



IN THE TRENCHES: THIS WEEK'S OUTLAND TROPHY MATCHUPS

PRESENTED BY THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES

USC AT TEXAS, 8 P.M. ET ON FOX

Our weekly sojourn highlighting games with Outland Trophy significance takes us to a place that has already been home to three Outland winners, Austin, Texas. **Patrick Vahe** (Euleless, Texas) and **Toa Lobendahn** (Cerritos, Calif.) face off in one of Saturday's most-hyped games. It's a matchup of two veterans who are among the most decorated and most experienced linemen in the country as well as former Freshman All-Americans (Lobendahn, 2014, from the FWAA; and Vahe, 2015, from ESPN). Both are keys to offenses still looking for breakout games.

Lobendahn (6-3, 295), now back at center after two seasons at left tackle for USC, is one of four returning Trojan starters on the offense line and has a versatile resume that sets him apart nationally. The senior captain has started every game (36) that he has appeared in at USC, but with a mix of starting at four different positions, 18 at left tackle, eight at left guard, five at right guard and now five at center. He was the Trojans' left tackle last season, but returned to center this season, where early injuries took away most of his 2015 and 2016 (redshirt) seasons. He was All-Pac-12 at left tackle in 2017.

Vahe (6-3, 325), a senior and three-year letterman, was an honorable mention Big 12 player last season and has played in 36 games with 33 career starts for the Longhorns. The left guard helped Texas to one of its most complete offensive games in the Tom Herman era last week in a win over Tulsa. The Longhorns didn't allow a sack for only the fourth time in Herman's 15 games in Austin, and Texas had a balanced attack of 241 rushing yards and 237 through the air as quarterback Sam Ehlinger set a career-high mark for completion percentage (21 of 27, .778).

It's been 41 years since a Longhorn won the Outland Trophy – Brad Shearer was the last in 1977 – but Texas can also boast Tommy Nobis in 1965 and Scott Appleton in 1963. They've come close recently, as Malcolm Brown was a finalist in 2014. USC's lone Outland winner was Ron Yary in 1967 and the Trojans haven't had a finalist since Tony Boselli in 1994.

The two storied programs enter Saturday with some extra history blended into their matchup. A victory earns Texas its 900th all-time win – its 899 wins are the third-most in college football history. The Longhorns' 800th win came against USC to win the national championship in the 2006 Rose Bowl. USC is ninth on the all-time wins list with 835.

OKLAHOMA AT IOWA STATE, 12 P.M. ET ON ABC

The Sooners' offense is performing with fast-action force, and while OU's skill-position players rack up record-reaching statistics, it's the veterans up front that start the show. The three Outland Trophy Watch List members along Oklahoma's line – junior left tackle **Bobby Evans** (Allen, Texas), senior left guard **Ben Powers** (Wichita, Kan.) and senior right guard **Dru Samia** (Sacramento, Calif.) – have each given the Sooners remarkable consistency that has kept the program in each season's national championship conversation.

Since the 2017 season representing the bulk of this trio's starting careers, OU has scored at least 30 points in 37 of 42 games. Over its last nine games, Oklahoma is averaging 32 first-half points, and four of its opponents in that nine-game stretch came into the game ranked in the top 12 of the AP poll. The Sooners have scored at least 20 first-half points in 14 of their last 16 games, and since the start of the 2015 season when now-head coach Lincoln Riley came on as offensive coordinator, OU leads the nation in passing efficiency rating (187.8), completion percentage (69.3), points per game (44.8), total offense (556.0) and touchdowns from scrimmage (238).

Evans started all 14 games last year at right tackle before moving to the left side this season. Powers started 12 games (10 at left guard, two at right guard) and played in all 14 a year ago. Samia made 12 starts at right guard and played in 13 games. Powers and Samia earned Second Team All-Big 12 honors (Evans was honorable mention) and all three were on the 2017 Academic All-Big 12 teams to complement their performance on the field.

The Sooners have had five Outland winners (the last was Jammal Brown in 2004) and had a finalist (Orlando Brown) last year, and have been ranked in the AP's top 10 in 24 of the last 25 polls. The only week it missed was following last year's loss to Iowa State, which has **Ray Lima** (Los Angeles, Calif.) posted at defensive tackle and will line up opposite Powers or Samia. Lima (6-3, 302) is a team captain with 10 career starts and was honorable mention All-Big 12 last season. He has 27 tackles (14 solo) and 4.5 tackles for loss in his career and had two tackles in last week's loss to Iowa. ISU ended an 18-game losing streak to OU last year with a win in Norman.

OTHER MATCHUP OF NOTE ...

Arkansas State at Tulsa, 7 p.m. ET on CBS Sports Network: **Lanard Bonner** (Birmingham, Ala.) is the left tackle anchor and All-Sun Belt first-teamer for an ASU offense that led the conference in scoring offense (37.8 ppg), total offense (495.3 ypg) and passing offense (342.2 ypg) a year ago. Tulsa senior center **Chandler Miller** (Bixby, Okla.) returned to the Outland Watch after consecutive All-American Athletic Conference seasons and has started his last 40 games. **Tyler Bowling** (Yukon, Okla.) is also a two-time second-team all-conference player, a durable senior left guard with 27 consecutive starts and three career games playing more than 100 snaps.

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