

99 Spring Report

California faces offensive uncertainty in '99

By CHRISTOPHER HEINE
Senior staff writer

California Football Coach Tom Holmoe thinks his defense might be good enough this fall to carry his team into a late-season run at the Pac-10 Conference title.

It's his offense that he's worried about, and it's easy to understand why.

The Golden Bears, in a similar situation to their Sept. 11 opponent, Nebraska, will probably head into fall camp without a clear picture as to who will lead the offense at quarterback.

Holmoe said he'd like one of two inexperienced signal callers to emerge this spring and claim the job.

Sophomore Samuel Clemons is expected to be the leading candidate, he said, because he has more experience than his competition, freshman David Page. Clemons was the backup in 1998 for Bear starting quarterback Justin Vedder, who has graduated.

Holmoe said Clemons, a 6-2, 210-pounder, would be a greater threat throwing the ball than would Page.

"He is big and strong and has a very strong arm," Holmoe said. "He has pretty good speed, but I wouldn't call him an elusive runner."

Page on the other hand, he said, has "great speed and mobility."

Cornhusker fans should already know who they'd rather face of these two young quarterbacks.

The Huskers return a secondary that should rate among the country's best, and a linebacker core that could prove to be among the nation's fastest.

A successful game plan against the NU defense would seem to need a quarterback who can create yards outside of normal execution of plays.

Holmoe said Page is the type of

player who can break the hold of the Blackshirts' 4-3 defense.

By Holmoe's account, the 6-0, 190-pound redshirt freshman sounds like a more complete college-style quarterback than does Clemons.

"David's a very good runner, very elusive, hard to tackle," Holmoe said. "He also has a very good arm, very good accuracy and throws the ball well down field. And he's dangerous running around out there."

NU Coach Frank Solich said defending a quarterback with the ability to scramble naturally worries an opposing coach.

"Everybody has problems with a mobile quarterback," Solich said. "Those kind of guys are tough to defend because they can take off on a drop-back pass and have the ability to make big plays running in that manner."

Holmoe said it was too early to say if either young quarterback has an edge, and the Bears likely wouldn't have decided on a starter heading into fall camp.

That might be because of two heralded incoming freshmen who are expected to make an impact on fall drills - Kyle Boller and Ryan Sorahan.

Holmoe said he plans to take a serious look at both.

"We'll give those two guys the opportunity to jump in and see what they can do," he said. "They are very good players. And based on what they did in high school, they deserve a chance."

Fortunately for the Bears, they return 16 starters, most of them coming back on defense from last year's 5-6 campaign.

When Solich was asked to make an early assessment of Cal, one answer came quickly.

Texas adjusting to life after Williams

By JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

When Texas Football Coach Mack Brown came to his first spring practice, there was a noticeable absence.

The dreadlocks and powerful running style of 1998 Heisman Trophy winner Ricky Williams were nowhere to be found. The second-year coach wasn't the only one to notice. Well, everybody noticed. You don't easily forget the nation's all-time leader rusher.

"It was odd not seeing (Williams) run past me," fullback Ricky Brown said. "But I don't see it as a negative. It is something that will drive us."

Losing a star running back is bad enough, but the absence of Williams isn't the only problem in Austin this spring.

A total of eight players who started on offense last season for UT graduated. The first season in the Mack Brown era was a success in part because of those seniors.

But like any coach who loses a large part of his team, Brown said, he is trying to get the Longhorns to move on.

"Most people would call what we are going through a rebuilding year," Brown said. "I felt like we had a good spring, but we are not as good as we were at the end of last year's Cotton Bowl."

It is probably a good thing Texas doesn't have to play a real game until September. If Texas did have to suit up, they would have only one quarterback.

Sophomore Major Applewhite returns after a season of platooning with Richard Walton, who was a senior last season. Adam Dunn, who was the only other quarterback this spring, signed a contract to play baseball in the Cincinnati Reds organization.

When the fall rolls around, the buzz will be about freshman Chris Simms. The son of former New York Giants quarterback Phil Simms signed with Texas after making (and breaking) an oral commitment to Tennessee.

"It frightens me short-term and excites me long-term," Mack Brown said. "In the future we will be in good shape."

The excitement in Austin, Texas, is reaching the levels of when the program has its glory years not too long ago.

The natural grass at Daryl K. Royal Field is being replaced. Because of that, the annual spring game was not promoted around the campus.

For Texas fans, it didn't matter, as 20,000 people showed up at a track stadium to watch the Longhorns' final spring scrimmage.

"There is a tremendous football tradition here," Mack Brown said. "We just have to feed off of the excitement."

A 9-3 season would get most teams buzzing with excitement, and both the coach and the fullback said there were high expectations.

"We've told this team they haven't accomplished anything," Mack Brown said. "We have great memories, but we have to build on them."

defense might have to carry our young offense for a little while."

Holmoe said while the Bears' defense should be the strongest part of the team, it will have to give a top effort to stop the Huskers in Lincoln next season. The second-year coach said that whether the California wins or loses, playing a team of NU's caliber can only help its chances in conference play.

"Nebraska's going to be one of the most physical offensive teams you'll ever play," he said. "If you don't come

with something, come back somewhat physical, they'll have their way with you sooner or later."

Holmoe listed Arizona, UCLA and USC as the early favorites to earn a trip to the Rose Bowl next January. However, he said the Pac-10 race should be "fairly wide open," and the Bears will list the conference championship as a team goal.

"To go into a season and not have that as your goal would be criminal to me," he said.

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