

Two probable NFLers anchor Stanford's offensive line

Tom FitzGerald, Chronicle Staff Writer

Right guard David DeCastro (52) might not go as high as Martin in the NFL draft, but he would in a sushi-eating draft.

-- This is a cautionary tale for purveyors of all-you-can-eat sushi bars in the Stanford area. When you open your doors to Jonathan Martin and David DeCastro, you're apt to lose money.

Last year, the two walked into one sushi place, and seafood started disappearing.

"I thought I could eat a lot," Martin said. "We each went through three plates of sushi. I was pretty full, but David went through another four rounds and said, 'I think I'm done now.' That's when I realized this guy is not a human being."

Martin, the 6-foot-6, 304-pound left tackle, and DeCastro, the 6-5, 318-pound right guard, anchor a Cardinal offensive line that has allowed just 13 sacks over the past two seasons while helping the team post the top two rushing totals in school history.

Both are fourth-year juniors who are likely to turn pro after this season. Martin is already projected as a top-five pick in most 2012 mock NFL drafts, DeCastro as either a first- or second-rounder. So they'll probably be able to spring for plenty of sushi next year.

"I don't think about that right now," said Martin, who has the key role of protecting quarterback Andrew Luck's blind side. "I'm focused on winning the Pac-12 championship. It's still my job to protect Andrew."

DeCastro said he doesn't think about the NFL either. "You don't want to do that, because you might blow out your knee," he said. "You take each day and realize how lucky you are to have the ability to play and be a student here."

Going into training camp, coach David Shaw said his biggest concern was whether the offensive line would be as formidable as it was last year, before it lost center Chase Beeler, guard Andrew Phillips and tackle Derek Hall.

Sophomore Kevin Danser came out of spring practice as the leader at left guard, over Matt Bentler. Sam Schwartzstein and Khalil Wilkes are dueling at center, and right tackle is a three-way slugfest among fifth-year senior Tyler Mabry and redshirt freshmen Cameron Fleming and David Yankey.

The line still answers to the "Tunnel Workers" nickname that former tackle Chris Marinelli originated two years ago. At the end of each practice, they huddle, make a "Woo, woo" whistle sound and shout "Union!" So the labor movement is alive and well in at least one corner of the Stanford campus.

Martin, who has been called "Moose" since he was a 180-pound flag football player in fifth grade, is majoring in classics and plans to attend law school, following in his parents' footsteps. His mother is a legal counsel for Toyota, his father a criminal justice professor at California State University Dominguez Hills.

DeCastro's size-20 neck makes it difficult for him to buy shirts. Not as difficult, though, as it is for defenders to get by him.

"He's probably the smartest offensive lineman I've been around at the college level," new offensive line coach and running game coordinator Mike Bloomgren said.

He said DeCastro reminds him of Alan Faneca, a nine-time Pro Bowler whom Bloomgren coached on the New York Jets for a couple of years, in terms of his core strength, intelligence and pulling ability.

"He's got incredible balance," Bloomgren said. "He finds a way to get power generated to run through people. When he gets his hands on you, it's over."

Taking a look at Stanford football matchups

Stanford Daily

We're almost halfway through August, so there's no denying it any longer — it's college football season. True, 23 days remain until Stanford football kicks off its Andrew Luck Farewell Tour, but that just means we all have a bit over three weeks left to analyze the heck out of the Cardinal's chances.

Roughly 99.999 percent of the offseason news surrounding Stanford football has been concentrated on Luck staying for one more season (sorry, Class of 2013, it's just one more) and David Shaw replacing Jim Harbaugh. Yes, coaching changes in college football really do matter, and having the preseason Heisman favorite and a candidate for sainthood under center is certainly a big deal, but there is a lot more to this team than the coach and the quarterback.

How will the new-look O-line perform? Can the defense match its breakout 2010 campaign despite losing five starters? Will anyone step up at wide receiver? Can Jordan Williamson or Eric Whitaker match Nate Whitaker's output at kicker? Will Chris Owusu be the Chris Owusu of 2009 (one of the most explosive players in the country) or the Chris Owusu of 2010 (hurt too much of the year to make a significant impact)?

These questions will go a long way toward determining if 2011 will look like 2010 or 2009. One of the most important factors in Stanford's success, though, is something that cannot make a play or run a practice. I'm talking, of course, about the schedule. You can talk personnel all you want, but the fact is that you're more likely to have success against Directional State than against a BCS contender. Just ask Kentucky.

So, without further ado, here's a look at what the 2011 season has in store for Stanford football, along with my level of worry for each game (and don't worry, I'm not nearly powerful enough to jinx anything):

Week 1 opponent: San Jose State (home). 2010 record: 1-12. Outlook: If the Cardinal can't beat the lowly Spartans at home, Stanford might very well be on the other side of the new Biggest. Upset. Ever. SJSU fans, don't hold your breath. Worry factor: subzero.

Week 2 opponent: Duke (road). 2010 record: 3-9. Outlook: Two of the best academic institutions in the FBS face off on a football field. Unless the folks at Durham find a way to move the game to Cameron Indoor or they draw a whole lot of phantom clipping calls, Stanford shouldn't have any problems in this trip to ACC territory. Worry factor: barring a Jarrett Mann vs. Austin Rivers showdown, zero.

Week 3 opponent: Arizona (road). 2010 record: 7-6 (4-5 Pac-10). Outlook: The Wildcats ended 2010 in the worst possible fashion, losing five in a row after a hot start. Tucson is not an easy place to win, and Arizona returns the best QB-WR combo in the conference in Nick Foles and Juron Criner, but the O-line is entirely new and the defense has questions. It still should be the toughest test of the first half of the season. Worry factor: moderate.

Week 4: Bye.

Week 5 opponent: UCLA (home). 2010 record: 4-8 (2-7 Pac-10). Outlook: Kevin Prince's health has meant everything to the Bruins. Even a healthy Prince doesn't figure to stand a chance on the Farm. Worry factor: minimal.

