



This week the MAC features a nationally televised game and four other key matchups as the conference season heats up. A top network considers the MAC a top five conference, and four teams got Top 25 votes. And we are on top of it all.

The rest of the nation is starting to notice the quality of the MAC programs. CBSSports.com has moved the Mid-American Conference up two places in their conference power rankings. The MAC leap-frogged the Big East and the Atlantic Coast Conference to take over fifth in the power ranks. The SEC and Big 12 remain tied for first, the Pac-12 remains in third, and the Big Ten still sits third. “As we explained on Saturday in a bit more detail, this is a very special season for the MAC. If you include Ohio’s loss to rival Miami, then MAC teams have taken down three undefeated opponents in the last two weeks. The league is second among FBS conferences with six teams already bowl eligible. There might be no MAC teams left in the polls, but I’ll take Toledo, Kent State or Northern Illinois over most of the Top 25.”

This week's Game of the Week is, of course, the Wagon Wheel game. **Akron** travels to **Kent State**

to take part in the 51

st

edition of the rivalry game. The first time the two natural rivals 12 miles apart met was in 1923 and Akron leads the series 30-22-2. The schools had other rivalries before and the first Wagon Wheel game wasn't until 1946. As the story goes, the "Wagon Wheel" came into being in the spring of 1870 when John R. Buchtel, an Akron industrialist, at the insistence of Rev. Andrew Willson of the Kent Universalist Church, set out for Kent in search of a site for a proposed college. However, his wagon became bogged down in the mud where Kent State University is currently located, the horses broke away and left bits and pieces of the carriage scattered, including one of the wheels, which remained wedged in the mud. Buchtel eventually found his way back to Akron, where he settled on a site for Buchtel College, the forerunner of the present University of Akron. During construction of a pipeline along the Western Reserve Trail in 1902, the wheel was discovered and eventually became the property of Dr. Raymond Manchester, who in 1945 as the Kent State Dean of Men, suggested the wheel be set up as an award to the winner of the annual Akron-Kent State football game. Manchester had the wheel painted blue and gold, the school colors of both schools, and it has been a prized trophy ever since. Each spoke bears a plaque verifying the score of each game. In 1946, Kent State defeated the Zips, 13-6, to capture the Wagon Wheel Trophy. Kent leads the Wagon Wheel series 11-19-1.

This year's Wagon Wheel finds the schools in two very different places in their history. Head coach Darrell Hazell has put together a Golden Flashes team that enters the game at 7-1 and in first place in the MAC at 4-0. And for the first time in history, Kent received Top 25 votes last week after booting Rutgers out of the rankings. Meanwhile over in Summit County, Terry Bowden inherited a program that had gone through several long years of bad coaching and worse recruiting. He brings the Zips in with a 1-8 record (beating Morgan State) and on the opposite end of the East Division at 0-5. But even against the best teams in the East, Akron has been in the game all day. They lost to Miami by a late TD, Bowling Green by 14, and to Ohio by 6. Key injuries have slowed the team more recently though, and will play a key part in this game.

Akron QB Dalton Williams puts the ball up more than anybody else in the FBS, which could spell trouble against a team that wins by creating turnovers. On the other side of the ball, the tailback tandem of big-play Dri Archer and working-man Traiyon Durham have to be licking their chops looking at Akron's front seven. Kent is favored by 20, but still Akron somehow never seems to be "put away" by strong teams, and many are waiting for Cinderella's midnight. I can't take Kent over Akron, I'm calling it. The Zips in an upset. This game starts at Dix Stadium at 2pm Saturday, and will be televised by Sports Time Ohio and ESPN3.

Thursday night's ESPNU game features **Ohio** hosting **Eastern Michigan**. The Bobcats are pissed about their first loss to division rival Miami last week and comes in 7-1 3-1. Eastern Michigan is still looking for their first MAC win, and come in 1-7 0-4. This one could be ugly, Ohio wins easily.

The other two Michigans face off in Mt. Pleasant as **Western Michigan** brings its 3-6 1-4 record to **Central Michigan** (3-5 1-3). The Broncos are the surprise team of the West, not by how good they have ben, but how bad. Some rags even chose them to win the West. Despite that I think they have enough horses to best the Chippewas on the road.

Miami rolls into **Buffalo** after taking Ohio apart last week, Buffalo winless in the conference. Buffalo could actually make a game of this, and the spread is only 3.5. I'm not buying it, the RedHawks win big.

And last but not least we have **UMess** travelling to **Northern Illinois**. What could go wrong there, right?

Oddly enough, nobody chose to televise the last two games mentioned.