

Appalachian State 34 Michigan 32. In da Big House. Still hard to believe, isn't it? In his latest piece for us here at TCF, The Rhino looks back on one of the biggest upsets in sports history, and says that like the recent success of Boise State and Utah, this win really gives hope to the little guys, that on Any Given Saturday, they can play with the big boys and bust the big bad BCS.



I was listening to the radio as I was running around doing errands yesterday afternoon. The Ohio State game had ended and the Notre Dame debacle hadn't started yet, so I was surfing the dial trying to find a game. It was while I was doing this that I first learned that the Appalachian State Mountaineers were giving the Michigan Wolverines all they could handle.

Like everyone in the Buckeye State, I found the prospect of Michigan being put to the test by a I-AA -- er, I mean a "Football Championship Subdivision"-- team absolutely delightful. Still, I couldn't fathom the possibility that App State might actually beat Michigan.

I knew App State was good, and I also knew that they've been good for quite some time. In fact, I saw my brother's VMI team play against them back in the 1980s when they won back-to-back Southern Conference championships. But beating Michigan? That's a pipe dream.

It wasn't until I got back to my house and my wife handed me the phone that the reality of what was happening began to dawn on me. That's because my youngest brother, who played his college ball at Cornell, was on the line breathlessly asking me "Dude, are you watching this?";

It was then that he informed me that somehow his cable company (he lives in Indianapolis) wasn't engaged in a pitched battle with The Big Ten Network and that he was watching Michigan and App State. To make a long story short, I spent the next five minutes on the phone with him sweating out the long pass to Manningham and the field goal attempt. Then -- after what seemed like forever--

came the blocked kick, and the kind of joy that can only arise when you know that you're going to see headlines like [this one](#) in the Detroit papers.

As everybody knows, this is the first time that a I-AA team has ever defeated a ranked BCS school, but when you combine the Mountaineers' achievement with shockers like Boise State's [Fiesta Bowl victory](#) over Oklahoma last year, it's hard not to conclude that the entire edifice upon which the BCS system rests is crumbling. In the end, it's not about your national fan base or 100,000 seat stadiums, it's about what you can do on the field, and there needs to be a better mechanism to make sure that teams who deserve their shot get their shot.

For the past 30 years, NCAA football has been operated by and for the benefit of college football's Goliaths. In 1977, many of the major conferences and independents formed the College Football Association for the purpose of lobbying the NCAA on behalf of their interests. Those interests basically consisted of maximizing television revenues, and so the CFA subsequently sued the NCAA to break its monopoly on television rights. The CFA [won that case](#) thanks to a Supreme Court decision in 1984, and the money bonanza began in earnest.

True to its high ideals, the University of Notre Dame -- the biggest fish in the CFA coalition in terms of national fan base -- abandoned the rest of the cabal in the early 1990s and cut its own deal with NBC. While the nation's other football factories may still act together and bemoan the greed of the Irish in deciding to go it alone, they have by no means abandoned their own relentless quest for cash. Nothing brings that point home quite like the infuriating dispute between The Big Ten Network and the cable companies that deprived everyone in Northeast Ohio of not only the Ohio State game, but of a chance to witness the biggest upset in college football history.

But while the big schools were raking in the big bucks, a funny thing began to happen. People liked watching all of the college football that they were seeing, so networks like ESPN gave them more. And, since the supply of football superpowers was limited, ESPN and other broadcasters had to expand the number of teams that made the TV cut. This opened up the money spigot for a broader range of teams and conferences.

The money provided schools with the resources to enhance their own programs, and in recent years, we've witnessed the emergence of programs like Utah and Boise State as unlikely participants in the BCS sweepstakes. But those teams are

the exception to the rule, and the National Championship game continues to be the exclusive domain of the traditional powers.

So in a strange way, a process that began 30 years ago to line the pockets of football's Goliaths has spawned a generation of Davids, all of whom ought to have a fair shot at the same brass ring that the big guys try to keep to themselves. If it does nothing else, Appalachian State's defeat of Michigan puts a stake through the heart of the myth that it's only the big schools and big conferences that produce teams worthy of playing on the national stage. If the BCS ever had any credibility, it ended with a blocked field goal in Ann Arbor yesterday afternoon.