

The Bogus Championship Series—The Devil is in the Details

by Jeff Fuller M.D. (jjfuller72@yahoo.com)

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A Sad Scenario

This year, **Northern Illinois** has **beaten two ranked BCS conference teams** and yet has **ABSOLUTELY NO CHANCE AT PLAYING IN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME** if they end up running the table. **What's more, they will not even get an "automatic" BCS-bowl bid for attaining a BCS ranking of #6 or higher.** Why? While their BCS-strength of schedule (SOS) is currently 42nd, but it's projected to be 103rd by the end of the season. Any climb they have in the national polls will be negated by a poor SOS which will cause them to drop in the computer ratings and acquire additional BCS-SOS penalty points. **Even if they climb to #1 in both national polls, they will not attain a BCS rating of #1 or #2 and qualify for the Sugar Bowl/BCS title game.** This is the plight of non-BCS teams who may try their hardest to take on and beat the "big BCS boys." While they often prove equal or even superior on the football field, **there is no equality in the post-season of Div IA college football.**

The Bowl Championship Series (BCS) title game is not a true "national championship game." No non-BCS team will ever have a chance to play in the "#1 vs. #2" match-up. Granted, the best team in the nation is nearly always from one of the six BCS conferences, but the current system of the BCS is cleverly structured to ensure that the "national champion" is **ALWAYS** from one of those six conferences.

First, the key purpose of the BCS (or so they claim) is to get a true #1 against #2 team for a national title game. Below, I detail how it is all but impossible for a non-BCS (non-Notre Dame) team to achieve such a BCS ranking. Sure, the BCS added a rule to allow automatic berth for a non-BCS teams with a BCS ranking of #6 or higher, **but that's just to get into "any old BCS game" NOT the national championship (NC) game.** They state that any team (from a BCS conference or not) that gets the #1 or #2 ranking will play for the title. However, it's easy for them to make this promise—they know that a non-BCS team cannot conceivably make it to #1 or #2. Here's why . . .

A Rigged System

There is no valid reason for the BCS to have its OWN points/ratings system. BCS founders and proponents emphatically argue that the purpose of the BCS is to allow for a national title game of #1 vs #2. If that is/was the purpose, **then why wasn't the BCS structured to just allow the top two teams in the national polls** to be released from old conference tie-in bowls and play for the NC with the other six teams being chosen by the remaining three bowls? If there was a discrepancy about who the top two teams are in the national polls, they should have used computer rankings and/or strength of schedule (SOS) as a **TIEBREAKER only.** The BCS could and should have been structured this way. However, the founders saw and seized an opportunity to further control the prestige, power and money that comes along with a NC. **By making their own "BCS" rating system to determine a "national champion" they crossed a line that will make them very vulnerable if they ever face anti-trust claims in court.**

No, simply letting poll-voted #1 vs. #2 duke it out for the NC was not enough. A rigged system of over-weighted SOS system, convoluted and biased computer rankings, a recently removed margin of victory (MOV) component, and a recently added "quality win" component have made it impossible for a team that plays in a weaker conference to get into the BCS title game.

Quadruple (or more) Jeopardy

Strength of schedule (SOS) is used in every part of the BCS. It is drastically overused and represents a "quadruple jeopardy" as currently employed by the BCS system.

1-The BCS rankings themselves factor in a point value for SOS based on a formula discussed below.

2-Pollsters factor in SOS when they cast their votes for the AP and Coaches poll; otherwise 11-0 **Tulane** (1998) and 11-0 **Marshall** (1999) would have finished much higher ranked than their pre-bowl 10th and 11th rankings respectively.

3-Computer rankings rely HEAVILY on SOS (More on this later).

4-The “quality win” deduction (given to teams who beat teams which finish in the BCS top 10) indirectly penalizes teams who don’t have the opportunity to play a team that ends up as BCS top-10.

The inherent BCS SOS value is calculated by the following formula: $[(2/3 * \text{opponents W-L record}) + (1/3 * \text{opponent's opponents W-L record})]$. This sounds like a fancy and valid way to calculate SOS, but what it really boils down to are two things: 1) how did your conference foes do in their OOC games (W-L record only) and 2) were you fortunate enough to play non-conference games against teams that ended the year with good W-L records (and, as a bonus prize, were they from a conference that ended with a good OOC record)? Conference games end up being a wash as far as the BCS SOS calculation goes because the sum total of all a conferences games is an equal number of wins and losses. This is the same for the Sun Belt as it is for the SEC. If the Sun Belt had a better OOC record than the SEC, they would have the better SOS rating. What ends up mattering is the conference sum total W-L record in OOC games.

