

The Heisman Trophy



Looking for the Heisman trophy winner? One of these four could walk or run off with it this year. They are Notre Dame QB Tom Clements, Texas FB Roosevelt Leaks, Penn State TB John Cappelletti and Southern Cal TB Anthony Davis.



Voters search for a suitable winner in the year of the non-candidate

By Mark Simonson

Times are bad all around. The nation is embroiled in Watergate, beef prices have skyrocketed and linemen are in the running for the Heisman Trophy.

Sportswriters and broadcasters charged with selecting this year's recipient are at such a loss, they are even considering a lineman for the Heisman, awarded annually to the top college football player in the country.

In the past there was always at least one dominant figure the voters could pick, even if they were nudged a little by the sports publicity offices. What ever happened to the good old days when you could tell the winner from the pack of pretenders. O.J. Simpson in 1968. Jim Plunket in 1970.

This year there are a half dozen candidates for the Trophy, named after Football Hall of Fame coach John W. Heisman. The Downtown Athletic Club of New York distributes between 1,200 and 1,300 ballots and receives about 75 per cent of them back.

Checking the list of top teams, there is no one player who has taken charge of the imagination of the voters to have his name announced as the winner on Dec. 13. In fact, many people are billing this year's Heisman follies as the Year of the Non-candidate.

Looking at the list of preseason all-Americans, it is still difficult to find one standout who deserves the Trophy yet. There is still more than three weeks of the season left and any spurt of yardage or touchdowns might be enough to determine this year's winner.

A quick look at the possible winners reveals there are four underclassmen in the running. This leads one to believe this year they will be just jockeying for position. Whatever happens in the stretch drive next year or the following one is what counts.

Herschel Nissenson, who covers college football for the

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Associated Press, has come to this conclusion regarding the current race.

"There doesn't seem to be any one player as in recent years," he said for his New York office earlier this week.

"Nobody has had a great year," he added. "The best picks would be linemen, but nobody votes for them."

Ohio State is hoping to break the lineman jinx and is pushing its two All-Americans offensive tackle John Hicks and linebacker Randy Gradishar. At 6-3, 260, Hicks

usually leads the way for the Buckeyes punishing ground game and Gradishar is the top stopper in the Ohio State defense, ranked first in scoring defense.

If the swing to lineman is for real, then Lucius Selmon of Oklahoma might be a good choice. Selmon is a quick, strong middle guard for the Sooners. He gave Penn State fits in the Sugar Bowl last year. Oklahoma is on national television against Nebraska Thanksgiving and Selmon could turn a few heads while voters nibbled on the turkey.

Other linemen have fantasized winning the Heisman and learn that it is for the backs and quarterbacks to tote around. With the voting in an uncertain state, the first eight weeks of the season will probably be forgotten for the final three. Television appearances and "Back of the Week" mentions go a long way in the Heisman countdown.

Publicity plays an important part in the grooming of the Heisman candidate. Oklahoma feels Steve Owens' Back of the Week honors a week before the 1969 Heisman voting was enough to push his campaign over the top.

Here is a look at the current standouts who have a shot at the Trophy:

Texas fullback Roosevelt Leaks is the NCAA rushing leader with 1,146 yards. The 5-10, 218-pound Longhorn junior was named Southwest Conference Player of the Year in 1972. He didn't hurt his chances any last week when he sprang for 342 yards against Southern Methodist and earned "Back of the Week" honors from the Associated Press.

According to Ohio State's sports information office, Archie Griffin is a non-candidate in the non-candidate year. "He is not in our plans, we are not pushing him," the spokesman said, indicating the efforts are squarely behind seniors Hicks and Gradishar and not the sophomore Griffin. Griffin (5-10, 185 pounds) has seven 100 yard-plus games to his credit for 888 yards rushing. Ohio State ends the season against Michigan on television.

Anthony Davis is finding that USC 1973 isn't the same as USC 1972. Last year the 5-9, 190-pound Davis excited the country when he ravaged Notre Dame for five TDs. Last year Davis gained 1,191 yards on 207 carries and scored 17 touchdowns as the Trojans won the national champions. This year Southern Cal is 6-1-1 and Davis has a 3.7 yard rushing average (678 yards on 182 carries and nine TDs).

Penn State's entry in the Heisman race is John Cappelletti, the only senior of the bunch. Cappy is rushing to make up lost time (he was a defensive back his sophomore year). He passed Franco Harris Saturday with 202 yards against Maryland to move into third place

on Penn State's all-time rushing list. He was nominated for Back of the Week for that game. The 6-1, 215 tailback, praised by coach Joe Paterno as the best football player he's ever had, has rushed for 937 yards. He had 1117 yards in 1972. Penn State is not on television again this season.

The final candidate is Notre Dame quarterback Tom Clements, who has compiled 1,014 yards offensively, leading the Irish to a 7-0 record. Clements, a 6-0, 185-

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pound junior, has completed 43 of 79 attempts for 665 yards and has better than a 5.0 yard rushing average.

There are a few darkhorse candidates who could get hot the final weeks and sneak in. Woody Green of Arizona State is not having as good a year as he did in 1972 and the fact that his games are played too late to be mentioned in the early Sunday morning Eastern papers will hurt his chances.

A win over Southern Cal would boost UCLA quarterback Mark Harmon's chances of winning the Trophy his father received in 1940.

Tennessee quarterback Conredge Holloway could pick up much of the Southern vote, although the Vols aren't on television any more this year.

While the main thrust of the Heisman voting is dependent on the field action, a few blocks by the publicity department is always helpful. It is unlikely that any school will try to rhyme its player's name with Heisman this year as Notre Dame did in 1970 with quarterback Joe Theisman (its these-man), but expect some wild campaigns.

After seeing the top players around the nation, Nissenson leans toward Clements. "The Notre Dame quarterback has a certain magic about him," he said. "If the voting were held today, Clements would win." Since 1935, six Irish quarterbacks have won the Heisman.

Davis is having a bad year and Ohio State is saving Griffin for next year or the following one. That leaves Leaks and Cappelletti.

Cappelletti doesn't have the same problem Ed Marinaro of Cornell had in 1971. Marinaro led the nation in rushing, but lost the Heisman to Auburn quarterback Pat Sullivan. Besides playing Eastern football, he played in the Ivy League.

Nissenson sees these five names as being very close together. "Throw these five names in a hat and anyone could win," he said.