

Where They Still Dream Of Roses

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Tuesday, August 11 2009 7:00 PM -

As any regular reader of Jesse Lamovsky should know, he has a deep and longstanding affection for the Rose Bowl. It's been one of his favorite sporting events since he's been a kid. Five Big Ten and Pac-10 programs have either gone more than forty years without a Rose Bowl bid, or in the case of Arizona, have never received one at all. Do any of the five have an opportunity to make their Rose Bowl dreams come true in 2009? Let's take a look.



As any regular reader of this column might know, I have a deep and longstanding affection for the Rose Bowl. I can distinctly remember the first time I watched the game as a kid- it was [1984, Illinois versus UCLA](#) - and there seemed to be something magical about it that the other bowls lacked. The end zones brightly painted in the colors of the contestants, the 4:30 start time and the California sunshine that deepened through twilight into a hazy evening as the game progressed, the way it looked warm and summery on the television screen as the bitter-cold January darkness pressed against the windows of our home- I just dug the whole scene.

Back in those days you couldn't have persuaded me there was a better place to be on January 1st than in that massive stadium with 70-degree temps in the air and the sun setting over the San Gabriel Mountains. I wasn't the only one who felt that way, either. It's said that when Northwestern made its miracle trip to Pasadena in 1996, some Wildcat fans [shed tears](#) when they entered the stadium and saw their team's end zone painted in resplendent purple. To generations of fans the Rose Bowl was special, a veritable Jerusalem at the college football Seder-
"Next year in Pasadena!"

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Unfortunately, it isn't so special anymore- at least not for some. Maybe the saddest thing about the rise of the BCS is the way the Rose Bowl has been relegated to the status of second-tier January destination. For the elite of the Big Ten and Pac-10- Ohio State, USC, Penn State and formerly Michigan- the game has become little more than a consolation prize. Once upon a time, whether you hailed from Columbus, Champaign, Pullman, Palo Alto, or everywhere in between, the Rose Bowl was the first, last and only goal. It isn't that way anymore. Paradise has been reduced to a nice parting gift, and that's a shame. The Granddaddy deserves better.

But in some less privileged locales, where National Championships are an impossible dream and conference championships only slightly less so, the old prestige of the Rose Bowl is still strong as ever. Five Big Ten and Pac-10 programs- Indiana, Oregon State, Minnesota, California and Arizona- have either gone more than forty years without a Rose Bowl bid, or in the case of Arizona, have never received one at all. On these campuses, a trip to Pasadena would be greeted by anything but upturned noses. You might even get some watery eyes at just the thought of it.

Do any of the five have an opportunity to make their Rose Bowl dreams come true in 2009? Let's take a look.

Indiana

Last Rose Bowl: [1968](#) (Lost to USC 14-3)

Best Shot Since- 1987: Having beaten Michigan and Ohio State in the same season for the first and only time in program history, Bill Mallory's revived '87 Hoosiers faced Michigan State in the season finale in East Lansing with the Rose Bowl on the line for both teams. The showdown was no contest. Lorenzo White rushed for 292 yards, Blake Ezor broke things open with a 90-yard kickoff return for a touchdown to start the second half, [and the Spartans rolled, 27-3](#) .

Indiana placed second in the Big Ten that year, their best finish since the Rose Bowl season of 1967. Though disappointed at the outcome in East Lansing that day, Coach Mallory was no sore loser: he made his way to the MSU locker room following the game and gave a rousing pep talk to the Spartans, exhorting them to [kick ass in Pasadena](#)

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[which they did](#)

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Can they get there in '09? Sure. All the Hoosiers need is a natural disaster that spares Bloomington and wipes out every other Big Ten city. Indiana is going to struggle to win "a" game in the conference this season, let alone six, seven, or however many it will take to get to Pasadena. Once again Hoosier fans will cool their heels and wait for basketball season, although that prospect doesn't look too appetizing these days either.

Truthfully, no school- not Northwestern, not Minnesota, not anyone- has a tougher climb in the Big Ten, year-in and year-out, than Indiana. It's a basketball school in a basketball state that also contains two other major-college programs, one of them being Notre Dame. There isn't much local talent to be had, and there's a deep culture of indifference toward football. There's a reason why Indiana has made the fewest trips

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to the Rose Bowl (one) of any Big Ten school, and why the Hoosiers are the only team in either the Big Ten or the Pac-10 to have never even scored a touchdown in Pasadena.

Oregon State

Last Rose Bowl: [1965](#) (Lost to Michigan 34-7)

Best Shot Since- 2008: Everything seemed in place for the Beavers to go to Pasadena last season. Having beaten USC to clinch the tie-breaker with the Trojans, all OrSU needed to do was defeat Oregon in the Civil War in Corvallis- where they hadn't lost to the Ducks since 1996- and the Pac-10 title was theirs. But Jazquizz Rodgers had to sit out the game with an injury, and unfortunately, Oregon State's defense followed suit. [694 yards and 65 points later](#) , the Rose Bowl dream was dead.