Yes, your BCS SOS does suffer some if you bring in teams with poor W-L records, especially if they’re from weak conferences. However, because of the 2/3-1/3 weighted factors, it really doesn’t hurt that much to bring in teams that are in the upper crust of a weak conference. For example, bringing teams like **North Texas, Middle Tennessee State, Toledo, or Bowling Green** who generally end the year at 9-3 or 8-4, but don’t pose a huge threat to beat you at home, can really bolster your BCS SOS. The fact that they play in a weak conference only detracts from the opponent’s opponents aspect; but since that is only weighted at 1/3, it doesn’t hurt the final tally much. Also, **since all your in-conference foes built up good non-conference records by bringing in weak schools this is multiplied by 2/3 and carries the bulk of the weight toward the final number.**

The Dirty Little Secret

The BCS conference teams have **paid their way to power**. Every year, they buy off some of the newest/weakest Div IA teams to come in to their huge intimidating stadiums and take a beating. While this may seem like the “natural pecking order” of college football, **this is the direct means by which BCS teams stay in power and secure a NC amongst themselves**. This vicious cycle continually perpetuates because these BCS teams can largely afford to bring in lightweights directly because of the huge BCS payouts they get each year. Granted, some teams do this mostly to increase their chances of becoming “bowl eligible.” However, by paying teams to come in, they avoid home-and-home series with teams and eliminate their risk of going on the road and taking losses. **Think it’s easy to win big games on the road? Ask Texas A&M, which has not accomplished beat a ranked team on the road in 24 years.**

Conversely, maybe you don’t think it’s a big risk to go on the road?—Just ask **Florida State** (4-0 and ranked #3 in the nation at the time) who went into unranked **Louisville** (2-2) last year and lost, sending their season into a horrible funk. Or what about 1990 when pre-season **#1 Miami** opened their season in Provo, Utah vs. **BYU** and took a thumping at the hands of Ty Detmer and crew. This year, **Northern Illinois** brought in and beat a highly ranked **Maryland** team as did **Toledo** to top-10 **Pittsburg**. Programs around the nation see these “shocker” games and ADs/Coaches all work hard to avoid scheduling such “no-win situation” games.

The Numbers

Lest you think that this is just an opinion with no facts supporting it, I give you the following:

Nebraska. Their scheduling sickens me. Before this year, when was the last time they played a non-BCS conference team /non-**Notre Dame** on the road? . . . I’m really asking . . . (and let me know if you find out) I searched back through 1984 and couldn’t find one so I gave up. They did manage to squeeze in 24 games against non-BCS teams during that time, but **ALL 24 games were in Lincoln**, NE and the Huskers went an astounding 24-0. Hardly adopting the “play anyone anywhere anytime” theme that the non-BCS schools are forced to follow to gain any national respect. Maybe the Huskers are turning over a new leaf by going to Hattiesburg to play **So. Miss** this year (granted, it’s a 2 for 1 deal).

Ohio State has eight home games scheduled this year. They had eight home games last year when they won the BCS title. This year, 8 of the Big Ten teams have 7 or more home games. Excluding **Hawaii** (vacation trip for visiting teams), no non-BCS team has had even seven home games vs. Div IA opponents since the BCS was initiated in 1998.

The SEC. In 2001 the **SEC** played 22 OOC games against non-BCS teams. They went 19-3 in these games, but **only left a SEC stadium once**. That's right, they played 21 of these 22 games against non-BCSers from the comfort of their own homes. The **SEC** has seemed to enjoy picking on members of the **Sun Belt** conference. From 1996-2001 they're 36-1 in head to head, but 35 of those 37 games have been played at **SEC** stadiums (yes, the only loss was an away game for the **SEC** team—that'll teach you to venture out and take risks, eh?).

Extending the trend further, from 1996-2001 while BCS conference teams went 567-143 against non-BCSers, they played 530 of those 710 games at home (75%). Thus, a non-BCS team, on average, has to play three games in a BCS teams' stadium to get one home game. Further analysis reveals that most of the BCS teams that go on the road to play non-BCS teams are the likes of powerhouse schools **Duke, Baylor, Temple, Rutgers, Vanderbilt, Indiana, Northwestern**, etc . . . you get the picture.

Breaking up the 1996-2001 data: **ACC** vs non-BCS: 45-16 (43H, 18A), **Big 10**: 93-20 (86H, 27A), **Big XII**: 116-26 (103H, 40A), **Big East**: 91-35 (87H, 39A), **PAC 10**: 93-21 (79H, 35A), **SEC**: 129-25 (133H, 21A).

