

2010-11 Bowl Preview, Part I

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Friday, December 17 2010 1:00 PM - Last Updated Friday, December 17 2010 1:43 PM



Once again it's bowl season, and once again it's time to preview each and every one of the 35 bowl games that will be played in December and January. That's at least 15 bowls too many- or 35 too many if you're partial to a Tournament system- but there will be some games worth watching amid the detritus. There always are.

Part I of my Bowl Preview covers the 22 games played prior to New Year's Day. Enjoy:

Saturday, December 18

New Mexico Bowl (Albuquerque, NM, 2:00 PM): Brigham Young (6-6) vs. Texas-El Paso (6-6)

The season's first bowl is Exhibit A for the "too many bowls" argument, as a pair of .500 teams square off in what won't exactly be must-see-TV. UTEP in particular looks weak, having lost five of their last six to finish with a losing record (3-5) in Conference USA. BYU was 2-5 until rallying back into bowl consideration with four straight wins before a narrow Holy War loss to Utah. The Cougars and Miners were conference rivals for thirty years in the WAC, until the former left for the newly formed Mountain West in 1999.

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Whack Predict-O: Brigham Young 42, Texas-El Paso 17

Fun Fact: The only victory for the dismal 1985 UTEP Miners came, improbably, [over a BYU team](#) that finished 11-3.

Humanitarian Bowl (Boise, ID, 5:30 PM): Northern Illinois (10-3) vs. Fresno State (8-4)

Northern Illinois was the best team in the MAC from the beginning of the season until the conference title game, when the Huskies were upset by the O.G. Miami. Fresno was a cut below the kingpins in the WAC but still enjoyed another solid season under Pat Hill. The Bulldogs were beaten badly by Boise and Hawaii but nearly pulled an upset of Nevada before falling by a point. Northern has the better overall resume; Fresno played the superior schedule.

Whack Predict-O: Fresno State 34, Northern Illinois 16

Fun Fact: Both teams share one common opponent- Illinois. The Huskies lost to the Illini 28-22 in Champagne in September; the Bulldogs beat the Illini 25-23 in Fresno on December 3.

New Orleans Bowl (New Orleans, LA, 9:00 PM): Ohio (8-4) vs. Troy (7-5)

Despite losing a head-to-head tiebreaker to Florida International the Trojans still finished with a share of the Sun Belt title for the fifth consecutive season. The Bobcats had the MAC East title in their paws until an upset loss to Kent State in the finale. The man to watch in this game is Troy quarterback Corey Robinson, who replaced star Levi Brown and threw for 3,320 yards and 24 touchdowns. Robinson also threw 15 interceptions, tied with Marshall's Brian Anderson for

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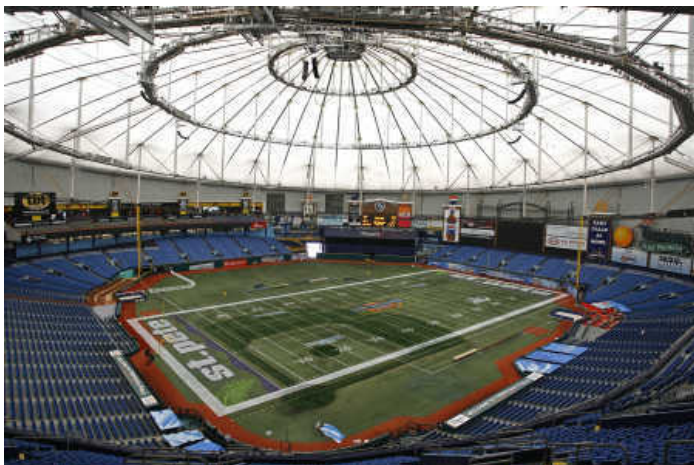
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the most in the FBS. Ohio did it with a defense that ranked a respectable 28th overall in total yards allowed.

Whack Predict-O: Ohio 28, Troy 21

Fun Fact: Troy is 0-2 in bowl games against MAC opponents, having lost to Northern Illinois in the 2004 Silicon Valley Classic and Central Michigan in last season's GMAC Bowl.