Week 6 opponent: Colorado (home). 2010 record: 5-7. Outlook: The Buffaloes escape the Big 12 only to play their first Pac-12 road game against a team that is superior in seemingly every aspect of the game. Worry factor: low.

Week 7 opponent: Washington State (road). 2010 record: 2-10 (1-8 Pac-10). Outlook: This isn't your older sister's Washington State. Yes, they're picked to finish last in the Pac-12 North, but Jeff Tuel and Co. could be in bowl contention in 2011. Worry factor: mild.

Week 8 opponent: Washington (home). 2010 record: 7-6 (5-4 Pac-10). Outlook: Chris Polk is back, Jake Locker is not. This might mean something more to the Cardinal if the Huskies had gotten within 40 points of Stanford in Seattle last year. Worry factor: slight.

Week 9 opponent: USC (road). 2010 record: 8-5 (5-4 Pac-10). Outlook: Stanford has had success in its past two trips to the Coliseum (24-23 and 55-21 will live on in Farm lore for years to come), but that still doesn't make playing in L.A. easy for anyone. If the Trojans found a pass defense over the summer, this could be the first major challenge to Stanford's title hopes. Worry factor: just less than what it was with a minute left in last year's game (before this happened).

Week 10 opponent: Oregon State (road). 2010 record: 5-7 (4-5 Pac-10). Outlook: The Beavers didn't put up much of a fight in 2010, and now they are missing the one player Stanford couldn't contain: Jacquizz Rodgers. Worry factor: small.

Week 11 opponent: Oregon (home). 2010 record: 12-1 (9-0 Pac-10). Outlook: If you have to ask, you haven't been watching college

football. This is the game of the year for Stanford, for the Pac-12 and possibly for the nation. Worry factor: the only reason I'm not shaking in my boots already is that I'm not wearing boots.

Week 12 opponent: Cal (home). 2010 record: 5-7 (3-6 Pac-10). Outlook: No rivalry game is a guarantee, there's no debating that. But based on pure talent, Stanford should run over the Bears once more. Worry factor: mild, if only because of a possible letdown after Oregon.

Week 13 opponent: Notre Dame (home). 2010 record: 8-5. Outlook: If it was anyone else, all the preseason hype would mean this is a team to be truly scared of. But it's Notre Dame, where hype is more ingrained in the school than NBC and Touchdown Jesus. Still, there's definitely talent and a winning coach visiting from South Bend. Worry factor: decent.

Dec. 2: Pac-12 Championship (home).

Jan. 9: BCS National Championship Game (New Orleans).

Hmm, now why did I include those last two dates?

Power position: Conference of Backfields?

By Ted Miller

Look, the Pac-12 is the conference of quarterbacks. Everybody knows that. No other conference even approaches the talent the Pac-12 has at the position in 2011.

Stanford's Andrew Luck, USC's Matt Barkley and Arizona's Nick Foles each could be first-round NFL draft picks next spring. Luck is almost certain to go No. 1 overall. Oregon's Darron Thomas, Oregon State's Ryan Katz, Utah's Jordan Wynn and Washington State's Jeff Tuel also are experienced, talented guys with plenty of upside.

[+] EnlargeLaMichael James

Kirby Lee/Image of Sport/US PresswireQuarterback is the position of power in the Pac-12, but LaMichael James and his fellow running backs can make a strong case as well.

So the Pac-12's position of power is, obviously, quarterback.

But don't sleep on the running backs, either.

The conference welcomes back five backs who eclipsed the 1,000-yard mark last fall, including Oregon's Heisman Trophy finalist and Doak Walker Award winner, LaMichael James. That crew includes Washington's Chris Polk, Colorado's Rodney Stewart, UCLA's Johnathan Franklin and Stanford's Stepfan Taylor. Those are five backs who ranked among the top-38 in the nation in rushing last fall, including three in the top 13.

(And, by the way, if Oregon State's Jacquizz Rodgers and California's Shane Vereen hadn't opted to enter the NFL draft a year early, the conference also would include the nation's No. 21 and 23 rushers from 2010).

Further, only California, Oregon State, Utah and Washington State have questions at the position. USC is stacked with talented backs, whether senior Marc Tyler (913 yards, nine TDs in 2010) comes back from suspension or not. Arizona State's Cameron Marshall (787 yards, nine TDs) is one of the most underrated players in the conference, and Arizona's Keola Antolin (668, seven TDs in 2010) has rushed for 1,830 yards and scored 21 TDs in three seasons.

Further, many of the backups -- Oregon's Kenjon Barner, Washington's Jesse Callier, Arizona State's Deantre Lewis or Kyle Middlebrooks, Stanford's Anthony Wilkerson and UCLA's Derrick Coleman (or Malcolm Jones/Jordan James) -- are talented and experienced (other than James, a redshirt freshman).

So conference of quarterbacks, conference of running backs -- both are positions of power.

Perhaps the Pac-12 in 2011 is now the Conference of Backfields?

2011 preseason All-Pac-12 team

By Ted Miller

It's time for our preseason All-Pac-12 team.

Feel free to disagree.

Offense

QB Andrew Luck, Stanford
RB LaMichael James, Oregon
RB Chris Polk, Washington
TE David Paulson, Oregon
WR Juron Criner, Arizona
WR Jermaine Kearse, Washington
OL Jonathan Martin, Stanford
OL Matt Kalil, USC
OL David DeCastro, Stanford
OL Ryan Miller, Colorado
OL Tony Bergstrom, Utah
K Erik Folk, Washington

Defense

DE Nick Perry, USC
DT Alameda Ta'amu, Washington
DE Junior Onyeali, Arizona State
LB Vontaze Burfict, Arizona State
LB Shayne Skov, Stanford
LB Mychal Kendricks, California
LB Chase Thomas, Stanford
CB Cliff Harris, Oregon
CB Nickell Robey, USC
S T.J. McDonald, USC
S Delano Howell, Stanford

P Bryan Anger, California
PR Cliff Harris, Oregon
KR Robert Woods, USC

SJSU focuses on improvement

By Daniel Bohm, Mercury News

The battle for Silicon Valley football supremacy is more than three weeks away, but both San Jose State and Stanford already are preparing for one another.

