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Bowling for No Reason

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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Are you ready for some football? Are you ready for some mediocre football? Are you ready to watch teams that couldn't break even have their time in the spotlight at some nondescript bowl game?

If you are, now is *your* time. The first six of forty bowl games comes to a television set near you tomorrow via ABC, ESPN, and CBSSN. As a public service I want to tell you something about these bowls that exist only because television has become the largest consumer of bowl games.

Ever hear of the "Cure Bowl?" Neither have I and I live in the host city of this medical miracle bowl. It is the Spartans v. Panthers in this one. No it is not Michigan State and not the NFL team from North Carolina. It is the San Jose Spartans v. the Georgia State Panthers. The feline phenoms will be making the trip to the first bowl game in history, including pre-history. The trip down I-75 from Atlanta should be a memorable one, especially if traffic is as bad as it was last Saturday. As for the Spartan fans they may not come to the City Beautiful in droves, choosing Disneyland over Disney World. Staying in California they can avoid the game as well as the high humidity of Central Florida. You can avoid the game by staying away from CBSSN between noon and 3 p.m. EST. This is the first of three bowl games for Orlando which once again demonstrates that it sits at the center of the universe.

Kicking off at the same time on ABC is the Air Force Reserve Celebration Bowl. It will feature Alcorn State and North Carolina A&T in the Georgia Dome. Both teams are conference champions with impressive records, and one might expect to see them on New Year's Day. Unfortunately they are not part of the Power Five group, and these HBCU's cannot get access to the big dollar bowls.

Two hours later you can switch to the Gildan New Mexico Bowl and see Arizona, 2-5 in the PAC-12, take on New Mexico in the final home game of their season. An hour and a half later Utah will take on BYU in the Royal Purple Las Vegas Bowl where locals and tourists are still trying to recover from the Republican insult fest. Both teams are 9-3 and barely cast a shadow east of the Rockies. Virtually nothing

is at stake if you are not a Mormon or from Utah, unless you have been duped by the Utah player who claims that BYU plays dirty.

The Raycom Media Camellia Bowl kicks off at 5:30 EST with Appalachian State meeting Ohio University, the one without the "The" and the "State." This may be a good time to take a dinner break if you are on the East Coast or a late lunch on the West Coast. Those in other time zones will have to come up with their own reason to turn off the telly, unless they must know if the camellias are red or white.

Be sure to be back in time for the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl at nine eastern. This is must not see TV. Arkansas State will take on Louisiana Tech. You may not appreciate this one on TV, but if you are in New Orleans it simply doesn't matter who is playing. By the end of game you will be pleasantly buzzed in the French Quarter.

These are only the first six games of forty. You may wonder if I am going to go on with this nonsense for another thirty-six bowls. I am not a sadist. I do however want to mention a few more things about this illustrious bowl season.

There are some new ones, and some old ones with new names. I have given up trying to figure out which ones belong in which category. There is now a Miami Beach Bowl, the Marmot Boca Raton Bowl, the Foster Farm's Bowl, and the Quick Lane Bowl. But for aficionados the Grand Daddy of all the Bowl Games remains the Camping World Independence Bowl in Shreveport, Louisiana. The Independence Bowl is the Grand Daddy because it was once the Poulon Weed-Eater Bowl and the sight of some of the worst weather ever endured by bowl goers.

I was puzzled by the Marmot Boca Raton Bowl until I learned that a Marmot is a large squirrel or rodent. It may seem odd that a rodent, other than the head guy at Disney, would be sponsoring a bowl game. However Boca Raton means Mouth of the Rat and so in the end it all makes sense.

There was a scare a few weeks ago that there would not be enough "bowl eligible" teams to fill these bowls. A bowl "eligible team" is defined as one that has won a number of games against Football Bowl Subdivision teams that is equal to or greater than the number of its overall losses. In

practical terms that means 6-6 or better. In the end only a few 5-7 teams were needed to populate the bowl season and they were chosen by some means understood only by those who know what an A.P.R. is or are willing to make exceptions to rules. As it turned out Nebraska, Minnesota, and San Jose State were lucky enough to get bowl bids at 5-7 and therefore have the opportunity to lose even more money this season.

It seems a shame that the worst teams in college football do not have some bowl games just for them. The LBS or Loser Bowl Series could certainly find some sponsors such as Enron or Lehman Brothers. Spike TV could be the outlet for The Enron Stinkweed Bowl and the Lehman Brothers Sell Short Bowl could have a movie tie-in.

And how would the teams be chosen?

Luckily there is something called "The Bottom Ten," a ranking prepared by Steve Harvey that started about thirty years ago. There is also a newer Bottom Ten Ranking at ESPN.com. This year it was a major struggle to the bottom between the University of Central Florida and Kansas with the 0-10 Knights coming out on top of the bottom. Kansas could meet North Texas State in the Lehman Brothers Sell Short Bowl while UCF could take on Eastern Michigan at the Enron Stinkweed Bowl Festival. The losers would then have a national title game at an undisclosed location hosted by Dick Cheney.

Decisions on the Bottom Ten are not easy except for those able to distinguish between "bad losses," "pathetic losses," and "don't even mention the final score losses."

So fasten your seat belts all you football masochists out there, the fun starts Saturday December 19 and goes on through the Winter Solstice until sometime near the Vernal Equinox.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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