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The BCS and the Non-Sense it Spawns

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About this time each year since the creation of the BCS I have posed the question, "Who took the "C" out of the "BCS?" Each year there are different answers to the question, and this year there are many and there may be still more to come.

In all NCAA sports, men's and women's, all divisions, with the exception of Division IA football, there is a national championship tournament. In IA football that development has been strongly resisted. The Bowl Championship Series (BCS) is the creation of a number of football universities and those running bowl games along with the collaboration of the television networks. The purpose of the BCS is to prevent the creation of a true national championship tournament for IA football.

In place of a tournament the BCS has attempted to create a system that will identify the two best IA college football teams in the country at the end of the season, and those two will be paired against one another in one of the "major" bowl games. The determination of the two best teams is done by computer under a semi-mystical set of formulas that purport to account for strength of schedule, strength of conference, and size of egos of football coaches. The illusion being sold by the BCS is that their computer system operates in a completely objective and disinterested scientific fashion.

There are several flaws in this claim. First, someone must program the computers and in the process make judgements about strength of conferences and schedules. Second, conferences not holding BCS membership find their teams at a decided disadvantage in attaining top BCS rankings.

To look at last week's rankings begins to reveal the absurdity of this process. Remember this system claims to be able to identify the two best teams at the end of the season. Of course it can't even do that week by week.

Nebraska, which had been totally demolished by Colorado the previous week, retained a higher ranking than Colorado. If the rankings had any meaning Nebraska would have demolished Colorado on the field not in the rankings. In the last few weeks lower ranked teams have beaten higher ranked teams in game after game. In addition to the Colorado-Nebraska mismatch, Oklahoma State beat Oklahoma in Norman that same weekend. Inexplicably

Oklahoma remains in the BCS top ten and remains eligible for the big New Year's Bowl payday.

This week the unreliability of the polls played out once again. Florida, ranked second by the BCS and heading for the national championship game with Miami in the Rose Bowl, lost at home to sixth ranked Tennessee which had not won a game in Gainesville in thirty years. Texas, ranked third and with the inside track to play Miami after Florida lost earlier in the day, then lost to Colorado in the Big 12 Championship game. Texas had a BCS ranking of third while Colorado was seventh and are ranked behind Nebraska.

Miami won on Saturday and remained undefeated. They will likely be one of the participants in the national championship game even though Miami barely won at unranked Virginia Tech and managed to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat at the last minute at unranked Boston College three weeks ago. Miami's road woes make you wonder if the Hurricanes should be playing in the national championship game only if it is held in the Orange Bowl.

Then there is the case of Oregon. It is ranked fifth in the BCS and struggled on Saturday to beat Oregon State in a driving rainstorm. Should this count in their favor or against them in the next BCS computer rankings? Does the computer account for weather in the rankings system?

There are now several teams with one loss that could be anointed by the computer to play in the national championship game against Miami. Among these are Oregon, Nebraska, Tennessee, Maryland, and Illinois.

The team which seems to be playing the best football down the stretch, Colorado, apparently has no chance of being the anointed one, while the team they demolished, Nebraska, apparently does still have a chance of playing in the big game. If there were a football championship tournament, Colorado might have some chance to show that at present they are the best team in the nation. Maybe they couldn't prove that, but at least it would be determined on the field rather than inside a computer.

And one more thing. The only other major college football team in the United States that is undefeated will not even be close to consideration for the national championship game or even a BCS big money bowl game. That would be Brigham Young University

of the Mountain West Conference, a non-BCS member, and winner of fourteen straight games.

BYU has been through this before. Undefeated BYU teams of years past have ended up showcasing their wares in the Holiday Bowl or some other lesser venue because it was felt that their conference was not as strong as others were. These were decisions made by powerful television executives and bowl selection committees who calculated any number of factors in their choices. Now of course BYU is left out of consideration by the completely unbiased and scientific computers who know intuitively that BYU comes from a weak conference.

So the beat goes on and the "C" remains decidedly absent from the BCS. It could get worse if Tennessee loses next week in the SEC championship game to LSU. We can only hope they do.

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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