Factoring out the three stronger non-BCS conferences (**C-USA, MWC, & WAC**) the figures are even more staggering. The sum record (1996-2001) for BCS teams vs. **Sun Belt, MAC, and Independents (excluding ND)** is 262-46 with only 47 of the 308 games (15%) being home games for the non-BCSers. However, take **Navy** (long series with **Boston College** and others), **Marshall** (who BCS schools often want to schedule home and home series because of the great W-L record they bring in to bolster the SOS), and **Central Florida** (who, like **Hawaii**, gets more home-and-home series because of the tourism/location issue being in Orlando, FL) out of the mix, and only 9% of these games are played in non-BCS stadiums. **That's right, most of these teams must play an average of eleven games in BCS stadiums to get one home game against a BCS conference team.**

After the **SEC**, the **Big 10** is the second worst offender at paying teams to come in to take a walloping. From 1996-2001 they played 49 games against **MAC** teams, but only went into **MAC** stadiums **THREE** times. The fact that the **MAC** won seven of these games should be an "embarrassment" to the **Big 10**.

Side note: The **MWC** and **C-USA** are neck and neck over that time period (1996-2001) with the highest win percentages; it's almost eerie how exact the percentages come out. **MWC vs. BCS 26-64** (29% winning percentage) with 33 of the 90 (37%) games being in **MWC** stadiums. **C-USA vs. BCS 50-121** (29% winning percentage) with 63 of the 171 (37%) games being in **C-USA** stadiums. Winning less than one out of three games is not the way to make an argument for inclusion in the BCS. However, I think we'd be closer to having an even record if we had even home field advantage. **The MAC is the only "overachieving" non-BCS conference over that time period** meaning that they won more games over BCS teams than they had home games: 26-119 total record (18% winning percentage) with 19 of the 145 (13%) games being in **MAC** stadiums. The **WAC** is the biggest "underperformer" with a 21-110 record (16%) and 37 of the 131 games (nearly 29%) being at home

The ironic factor in all this is that BCS big-wigs keep telling the non-BCS teams that they have to schedule and beat the tough BCS teams if they want to be considered for a chance at a BCS game. Now we know that this usually means road games or getting a 2 for 1 series (two away for one home) due to the difficulty of scheduling such games—a true Catch-22.

Those Quirky Computers

There are now **seven** computer rating systems used by the BCS. **ALL of them factor in SOS to a significant degree.** There used to be **eight** in 2001 and 4 of them factored in margin of victory (MOV). As of last year, **the four that used MOV were told they must remove it from their programs or they would no longer be accepted by the BCS.** Two complied and two (Matthews and Rothman) said "adios." After being "ousted" the year before that, the NY Times ranking removed their MOV component and was taken back into the BCS fold. **While removing the MOV component was viewed as a PR victory for the BCS (i.e. teams are not rewarded for running up the score) it simultaneously made SOS more "weighty" mathematically.** Without MOV, it is even harder for a non-BCS team having a stellar season to climb in the computer, and therefore, BCS ratings. Pollsters might be impressed with convincing victories, but the BCS computers are not. A lucky overtime win based on a blown call by an official is just as impressive to a computer as a sound spanking.

Anderson-Hester (http://www.andersonsports.com/football/ACF_frnk.html) This is the only system that has not had to change it's formula and has been with the BCS from day one, intact. It uses *both* a teams' SOS and their conference's

strength in ranking teams. This is based mostly on a conferences' W-L record (as a whole) in out of conference (OOC) games. This is a re-duplication of SOS values within the computer itself and should not be used.

Richard Billingsley (http://www.cfr.com/Archives/Search_of_NC.htm) This is one of the better systems, but it still has it's problems and still overvalues SOS. Basically, it carries a team's rank over from previous year and values early part of season more highly. He uses "opponent strength" which is based on W-L record, and rating and rank within his system. I take issue with carrying rank over from the previous year. This "feeds the monster" that is the BCS—of course, the highest ranked teams will be BCS teams, and beating them (don't they all play and beat each other?) is more valued than teams from weaker conferences playing and beating each other. He does get credit for giving "bonus points" for road victories.

Wes Colley (<http://www.colleyrankings.com/#advan>) Strength of schedule is taken into account. He uses no prior season data and everyone starts the year equally. His system is very complex, but teams from non-BCS conferences tend to end with a higher rating in his system compared to the BCS rankings. It seems to be one of the fairest systems to non-BCS teams.

Kenneth Massey— (<http://www.mratings.com/rate/cf-m.htm>) His rating system was rewritten for 2001 to remove MOV. He still has his old rating system at his website. The revised version heavily weighs SOS based on (guess what?) OOC W-L record. Comparison of how non-BCS teams are ranked in his previous ranking and his BCS-tailored ranking shows a general trend for a lower ranking after revision.

