

Winner not champ to all?

From "GAME," Page 1

Wait a minute: What about the Gators and Sooners?

"This is the national championship game," Oklahoma defensive end Auston English said. "There's a reason they call this the national

championship game and all the other ones bowl games."

The winner at Dolphin Stadium will get a crystal trophy and the No. 1 ranking in at least one of the major polls, probably both.

This, however, is certain: There will be no undisputed national champion this season. Neither the Florida or Oklahoma athletic directors would comment on Shurtliff's plan to investigate. BCS officials also declined to talk.

This is not the first time a team that didn't play in the title game made a case to be No. 1. But never have so many so boldly stated they deserve the national crown.

Considering the top six teams in the final regular-season AP Top 25 entered the bowl season with one loss, maybe it's no surprise.

First, No. 5 USC jumped all over No. 6 Penn State in the Rose Bowl. As if that wasn't enough to convince the football world just who's the best, Carroll had this parting shot before he left the field: "With all due respect, those are two great programs (Florida and Oklahoma), I don't think anybody can beat the Trojans."

Carroll, a staunch and vocal supporter of a major college play-off system, does not have a vote in the USA Today coaches' poll.

The American Football Coaches Association has agreed to have its poll voters make the winner of the BCS title No. 1 on their ballots.

Nonetheless, that apparently won't stop Brown and Whittingham from casting votes for their teams.

"Someone would have to convince me otherwise and that hasn't happened," Whittingham said Tuesday.

While their votes would still be tabulated, Brown and Whittingham also might get a stern talking to from Grant Teaff, executive director of the AFCA. Teaff said earlier this week he planned to send out a memo reminding his members of that agreement.

Only after the 2003 season, when LSU beat Oklahoma in the BCS national title game, but Southern California was voted No. 1 in the AP Top 25, have coaches broken that agreement.

Three coaches, including Carroll, voted for USC that year.

No. 7 Utah stunned No. 4 Alabama in the Sugar Bowl last week, with a convincing 31-17 victory

and finished the season as major college football's only unbeaten team at 13-0. Playing in the Mountain West Conference hurts the Utes' case, even though the league finished 6-2 against the Pac-10.

The Longhorns have felt all along they should be playing in the BCS title game instead of Oklahoma. Texas beat the Sooners 45-35 in October. But the Big 12's division tiebreaker and BCS standings sent the Sooners to Miami.

There was some hope in Austin that an impressive victory against Ohio State in the Fiesta Bowl, combined with an Oklahoma victory in Miami, would lead to AP voters making the Longhorns their national champion.

As exciting as Texas' 24-21 victory on Monday was, it didn't seem to help their cause.

In an informal survey of AP pollsters taken Tuesday, 12 of 30 voters to respond said they either were likely or definitely planning to vote the winner of Florida-Oklahoma game No. 1.

"In my mind there is no debate," Barker Davis from *The Washington Times* said in an e-mail. "This isn't like USC/LSU a few years back. The two teams who were the most impressive from the nation's two most impressive conferences actually made it to the title game, and my vote is a lock to the Florida/Oklahoma winner."

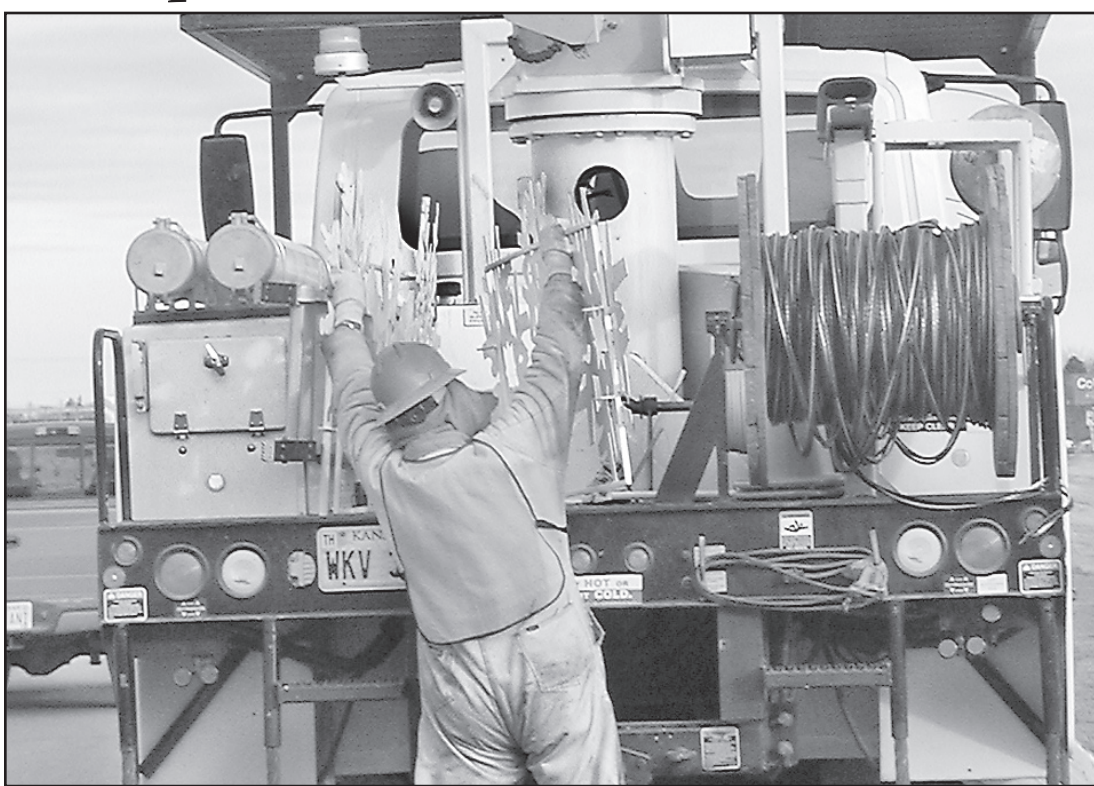
Most of the 18 other voters who said they were undecided had USC, Utah and the winner of the national championship game in the running. There was mild support for Texas, and only if Oklahoma won ugly against Florida.