"We started game planning San Jose State back in the middle of June," said Stanford offensive coordinator Pep Hamilton. "Our game plan for San Jose State is pretty much done."

Hamilton's counterpart at SJSU, John DeFilippo, said that the Spartans coaches watched Stanford tape over the summer but have focused this first week of practice on installing their offense.

Head coach Mike MacIntyre said the real preparation for Stanford will come the week before the teams square off at Stanford on Sept. 3 -- and recent transfer Tate Forcier will play the role of Heisman Trophy favorite Andrew Luck at practice. But for now, the emphasis of camp is improving as a team.

"We want to go over all the different scenarios during camp," MacIntyre said. "They run a 3-4 (defense), and we work on that."

Hamilton said that Stanford coaches gather material on "nontraditional" opponents early, although they haven't prepared for Duke because the Blue Devils have a game before facing Stanford on Sept. 10.

"With San Jose State, the film we have now is not going to change," Hamilton said.

Kyler O'Neal is expected to miss four to five weeks after suffering a broken ankle at practice Wednesday. O'Neal, who started four games at linebacker last season, has been moved to tailback.

"He

Advertisement

was really running well -- it's a shame," MacIntyre said. "He's really fast, and he weighs 224 pounds."

Left tackle David Quessenberry is expected to miss a week after having his appendix removed.

There is an open competition for the place-kicking job between Harrison Waid and Jens Alvernik. Waid did double duty as kicker and punter last season, but MacIntyre noted Alvernik's improvement during camp. Waid is expected to keep his job as punter.

SJSU will scrimmage Saturday at Spartan Stadium at approximately 2 p.m. MacIntyre said that with the first scrimmage he is going to rotate players to try to get them all into as many different game-like situations as possible. The scrimmage is open to the public.

SJSU had two guest coaches at practice this week. Former Baylor head coach and current executive director of the American Football Coaches Association, Grant Teaff, spoke to the team Wednesday. Charlie Weatherbie, who most recently coached Louisiana-Monroe -- and led the Warhawks to an upset on the road at Alabama in 2007 -- was at practice on Wednesday and Thursday.

The team took a popsicle break at practice today. MacIntyre said defensive coordinator Kent Baer loves popsicles, and it was Baer's idea to give the players a sugary interlude midway through the three-hour session.

Cal starting fullback Eric Stevens out for season with knee injury

By Jonathan Okanes

Cal starting fullback Eric Stevens will miss the 2011 season after tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee.

Stevens, a junior, started five games last season. He had only one carry for 2 yards and caught four passes for 27 yards and a touchdown.

Stevens, who was hurt during practice Wednesday, said nobody made contact with him on the play.

"It was one of those freak accidents," Stevens said. "I just planted a little funny. I was a little off balance and couldn't catch myself."

Senior Will Kapp is expected to move into the starting role.

Cal Practice Report

No great truths were revealed Wednesday in Cal's first full-pads football practice of camp, other than freshman outside linebacker Chris McCain looks to be the real deal.

Coach Jeff Tedford loves the kid, all 6-foot-6 and 233 pounds of long arms and legs. The coach has taken to calling him "Gadget" for his ability to shoot those long arms out and disrupt the flights of balls and the running of ballcarriers.

McCain did both of those things in practice, batting down one pass and breaking up another that looked to be a sure completion. Look for him to get major playing time at either of the outside linebacker spots.

Tailback Isi Sofele cramped up in both calves and spent the remainder of the day with icebags taped to his tender calves. In his stead, Covaugh DeBoskie-Johnson and Dasarte Yarnway both ran well. The Bears will need to have someone step up into the backup tailback spot, because as tough as he is, Sofele is not going to carry the ball 25 times a game.

Starting fullback Eric Stevens injured a knee when he planted his foot in the still-new FieldTurf surface and the rest of his body kept on going. He was taken for x-rays.

Tedford was not particularly pleased with the overall practice, saying, "We have to come out and have a better day tomorrow. It looked like we were banged up, stiff and sore. We have to work through it."

Nice scene the day before on the softball field now used for a parking lot during fall camp: Left tackle Mitchell Schwartz playing catch with a member of Cal's softball team, pitcher Valerie Arioto. She showed the big lug how to pitch underhand while Schwartz tried to teach her how to throw a split-fingered fast ball, overhand, with a softball, a neat trick.

I like to see athletes from different Cal teams interacting and breaking out of their own insular worlds.

Why I love the Berkeley campus, Part 67b: While taking a walk around campus before practice the other day, I came to a shady grove and saw a fellow balancing on a tightrope suspended between two towering eucalyptus trees a few feet above the ground. Did OK, too.

They aren't getting their kicks at UCLA

By Peter Yoon

It was never going to be easy for UCLA to replace kicker Kai Forbath, but it wasn't supposed to be this difficult, either.

Forbath, a former All-American and Lou Groza award winner as the nation's top kicker, is in Dallas Cowboys camp now and the burden of replacing one of the top kickers in UCLA history is apparently taking its toll.

Kip Smith, the redshirt freshman who had been the heir apparent, has had troubles since the spring and there is now an open competition for the job between Smith, punter Jeff Locke and walk-on Joe Roberts, but none of the kickers has proven reliable so far in camp.

Coach Rick Neuheisel is keeping a close eye on the competition, too, spending the early parts of practice the last two days watching over the kickers as they attempt field goals.

"I'm looking for some consistency," Neuheisel said. "We haven't been. That's a concern of mine right now. Kip, we have high hopes for, but he's been anything but consistent to start so we'll just have to keep working him so we're going to try to create some competition there."

