



Posing the Heisman question

Highlights, big wins speak volumes to voters

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By **CHIP BROWN** / The Dallas Morning News

AUSTIN – Some years, Heisman Trophy voters look in one huddle after another to find a worthy candidate.

This year, players are practically bull rushing the ballots. The two ramping up the buzz also happen to bring new meaning to postgame highlights.

When watching Texas quarterback Vince Young and USC running back-receiver-returner Reggie Bush, you're not watching football. You're watching Cirque du Soleil without having to spend the bucks to go to Las Vegas.

USC quarterback Matt Leinart began the year as the Heisman favorite for a pretty good reason ... he won last year. But it didn't take long for Bush and Young to electrify the electorate. Bush's dizzying zigzags through Notre Dame's defense could have made fence posts stand and applaud.

And then Young reminded everyone why he is a once-in-a-school talent at quarterback by taking over in the second half of the Oklahoma State game the way Don King is taken over by hair. Thanks to Young, a player other than a USC Trojan topped the *Rocky Mountain News'* Heisman Poll for the first time this season. The newspaper's poll taps the pulse of 10 Heisman voters (two from each of the nation's five voting regions).

ESPN's Heisman Watch, made up of reporters and broadcasters who cover college football, also saw Young move ahead of Bush this week – after his school-record 506 yards of offense in a 47-28, come-from-behind victory at Oklahoma State.

Here's a look into the minds of five Heisman voters. The most valued stiff arm in football will be presented Dec. 10 in New York.

Ivan Maisel

ESPN.com

"It has taken time for me to understand that the value of Bush, and threat of him, goes beyond the

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numbers. He makes defenses account for him on every single snap. That's why I could easily vote for him to win. That and the NFL people with whom I speak who tell me that he is hands-down the best player in college football.

"That said, this week I have Vince first in my Heisman ranking. He is the complete package, including leadership. The plaque on the little bronze guy says 'Most Outstanding Player,' but if you even begin to consider 'MVP' in your thoughts, then Young emerges as an even stronger candidate."

Tim Layden

Sports Illustrated

"This year, both Vince Young and Reggie Bush seem to have buzz. But it looks like Bush has a little more, although I would vote for Young if the deadline was here. Both Bush and Young are benefiting from a little Leinart Fatigue in the national media. Right now, I would expect Bush and Young to go 1-2 in the voting – with Leinart probably third. After that, maybe Brady Quinn or Marcus Vick or Maurice Drew."

Dennis Dodd

CBS Sportsline

"I have Vince No. 1 this week. Anyone who saw the Texas highlights ought to realize that the Longhorns are undefeated because of two words – Vince Young. End of discussion. I don't care if the guy ever plays a down in the NFL, CFL or AFL-CIO. He's better than Marcus Vick. He might be better than Michael Vick, and not the one who played at Virginia Tech in 1999. The one who plays with the Falcons right now.

"You can make a case for USC doing without Bush or Leinart or LenDale White. The only other guys who have as much impact on their teams are DeAngelo Williams at Memphis and Brady Quinn at Notre Dame."

B.G. Brooks

Rocky Mountain News

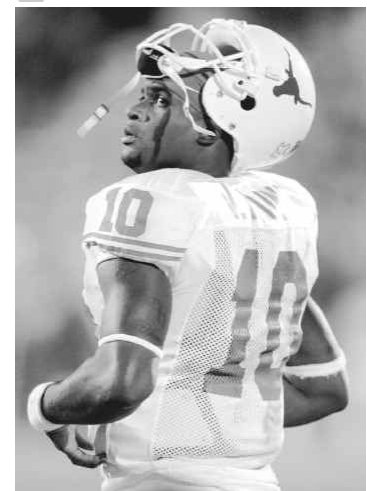
"Before Colorado played Texas, Gary Barnett said it was difficult to remember a guy who could take control of a game like Young can. And it's been played out several times in that game and since with Young's passing and running.

"The same goes for Bush, which makes it very difficult for any Heisman voter to ignore those kinds of performances. Not to say Leinart's effort at Notre Dame meant anything less in USC's win. But this might be the year that *SportsCenter* bling means even more to the Heisman electorate. If that's the case, Young and Bush will be in a two-man race."

