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Celebrating Medicrity at the Bowls

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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Well, you could have bowled me over with a feather, or perhaps a dot com, when I learned today that four bowl games had already been played. Not exactly stellar match-ups, but bowl games nonetheless. And say what you will; a bowl game is still a bowl game.

Missing these games is of great concern if you are a connoisseur of mediocrity, and in that case you still have several chances to see teams with five losses display their wares in a wilting bowl somewhere. For those worried over the recent Danish study that football increases the chance of heart attack, have no fear, these games will barely nudge the blood pressure.

Among the games missed in order of their kickoffs, were the Mobile Alabama Bowl which is not sponsored by an oil company or a wireless phone outfit from Alabama, but it did take place in the city of Mobile. Texas Christian University played Southern Mississippi, a school that is attended by a number of Christians but does not brag about it in its name. The fact that TCU had ten wins and only one loss and was sent to Mobile on a Wednesday in the week before Christmas makes one wonder how much weight Christianity carries these days.

Next came the Las Vegas Bowl, which at least held out the promise of considerable pre- and post-game action. The game saw the renewal of the old UNLV-Arkansas interstate rivalry, or was it the beginning of a rivalry? Whatever. These first two bowls were relegated to ESPN2 where tractor pulls go to die.

On Christmas Eve the players were gathered in Hawaii with care, with the hope that no one would be seriously injured while bringing home the payouts for the institutions of higher learning from Virginia, Georgia, Massachusetts and Arizona. The opportunity to spend Christmas in Hawaii was nothing to scoff at for those few friends of the families attending the Oahu and Aloha bowls, although one wonders how many televisions across the land were tuned in to see three 6-5 teams and one 7-4 team duke it out in the sun and surf on Christmas Eve and Day.

The pace will pick up a bit tomorrow when there will be two bowls. The Motor City Bowl, not to be confused with the Music City Bowl, will match Cincinnati against Marshall, another five-loss team. And in the first dot com Bowl of the season, the Galleryfurniture.com Bowl will host the much anticipated tussle

between five-loss Texas Tech and East Carolina in the Houston Astrodome, the former eighth wonder of the world. One can only hope that the furniture is in better shape than the dome.

There will be four bowls on both the 28th and 29th with the most obscure being the Crucial.com Humanitarian Bowl in Boise, Idaho, featuring UTEP against Boise State. There is no doubt an object lesson here as at 9-2 Boise State couldn't get out of town. Three of these eight games are dot com Bowls and they offer the final opportunities to see a five loss team in action.

Nebraska will meet Northwestern on the 30th in the least plausible matchup of the bowl season, and it is not likely to give us another reason to remember the Alamo. Two games will follow on New Year's Eve, the traditional Independence Bowl in beautiful Shreveport, Louisiana, and the new and exciting Silicon Valley Football Classic in San Jose where Fresno State and Air Force will prove they know the way.

Six games will be played by twelve former pretenders to the national championship on New Years Day, and the athletic departments will have their budgets massaged by several millions in payout money. These are the games with the big sponsor money that entitles them to put the corporate name on the bowl, except in the case of the Rose Bowl where AT&T is only allowed to "present" the game.

In Orlando the Citrus Bowl, formerly the OurHouse.com Citrus Bowl, has become the Capital One Citrus Bowl. Apparently at some point in the last few months the people at OurHouse decided that the people at their house would rather see payroll met than the name of the company on a bowl game between two disappointed and disappointing football teams.

January 2 will bring the first of the potential contingent national championship games as Miami meets Florida in the Nokia Sugar Bowl. Miami having handed Florida State its only loss thinks it should be playing in Miami on the 3rd rather than in New Orleans on the 2nd but the beauty of it all is that Miami could still be national champion at least in the AP poll.

And that brings us to January 3 and the FedEx Orange Bowl in Miami where undefeated Oklahoma will try to secure the national championship with a win over Florida State, a team that has suffered one loss on the field to Miami and one loss off the field to the academic standards of the university. The loss off the field may prove to be bigger than the one on it. Furthermore

it goes to show that on the rare occasion even Bobby Bowden can be blind-sided.

Anyone who tries to run the table and watch all these games deserves whatever mental breakdown results. Whether you do this or not, at the end of the game on the 3rd when the national champion is or is not named, pause for a moment of silence in memory of the greatest of all the bowl games ever.

We miss you Poulon Weed Eater Bowl!

The irritating, loud and stupid relative of all the bowl games is gone. The Poulan Weed Eater Bowl has whacked its last weed. So far no new bowl has been able to match the magic combination of banality and insidious stupidity of a name like "Weed Eater Bowl." So we wait another year for a worthy successor to the late beloved yard maintenance extravaganza.

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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