)** – Fort Worth, Texas

Ole Miss (7-5) vs. Georgia Tech (7-5) – Nashville, Tenn.

Oregon (10-2) vs. Texas (8-4) – San Antonio, Texas

Oregon-Texas:

This game is going to be about pride. After falling short of a shot at a BCS bowl appearance, Oregon will look for a win in San Antonio while Texas is looking to give legendary head coach Mack Brown a good send off in what's expected to be the last game of his coaching career. Oregon still boasts one of the nation's top offenses but has struggled on defense, giving up 32.6 points per game in its last three games. Texas is led by its defense, particularly its defensive line as Jackson Jeffcoat is one of the best defensive ends in the country. Texas won't be able to stop Oregon on offense, but it will be able to slow the Ducks down a bit. The question, and deciding outcome, is if Texas' offense can score against Oregon's defense. Oregon (59) – Texas (23)

🏆 Tuesday, Dec. 31

AdvoCare Bowl – Shreveport, La. – ESPN, 9:30 a.m.

Arizona (7-5) vs. Boston College (7-5): The top two running backs in the nation battle head-to-head when Andre Williams (175.17 yards per game) of Boston College takes on Ka'Deem Carey (156.0 yards per game) of Arizona.

Other Games:

Virginia Tech (8-4) vs. **UCLA (9-3)** – El Paso, Texas

Rice (10-3) vs. Mississippi State (6-6) – Memphis, Tenn.

Duke (10-3) vs. **Texas A&M (8-4)** – Atlanta, Ga.

🏆 Wednesday, Jan. 1

Rose Bowl – Pasadena, Calif. – ESPN, 2 p.m.

Stanford (11-2) vs. Michigan State (12-1): Two top-10 defenses battle when Shayne Skov leads Pac-12 champions Stanford against Darqueze Dennard and Michigan State, who finished at the top of the Big Ten conference.

Other Games:

Nebraska (8-4) vs. **Georgia (8-4)** – Jacksonville, Fla.

UNLV (7-5) vs. **North Texas (8-4)** – Dallas, Texas

Wisconsin (9-3) vs. **South Carolina (10-2)** – Orlando, Fla.

Iowa (8-4) vs. **LSU (9-3)** – Tampa, Fla.

UCF (11-1) vs. **Baylor (11-1)** – Glendale, Ariz.

🏆 Thursday, Jan. 2

Sugar Bowl – New Orleans, La. – ESPN, 5:30 p.m.

Oklahoma (10-2) vs. **Alabama (11-1)**: This is the last game of Alabama quarterback AJ McCarron's illustrious career. Many people throughout the country believe Oklahoma doesn't deserve to be in the Sugar Bowl, so this is the chance for the Sooners to prove themselves against the No. 2 scoring defense in the country.

🏆 Friday, Jan. 3

Orange Bowl – Miami, Fla. – ESPN, 5:30 p.m.

Clemson (10-2) vs. **Ohio State (12-1)**: Ohio State's 24-game winning streak was snapped last week, but the Buckeyes still got the chance at a BCS bowl, their first under head coach Urban Meyer. In Clemson's two losses (Florida State and South Carolina) the Tigers were outscored by an average of 25.5 points but still boast the 12th-best scoring offense in the nation.

Other Games:

Missouri (11-2) vs. Oklahoma State (10-2) – Arlington, Texas

🏆 Saturday, Jan. 4

BBVA Bowl – Birmingham, Ala. – ESPN, 10 a.m.

Vanderbilt (8-4) vs. **Houston (8-4)**: Houston's four losses have come by an average of five points per game while Vanderbilt is riding a four-game winning streak.

🏆 Sunday, Jan. 5

GoDaddy Bowl – Mobile, Ala. – ESPN, 6 p.m.

Arkansas State (7-5) vs. **Ball State (10-2)**: Quarterback Keith Wenning leads the No. 10 passing offense against an Arkansas State defense giving up 26.7 points per game.

Monday, Jan. 6

BCS national championship – Pasadena, Calif. – 5:30 p.m.

Florida State (13-0) vs. **Auburn (12-1)**: Led by quarterback Jameis Winston, Florida State has been as dominant a team as the nation has seen in the BCS era, ranking first in the nation in scoring defense (10.7) and second in scoring offense (53.0). Auburn had miraculous finishes in two of its last three games and is led by Heisman finalist Tre Mason as he ran for 304 yards against Missouri in the SEC championship game.

BY RYAN KOSTECKA. @RYAN_KOSTECKA



Texas head coach Mack Brown's 40-year coaching career is expected to come to an end after the Valero Alamo Bowl.

HELFRICH'S FIRST MAY BE BROWN'S LAST

Mack Brown started his college coaching career in 1973, the year Mark Helfrich was born. Brown arrived at Texas – his latest of 11 coaching gigs – in 1998, the year Helfrich began coaching. On Dec. 30, Brown and Helfrich will face off in the Alamo Bowl. For Helfrich, this will be his first career bowl game as a head coach. For Brown, it might be his last.

In many ways, the Oregon and Texas football programs have about as much in common as their current head coaches. Since Texas lost to Alabama in the 2010 national championship game, the Longhorns haven't won more than eight regular season games per season. The Ducks ascended into college football's upper class during that time, earning BCS bowl bids so frequently (four straight from 2009-12) that this season's 10-2 record looks pedestrian to many

Oregon fans.