Tuesday, December 21

St. Petersburg Bowl (St. Petersburg, FL, 8:00 PM): Southern Miss (8-4) vs. Louisville (6-6)

It's a battle under the dome between a pair of teams that are fairly familiar with one another. Southern Miss and Louisville were once fellow members of Conference USA and played last season, with the Cardinals narrowly prevailing 25-23. Louisville has been a pleasant surprise under first-year head coach Charlie Strong; the Golden Eagles lost one-point games to East Carolina and UAB to fall short of the C-USA East title. One of the top offensive teams in the FBS, Southern is led by three-year starting quarterback Austin Davis, who threw for 2,898 yards, ran for 436 and accounted for 28 touchdowns passing and running.

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Whack Predict-O: Southern Mississippi 31, Louisville 27

Fun Fact: Louisville has won the last four meetings between the schools dating back to 2000.

Wednesday, December 22

Las Vegas Bowl (Las Vegas, NV, 8:00 PM): Boise State (11-1) vs. Utah (10-2)

At one point both of these teams were undefeated, ranked in the top five and in possession of serious BCS aspirations. Now they meet in a pre-Christmas bowl game and bring plenty of disappointment with them into Sam Boyd Stadium. Utah looks especially vulnerable- the Utes struggled in their last four games, getting crushed by TCU and Notre Dame and barely beating San Diego State and BYU. Utah will be starting backup quarterback Terrance Cain, a senior who runs well and is 9-1 as a starter. Cain might actually be more effective than regular starter Jordan Wynn; still, beating what should be an angry Boise team will be a tall order.

Whack Predict-O: Boise State 38, Utah 21

Fun Fact: Utah hasn't beaten Boise since 1987, when the Broncos were members of the Big Sky Conference.

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Poinsettia Bowl (San Diego, CA, 8:00 PM): Navy (9-3) vs. San Diego State (8-4)

The Building Formerly Known as the Murph should be rocking for this one, with the Aztecs at home and the Midshipmen maintaining a strong presence in the city due to the nearby Naval Base Coronado. San Diego had a great season, winning its most games since 1996 and making its first bowl since '98 on the strength of the tenth-best pass attack in the FBS; Navy once again went bowling behind a rush attack that ranked fifth overall. It'll be a battle of contrasts between a pair of well-coached, highly motivated football teams.

Whack Predict-O: San Diego State 28, Navy 27

Fun Fact: Navy has made two other appearances in the Poinsettia Bowl, defeating Colorado State in 2005 and falling to Utah in 2007.

Friday, December 24

Hawaii Bowl (Honolulu, HI, 8:00 PM): Hawaii (9-3) vs. Tulsa (9-3)

It'll be bombs away in the soft tropical air as the nation's fifth and eighth-ranked offenses square off in Honolulu. Hawaii quarterback Bryant Moniz led the FBS in passing yards with 4,629; his top receiver Greg Salas led in receiving yards with 1,675, and the Rainbows also bring a second 1,000-yard receiver (Kealoha Pilaes) and a 1,000-yard rusher (Alex Green) to the table. Tulsa counters with a balanced offense triggered by G.J. Kinne (3,307 yards and 28 touchdowns) and the nation's all-purpose yardage leader, wide receiver Damaris Johnson. This could very well be the highest scoring game of the bowl season.

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Whack Predict-O: Hawaii 51, Tulsa 42

Fun Fact: Hawaii has lost its last two bowl games to Georgia and Notre Dame by a combined score of 90-31.

Sunday, December 26

Little Caesars Bowl (Detroit, MI, 8:30 PM): Toledo (8-4) vs. Florida International (6-6)

The reward for FIU's first Sun Belt title and first bowl appearance is a trip to wintry Detroit to take on a Toledo team playing practically in its own backyard. The Golden Panthers lost their first four but came on strong with a big charge in conference play while Toledo contended in the MAC West all season before finishing second to Northern Illinois. The big man for the Rockets is receiver Eric Page, who caught 94 balls for 1,081 yards and eight touchdowns. FIU is battle-tested; the Panthers hung tough at Maryland, Texas A&M and Pitt and won three road games in Sun Belt play.

