



Tis the season to be jolly. No, not Christmas. Bowl Season! Bowl season is the college football bettor's last chance to show or maintain a profit for the college football season. It's a very interesting time of year. The opening lines have already been hit and set where a portion of the market thinks they should be. However, what does a line move really mean for bowl season?

Consider that initial bets are either from professionals who think a line is *really* far off or from public bettors who are trying to act like pros. With early lines, it doesn't take a lot of money to move the market. One or two limit bets may turn a -2 into a -6, depending on what sportsbook you're looking at. It's hard to ascertain where a move is coming from. A lot of professionals will hope to grab middles during bowl season. For example, a line that opens -6.5 may jump to -11. Professionals may have -6.5 and +11 and they have a good shot at winning both plays. For professionals, they want the best number. They won't necessarily handicap the teams right away, but they'll grab the best number they can on whatever side the line will move.

The thing about bowl season is that lines become very stale, very quickly. There will be periods of movement, but, eventually, most of the heavy hitters will have taken their positions and the lines will pretty much stay where they are. It's hard to bet on stale lines, because you're likely getting the worst of the number, or close to it.

Another difficulty with bowl season is understanding how stepping up in class will affect a team. The Big Ten is an underdog in every one of their bowl games, in large part because most of their bowl games are against SEC opponents. The Big Ten is not a good conference and that is built into the line. Public money is undoubtedly going to come in on the SEC teams in greater volume than the Big Ten. The books have already accounted for that.

Then, there's coaching changes. When Brian Kelly led Cincinnati to the Sugar Bowl and the #5

ranking in the country in 2009, they were talked about to possibly upset Urban Meyer's Florida Gators. Before the bowl game, Kelly got hired at Notre Dame. The Bearcats closed a 12.5-point underdog. They lost 51-24, ending their bid at a perfect season. As a different example altogether, Jerry Kill left Northern Illinois before their 2010 bowl against Fresno State for the Minnesota head coaching job. The Huskies, a 1.5-point favorite, won 40-17.

With more coaching changes likely on the horizon, it's important to determine how much a coaching change matters. It's all on a case-by-case basis. Bret Bielema left Wisconsin for Arkansas, after hanging 70 on Nebraska and getting the 7-5 Badgers a Rose Bowl berth. Dave Doeren left Northern Illinois for North Carolina State, making it the fourth time in four years that the Huskies have had a different head coach for their bowl game than they did for the regular season. Mark Stoops, the defensive coordinator for Florida State, who will play the NIU Huskies, accepted the head coaching position at Kentucky. Darrell Hazell, who had a very impressive run with Kent State, has left for Purdue. All of these coaching changes will have an affect on the game. It's up to you to determine that affect.

Another element, overplayed in my opinion, is motivation. People are arguing that the Georgia Bulldogs won't play with max effort in the Capital One Bowl against Nebraska. The Bulldogs were a play away from beating Alabama and going to the National Championship game, and now, they're playing a non-BCS bowl game on New Year's Day. That's a hard thing to bounce back from. On the flip side, Nebraska should come in motivated after being embarrassed in the Big Ten Championship Game. So, you have two different mindsets and almost a month to determine how the teams will come out and play. Who's to say that Georgia won't be pissed off and make a statement against a mediocre Big Ten school?

Western Kentucky is playing in their first ever bowl game, after being snubbed last year despite having eight wins. They play Central Michigan, a team that is just thrilled to actually be in a bowl game after posting back-to-back three win seasons and winning their final three games just to become bowl-eligible. The common thought seems to be that WKU has a lot of motivation and CMU is just happy to play a 13th game. Who's to say that CMU won't want to win that bowl game, too?

University of Southern Cal and retiring defensive coordinator Monte Kiffin have had a difficult season. Ranked #1 in the preseason polls, they're playing on New Year's Eve Day in the Sun Bowl against Georgia Tech's triple option offense. How hard will USC prepare, facing a gimmick offense and a very bad defense?

All of these are things to consider for bowl season and there's no shortage of time to determine what they're worth and what they mean. Line moves are trickier to read, so you're better off trusting your own breakdown of the game and crunching the numbers. Next week, I'll talk more about bowl game totals, as I find that there is a lot of value in being familiar with offensive and defensive schemes and that the long layoff to prepare can be a major deciding factor in whether to play over or under.