# Brut Sun Bowl Preview

Sooners, Cardinal Set To Square Off On New Year's Eve

EL PASO, Texas (AP) – Stanford's Toby Gerhart came up just short in his Heisman Trophy bid. He may not have gotten so close, though, had Oklahoma's Sam Bradford been in the running.

Led by the country's top rusher, the Cardinal look to conclude their best season in eight years on a high note as they face the Sooners - inconsistent without their star quarterback - in the Brut Sun Bowl on Dec. 31.

Gerhart finished second to Alabama running back Mark Ingram in the closest vote in the 75-year history of the Heisman Trophy. Gerhart got 222 first-place votes and 1,276 points while Ingram received 227 first-place votes and 1,304 points.

Ingram is the successor to Bradford, who decided to return to school this season after winning the award. He likely hurt his NFL stock, undergoing season-ending surgery on his right shoulder after playing one complete game for the Sooners (7-5) this season.

That derailed the Sooners' hopes of making the BCS championship game for the second straight year - they lost 24-14 to Florida on Jan. 8. They've dropped three straight bowl games since a 17-14 win over Oregon in the 2005 Holiday Bowl.

Stanford (8-4), ranked 19th, is coming off its first winning season since 2001 and now makes its first bowl appearance since that same year - a 24-14 loss to Georgia Tech in the Seattle Bowl. No player has been more important to the Cardinal's success than Gerhart, a unanimous first-team All-American.

The senior has rushed for more yards (1,736) and more touchdowns (26) than any other player in the nation, helping

Stanford finish second in the Pac-10 after going 5-7 last season.

"I let the production and play speak for itself," Gerhart said. "There wasn't a lot of preseason hype, or no preseason hype to be exact. To be recognized for what you do on the field and not as a media baby, that makes it that much more special."

With Gerhart's help, coach Jim Harbaugh is getting a chance to continue leading Stanford, signing a three-year contract extension two weeks before this bowl.

The Cardinal upset Southern California and California in 2007, but ended up going 4-8 in what was Harbaugh's first season. They fell one win shy of a bowl bid last year, but have risen to national prominence following an impressive November that included wins over then-No. 7 Oregon and then-No. 11 USC.

Stanford won its last game, 45-38 over Notre Dame on Nov. 28, getting 205 yards and three touchdowns from Gerhart. Now the Cardinal are facing one of the top rush defenses in the country.

Oklahoma ranks seventh in that category, allowing 88.6 yards per game.

"We're going to have to gang tackle," said Sooners cornerback Dominique Franks, a second-team All-Big 12 selection. "Not just one person's going to be able to bring down that running back. But, you know, we're always up for the challenge, and we're going to face a great team. We want to go out there and get a win."

Oklahoma held then-No. 11 Oklahoma State to 62 yards on the ground in a 27-0 win Nov. 28. It was perhaps the Sooners' best performance of the season.

Oklahoma ranks seventh in total defense, surrendering 273.5 yards a contest, led by numerous pro prospects that could decide to leave school early.

The school announced Dec. 18 that defensive tackle Gerald McCoy will skip his senior season and enter the NFL draft.

Franks
and defensive tackle Adrian Taylor, though, intend to return. Taylor is durable in the interior, starting the last 27 games and posting seven tackles for a loss this season.

Offensively, the Sooners rely on
tackle Trent Williams, a first-team All-American. His consistency has helped freshman quarterback Landry Jones adjust after taking over for Bradford.

Jones has been sacked 12 times in 11 games, completing
58.0 percent of his passes for 2,780 yards and 23 TDs while getting picked off 13 times. He's thrown four or more touchdowns three times, but also had a five-interception game in a 10-3 loss to Nebraska on Nov. 7.

Jones hasn't gotten nearly as much production from the
running game as Bradford received last season, when Oklahoma ranked 16th in that category with 3,009 yards.

DeMarco Murray had 1,038 of those yards, but missed the BCS title game due to a ruptured tendon in his left hamstring.

This will be his first bowl appearance. A dislocated knee kept Murray out of the Fiesta Bowl as a freshman in 2007.

"I'm fired up," Murray said. "It feels like the national championship game to me."

Murray has rushed for 678 yards and seven TDs, and has 38 receptions for 482 yards and four scores.

This will be Oklahoma's school-record 11th straight bowl game, but the Sooners have lost five of their last six.

Oklahoma is 3-1 against Stanford.