

# No Defense for the Trojans

By Duane Plank

Whoa is me, Trojan football fans. What the heck happened last week against the smart kids from NoCal, the young men playing with the pigskin for the Stanford Cardinal? What a shellacking, 55-21. On the hallowed home turf of the Coliseum, no less. In the month of November, a month that Coach Pete Carroll and his squad have owned since Carroll took over the Trojan program.

For the second time in less than a month, the Trojan defense was dismantled and embarrassed by a Pac-10 foe, relegating the proud Trojans to insignificant also-rans in the conference standings. And Carroll doesn't sound like a guy who has a handle on fixing the problem, or stopping the bleeding on defense.

Said a probably shell shocked Carroll to reporters after the carnage ended: "I'm not of a clear mind right now. I'm not really sure how to deal with this." Carroll had voiced similar sentiments a couple of weeks ago when the Trojans traveled North and were humiliated by the conference leading Oregon Ducks, 47-21.

Heard something interesting while listening to the radio the other day. The guy doing the talking made, to me, a valid point. His contention was that the Trojans have lost so many ballsy, experienced assistant coaches over the years (Norm Chow, Lane Kiffin, Steve Sarkisian, Nick Holt), that they may be getting out-coached big-time. Especially by Pac-10 teams, who face the Trojans each and every year, and may have finally figured out a way to stymie Carroll.

The theory is that Carroll has surrounded himself with relatively inexperienced "yes-men" on the coaching staff, and that no one will stand up to the coach if he has an idea or scheme that may be hair-brained. Sounds like a plausible theory. Very successful teams, be it on the pro or collegiate level, lose their best assistants year-in and year-out. Other folks are always going to cherry-pick the assistants deemed to be the best and the brightest.

Carroll is a smart guy and should be able to get the kids to regroup and have the Trojans ready for their next game, which happens next weekend against the gutty little Bruins. But even the always positive Carroll, who preaches the mantra "compete," seemed ready

to *not* compete this weekend, and take some time to figure out what the heck has gone wrong in the last month. "I'm glad that we have a bye," Carroll told a scribe.

By the way, I guess this will end, for good, any of the ridiculous talk of SC's bumbling freshman QB Matt Barkley and the Heisman Trophy. Kid is reverting to the turnover machine that he was rumored to be in his final year in high school. Shocker there. Heck, some folks are claiming that Barkley isn't even the best freshman QB in the Ciudad, so help me Kevin Prince!

And to think, about three weeks ago, a bye would have been considered any game played against the Air Force Blue football team from Westwood. Sorry *KA*, but that's just the truth. But the Bruins have actually won two games in a row, heading into their Rose Bowl contest this Saturday against Arizona State. Sure loss for the Bruins. Isn't it grand how supportive I am of the locals?

The Bruins and relentlessly positive coach Rick Neuheisel rolled the nincompoops from Washington State last Saturday something like 43-7. A proud win for the Bruins and some of their supporters, to be sure. While watching the game out and about, was assaulted by a couple of well-meaning Bruin fans, who kept pounding a drum or something as their guys walloped WASU, and the Trojans were taking it in the shorts.

These guys were a tad bit overheated, and were starting to, shall we say, annoy us folks who were there diligently following all of the collegiate games, busting our humps gathering info for these riveting columns. I may have mentioned to the Bruin guys something to the effect that it was great that the Bruins were beating up on a junior varsity team, but it was someone way funnier and droller than me who quipped about the nice win over the "Vassar knitting team." Wow. Great shot, way to go, *Girl*. And sorry, all of you Vassar College fans. Didn't know that you had a knitting team.

Allrightee, before getting on to the NFL, need to give some futbol props to the LA Galaxy, who have advanced to the MLS Championship Game, which takes place Sunday night in Seattle. Think that they are playing the team from Salt Lake City. Saw some of the Galaxy's 2-0 semifinal win over Houston Dynamo last Friday night. Viewed it

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# Frankly Plank

By Duane Plank

Here's a question for ya. Does anyone out there actually use their garage as a spot to park your car? Or is it crammed with a bunch of nebulous overflow and assorted rummage sale-type items? Just wondering. Don't think I have ever used any of the garages at any of the mansions that I have lived in for the expressed purpose they were built for.

Good news for my Dodger fan friends. The mellifluous tones of iconic announcer Vin Scully will continue to be heard on the airwaves, at least through the 2010 season. Scully recently said that he pretty much is taking it one year at a time. And why not, the gentleman is about to turn 82 and apparently feels the need to keep working so that he can help to financially take care of some freeloading family members. Said the voice, "I'm trying to figure out if I can walk away. I'm the horse pulling the wagon with a lot of people on the wagon, so I am really not sure."

Translation from *Frankly*: Lots of folks are riding on the financial coattails of the highly compensated announcer who has worked for the team for nearly 60 years. Scully said that he doesn't like spending time away from his wife of 36 years, but said, "Then again, I look at our large family, and in this particular economic time, they could use some help, so that factors into the decision."

Translation: "Time for some of my kinfolk to get a job." Scully, whose son Michael was killed in a helicopter crash in 1994, has five living children and 18 grandkids.