"It's not a lock that I'll vote the winner of the BCS title game as national champ," John Heuser of *The Ann Arbor News* said in an e-mail. "If neither team looks especially good, I'll have no problem voting for a different team."

Steve Conroy of the *Boston Herald* said he has made up his mind and the Utes are going to be No. 1 on his ballot.

"Would I have Utah favored in a game against Florida or Oklahoma? Probably not," he said in an e-mail. "But it doesn't matter. Utah won every game in the regular season — which is the playoffs in the current, flawed system — and then went to the deep South and whacked a good Alabama team."

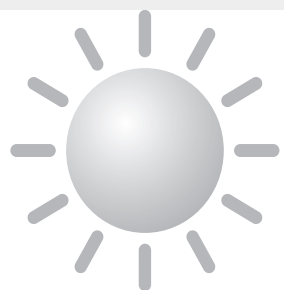
Crew packs decorations



STEVE HAYNES/Colby Free Press

Another snowflake went in the back of the truck, as Marty Carman shoved it into the bed of a city line truck. He and Kyle Brogan were removing holiday decorations on Range Avenue in a chill breeze this morning.

Weather Corner



National Weather Service

Tonight: Partly cloudy, with a low around 27. West wind between 10 and 15 mph.

Thursday: Sunny, with a high near 62. West wind 5 to 10 mph becoming south.

Thursday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around 29. South wind 10 to 15 mph becoming west.

Friday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 47. Windy, with a north wind 10 to 15 mph increasing to between 25 and 30 mph. Winds could gust as high as 40 mph.

Friday Night: Partly cloudy and blustery, with a low around 17.

Saturday: Sunny, with a high near 45.

Saturday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around 15.

Sunday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 51.

Sunday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 19.

Monday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 49.

Monday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 24.

Tuesday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 47.

Monday: High, 40; Low 13
 Tuesday: High, 47; Low 18
 Precip: Monday 0.00 inches
 Tuesday 0.00 inches
 Month: 0.00 inches
 Year: 0.00 inches
 Normal: 0.48 inches
 (K-State Experiment Station)

Trees easiest to prune in winter

Winter brings snow, ice, and frigid temperatures, but it also brings the perfect conditions for pruning most nonflowering trees.

In winter, trees go into their dormant season. Cooler weather causes leaves to fall to the ground, making the tree's branch structures easier to see. This is the ideal situation to spot broken or damaged branches that could easily snap under the pressure of snow and ice.

Deciding what and where to prune involves an understanding of basic tree biology, sharp tools and an artful eye. Where you make the cut is as important as knowing what to remove. There are a few simple principles to understand before you prune:

- Always have a purpose in mind before you cut. Removing dead or diseased wood, providing clearance or improving structure are most common.
- Proper technique is essential. Poor pruning technique can cause long-term damage. Learn how to make proper cuts.
- Small cuts do less damage to

the tree than large cuts. Unlike people, tree wounds do not heal, they close. Smaller cuts close quicker.

• Make cuts just outside the branch collar for quick wound closure.

• Avoid leaving stubs.

• Keep tools sharp and clean.

"Proper pruning can be an important part of tree health maintenance," said Jim Skiera, executive director of the International Society of Arboriculture. "Just be aware that each tree is different, and pruning at the wrong time or the wrong way can injure a tree or make it susceptible to disease."

If pruning your tree cannot be done without using power equipment or leaving the ground, then it should be left to a professional. You can find more tips on how to prune trees, or how to find a certified arborist in your area at www.treesaregood.com.

The society, headquartered in Champaign, Ill., is a nonprofit organization supporting tree care research and education around the world. For information, go to

www.isa-arbor.com



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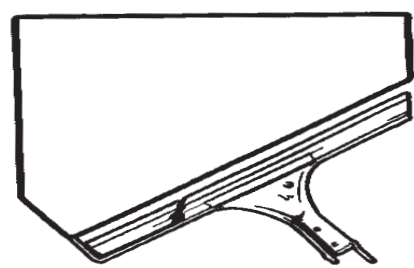
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