

SEC Championship: Two Teams With Nothing To Lose?

ATLANTA (AP) — Given little chance to knock off the nation's top-ranked team, Georgia doesn't have a lot to lose in the Southeastern Conference championship game.

Then again, No. 1 LSU probably doesn't either.

In all likelihood, the Tigers have already put together a resume that's impressive enough to get them to New Orleans for the BCS title game — even if the 12th-ranked Bulldogs pull off a huge upset Saturday.

Count Georgia coach Mark Richt among those who feels LSU (12-0, 8-0 SEC) deserves to play for the national championship, whether they win or lose to his team. He can certainly read a schedule, noting the Tigers have already beaten three teams among the top eight in The Associated Press poll — No. 2 Alabama, No. 6 Arkansas and No. 8 Oregon — as well as 22nd-ranked West Virginia.

"If you look at all the one-loss teams and if, in fact, they became a one-loss team, just look at who they played," Richt said Friday. "I would think they'd be a shoe-in to play (for the national title). I know that's not what they're focusing on, because you don't go 12-0 unless you can focus on every game."

LSU's Les Miles, whose team is a two-touchdown favorite, refused to get dragged into the debate. No need to, really, since he's coaching the last unbeaten team from one of the major conferences.

To some, this game is just an afterthought, something the Tigers must get out of the way before they get on with their rematch against SEC West rival Alabama for an even bigger crown.

Miles doesn't see it that way.

"I do know that's an issue for other folks," he said. "It's not one for us. We're very, very focused on the next game and a very quality Georgia opponent."

Indeed, there's a sense this team wants a national title that includes no ifs, ands or buts. In 2003, LSU defeated Oklahoma for the BCS title but Southern Cal was voted No. 1 in the AP poll. Four years later, the Tigers became the first two

loss team to win it all, getting plenty of help from other schools along the way.

This time, it's all in their hands.

"We've talked about it several times, but not about the what ifs," Miles said. "It's all about what we've accomplished to this point. We've put ourselves in position to play a championship game. That's this Saturday against a very, very talented Georgia team. I promise you, our football team understands that."

Georgia (10-2, 7-1) might be the hottest team in the country outside of LSU. The Bulldogs have bounced back from an 0-2 start with their longest in-season winning streak since 1982, removing any doubt about Richt's coaching future. But their schedule hasn't been nearly as tough as the Tigers' because of a quirk in the rotation that allowed them to avoid all three of the top teams in the SEC West.

Still, given the pressure his program was under coming off its first losing mark in 14 years and then dropping its first two games, Richt and his staff have engineered an impressive turnaround that bodes well for the future, given the youth of the team (only five starters are seniors).

"We've had a lot of really special times with this team," Richt said. "I've enjoyed it maybe as much as any team I've coached."

Georgia has one of the nation's most accomplished quarterbacks in Aaron Murray, who's set a school record with 32 touchdown passes. The tailback position is another story.

Freshman Isaiah Crowell missed the regular-season finale against Georgia Tech with an injured left ankle and he's already been involved in at least two disciplinary issues, including a failed drug test that led to a one-game suspension. But Crowell practiced this week and was with the team when it turned up at the Georgia Dome for a light walk-through Friday.

His top backup, Richard Samuel, has missed the last four games after undergoing ankle surgery and it's not known if he's recovered enough to play against the Tigers. Georgia was so desperate for runners last week that two defensive backs, Branden Smith and Brandon Boykins, got

extensive time on the offensive side. The Bulldogs have also pressed into service former walk-on Brandon Harton, who's only 5-foot-6 and 174 pounds.

Richt has been coy about the situation all week, and that stance didn't change on the eve of the game.

"I'm not telling," he said, chuckling. "We'll wait. A game-day decision. How about that one? That's a good one."

LSU had no such concerns. For the first time in school history, the Tigers have four backs with at least six rushing touchdowns, and all figure to touch the ball Saturday. Spencer Ware (687 yards) will get the start, but he's got plenty of help with Michael Ford (721), Alfred Blue (445) and freshman Kenny Hilliard (248).

"It helps to wear down a defense," offensive lineman Will Blackwell said. "Our guys don't get as tired. We've got fresh legs here at the end of the season. We've got three, four, maybe five guys that can all run the ball and run it hard. The main thing, the best thing for us is we don't have to put the whole load on one guy. When one of those guys comes in, he can just pound it as much as he can and look forward to getting a little break."