Of course, with the upcoming McCourt divorce, who knows what will happen with the team and its most valuable employee? No way that whoever is making the final financial decisions moving forward would tamper with Scully, try to force a pay cut on the guy just because he is a part-time employee not working Blue broadcasts when the team travels East of Denver. Then again, Jamie McCourt may need some extra cash for a new pair of trendy shoes, or a fresh bouquet of flowers...

Last add on Scully: I sure hope that the Dodger brain trust has a succession plan in mind for the day that the man hangs up his microphone. Because none of the current guys who handle the broadcasts when Vin is vacationing can cut it as the numero uno guy in L.A. Can you imagine listening to nine innings of Charlie Steiner every day for seven months? Me either.

NASCAR *GUY* noted that I completely ignored the Midshipmen's stirring upset victory at Notre Dame a couple of weeks ago. Big deal, I said. Anyone and everyone can beat the Fighting Irish, who under the tottering captainship of Coach Charlie Weis stand at a pedestrian 6-4 after last week's loss to Pittsburgh. Oh, I was supposed to give the kudos to the kids on the Navy squad. The Middies improved to 8-3 on the season after their home turf victory over Delaware last Saturday.

Navy has beaten Notre Dame twice in the past three seasons after losing 43 consecutive contests to the scholar-athletes from South Bend, Indiana. The powers that be at Notre Dame are not usually too quick to jettison a coach still under contract, and Weis would be due a big-buck buyout (\$18 mil), but times they are a-changing and Weis, only 35-25, is definitely in big-time trouble with many Notre Dame homers.

When/if Weis, who is completing his fifth season at Notre Dame, is sent packing, who will be the man ordained to lead the Domers back to BCS relevancy? A quick thought would be that ex-NFL Super Bowl winning coach Jon Gruden is available, having been canned by the miserable Tampa Bay Bucs after the conclusion of the 2008 regular season.

Gruden has been cooling his heels in '09, working in the TV booth for the folks at

*ESPN*, part of the broadcast team covering Monday Night Football. Gruden has been linked with job openings in South Bend before, but probably will opt to explore NFL coaching opportunities later this winter after the inevitable firings that will occur at the conclusion of the regular season.

So that leaves Brian Kelly, coach at the University Cincinnati, as the hot name on the shortlist of potential Weis replacements. Kelly is in the process of guiding the red-hot (10-0) Bearcats to their second straight Big East Title. Of course, Florida Coach Urban Meyer has always considered the Notre Dame gig his "dream job," and if the Gators continue on their merry ways and capture another national championship, maybe Meyer could somehow be pried out of Gainesville by the good folks who control the purse strings in South Bend.

Making dinner for the kid the other night... okay, I threw some stuff in the microwave, and I guess that I didn't know that you don't put coated paper plates in the microwave? Unless you want to start a fire and possibly burn down the mansion. No harm, no foul, the fire was quickly extinguished, but it did remind me of the time when I put a burrito, wrapped in tin foil, into the microwave. That also started a small conflagration inside the mic, which we also survived. Stupid is as stupid does, right.

Like to thank the kid, who chimed in, hoping to make me feel better, that he foolishly put some kind of pen in the microwave a few years back, and that didn't work out too well, either. He was trying to heat the sucker up, he said. Course he was in fifth grade at the time, and *I* have had some 25 years or so to figure out how to use one of the greatest inventions in modern history.

Speaking of fires, er, fired, ex-Morningside High hoop superstar Byron Scott was given his walking papers last week by the NBA's New Orleans Hornets, and if the ex-Laker star and established NBA winner doesn't resurface, today, with your sad-sack Clippers, then the fix must be in.

Scott was let go after a sputtering 3-6 start by the Hornets, but one of their wins was a 28- point stomping of the hapless Clippers on the hardwood at Staples. Had to be another lovely evening at the gym for the Clipper faithful, all 10 of them, who must be questioning whether there is a more fruitful way to waste/spend their entertainment dollars. Like flushing their discretionary greenbacks straight down the commode.

Anyway, the Clippers are off to their typical horrendous start, and GM/Coach Mike Dunleavy continues to astound us incredibly knowledgeable hoop fans by holding on to not just one, but both of his jobs.

After the Hornet debacle, Clipper center Chris Kaman, who has actually been playing very well this year, said, "We didn't come mentally prepared for this game, and that's why we lost. We've just got to bring the effort. We didn't have the effort tonight."

Granted, it is the responsibility of the pampered and (mostly) overpaid fellas in the NBA to motivate themselves each time that they hit the floor.

Shouldn't take a coach to get the players fired up to bounce a ball down the court and chuck a few shots at the old peach basket. Not when said players are cashing mega-buck paychecks. But whatever the career loser Dunleavy is doing, it ain't working and hasn't been working for years. Time for a change. Actually, it is about three years past the time for a change.

If anyone in the dubious Clipper brain trust isn't taking a siesta, someone place a call to Mr. Scott and see if he would be willing to help out his homies. Owner Donald Sterling has the cache to cut ties with Dunleavy, pay him the \$10 mil or so that he owes the beleaguered coach, and move on. •

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