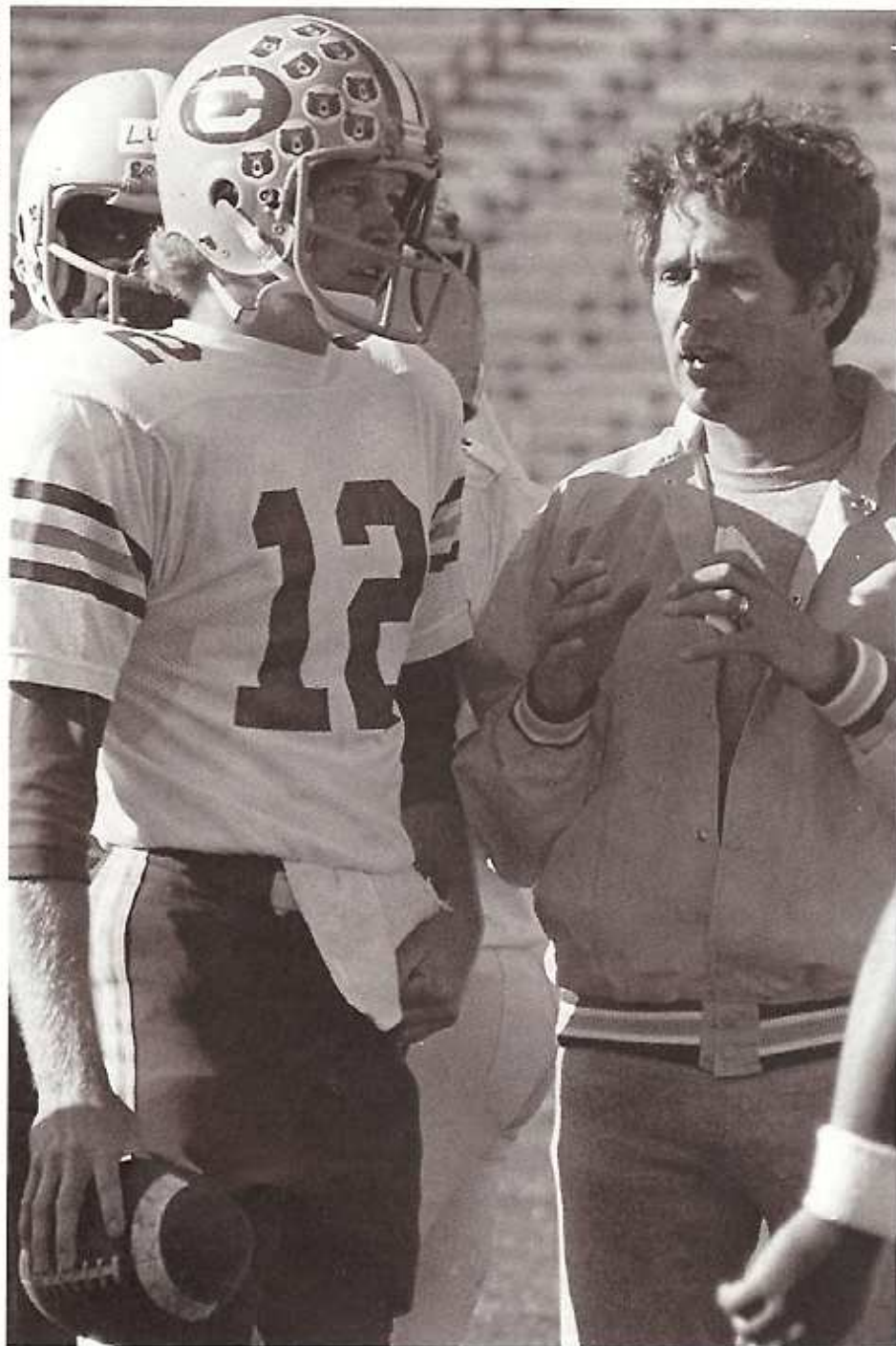


25TH ANNIVERSARY OF
CAL'S PAC-8 CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM OF 1975

Remembering a Cal Offense That Couldn't Be Stopped

BY KEVIN RENEAU



After 25 years, the numbers still evoke pride and wonderment.

It was a magical ride for a Cal football team during the 1975 season that ended with a Pac-8 Co-Championship. It was an awe-inspiring journey manned by a group of offensive superstars that numbered four different All-Americans and a future All-Pro in the NFL.

But, still the numbers remain the most significant legacy in one remarkable year for the

Cal football program, with an offense that did something that had never been accomplished before and likely never will be done again.

When the final stats were published at the end of the '75 season, California was not only the national total offense champion in averaging 458.6 yards a game, but it achieved the crown by gaining the exact same number of yards on the ground and through the air. Cal ran up 2,522 rushing yards, averaging 229.3 yards a game, and amazingly had the exact same 2,522 yards through the air. Every team likes to strive for balance, but the '75 Golden Bears hit the mark right on the head.

At halftime today, Cal will officially honor the 25th anniversary of that prolific team, introducing many members of that squad who have returned to Memorial Stadium to enjoy the celebration. Fittingly, it's also the renewal of the Joe Roth Memorial Game, a celebration honoring Cal's All-America quarterback from 1975 who died tragically of cancer just months after his final appearance in a Cal

Joe Roth, shown with head coach Mike White, had a brilliant career at Cal before falling victim to cancer just months after his senior season.

uniform.

The Cal offensive attack in '75 that had so many weapons that, when all cylinders were clicking, there was no way to slow it down, much less stop it.

