

Not All Bowl Wins Are Created Equally

Written by {ga=furls}

Saturday, December 29 2007 7:00 PM -

The early bowl game results are starting to spill in, and Furls says that the talking heads are at it already, beginning to correlate bowl records to conference strength as though the former speaks definitively about the latter. In his latest column, Furls takes a deeper look at what has happened in the December bowl games, and makes a couple correlations of his own.



They are doing it already, The talking heads are beginning to correlate bowl records to conference strength as though the former speaks definitively about the latter. This year, like last year, they are missing one key aspect: not all bowl wins were created equally and the same can be said for losses.

For example, BC won its bowl game against MSU. Congratulations are due to the Eagles, the second best team in the ACC, who squeaked out a 3 point win against the 9th place team in the Big Ten. If Brian Hoyer had played merely a bad game instead of one of the worst games I have ever seen a college quarterback play, MSU probably wins.

Conversely, UConn (Big East Co-Champions) lost to Wake Forest (5th place team in the ACC). What does this say about the relative strength of the two conferences? Your #1 lost to someone else's #5. It would not be very difficult to make a reasonable argument that UConn would not finish any better than sixth in the ACC.

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It is still early in the bowl season, so these results are obviously tainted by the possibility of match up issues. Here are my early assessments, but I must stress, they are early. Bowl season is just beginning, and there is a lot of data still to come.

Arizona State looked terrible while receiving a pounding at the hands of Texas. Obviously Arizona State (2nd place team in the PAC-10) was not as good as many thought and perhaps the Big XII is as strong as its leaders' rankings and records suggest. Remember, this Texas team finished 4th in the Big XII this year. Now, that being said, the Longhorns' actual position in the Big XII is a bit of a mystery because the Longhorns never actually played two of the teams, Kansas and Mizzou that finished with better records. So it could be that, Texas is for all intents and purposes, the second best team in the Big XII. We will never know due to their Big XII conference schedule, but what we do know is that Texas is much better than Arizona State.

The Big East appears to be every bit as bad as I expected. As mentioned above, UConn lost to Wake in a game that was not really as close as the score indicated and Cincinnati was not particularly impressive in dispatching of Conference USA's 5th place team, Southern Miss. While Cincinnati did win 31-21 in a game that was never really in doubt, Southern Miss was able to move the ball pretty well against them on the ground. I would hope that a BCS conference's third best team would be able to dispose of a middle of the pack mid major team handily. While Cincinnati has joined a BCS conference, the Bearcats, like UConn, still look like a mid major.

The Big Ten sent out mixed messages in its first two bowl games. Purdue looked pretty crappy in dispatching of the MAC's Champion, Central Michigan. It looked like Purdue was going to pull away and win in a laugher, but then their defense fell apart. It was not a particularly impressive performance. Michigan State was much more impressive in defeat, falling to ACC runner up Boston College by a field goal. Michigan State was able to move the ball pretty well on the ground in

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spite of a passing attack that was so poor that Boston College did not have to respect it.

Penn State was able to overcome an early 14-0 deficit en route to defeating Texas A&M 24-17. The Nittany Lions' defense looked a little suspect early on but really settled in nicely in a match up that featured two evenly matched, middle of the pack teams from the Big Ten and Big XII. Penn State (5th place in the Big Ten) was able to pull out a victory against the Big XII's 6th

place team in a virtual home game for the Aggies. Say what you will about Joe Pa, he wins bowl games, and based on the early results, it looks like the Big Ten may be a bit stronger than the pundits would have you believe.

The Terrapins looked respectable in a loss to the Oregon State Beavers, but it is hard to get a feel for how good the Beavers actually are. This is the same Beaver team that was destroyed at home by Cincinnati early in the year, but appeared to have recovered its season by playing well against what appeared to be a strong conference. In retrospect, we have to call the PAC-10s strength into question as UCLA has completely disintegrated and ASU looked horrible against Texas.

So in the end, it is not as easy as some in the media would have you believe. You cannot simply look at a conference's W-L record and gain any idea of how good or bad the conference is. If those in the "know" had their way, the Mountain West Conference would have be considered #1 with their 4-0 bowl record to date with one bowl remaining. That just doesn't pass the common sense test.

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