Smith was an All-State kicker in Colorado and once made a 67-yard free kick for a field goal. He made a 56-yarder as a sophomore and was considered a shoo-in to replace Forbath. But after struggling in the spring, Smith has changed his technique and still hasn't quite figured it out.

"So far, it's not what I would have liked," Smith said. "I think my problem right now is I'm not trusting myself. It's a new kick."

Smith says he is trying to employ a style similar to that of Forbath, where he swings at only 60 percent strength to increase accuracy.

"I used to be a driver and now I'm a chipper," Smith said.

His misses are coming almost exclusively to the right. Smith said it's a fixable problem, but that it's taking some time to get comfortable with the new approach.

"My problem is I'm not finishing with my form," he said. "I'm just not following through. I'm just coming up and too excited to see where it goes."

Locke, the Pac-10 leading in punting last season, doubles as the team's kickoff man but hasn't kicked field goals since high school. He hasn't fared much better as a field-goal kicker so far in camp as he tries to re-learn the techniques. He also missed all of spring practice because of a hip surgery.

"We've had our fair share of misses so far," Locke said. "With Kai, he was kind of a reliable thing and maybe we took that for granted. Now it's about getting back to the basics."

Forbath made 85 of 101 field goals in his four-year career, including 10 of 13 from 50 yards or longer. He accounted for 35 percent of UCLA's scoring during his four seasons and is tied with John Lee for the most field goals in school history with 85.

Locke said he'd rather have Smith or Roberts step up and take the job so he can focus on punting, but that he'd do the field goal kicking if it's what's best for the team.

"I'm definitely trying to be ready in case one of those guys doesn't get the job done," he said.

Smith acknowledged it has been tough psychologically to go through a kicking slump. He never has even played in a game, but called his career so far a roller-coaster ride.

"It's kind of shocking right now, but I'm coming around, though," he said. "You can't get too down about missing kicks. You just have to go in there and think you're going to make every one."

As far as being in a competition for the job when it seemed a foregone conclusion he would have it, Smith said he was fine with that.

"I wasn't expecting the spot to just be given to me," he said. "Everybody has to compete for their spot, so I don't mind the competition."

USC Practice Report

Twenty-three freshmen are in camp for the Trojans this fall, but only a few of them are receiving real publicity eight days in: quarterback Cody Kessler, running back Amir Carlisle, offensive guard Aundrey Walker and linebacker Lamar Dawson, with a little bit here and there for guys like Max Wittek and Marqise Lee.

Why are only a few standing out and the rest blending in?

Maturity, Trojans coach Lane Kiffin says. It's all about maturity. The majority of the players Kiffin and his staff recruited have the talent to play right away, he said. But only a select few have the right mindsets to it.

That's why Carlisle has been so successful so far. He's only 5 feet 10 and a slight 180 pounds, but he's made very few mistakes. That's why Dawson's been praised frequently by Kiffin after stepping for the injured Chris Galippo and that's why Kessler was under serious consideration to be Matt Barkley's backup even before Jesse Scroggins had thumb surgery Thursday.

"It's not normal, what Aundrey Walker, Lamar Dawson and Amir Carlisle are doing -- that's abnormal," Kiffin said Thursday, after only a few freshmen stood out in practice, Lee and Walker among them. "To do that, you're gonna have to be very, very talented and then you're gonna have to be very mature in your approach to the game, or you can't do it."

Wondering why highly-touted prospects like receiver George Farmer and Cyrus Hobbi haven't received the pub many expected of them? That's why. Both players are doing fine, staying out of trouble off the field and learning their respective playbooks while getting a hang of the camp schedule. But they're not shining yet -- which doesn't mean they won't do so later on in their careers, or even later on this year.

It just takes a special type of player to challenge for playing time right away. "We've seen extremely talented guys come in here and they're just not ready," Kiffin said. "And so what those guys are doing is abnormal. A lot of places those guys are still sitting down on the third team. I think our approach is unique with those guys."

The approach can at least be partially attributed to inside the classroom, where special teams coordinator and designated academics coach John Baxter has tried to work his magic since receiving the freshmen in multiple shipments over the summer. Six or so of them, Baxter said, already have a full semester of classes -- 14 units -- done as they work toward their degree, putting them on a three-year pace to graduate. And many others have begun work too, which he says has helped them speed up the assimilation process off the field and allow them to focus on the field.

"This class is a really unique class," Baxter said. "This is really a fun place to be because we have legitimate student-athletes."

16 players miss practice with injuries

Injuries started to mount Wednesday, but Thursday they just took control.

It was the biggest story of the Trojans' practice on Howard Jones Field. It took coach Lane Kiffin 40 seconds in meeting with the media afterward just to list all the various ailments and injuries and then another couple of minutes to detail some of them.

In total, 16 scholarship players sat out practice Thursday because of injuries -- of which four were new injuries or things that hadn't yet caused the players to miss practice this fall.

"We're seeing the price that you pay for doing what we're doing," Kiffin said. "And it's a decision we made to go this direction, to tackle and have physical practices the way that we are, because we think it's too critical to prepare our guys for game-like situations.

"And so this is the downside to it."

The list of 16 players: defensive tackles J.R. Tavai (hamstring) and Christian Tupou (knee), cornerbacks Brian Baucham (hamstring), Tony Burnett (ankle), Torin Harris (concussion) and Patrick Hall (knee), safeties Demetrius Wright (hip), T.J. McDonald (ankle) and Jawanza Starling (undisclosed), linebacker Chris Galippo (shoulder) and Dion Bailey (foot), offensive guard Giovanni Di Poalo (shoulder), center Cody Temple (back), quarterback Jesse Scroggins (thumb), tight end Christian Thomas (hip) and receiver Robert Woods (ankle).