That, in turn, has helped bolster the passing game. Jordan Jefferson took over from Jarrett Lee in the first 1-2 showdown with Alabama and rallied the Tigers to an overtime win. Over the final three games of the regular season, Jefferson completed 33 of 50 passes (66 percent) for 464 yards, with three touchdowns and only one interception. Plus, he gives LSU another running threat (253 yards, three TDs) when he tucks it under his arm.

"You've got to be able to run the ball to throw the ball," Blackwell said. "That's the philosophy we've taken on this season."

Georgia just took 'em one at a time, especially when it dug that early hole. Every SEC contest was, in essence, an elimination game. The Bulldogs passed every test, most notably rallying from a 14-point deficit to beat perennial nemesis Florida.

Suh's Suspension Upheld By NFL

NEW YORK (AP) — The suspension stands, and that means Detroit Lions defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh will sit out the next two games for stomping an opponent during a loss to the Green Bay Packers.

Suh's appeal of the suspension handed out earlier this week was denied Friday by Art Shell, jointly appointed by the NFL and the players' association to hear such cases. Suh will miss Sunday's game at New Orleans and a Dec. 11 home game against Minnesota. He can return for practice on Dec. 12.

The 2010 Defensive Rookie of the Year was penalized and ejected from the Thanksgiving Day loss to the Packers for stomping on the arm of guard Evan Dietrich-Smith. On Tuesday, the league suspended Suh and the player appealed.

Shell, however, saw no merits to the appeal during a conference call with Suh on Thursday.

Lions president Tom Lewand issued a statement saying the club respects the disciplinary process and added "obviously, today's ruling does not impact our preparations for this week's game. We remain exclusively focused on the New Orleans Saints."

Usually, a hearing is held within 10 days of an appeal, but the league expedited Suh's high-profile case so a decision could be made before Sunday's game.

Suh is barred from practice and the team's facility while sus-

pending.

Early last month, Suh requested and was granted a meeting with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell to discuss his play after he drew several penalties and fines. Suh said he had a better understanding of the rules after that meeting.

On Sunday, with it becoming apparent he would be disciplined again, Suh called Goodell to apologize.

In the game against the Packers, Suh lifted up his right knee and forcibly stepped on Dietrich-Smith's right arm during the third quarter of the Lions' 27-15 loss. Before the stomp, Suh shoved Dietrich-Smith's helmet toward the turf while separating himself from the Packers player on the ground.

He was penalized and ejected.

Asked about the incident after the game, Suh sounded defiant, insisting he didn't intentionally step on Dietrich-Smith. A day later, following criticism from the Lions, Suh apologized to his teammates, organization and fans — not to Dietrich-Smith.

His actions prompted more criticism around the league, with some calling Suh the NFL's dirtiest player.

Suh can afford any fines — he is making \$40 million guaranteed with a chance to get paid as much as \$68 million in a five-year contract he signed after Detroit drafted him No. 2 overall in 2010.

Vikings RB Peterson Out For Sunday

EDEN PRAIRIE, Minn. (AP) — Vikings running back Adrian Peterson will miss Sunday's game against the Denver Broncos with a high ankle sprain, and receiver Percy Harvin is listed as questionable with an illness.

Both players missed Friday's practice. Peterson hasn't practiced since sustaining the injury against Oakland in Week 10.

Peterson is seventh in the league with 872 yards rushing and his 12 touchdowns are tied for second. But at 2-9 Minnesota isn't taking any chances with its franchise back.

"The work he did today was far better than a week ago when he worked out, coach Leslie Frazier said. "He's able to do things pretty good. The cutting is still a little bit of an issue, but he's much further

along than he was a week ago, so hopefully the next days being able to cut will be less of a problem than it is today."

Frazier said Harvin's illness is not migraine-related, but would not disclose the exact issue. Harvin has dealt with migraines during his career. He's also dealt with rib soreness throughout this season, but hasn't missed a game.

"I know they're evaluating Percy and determining what's going on," Frazier said. "My first question like your first question was, 'Is it a migraine?' They told me we're evaluating the situation and we'll let you know when we get back in. But everything that's been indicated to me is he's fine and nothing like what we've experienced in the past."

After putting second-leading re-

ceiver Michael Jenkins on injured reserve this week, Frazier didn't want to think about his offense without Harvin.

Harvin leads the Vikings with 51 catches for 554 yards and two touchdowns. He's added another 235 yards and a touchdown rushing.

"Please, please, please let's not go down that one," Frazier said of his receivers without Harvin. "We need No. 12 out there."