Can they get there in '09? They could- Mike Riley's team has won nine or more games three seasons in a row and established itself as one of most consistently solid programs in the Pac-10- but the schedule is not kind. The Beavers are at USC (where they haven't won since 1960), at Cal, and at Oregon this season. They'll have to win at least two of those three to make a serious run, and that's probably too tall of an order. Oregon State might not get another opportunity like last season's for a long time.

Minnesota

Last Rose Bowl: [1962](#) (Beat UCLA 21-3)

Best Shot Since- 2003: With the running back tandem of Marion Barber and Laurence Maroney rolling up huge yards, Minnesota was 2-0 in the Big Ten when they hosted Michigan in the battle for the Little Brown Jug on October 10, 2003. The Gophers led the Wolverines 28-7 early in the fourth quarter when they fell apart, [giving up 31 points in fourteen minutes and losing](#) , 38-35. The following week at home against Michigan State the Gophers came out flat, fell behind 17-0 in the first quarter, and lost [44-38](#) despite piling up 525 total yards. Had they won both of those games- which they should have- Minnesota would have finished as Big Ten co-champion and gotten the Rose Bowl bid over Michigan on the tie-breaker.

Can they get there in '09? Not bloody likely! Two years removed from a 1-11 season, getting to any bowl- and hopefully winning it- should be the present ceiling of expectations in Minneapolis. Not to mention the fact that the Gophers make trips to both Ohio State and Penn State this season. Still, the prospects for the near future are better perhaps than they've been since [Sandy Stephens](#) and [Bobby Bell](#) were wreaking havoc in Maroon and Gold way back in the day. With the opening of [TCF Bank Stadium](#), Minnesota should have one of the best home-field advantages in the Big Ten, especially late in the season when the weather turns bitter.

California

Last Rose Bowl: [1959](#) (Lost to Iowa 38-12)

Best Shot Since- 2004: With a 10-1 record, a fourth-place ranking in the polls, and a Rose Bowl spot vacated by USC's inclusion in the BCS Championship Game, the 2004 Bears practically had their bags packed for the Arroyo Seco. That was before Mack Brown [began lobbying hard](#) for his sixth-ranked Texas Longhorns. Influenced by Coach Brown's politicking, California's lackluster showing in a season-ending victory at Southern Miss; and the prospect of all those burnt orange-clad, fat-wallet-ed tourists flooding Pasadena, the Rose Bowl committee snubbed the Bears and invited Texas instead. Off went California to the Holiday Bowl, where they sleepwalked through an [embarrassing loss](#) to Texas Tech.

Can they get there in '09? It's possible, more so than for any other team in this group- but it won't be easy. The Bears host USC and Oregon State, but they also go on the road five times in their unbalanced nine-game Pac-10 schedule, including trips to Oregon, Arizona State and improving Stanford for the Big Game. The best scenario for Cal might be to lose to USC, finish second in the Pac-10 while the Trojans run the table and compete for the BCS Championship- and hope the Rose Bowl committee is a little more sympathetic this time around.

Arizona

Last Rose Bowl: Never (Arizona was a member of the Western Athletic Conference until 1978.)

Best Shot Since- 1993: Led by their ferocious [Desert Swarm](#) defense, Dick Tomey's Wildcats were 7-0 and ranked seventh in the land when they rolled into Pasadena to take on UCLA on October 30, 1993 in a battle for first place in the Pac-10. It was their first game in the Rose Bowl Stadium that year, but it was fated to be their last. The Bruins took advantage of five Arizona turnovers and [won in a rout](#), 37-17. The teams finished as Pac-10 co-champions, but UCLA won the tie-breaker and the Rose Bowl trip. Arizona had to content itself with a trip to the Fiesta Bowl, where they [hammered Miami](#), 29-0.

Can they get there in '09? It's very, very doubtful, especially with trips to Oregon State, Cal and USC on the docket. Last season the Wildcats finished 8-5, their first winning record in a decade. A trip to Pasadena would be a giant leap for a program still taking baby steps. Win eight or more games, get to another bowl, and win it: that should be the goal in Tucson. Dreams of roses will have to wait another day.

So *is* there a Rose Bowl sleeper somewhere in the Big Ten and Pac-10? There is indeed- but not on this list. The Michigan State Spartans haven't gone to Pasadena since an (allegedly) [steroid-enhanced](#) trip in 1988, but their schedule sets up nicely to break that drought, with Ohio State off the docket and Northwestern, Iowa and Penn State all coming to East Lansing. If Mark Dantonio's team handles business at

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home, wins two of three road games against Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota- not an impossible task by any means- and finishes in a tie for the Big Ten Championship, they'll be Rose Bowl-bound.

And if none of the sleepers should happen to wake up, well, I'd be more than pleased to see a Rose Bowl end zone painted in scarlet-on-gray come January 1st. For me, there's still something magical about the game, the setting, and that warm glow from the television screen on a cold winter's evening. There's still nothing quite like it. Besides, I've only seen the Buckeyes play in two Rose Bowls since I became a fan back in 1984. That's not enough for my liking. I'd like to see another one before I die- or at least before I turn 35.

Of course, the BCS Championship Game is *also* being held at the Rose Bowl this year...