"It says a lot when a team goes 10-2 and it's kind of disappointing," Oregon quarterback Marcus Mariota said. "That says a lot about where we've come as a program and where we want to be."

For the first 105 years of Oregon football, the Ducks never reached double digits in the win column. Then, in 2000, Oregon reached that milestone with a 35-30 win over Texas in the Holiday Bowl.

That season might've marked the beginning of the Oregon football renaissance. Brown and Texas, on the other hand, were simply experiencing another successful season and gearing up for one of the most prosperous runs in the program's history.

Brown took over for John Mackovic in 1998 and set Texas' floor at nine wins. Literally. Until 2010, the Longhorns never finished worse than 9-5 under Brown. From 2001-2009, they never won less than 10 games and won a national title in 2005. The run turned Brown into a legend in Austin, Texas.

"Our guys will be very excited to take on an iconic program and an iconic coach in Coach Brown," Helfrich said.

But Helfrich and the Ducks won't be facing the same program and coach Dec. 30. Texas has only reached nine wins once (last season) since 2009 and needed an Alamo Bowl win to do so. After this season, many expect Brown to step down.

A win in the Alamo Bowl likely won't satisfy the Longhorns' fan base, as Texas' current 8-4 record is a far cry from its dominance in the 2000s.

Many Oregon fans will feel the same way regardless of the Alamo outcome, but if the Ducks win, it will be their fourth-straight season with 11 wins or more. Not even Brown's Longhorns have accomplished that feat.

"Maybe some people are disappointed but I don't think anyone's disappointed," Oregon center Hroniss Grasu said. "It's an honor to play in a bowl game against Texas and getting a bowl win in the Alamo Bowl would be a big boost in the offseason getting ready for next season."

Brown also mentioned the importance of winning a bowl game.

"You need to win your last game, regardless of where you're coaching," Brown said.

While Brown was referring to the last game of any season, the 2013 Alamo Bowl will likely be his last game, maybe ever.

Helfrich, meanwhile, is preparing for what could be the first of many bowl games during his tenure at Oregon. Who knows? Maybe Brown will be on his couch this next decade watching Helfrich lead the Ducks on a 15-year run of excellence nearly identical to the Brown-led Longhorns.

BY VICTOR FLORES, @VFLORES415

OPINION

2013 was a bump in the road, not the end of an era

Throughout a season filled with championship aspirations and dramatic letdowns, the Oregon football team emphasized the importance of turning a page. The Ducks might have stumbled upon a perfect way to end a chapter, and an era, in the program's story.

Following a 42-31 comeback victory over Oklahoma State in the 2008 Holiday Bowl, Oregon, lead by then-head coach Mike Bellotti and junior college transfer quarterback Jeremiah Masoli, finished the season ranked 10th in the nation and also eclipsed the double-digit win mark for only the fourth time in school history. A 10-3 season was considered an absolute success for a team laden with professional talent.

This was the start of a new chapter in Oregon's football program, the rise of a team from mediocre Pac-10 participants to consistent national powerhouse.

The chapter continued the next season when Bellotti retired and former offensive coordinator Chip Kelly was promoted to head man in Eugene. Kelly's hiring immediately paid dividends. In his four seasons as head coach, Kelly and the Ducks soared to previously unknown heights. Using a fast-paced offense and an opportunistic defense, Oregon finished 46-7 in that four-year period and went to four consecutive BCS bowl games.

After a 35-17 victory in the 2013 Fiesta Bowl, Kelly left the Ducks to join the Philadelphia Eagles. For the second time in a row, Oregon turned to its offensive coordinator to be the next head coach. Mark Helfrich took over, and expectations reached an all-time high coming into the 2013 season.

Fast forward to today. For the first time since that victory in the 2008 Holiday Bowl, the Ducks will not be going to a BCS game. Instead of playing Alabama in the Allstate Sugar Bowl, the Ducks will travel to San Antonio to face off against unranked Texas in the Valero Alamo Bowl.

In 2008, 10-2 and a spot in the Alamo Bowl would be considered a successful season. However,

due to an inflation of Oregon fan expectations, many believe that a two-loss season and a bowl game with the Longhorns is an absolute failure.

SportsCenter anchor Neil Everett spoke about this in an interview while he was visiting UO earlier this year.

"People who have expectations that are if Oregon doesn't play in a BCS game then it's been a failure of a season, they need a history lesson in Oregon football. If Oregon goes to the Holiday Bowl ... or if Oregon goes to a bowl game that is not the Rose Bowl, the Fiesta Bowl, the Sugar Bowl ... that doesn't mean it's been a disappointing season," Everett said.

Instead of ridiculing a first-year head coach and a group of talented student athletes for faltering twice in a 12-game season, maybe fans should take a step back and look at the progress this program has made in the past five years. In a five-year stretch, losses happen, and expecting perfection from a team year in and year out is expecting the impossible.

Offensive lineman Hroniss Grasu emphasized the importance of the upcoming bowl game against Texas earlier this week.

"I don't think anyone's disappointed," Grasu said during a conference call earlier this week. "I think this would be a big momentum booster for the offseason."

And that's exactly what the Ducks have to accomplish in their game against Texas on Dec. 30 – seize the unique opportunity to build into 2014 instead of turning the page and ending the most important chapter in the book of Oregon football.



Joseph Hoyt is a sports reporter at the Emerald. Follow his Twitter: @jhoyt42

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