Steve Wieberg

USA Today

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LOUIS DeLUCA/DMN
Vince Young's hopes are looking up - he is No. 1 in several 'Heisman Watches.'

"I think Young is popularly viewed as the nation's midseason MVP. And I think those who follow closely enough know that Bush has had a better season than Leinart, separating the two USC front-runners. As long as they and their teams stay on their current tracks, Marcus Vick, Brodie Croyle and everybody else in the Heisman picture is playing to get to New York as runners-up.

"It seems like a pick 'em at this point. I think Bush is widely regarded as the game's most gifted player, Young as the most indispensable. I know it's a cliché, but there's the question of voter split between Bush and Leinart. Fortunately, we've got some good forums for closing arguments. If people are smart, they'll hold off voting until Dec. 4 and they've had a chance to digest USC-UCLA, Texas-Texas A&M and the Big 12 championship game."

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MANAGING A HEISMAN TROPHY CAMPAIGN

Texas sports information director John Bianco

"Our philosophy is that the player wins the trophy on the field and it's our job in a supportive role to get maximum exposure of his and the team's performance. We take a no-gimmicks approach and believe in allowing the player to establish himself before actively promoting him as a Heisman Trophy candidate. Obviously with Vince Young, he has been at that point for several weeks now. Since then, we have spent countless hours of research to provide as many facts and notes to the media and through our Web site to best illustrate his tremendous performances.

"With a player like Vince, who brings such a diverse cross-section of skills, leadership, personality and community involvement, there also are a number of storylines beyond the playing field. With all of the games being televised and the relationships we've developed with the media, we've had a tremendous opportunity to share Vince's and the team's story. It's not Vince's job to worry about campaigning and certainly isn't the deciding factor for the winner. But we wouldn't want to miss any angle that might help someone decide on the very difficult task of who to vote for in the Heisman Trophy race. We're lucky Mack Brown is unbelievably supportive of that."

USC sports information director Tim Tessalone

"Our games are all on live television. We're fortunate this year with the position our team is in, and Matt Leinart and Reggie Bush are recognizable players. Everything we do is going to get noticed. We might have to present our case later in the year, but it's not our style to go overboard with this. We've seen the value with how we did it with Carson Palmer in 2002 and Leinart last year. The voters are sophisticated and knowledgeable and often get turned off by the hard sell – life-sized posters, T-shirts or whatever. It was very low-key and not a hard-hitting thing with Palmer and Leinart. Voters know and understand and aren't swayed by gimmicks.

"Our stories have been told for two years now. You're talking about two players who are on the top-ranked team putting up freakish-type numbers and doing things to help their team keep its winning streak going. It's early November, and we've got a lot of football to be played. Our team's focus and the players' focus is not on the Heisman Trophy. Matt Leinart wants to keep his win-loss record to one loss (33-1). Reggie Bush has never lost a game here and never wants to. You do those things, and it speaks volumes about your individual ability."

WHAT'S LEFT?

Vince Young and Texas (8-0, 5-0 Big 12)

Date	Opponent	Time TV
Sat.	at Baylor	11:30 a.m. FSNSW
Nov. 12	vs. Kansas	2:30 p.m. Ch. 8
Nov. 25	at A&M	11 a.m. Ch. 8
Dec. 3	Big 12 title*	Noon Ch. 8

*-UT has a one-game lead over Texas Tech and OU in the South

Reggie Bush and USC (8-0, 5-0 Pac-10)

Date	Opponent	Time TV
Sat.	vs. Stanford	9 p.m. TBS
Nov. 12	at California	2:30 p.m. ABC*
Nov. 19	vs. Fresno St.	9:15 p.m. FSN
Dec. 3	vs. UCLA	3:30 p.m. Ch. 8

*Regional broadcast

Wednesday, Nov. 16: 923 Heisman ballots mailed

Tuesday, Dec. 6: Heisman ballots are due

Saturday, Dec. 10: Heisman Trophy awarded

Online at:

<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/spt/colleges/texas/stories/110405dnspofbwheismanlede.1b93da8.f>