When Washington and Washington State meet, the game always carries extra meaning as a rivalry. But not much other than bragging rights has been on the line when the Huskies and Cougars have collided in recent years. This time, the Apple Cup has playoff implications.

Washington State is 2-2 and in a three-way tie atop the Northwest's East Division. Washington is 3-1 and in first place in the West.

"It gives us a chance to pull away if we can," said Wazzu coach Matt Hudson of the game's potential impact on the conference standings. "It's probably the first Apple Cup in my memory where both sides have a good chunk of change on the line."

And there is actual money on the line, too. Washington and Washington State have instituted a points-pledge system, with boosters and alums pledging to donate a certain amount of money for every point their team scores on Saturday. At the time of print, Washington State was scheduled to bring in $70/point and Washington $121/point.

The Cougars have dominated the rivalry as of late, winning every game the head coach of either program could remember. But Washington is much improved this year, so could this be the year the Huskies win the Apple Cup?

“I believe that to be the case. We have high hopes this year, and it’s funny because I couldn’t say at the beginning of the year we had tremendously high hopes since we’ve struggled the last couple of seasons,” said Washington head coach Brian Schoener.

“We’re definitely a program that’s turning the corner. We’ve done some recruiting. We had a great incoming freshman class. We hope to have an even bigger one next year. There’s five members on our coaching staff, and I think that’s paid huge dividends to the success of the club.”

“They’re much more organized, much more disciplined,” said Hudson of UW. “We’ve definitely had the upper hand in the last couple of years, but there’s a lot of parity in our league right now, so it could go either way.”

Both programs have players who played with and against each other in high school for programs like Chuckanut, Eastside Lions and Rainier Plateau, adding more to the rivalry.

“They definitely know each other,” said Hudson of the opposing players. “Some of these kids know each other from football days, from high school rugby days, various things.”

One of the key guys for the Cougars is freshman flyhalf Tayler Fischlin.

“He’s been kind of the catalyst. We didn’t have him for the Eastern Washington game, and we lost 10-0. We could have very easily won that game, so he’s definitely been a key contributor,” said Hudson.

“We’ve adopted a new offensive system his year that lets them play but gives them a little bit more structure to what they’re doing, and he has really grasped that extremely well. I had some questions about who was going to be playing flyhalf this season, and he has been answering them.”

Washington’s trigger man is usually scrumhalf Justin Santos, but he’s out Saturday because of a concussion he suffered in the Huskies’ win over Idaho last week. Stepping in at No. 9 is Dave McGrath, an international student who has a start at scrumhalf under his belt already this season.

With Santos out, center Andrew Fargo will have to up his scoring output for Washington.

“He’s a pretty stud player. He makes pretty good breaks,” said Schoener of Fargo. “The center match-up is probably going to be the key this weekend I think The way Wazzu usually plays is around the fringe with their forwards, but we have a pretty experienced pack, and I think we can handle their forwards. It’s whether we can exploit them in the backs, and especially in the centers, is going to be the difference.”