The most serious of those is Scroggins', with his injured right thumb requiring surgery that will sideline him for an unidentified amount of time. We'll go over the implications to the rest of the injuries Friday. With 79 scholarship players in camp for the Trojans, that means more than 20 percent of the team was out of commission Thursday. And that's not counting running back Marc Tyler, who's suspended.

Oregon Practice Report

Ken Goe, The Oregonian By Ken Goe, The Oregonian The Oregonian

Three players -- Karrington Armstrong, Horniss Grasu and Hamani Stevens -- have a shot to start on Sept. 3 in Cowboys Stadium when the Ducks open against LSU in what probably is the marquee game of the season's first week.

Oregon is ranked third in the preseason coaches poll, LSU fourth.

Oh, boy.

Center is a key position in the Ducks' spread offense, which operates from a shotgun formation most of the time. The starter needs to make an accurate snap for the play to be successful. If the snap is offline, and quarterback Darron Thomas has to reach for it, the play's timing becomes disrupted.

The situation is complicated by the fact that two-year starter Jordan Holmes took most of the important snaps a year ago. He's out of the picture now, his eligibility expired.

None of the three contenders was a factor in 2010.

Grasu, a true freshman, redshirted. Armstrong saw action in one game, the blowout victory over Portland State. Stevens was completing a two-year church mission.

Asked for an update after practice yesterday, UO coach Chip Kelly begged off.

"I really don't know," he said. "It's still up in the air. To us, it's how many reps can they get, and then let's just see how it is. It's not like every day we're coming in and saying, 'Hey this guy is ahead of that guy.' And, we go so fast, especially in practice, it's tough to know who the center is. It's almost like the only reason you know is if there is a bad snap.

"I think we've been pretty good with our snaps. Those guys have been pretty consistent. They're getting in some good work."

The evaluation process became a little easier on Thursday, when the Ducks put on shoulder pads for the first time. They will go with full pads on Saturday.

"Now there is somebody with pads on across from them," Kelly said. "So it'll be interesting to go watch the film."

Oregon Ducks need minimal retooling on special teams

EUGENE - While Oregon's coaches on offense and defense sift through young players to find replacements at key positions, special teams coach Tom Osborne is sitting pretty, for the most part.

He returns kicker Rob Beard, punter Jackson Rice, and return men, Kenjon Barner, Josh Huff, and Cliff Harris.

The special teams units showed well last season, ranking in the top three in most statistical categories in the Pacific-10 Conference.

Experience should lead to improvement in several phases. But some areas require constant juggling that can't be avoided, such as kickoff and punt coverage.

Osborne faces the challenge of identifying the next group of players not quite ready to contribute heavily on either side of the ball, but who can block and tackle well enough to earn roles on special teams.

An important area is kickoff coverage where the Ducks get plenty of work thanks to its formidable offense. Oregon last year led the nation in kickoffs (108) and kickoff returns defended (95) while finishing 12th in return yards allowed (19.28 per return). Oregon placed second in the conference in net kickoff average (45.2), calculated by subtracting return yards from kickoff distance.

"If your kickoff team gets off 100 some-odd kicks like we did last year and that's what your net is, then those guys did a phenomenal job in coverage," Osborne said.

Many of those guys, however, are now gone. Not only does Osborne face losing players to graduation each season, he also loses them to the offense and the defense, such as linebacker Lokombo Boseko, a standout on special teams last year who could see an increased role on defense this season.

Leading candidates to break in on coverage teams this season, Osborne said, are redshirt freshmen, cornerback Troy Hill, linebacker Derrick Malone Jr. and tight end Curtis White, sophomore defensive back Brian Jackson, and sophomore cornerback Avery Patterson.

Punting average is the only area the Ducks didn't rank highly in last season. But that's a misleading statistic. Rice ranked sixth in the conference at 42.3 yards per punt. Not a problem, Osborne said.

"Punting average in itself is overrated," he said.

Situational punting and accuracy are far more important to Osborne. Rice excelled in that area. Oregon, which led the nation in yards and scoring, didn't punt often last year and when it did, the Ducks were in good enough field position to require accuracy over distance.

Rice punted 40 times, placing 18 inside the opponent's 20-yard line. The opposition punted 80 times with 23 landing inside the Ducks' 20. Advantage Rice.

"That creates a long field for our defense," Osborne said. "That's why we're out there. That's our goal."

Day 4 at Oregon State

Paul Buker, The Oregonian By Paul Buker, The Oregonian The Oregonian

Oregon State coach Mike Riley said potential starting defensive tackle Castro Masaniai's fate will be known Friday morning.

Masaniai was suspended indefinitely in mid-May after being jailed following a domestic violence incident at a downtown McDonalds restaurant in Corvallis.

There was a settlement conference at the Benton County Courthouse Thursday morning, but no details of the settlement were released.

Riley indicated there were some issues still to be cleared up before he announces his decision to either let the 6-foot-2, 334-pound junior back on the team, or dismiss him from the team.

Masaniai has not been in camp, but he is listed No. 1 on the depth chart at left tackle.

Another potential starter at defensive tackle, Dominic Glover, isn't officially out of the woods with Riley in terms of his academics and that may be the case until next week.

The Beavers practice in full gear Friday and will hold their first two-a-day practices on Saturday, with the morning workout at 8:30 and the night-time workout at 6:30.

Notes: Outside linebacker Michael Doctor sat out. Riley said he experienced "a whole body cramp" after Wednesday's practice. "His hydration levels weren't correct yet," said Riley. ... good news of a sort for WR Micah Hatfield, who doctors now say doesn't need surgery. Riley said he could be out four weeks instead of six weeks. ... freshman DB Larry Scott hasn't had his MRI yet and Riley doesn't know if he will need surgery. ... slotback Mitch Singler (back spasms) and cornerback Ryan Handford (eyes were dilated and he couldn't see well enough) sat out.