Along with Jenkins, Minnesota also put safeties Husain Abdullah and Tyrell Johnson and long snapper Cullen Loeffler on injured reserve this week.

Also listed as questionable for Sunday are cornerback Asher Allen (shoulder), linebacker E.J. Henderson (shoulder) and tight end Kyle Rudolph (quadriceps contusion).

player himself," GM Terry Ryan said. "If he feels good, then I feel good."

"You can talk to all the medical people you want; talk about what he's had and what's he's gone through and experienced, but if you ask the player and he tells you that he feels good, that gives you a pretty good sense things are going right."

All-State

From Page 8

didn't fall off by end of the season."

With Hora leading the offensive charge for the Gazelles, Yankton finished the season 16-5 and just short of a state tournament berth. The junior brought the kind of energy to the floor that spread to her teammates, Woodward said.

"Certainly her athletic ability speaks for itself, but the common person doesn't see her leadership on the floor and the enthusiasm she brings," Woodward said. "She has a great time playing the game, and I think that's contagious."

Although Stevens' middle hitter McCloud recorded the fewest number of kills (174) among the first-team selections, it was what the senior brought in other areas that was as valuable, according to head coach Jonel Geske.

"She's a great leader on the floor and has the respect of all the players," Geske said. "Obviously she's a very gifted athlete, but you can't find a better role

model for our younger players."

A Division I basketball recruit headed to the University of South Dakota, the 6-foot-1 McCloud posted plenty of problems for opposing defenses.

"Her presence in the front row changed team's plans; they had to key on her a lot," said Ge%matches (thumb injury), there was definitely a different feel to our team."

Likewise for Roosevelt and Dejong.

The youngest of the first team selections, the 5-foot-11 sophomore was essentially a first-year player for the Rough Riders. She played only eight matches because of injury during her freshman season.

"We really didn't know her potential until this year, and she just took off," coach Holly Lynch said. "Her court awareness is incredible for being so young, and her slide attack is one of the best I've seen."

Dejong led the Rough Riders — who lost to Lincoln in the state finals for the second straight year — in kills (202) and solo blocks (54).

"It says a lot about the year she had, for being a sophomore, to get on a list with those other girls," Lynch said. "She's got a

great career ahead of her."

On an Aberdeen Central team that boasted just one senior, the leadership role was often filled by McCafferty.

The 6-foot junior recorded 215 kills on a squad that had four players with at least 145 kills.

"When we had only one senior, we had some problems finding a leader," coach Dennis Northrup said. "Lauren leads by example, so the girls know when she's rolling, that she'll take charge."

The Golden Eagles finished third at the state tournament, and that outcome was partly due to McCafferty's leadership, Northrup said.

"She's one of those girls who can do a little of everything for you," he said.

Second team selections included Kersten Bork and Lizzie Palmer of Sioux Falls Lincoln, Haley Chambers of Roosevelt, Ashlyn Hazard of Washington, Mikaela Schnetter of O'Gorman, Tia Hemiller of Watertown, Kacey Hermann of Rapid City Stevens, Anna Cramer of Huron and Chloe Cornemann of Yankton.

Hermann, Hazard and Hemiller are repeat selections to the second team.

Mauer

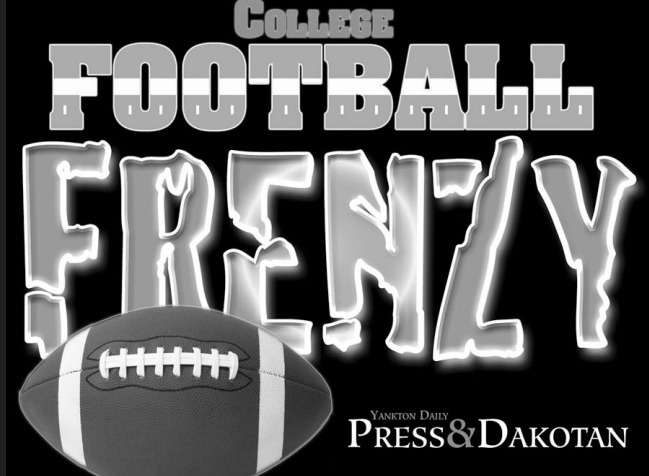
From Page 8

opinions and you can't control that. As long as my family, my friends and the organization know what's going on, that's what's im-

portant to me."


Mauer said his knee and legs feel good and he is making some changes to his workout and eating habits this offseason to try and be better prepared for the season. He still sees himself as a full-time catcher and is determined to help make sure the 99-loss season last year was a one-time setback.

"The best barometer is the



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