Whack Predict-O: Toledo 35, Florida International 23

Fun Fact: Florida International's [35-16 conquest of Toledo](#) at the Glass Bowl in September of 2008 was the program's first-ever non-conference victory over an FBS foe.

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Independence Bowl (Shreveport, LA, 5:00 PM): Air Force (8-4) vs. Georgia Tech (6-6)

Fans of the ground game: here's the bowl for you. Paul Johnson's Rambling Wreck and Troy Calhoun's Falcons are one-two in the nation in rushing offense, one-two in rushing attempts and 117-118 in passing attempts. Air Force looked far more impressive overall, losing badly only to TCU and pushing Oklahoma to the limit in Norman. Georgia Tech never really got untracked after winning the ACC last season and wobbled badly down the stretch, beating only Duke in its last five games. The Yellow Jackets have also struggled recently in bowl games, losing their last five.

Whack Predict-O: Air Force 31, Georgia Tech 28

Fun Fact: Paul Johnson was 5-1 against Air Force as the head coach at the Naval Academy, losing only his first meeting with the Falcons in 2002.

Tuesday, December 28

Champs Sports Bowl (Orlando, FL, 6:30 PM): West Virginia (9-3) vs. North Carolina State (8-4)

Bill Stewart once again had the best talent in the Big East and once again settled for something less than the outright Big East title and BCS bid. N.C. State had the ACC Atlantic title all but wrapped up until a loss at Maryland in the season finale. Like the Las Vegas Bowl, this game features teams that fell short of their own expectations. It's an attractive match-up between a pair of fast, athletic teams with brilliant individual performers- Russell Wilson for the 'Pack, Noel Devine for the Mountaineers. West V is also second in the nation in scoring defense behind TCU.

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Whack Predict-O: North Carolina State 21, West Virginia 20

Fun Fact: N.C. State and West Virginia have met twice before in bowl games, both in the Peach. Lou Holtz's Wolfpack and Bobby Bowden's Mountaineers split the two meetings, in 1972 and '75.



Insight Bowl (Tempe, AZ, 10:00 PM): Missouri (10-2) vs. Iowa (7-5)

Insight Bowl organizers should be delighted with this border-state match-up between talented and experienced opponents. Missouri finished tied for the Big 12 North title and defeated eventual conference champion Oklahoma; Iowa was a major disappointment, losing five games—all of them close. The Hawkeyes were still good enough to embarrass Michigan State and will give the Tigers everything they can handle. Kirk Ferentz's teams generally show up in bowl games; the Hawkeyes are 5-3 in bowls under his tutelage.

Whack Predict-O: Iowa 27, Missouri 24

Fun Fact: Despite being located in neighboring states with just a four-hour drive between them, the Tigers and Hawkeyes haven't met since 1910.

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Wednesday, December 29

Military Bowl (Washington, DC, 2:30 PM): Maryland (8-4) vs. East Carolina (6-6)

The Terrapins bounced back strong from a 2-10 horror show in 2009, never losing more than one game in a row and winning four of their five games decided by a touchdown or less. Their top difference-maker was freshman quarterback Danny O'Brien, who threw for 2,257 yards and 21 touchdowns with only six interceptions. He and receiver Torrey Smith (65 catches, 1,045 yards, 12 scores) should find the pickings rich against an East Carolina defense that finished dead last nationally in total yards allowed and gave up an average of 43.4 points per game.

Whack Predict-O: Maryland 48, East Carolina 21

Fun Fact: Maryland is 4-2 in bowl games under Ralph Friedgen.

Texas Bowl (Houston, TX, 6:00 PM): Baylor (7-5) vs. Illinois (6-6)

After sixteen dry seasons the Bears are bowling again thanks in large part to the heroics of quarterback Robert Griffin III. The junior speedster threw for 3,195 yards, ran for 591 and accounted for 29 touchdowns with his arm and legs. Illinois put together a somewhat surprising bowl run behind freshman quarterback Nate Scheelhaase and 1,522-yard rusher Mikel Leshoure. Both teams slumped late- Baylor dropped its last three games while the Illini lost three of their last four. Both can count this season as a relatively major success with a victory. Baylor rates the logistical edge: its campus in Waco is only about a three-and-a-half hour drive from Houston.