UW Fall Camp practice report, Day Four

Posted by Bob Condotta

College football training camps almost inevitably result in a departure of a player or two, for any number of reasons.

So it was with UW today. As noted in the previous post, backup middle linebacker Victor Burnett was dismissed from the team for an unspecified violation of team rules. The redshirt freshman was vying with Tim Tucker for the third spot behind starter Cort Dennison and JC transfer Thomas Tutogi, who appears to be the backup there at the moment.

UW coach Steve Sarkisian didn't elaborate on the reasons for dismissing Burnett but said he doesn't feel as if the Huskies have had significant off-field issues during his tenure.

"I am not frustrated," he said. "I am frustrated maybe with myself, because I feel like part of my job is to raise these guys. I am inheriting a kid at 18 years old, and I have him for the four or five years of their lives, and those are big years in a young man's life with a lot of changes. You try to get them all - try and make them all better people, and better students and better football players, so the frustration maybe is with me when you don't get them all. Then you sit back and you realize I've got 115 sons, and the percentages tell me we're doing pretty good."

Given his status as a third- or fourth-team MLB this year, Burnett's loss isn't critical to the 2011 Huskies and obviously opens up a spot down the road.

As for practice, it was the second straight day in helmets and shoulder pads, and featured some significant 11-on-11 work.

Statistically, it wasn't the greatest day for QB Keith Price, who had three interceptions during the team sessions. But one was, and as is always the case this time of year, a bad play for the offense is a good one for the defense, so there's always somebody feeling good about something, and vice versa.

"I thought it was a very intense, upbeat, enthusiastic practice," he said.

The tipped interception landed in the hands of John Timu, who appears to be making a serious run at taking the weakside linebacker spot manned last year by Mason Foster. Garret Gilliland is also playing at that position.

Asked later to name some players who have made significant moves up the depth chart, Sarkisian started with Timu.

"For a guy who is essentially a true freshman for us right now, he basically started today," Sarkisian said. "For a guy who has never really played the position, being a high school quarterback and safety, he is just a natural football player. He has got great instincts. He is very athletic. He can run. He's tough. He has really probably made the biggest impact."

Making one of the other interceptions, a bomb on what was the last play of the day, was Sean Parker, who was the next player cited by Sarkisian as being a standout so far.

"He is just around the ball," Sarkisian said. "He is a natural football player. If he doesn't get an interception a day, he's got his hands on one that he doesn't quite catch. He is around the ball quite a bit." (The other interceptions were by Quinton Richardson and Travis Feeney of a tipped pass by Nick Montana that in a game situation would have gone for a touchdown --- in practice, he met the line of the rest of the waiting players).

Other highlights of the day included about a 60-yard TD run by Chris Polk, a nice catch-and-run by James Johnson on a slant to escape a tackle by Greg Ducre, a short pass that Johri Fogerson turned into about a 70-yard TD, and two straight completions by Montana in the last two-minute drill to Kasen Williams and Kevin Smith --- Sarkisian said it was an emphasis to throw the ball deep during the drill.

MORE NOTES

--- Sarkisian on when Semisi Tokolahi may be back: "I don't know. He (was able to practice) on the sled. But we're not going to force it with him. We've got time. We've got a lot more depth on the defensive line than I think people think. I want to make sure he's playing really good football for us in October and in November. If that means that we lose a little of that in early September, that's okay with me. I just want to make sure he's healthy."

--- Backup CB Marquis Persley sat out the end of practice with a foot/leg injury of unknown severity, but otherwise the Huskies have stayed pretty healthy so far. "Knock on wood," Sarkisian said. "We're doing pretty good. And some guys that weren't healthy are getting healthier, so that's the idea being the madness, I guess. ... (Evan) Zeger's getting better, Taz (Stevenson) is getting better. Sione's (Potoa'e)

obviously getting better. We're getting healthy."

--- Asked to elaborate on Zeger, Sarkisian said: "It's a hamstring, and the last thing I want is for that thing to linger for months. Let's just nip it in the bud and get him 100 percent healthy before we get into October and we're still talking about Evan Zeger and his hamstring."

--- Asked if he feels better about the linebacker spot with what he's seen of Timu, Sarkisian said: "I think so, because Princeton (Fuimaono) is playing at a high level. Cort (Dennison) is playing at a high level. Not that Garret (Gilliland) isn't, it's just Johnny is really pressing the issue. That is going to be make Garret better, going to make Jamaal better and so overall it's tough to go through a year with just three (linebackers). That is a physical spot, so we are going to need the depth that we have. They are pushing one another."

--- The Huskies are practicing more on the East Field, in part as preparation for the renovation:
"Well, we got new turf over there," Sarkisian said. "That's part of it. We like to be over there and the guys like to be over there too...sometimes there's a little bit more sun on that side of it. And there's a little bit of trying to get into a comfort zone over there, because come November 6th, and this thing closes down, we're over there full time and I don't want the shock of all of a sudden moving to the East field. The turf's good, and we're just trying to get used to it."

--- Sarkisian said the Huskies continue to experiment with two-tight end sets due to the sudden depth at that spot. "We've been doing quite a bit of it. lot of two tight sets with Austin (Seferian-Jenkins) and Michael (Hartvigson), as well as Evan Hudson...and Cameron Salley has shown up too at that spot. We've been doing it and I think it's been good to us. We've created a lot of big plays in the passing game and the running game because of it, so I think we'll stay the course and it'll be a part of our offense."

--- He said, however, that doesn't mean less fullback stuff, necessarily. "Jonathan Amosa played quite a bit, and I've been pleasantly surprised with Nick Holt at the position, it's something he hasn't played before. But we're also doing some stuff, utilizing what appears to be two tight end sets, with one of the tight ends at fullback. So we're incorporating that as well."

--- The punting job remains wide open and Sarkisian said he hasn't really narrowed down yet when or how that will be decided. "I'm hoping one starts shanking a couple of them. They are both bombing the ball right now. They are cranking it. We don't need to rush. They are both experienced, and they've both played a lot of football. Hopefully when it's all said and done they both get their opportunities."