"We were Florida State and Miami of our era, without all the hype and the self-promotion," said Chuck Muncie, Cal's star tailback on that team. "We had so many guys performing at such a high level, nobody was concerned about their individual statistics. It's not like that anymore. That was a special



JIM WIDELSON



When fullback Tom Newton clinched a victory over No. 4 USC with this 10-yard TD run, there were many smiles in a soldout Memorial Stadium in 1975.

football team."

It didn't all come together at the start of the season. After the graduation of All-American Steve Bartkowski the previous year, head coach Mike White decided to bring JC transfer Joe Roth along slowly at quarterback, letting him absorb the complex offense that White and Roger Theder directed. The Bears were 1-2 out of the blocks before Roth got his first start against San Jose State on October 4.

That game proved to be the turning point of the season. The Spartans were a dominant team, eventually ending up with a 9-2 record, and had a 24-20 lead on the

Golden Bears with just three minutes left in the game.

On the final series, Roth faced a 3rd-and-22 situation from Cal's own 10-yard-line. He pulled a rabbit out of the hat when he hit a leaping Muncie for a 25-yard-gain and a first down with just over two minutes on the clock. Five plays later, Cal had another 3rd-and-14 situation staring it in the face. This time, Roth hit Wesley Walker on a streak pattern down the right sidelines for a 46-yard TD and the come-

from-behind victory.

From there, Cal went on a roll, winning seven of the final eight games and finishing with an 8-3 mark. The only misstep came at UCLA when the Bears lost a 28-14 decision, despite 441 yards of total offense.

However, the Bears bounced back by whipping fourth-ranked USC the next week, 28-14, with 477 yards of total

offense before a soldout Memorial Stadium crowd and a big ABC-TV audience. In those days, teams just didn't shred USC like Cal did on that sunny afternoon in Berkeley. This was a team replete with future NFL greats such as Ricky Bell, Dennis Thurman, Gary Jeter, Clay Matthews and Marvin Powell, but they were dominated by the Golden Bears.

Then, Cal closed out the season with 522 yards against Washington, 492 yards at Air Force and 488 yards at Stanford.

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After tying for the Pac-8 crown, Cal had to sit and watch a USC-UCLA game the next week on television. A Trojan win or tie would give Cal a Rose Bowl berth. The Bruins cooperated by fumbling the ball nine, yes that's right, nine times. However, the Trojans also fumbled several times and passed up an opportunity to tie the game in the final minute with a field goal in a 25-22 loss.

Despite having an incredible offense and perhaps the hottest team in college football in November, Cal was done for the season.

Still, the remarkable offensive statistics are the type which are destined to remain immortal.

White enjoyed a long history of success as a head coach, directing a Big 10 Championship team at Illinois, leading the Oakland Raiders and serving as an assistant on the Super Bowl Champion St. Louis Rams. However, he still singles out that 1975 season as the favorite in his coaching career.

"That was a special, special team, especially on offense," said White. "We could go in any direction we wanted, whether it was the run or the pass. It was one of those seasons when everything came together. I don't think there was any team in the country that could have stayed with us at the end of the year. It's just too bad, we didn't get an opportunity to show the nation what we had in a bowl game."

Muncie was the big gun. He was a 6-2, 240 pound tailback with 4.5 speed and a cutting ability usually exclusive to 180-pound scatbacks. He could run right over you or give you a head-and-shoulders fake and glide right past you. He was Barry Sanders with Eddie George size.

Muncie ran for 1,460 yards and finished second in the Heisman Trophy voting as a senior. But he had plenty of company on the Cal offense.

Joe Roth may have become a household name if his illness had not stopped him before he was able to show his many abilities in the NFL. He had Joe Montana skills with a stronger arm. In his first year at Cal in 1975, he threw for 1,880 yards while completing 55.8 percent of his passes and



Chuck Muncie finished second in the 1975 Heisman Trophy voting. Here he is shown getting ready to complete a 46-yard halfback option pass for a touchdown to Wesley Walker in Cal's, 48-15, rout over Stanford.

then earned first team All-America honors his senior season in '76. However, he fell victim to cancer and died in February of 1977.

Roth enjoyed a great selection of receivers, including Steve Rivera who led the Pac-8 with 57 catches. He was as tough a player as you could find. In third down situations, there was nobody better coming up with the big catch in the middle of the secondary.

The deep threat was speedy Wesley Walker, who managed nine touchdowns among his 36 receptions in '75. Legally blind in one eye, he never dropped a long ball and would end his collegiate career with the highest yards per catch average, accounting for 25.7 yards on his 86 career receptions. He then went on to an all-pro career with the New York Jets.

George Freitas was a solid threat at tight end as he added 13 catches and a TD.

Although fullback Tom "Nasty" Newton was a devastating blocker, he also averaged 5.6 yards on his 98 carries in 1975 and Cal fans still remember his 10-yard TD run against USC in the final three minutes to seal the Golden Bear victory.

There were fewer superstars on the offensive line, but tackle Ted Albrecht was

a first team All-American and center Duane Williams earned first team all-league honors.

Cal featured an opportunistic defense that didn't have great team speed, but still made things happen. After the opening game when Colorado had 34 points, no opponent managed to score more than 28 points, and during Cal's stretch run, opponents averaged only 16.8 points a game in the last four games.

Phil Heck was a rugged middle linebacker who had a big heart and gimpy knees. He had several big games, including 15 tackles against USC. Jeff "Bad News" Barnes was also a big threat on the defensive line. He, James Reed and Daryle Skaugstad were the only players who went on to NFL careers, but the coaching staff wasn't afraid to use superior depth to achieve a solid defense. Players such as Bob Warner, Paul von der Mehden, Pete Sitta, Jeff Moye and Syd Lofton and so many others didn't get a second look from the pro scouts, but they helped make 1975 a very special year.

It's been 25 years since that special season, but it seems like yesterday to true Cal fans.