Whack Predict-O: Baylor 34, Illinois 28

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Fun Fact: Neither school has won a bowl game in this century. Baylor's last bowl win came over Arizona in the 1992 Sun Bowl; Illinois's last came over N.C. State in the 1999 Micron PC Bowl.

Alamo Bowl (San Antonio, TX, 9:15 PM): Oklahoma State (10-2) vs. Arizona (7-5)

The Wildcats stumble into San Antonio with a four-game losing streak and a 4-5 record in Pac-10 play, a far cry from the high expectations set during a 7-1 start. The Cowboys were one of the nation's biggest surprises, winning ten games and coming close to the Big 12 South title despite losing major star power from last season. Mike Gundy's team gets it done with the spectacular troika of quarterback Brandon Weeden (4,037 yards, 32 touchdown passes), tailback Kendall Hunter (1,516 yards, 16 touchdowns) and the great receiver Justin Blackmon (102 catches, 1,665 yards, 18 touchdowns.) Arizona struggled defensively in the last month of the season, which means trouble against a Cowboy offense that topped the nation in total yardage.

Whack Predict-O: Oklahoma State 44, Arizona 28

Fun Fact: Mike Gundy has a 0-6 lifetime record against Bob Stoops, brother of Arizona head coach Mike Stoops.

Thursday, December 30

Armed Forces Bowl (Dallas, TX, 12:00 PM): Southern Methodist (7-6) vs. Army (6-6)

The Mustangs get to stay at home in Gerald Ford Stadium against an Army team with perhaps the thinnest resume of any bowl qualifier. The Black Knights have just five wins against FBS opponents and those five came over teams with a combined record of 17-43. SMU didn't exactly set the world on fire either but the Ponies did win the C-USA West crown and held Tulsa

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to its lowest point total of the season. They'll match their Run 'n Shoot attack against an Army pass offense that finished dead last in the nation at barely 82 yards per game.

Whack Predict-O: Southern Methodist 34, Army 14

Fun Fact: Army's last bowl win came in 1985, when the Cadets defeated Illinois in the Peach Bowl.



Pinstripe Bowl (Bronx, NY, 3:20 PM): Syracuse (7-5) vs. Kansas State (7-5)

The inaugural Pinstripe Bowl features a pair of teams just happy to be playing December football. The Orange- which should have a very nice-sized crowd in Yankee Stadium- clawed to their first winning season since 2001, despite failing to beat an FBS team at home. K-State was overmatched by the Big 12's elite but achieved its first winning regular season since 2006. The game's biggest star is Wildcat tailback Daniel Thomas, who rushed for 1,495 yards and scored

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16 touchdowns. Syracuse's offense is dismal, ranking 106th nationally in total yardage.

Whack Predict-O: Kansas State 24, Syracuse 10

Fun Fact: This is the third bowl meeting between the teams. K-State defeated Syracuse in the 1997 Fiesta Bowl while the Orangemen defeated the Wildcats in the 2001 Insight Bowl.

Music City Bowl (Nashville, TN, 6:40 PM): North Carolina (7-5) vs. Tennessee (6-6)

Not much was expected of Derek Dooley's first season in Knoxville and that's a good thing, because the Volunteers didn't show much. Tennessee started 2-6 and only got healthy late against a soft closing schedule. Much was expected of Butch Davis's Tarheels before scandal depleted their roster just prior to the regular season. North Carolina lost its first two games and had to fight uphill the rest of the way just to finish with a winning record. Now two teams that struggled, one expectedly, the other not so much, meet in Nashville in what should be a reasonably entertaining contest.

Whack Predict-O: North Carolina 28, Tennessee 14

Fun Fact: Like Missouri and Iowa, UNC and Tennessee are next-door neighbors that haven't met on the football field in a long while. The last game between the schools took place way back on November 4, 1961.