--- The Huskies will be in full pads for a 3:15 p.m. practice on Friday.

Arizona Wildcats football defensive player on the spot: Trevin Wade

by Anthony Gimino - Aug. 10, 2011 05:19 PM
tucsoncitizen.com

To use the football vernacular, Arizona Wildcats cornerback Trevin Wade is a ballhawk. At least that used to be his reputation.

He intercepted four passes as a freshman, despite very limited playing time. He followed with five picks as a sophomore starter.

And then?

Well, maybe Wade got a little too happy, a little too caught in the building hype before his junior season. He often struggled last season, losing his starting spot for one game.

"It all gets back to preparation, and in my observation, the lack of it," said coach Mike Stoops. "The lack of preparation for a season and taking things for granted is something that can happen to even good people.

"That's a great lesson to learn and, hopefully, he learned his lesson because we have great challenges out there on the perimeter."

Stoops and defensive coordinator Tim Kish say they love what Arizona has at cornerback. Wade is the senior leader, a two-year starter. But as the coaches showed last season, they are not afraid to sit Wade if they have to.

Sophomore cornerbacks Jonathan McKnight and Shaquille Richardson are talented, athletic prospects. McKnight looks like the starter opposite Wade for now, but camp will further sort out the competition.

The bench is a great motivator?

"There's competition," Stoops said.

"He knows what Shaquille and McKnight are capable of better than anybody. They are all competing, and then the best players play. ... We have to win and we have to cover people out on the perimeter in big games better than we did a year ago."

Another sophomore Derrick Rainey has looked good in practice drills. Redshirt freshman Jourdon Grandon can play cornerback, too, although he might be needed more at safety this season.

For his part, Wade was re-dedicated in the spring, cutting down on mental mistakes and directing others in the secondary, secondary coach Ryan Walters said.

"I think part of the problem was that Trevin got complacent in his performance from a year before," Walters said.

"I talked to him before spring ball and said, 'You're capable of being a game-changing corner.' Last year was nothing that has to do with his ability. It is more to do with the intangible stuff. And that is the stuff where he grew this spring."

Wade intercepted only one pass last season, although it was a game-changer -- he returned it 85 yards for a touchdown against Iowa.

"Last year was not what I expected," Wade said. "But you have mistakes and learn from it and it makes you a better player. "You play how you practice, so if you come out and practice 100 percent and give it your all and you come off the field tired, then when you come to the game, it will all be easy for you." There is urgency for the defense, especially the secondary, to correct bad habits.

The Wildcats face Oklahoma State -- with Biletnikoff Award-winning receiver Justin Blackmon and 27-year-old strong-armed quarterback Brandon Weeden -- in the second game. The Cats have to try to stop Stanford quarterback Andrew Luck, the likely No. 1 pick in the 2012 NFL Draft, in the third game. Then comes high-powered and versatile Oregon. Then quarterback Matt Barkley and USC. Then Oregon State's Ryan Katz, who carved up Arizona for 393 passing yards last season. The tough schedule and the competition from his fellow cornerbacks are the main reasons why Wade is on the spot.

Walters made a prediction about how Wade will bounce back after absorbing the lessons of last season. "Because of his junior year performance," Walters said, "his senior year will be that much better."

Wildcats lose Jourdon Grandon for remainder of camp

8 comments by Ryan Finley - Aug. 11, 2011 11:03 AM
Arizona Daily Star

FORT HUACHUCA - One of the Arizona Wildcats' projected starters will miss the rest of training camp with a knee injury.

Jourdon Grandon sprained the meniscus in his knee during Tuesday's scrimmage on campus, and will be out for three weeks - and maybe longer. Grandon did not travel with the team to Fort Huachuca for its annual four-day trip to the Army installation.

Grandon, a 6-foot, 180-pound redshirt freshman, was playing with the first-team defense as nickelback during the first week of training camp. He intercepted quarterback Nick Foles Tuesday before suffering the injury.

Cornerbacks Trevin Wade and Shaquille Richardson took reps in Grandon's spot in practice this morning.

Grandon is the fifth Wildcat to be sidelined with a knee injury since the start of spring drills in March. Safety Adam Hall, linebacker Jake Fischer, running back Greg Nwoko and defensive tackle Willie Mobley are all recovering from surgery to repair torn ACLs. Grandon won't need surgery, coach Mike Stoops said - just rest.

"It's not anything longterm," he said. "We're trying to continually adjust our secondary to get the best players on the field."

Cougars pile up points in pads

By Vince Grippi
The Spokesman-Review

PULLMAN — After four days of preseason practice, Washington State put on all the pads.

And got after it.

The Cougars ended practice Thursday with a 51-play, 30-minute scrimmage dominated, for the most part, by the offense.

"Obviously, they moved the ball a lot," coach Paul Wulff said after the offense finished its first five possessions with either a field goal or touchdown.

"We wanted to get out and tackle and get in a live situation as early in camp as we can," Wulff said. "It's nice getting this live (play) in, because it makes it a lot easier to teach moving forward."

With that in mind, the starters on both sides of the ball put in just 14 plays and the first group of reserves added 11.

The remainder was left for the newest players, including redshirt freshman quarterback Connor Halliday, who was 7 for 9 for 104 yards and two touchdowns, and true freshman wide receiver Dominique Williams, who out-jumped defensive back Tracy Clark for a 43-yard gain among his two catches.

"We made sure (the starters) got some pops, got the speed of it," Wulff said. "Usually you can get great teaching off live film. ... We can come back (Friday) morning and we can clean a lot of stuff up off these live reps."

The No. 1 offense exploded from the start, with Jeff Tuel hitting Jared Karstetter for a 29-yard gain. Five plays later, Tuel, who was 5 of 5 for 63 yards, connected with Marquess Wilson on a play that should have given the offense a first-and-goal. But Wulff pulled the ball back and had Andrew Furney attempt — and make — a 28-yard field goal.

