

Far reaches of the holiday bowl lineup

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Far reaches of the holiday bowl lineup
DECEMBER 18, 2005

Several years ago the good people at the Miller Brewing Company put together the Miller Lite Survey of Sport in America. The survey, greeted by many with a roar of disbelief, found that bowling was the most popular participatory sport in the nation. We are now about to enter the Bowling Zone, a sixteen-day run of college football games with little or no meaning except to close family and friends of the participants, with a few notable exceptions. This is not the kind of bowling that was found in the Miller Lite Survey. These are not events featuring a hard round ball and ten pins.

The Bowling Zone spotlights the hard sell of commercial sponsorship designed to exploit college football players for advertising purposes. There are twenty-eight bowl games featuring fifty-six teams from fifty-six institutions of the higher learning in America involving in excess of 5,600 student athletes. Many of the fifty-six universities will lose money on their venture into bowldom, with expenses exceeding costs at levels that will run, in some cases, into the millions.

The fun begins in New Orleans, well not in New Orleans but in Lafayette, Louisiana, at the New Orleans Bowl on December 20. The recent unpleasantness in the Crescent City dictated the move. There is no major sponsor listed for this game, a distinction it holds with the Fort Worth Bowl. FEMA apparently decided against using the New Orleans Bowl as a public relations opportunity to recoup some of the bad press it accumulated over the summer. This is most unfortunate, as "Brownie" would have been a perfect Grand Marshall for the New Orleans Bowl parade. The Golden Eagles of Southern Mississippi will do battle with the Arkansas State Indians in a long anticipated game between two 6-5 teams. No word yet on the status of the Arkansas State mascot.

In the wonderful world of college football you must have six wins to become bowl eligible. The New Orleans Bowl is not the only bowl in contention for the title of Mediocre Bowl of the Year, as there are two other 6-5 match-ups. They are the Fort Worth Bowl (Kansas v. Houston) and the Meineke Car Care Bowl (South Florida v. North Carolina State) in Charlotte, North Carolina. There are seven other 6-5 teams in bowls, and the

Motor City Bowl in Michigan's Motor City just missed mediocrity with Memphis at 6-5 and Akron at 7-5. Maybe next year.

On the principle that two bowls are better than one, two cities will host two bowl games, an excess of largesse if ever there was one. San Diego will host the San Diego County Credit Union Poinsettia Bowl on December 22, the bowl with the longest name, and the Pacific Life Holiday Bowl on the 29th of the month. Orlando, the City Beautiful, will host the Champs Sports Bowl featuring the champions of nothing, Clemson and Colorado (well they be the champions of off-field play) on December 27. Then on January 2, the Capital One Bowl, formerly the Citrus Bowl, which was formerly the Tangerine Bowl, brings Wisconsin and Auburn to Disney Country.

Some of the sponsorships for the bowls produce a great deal of head scratching as to their precise meaning. For example, just what is the Pioneer PureVision Las Vegas Bowl? What might qualify as ImpureVision? Some of you may know that the "Pioneer" in the title refers to Pioneer Electronics and PureVision is a Pioneer Brand of plasma television. What you may not know however is that "at a time when the universe of entertainment options is expanding faster than ever, Pioneer continues to develop high-performance products that are aesthetically pleasing to look at and easy to use as well." I hope this brings some clarity of vision to the subject.

Another mystery surrounds the Emerald Bowl in San Francisco. Is this related in some way to the Chef? No he is Emeril Lagasse not Emerald Lagasse. If you knew that this bowl is named for Emerald of California and you don't live in California you may need professional help, or at least a serious session with a close friend. Emerald of California is the snack nut brand of Diamond Foods. This is nearly a perfect tie-in for a football game with its snack food and nut references, although the San Francisco bowl committee may want to take a look at the name Diamond Bowl, opting for precious gems over goobers.

More mysterious is the EV1.net Houston Bowl which, odd as it may seem, is in Houston, Texas. This is one of the strangest names in bowl history although not the best. That distinction still rests with the Poulan/Weed Eater Independence Bowl of Shreveport, Louisiana, which is now the rather staid Independence Bowl. But I digress.

EV1.net is in fact Everyone's Internet at www.ev1.net. They are an internet service provider offering dial-up service for "ten

bucks a month," web hosting services, something called Web Jet to put some giddy-up in your dial-up, and several other goodies. You will be happy to know that Everyone's Internet "was born of humble beginnings on October 6, 1998 in Houston, Texas. Founded by Robert Marsh, Roy Marsh III, and Randy Williams." Maybe they should call it the Horatio Alger Bowl.

Finally another intriguing name is the Vitalis Sun Bowl in El Paso, Texas. I was unsure of what a Vitalis Sun might be and wondered if it was related in any way to a Harvest Moon. Of course it isn't Vitalis Sun, but rather the Sun Bowl sponsored by Vitalis, the hair care people who bring you high tech hair slick with 360 degree Surround Technology. Do you remember when it was just some oily stuff in a bottle? If you tune in to watch the game which features perennial football power Northwestern against UCLA, be sure to catch the Helen of Troy Halftime Show. It should make this game a Classic even without the USC Trojans.

So we end with the famous face that launched a thousand bowl games.

Let's get bowling!

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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