Holiday Bowl (San Diego, CA, 10:00 PM): Nebraska (10-3) vs. Washington (6-6)

This isn't the match-up either team wanted. The Huskers had serious BCS aspirations and didn't want another trip to the Holiday Bowl and a rematch with a mediocre Washington team they buried 56-21 in September. The Huskies are bowling for the first time since 2002 but probably want no part of a Nebraska team that handed them a 35-point defeat in Seattle. Rematches can be tricky things in college football, but it's hard to imagine this game turning out

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too much differently than the lopsided first go-around.

Whack Predict-O: Nebraska 41, Washington 14

Fun Fact: Nebraska-Washington is the only rematch of a regular-season meeting during this bowl season.

Friday, December 31

Meineke Car Care Bowl (Charlotte, NC, 12:00 PM): South Florida (7-5) vs. Clemson (6-6)

Coaches and players come and go but Clemson remains its usual underachieving self. The Tigers lost three straight early in the season and were never a factor in the ACC race. South Florida continued its middling success in the first season under Skip Holtz, falling out of the Big East race with early losses to Syracuse and West Virginia. The Bulls were solid defensively, finishing in the top twenty nationally in yardage and points allowed, but were doomed by an inconsistent offense. Quarterback B.J. Daniels was sporadic, throwing just nine touchdown passes to 12 interceptions.

Whack Predict-O: Clemson 19, South Florida 14

Fun Fact: South Florida is making its second appearance in the Meineke Car Care Bowl. In their first appearance, in 2005, they were shut out by N.C. State, 14-0.

Sun Bowl (El Paso, TX, 2:00 PM): Notre Dame (7-5) vs. Miami (7-5)

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It isn't exactly [Catholics vs. Convicts](#) , but the renewal of the heated Irish-Hurricane rivalry should generate some lively interest. Both storied programs are going in opposite directions. Notre Dame rallied for three straight impressive wins to close the season, including their first win over USC since 2001; Miami's late slump cost Randy Shannon his job. Al Golden has been hired as the new head coach in Coral Gables but offensive line coach Jeff Stoutland will guide the team in El Paso. Coaching situations aside, this looks like a solid matchup between two evenly matched teams.

Whack Predict-O: Notre Dame 27, Miami 21

Fun Fact: The Irish and Hurricanes are scheduled to formally renew their rivalry on [October 6, 2012](#) at Soldier Field in Chicago.

Liberty Bowl (Memphis, TN, 3:30 PM): Central Florida (10-3) vs. Georgia (6-6)

Georgia has gone just 14-11 over the last two seasons, and the last thing Mark Richt needs at this point is a loss in a pre-New Year's bowl game to a Conference USA opponent. Central Florida rose to the top of the C-USA heap behind freshman quarterback Jeff Godfrey, who threw for 2,042 yards and ran for 546. The Knights are trying to do what no C-USA team has done: defeat an SEC opponent in the Liberty Bowl. The former is 0-4 against the latter since the bowl went to the arrangement in 2006.

Whack Predict-O: Georgia 30, Central Florida 17

Fun Fact: Central Florida has never won a bowl game. The Knights are 0-3 in the FBS postseason, including a loss to Mississippi State in the 2007 Liberty Bowl.

Chick-fil-A Bowl (Atlanta, GA, 7:30 PM): South Carolina (9-4) vs. Florida State (9-4)

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The year ends with a solid match-up between division champs in the Georgia Dome. Florida State played well in Jimbo Fisher's first season, taking the ACC Atlantic behind senior quarterback Christian Ponder (2,038 yards and twenty touchdowns) and an improved defense. South Carolina finally broke through with an SEC East title, with their biggest guns being freshman tailback Marcus Lattimore (1,198 yards, 17 touchdowns) and man-child receiver Alshon Jeffery (79 catches, 1387 yards.) Florida State has been more consistent than South Carolina, but both teams arrive in roughly the same condition. This should be a very entertaining lead-up to "New Year's Rockin' Eve" or whatever it is you're watching when the ball drops.

Whack Predict-O: South Carolina 26, Florida State 23

Fun Fact: South Carolina is 3-15 overall against Florida State. The Cocks haven't beaten the Seminoles since 1984.

I'll be back next week with previews and predictions of the bowls for New Year's Day and beyond. Have a safe and festive holiday season and thanks for reading.