The other time the No. 1s matched up, Rickey Galvin broke off a 12-yard run to open the possession and ended it by taking a Tuel screen pass down to 1. Again, Wulff called on Furney, this time from 39 yards, and again the sophomore converted.

"I'd like to say because we're pretty good," Tuel said when asked about the offense's success. "That's just kind of how I feel, I mean at all levels, ones, twos and threes, we performed pretty well."

Notre Dame football: Irish coaches seeing new side of running back

By AL LESAR South Bend Tribune Staff Writer

Jonas Gray has a suggestion for Notre Dame football fans as the senior running back gets ready for his last hurrah.

The 2011 Irish Sports Report Notre Dame Football Annual is your VIP pass to the 2011 season. Find out more - [click here](#).

"I tell a lot of people, get your popcorn ready," Gray said with a wide smile. "It's gonna be a good year."

It's his time to shine.

Three very pedestrian seasons are in the rear-view mirror. Gray's no longer an afterthought on the Irish depth chart.

At 5-foot-10 and 230 pounds, Gray has always had the physical frame to be a power back. That doesn't mean the "want to" was always there.

In three years, he has played in 22 games, carrying the ball 75 times for 309 yards. He is still looking for his first career touchdown. Last season, in seven games, he had 20 carries for 100 yards.

"He's changed tremendously (from last year)," Irish offensive coordinator Charley Molnar said of Gray. "You can see a real love and passion for the game of football that he didn't demonstrate as much a year ago. You can see the love of his teammates and Notre Dame. Last year, I didn't know if he had those feelings or not.

"It comes down to being at the end of his career, probably has a better sense of what he had, and has a little bit of time to go out and reach all the goals or some of the goals he set for himself."

It might also come down to the fact that there's an opportunity dangling right before his eyes. Gray and junior Cierre Wood are battling for reps in the running game. Wood has the speed and elusiveness in the open field, while Gray finds his comfort zone between the tackles.

"(Cierre and I) try to push each other every day," Gray said. "It's 1 and 1-A. It's always been my goal to win the starting spot since I've been at Notre Dame. Now, I'm close to doing it.

"In between the tackles, I'm the best at that. I truly believe that I'm the fastest guy on the team. When I'm wearing (No. 25, which used to belong to Rocket Ismail), I take the approach I'm the fastest guy out there. That's what it means to wear that number, a guy who's relentless on the field."

Would Wood agree that Gray is faster?

"He might. You'd be surprised," Gray said. "We raced a few times this summer and we were pretty close. That's all I'm going to say." Speed is one part of the game. For Gray to be an impact player, he needs to show power - much the same as Robert Hughes did late last season.

"The main thing I hear (running backs) coach (Tim) Hinton saying, before a game: 'Break their will with your toughness,'" Gray said. "One other thing he says, 'You've gotta be the Manti (Te'o) of the offense. You've gotta be the guy that brings the toughness to the team.' When (Te'o is) out there, you know what you're going to get from him. He's going to go 110 miles an hour, he'll be all over the field, he's gonna be a tough guy." Gray's newfound mental approach to the game appears to be paying dividends, at least in preseason camp.

"The margin between Jonas and Cierre is very small," Molnar said. "Jonas wasn't really healthy for the full year we had him (last season). We're seeing a new side of Jonas Gray. He comes to work every day, practicing tremendously hard, and is becoming a leader and a mentor to the younger kids. "What we want to see out of Jonas now is being consistent, play-to-play, day-to-day. He's not been in that role. Jonas is reading his keys properly, he's pass-protecting, and he's catching the football. We're really pleased with his development."

"It's the last go-'round," Gray said. "You want to leave with a legacy of doing it the right way. You take it as a businesslike mentality; more businesslike than you would have in the past. You want to leave a mark." Put some butter on those kernels.

Colorado QB Tyler Hansen looking sharp in camp

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

BOULDER — With all the holes new coach Jon Embree has on his Colorado football team, he can take solace in knowing one hole that doesn't exist is at quarterback. I've been to most of the practices and senior Tyler Hansen has looked as good if not better than any player on the team.

He has shown a quick release, remarkable accuracy and a quick knowledge of Embree's new pro-set offense. Except for Thursday's afternoon practice, his receivers have hung onto the ball all camp, too. That's a nice change.

"He's really sharp," Embree said. "He was a little rusty at the beginning of camp. I don't know if he was pressing a bit, trying to be perfect but he's good. He does a good job of getting us in the huddle, getting us in the right plays. He does a lot of little things that don't necessarily show up."

I'm a huge believer in senior quarterbacks. Look at the leaps junior QBs make their senior years. If the offensive line forms and receivers Toney Clemons and Paul Richardson continue showing the hands they've had in camp, Colorado will score points.

Then again, don't get too excited. They're going against Colorado's cornerbacks.

O'Neill has inside track on Buffs punting job

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

BOULDER — Freshman walk-on Darragh O'Neill appears to be leading the punting race after a Thursday punt off. Colorado coach Jon Embree said he wants to narrow the race to two punters and O'Neill will definitely be one of them.

Embree said Rice-transfer Mark Brundage will battle O'Neill, a 2010 graduate of Boulder's Fairview High. Incumbent punter Zach Grossnickle, who averaged a net of 35.7 yards per kick last year, appears to be on the outside looking in.

"We'll see when I see the stats, but that's what it looks like on the field," said Embree who added he likely won't name a starter until next week.

O'Neill, who led Fairview to the 2010 state basketball final, was a mere student at Colorado last season. Born in Cork, Ireland, he is the son of Colm O'Neill, owner of Boulder's popular Irish bar-restaurant, Conor O'Neill's. Early speculation among reporters is Darragh O'Neill will get extremely good press.