New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/sports/NCAA-RANKINGS.html>) Quoting from Jerry Palm's www.collegebcs.com the NY Times "Used to be part of the BCS from inception through 2000, but was removed for being too reliant on MOV. Now, MOV has been removed from the formula and it is back. This system used to place undue emphasis on more recent games, but nothing is known about the new version. This system used to only publish its top 50." As is stated, I can't peruse the formulas, but the results are pretty depressing for non-BCS teams. Last year only 3 non-BCS teams finished in the top 40, and they weren't always the best ones. 12-1 **Boise State** ended ranked 31st. 11-2 **Marshall** finished 63rd and 10-2 **TCU** finished 65th. Meanwhile, **Texas Tech** was ranked 12th with a 9-5 record. This BCS-revised system IS NOT the friend of "the little guy."

Jeff Sagarin (<http://www.usatoday.com/sports/sagarin-archive.htm>) He also has a "modified version" that the BCS uses (excluding MOV factors). His old system has always given a HUGE amount of weight to SOS (so much so that **his final #1 rated team last year (2002) was 11-2 USC**—yes, above his #2 **Miami** and #3 14-0 **Ohio State**—who nobody can argue was the national champion last year; . . . and we trust these computers?) The revised version doesn't do any favors to non-BCSers. Before the modification, 12-1 Boise State would have been 18th ranked, but the modification brought them down FIVE spots to 23rd. Also, Sagarin-BCS version (called Elo Chess or ELO-BCS) gave 10-2 **TCU** a ranking of 41st, and 11-2 **Marshall** a ranking of 45th. Again, no love for the lowly. On his own website he states "In ELO-BCS, only **winning** and **losing** matters; the **score margin** is of **no consequence**, which makes it very "**politically correct**". However it is **less accurate . . .**" There you have it, from the horses' mouth (and this horse—Sagarin—is widely regarded as the premier sports computer ranker in the world).

Peter Wolfe (<http://www.bol.ucla.edu/~prwolfe/cfootball/ratings.htm>). His rankings are based on actual outcome vs. predicted outcome. He does not consider game location. His format is not public, but non-BCS teams generally get horrible rankings. Prior to bowl games, 11-1 **Boise State** had a ranking of 33rd, 10-3 **Colo. St.** was ranked 41st, 10-2 **Marshall**, and 10-3 **Hawaii** were ranked 51st and 52nd respectively. For comparison, 9-4 **Florida State** was ranked 13th and 8-5 **Texas Tech** was 23rd.

Well, maybe "quirky" might not be the right word to describe these computers. Maybe I should rename this section, "Those Conspiring Computers."

The Value of History

Let's take a lesson from history. The BCS folk insist that their system is open to anyone who meets their criteria. Well, based on the 1998-2002 seasons it doesn't seem like a non-BCS team will be able to play for a NC. Why? Since the inception of the BCS, the average SOS of a team in the BCS title game is 17th while the average SOS of a non-BCS team in around 90th. The highest SOS ever obtained by a non-BCS school is 26th. Below is a breakdown of the results year by year.

2002

BCS #1 **Miami** (SOS 19) vs. BCS #2 **Ohio State** (SOS 20)

Undefeated teams: **Miami & OSU**

Non-BCS SOS (better than 54): **Cincinnati 29, Colo St. 46**
Median SOS: BCS teams 33rd; non-BCS teams 92nd

2001

BCS #1 **Miami** (SOS 18) vs BCS #2 **Nebraska** (SOS 14)

Undefeated teams: **Miami**

Non-BCS top SOS(under 54): **Colo St. 26, Nevada 41, Houston 44, SJSt 48, Fresno State 51, Miami-OH 52**

Median SOS: BCS teams 33rd; non-BCS teams 91st

2000

BCS #1 **Oklahoma** (SOS 11) vs. BCS #2 **Florida State** (SOS 2)

Undefeated teams: **Oklahoma**

Non-BCS top SOS(under 54): **BYU 47, Rice 51**

Median SOS: BCS teams 32nd; non-BCS teams 92nd

THREE YEAR DATA: (I break off the data here because this is when the BCS started removing MOV-based components from the BCS ratings)

***Chance of going undefeated** (during regular season) $4/349 = 1.1\%$.

***Chance of non-BCS school having SOS equivalent to BCS title game participants** (lowest SOS 20th—mean SOS 14th) **to qualify for national championship game.** $0/157 = 0\%$.

***Combined chance of going undefeated 1.1% and (x) attaining minimal SOS required (0%) = 0%.**

Continuing back in time:

1999

BCS #1 **Florida State** (SOS 6) vs. BCS #2 **Virginia Tech** (SOS 53)

Undefeated teams: **FSU, VT, & BCS #12 Marshall 11-0** (SOS 93)

Non-BCS top SOS(under 54): **Cincinnati 30, UAB 33, BYU 35, So. Miss 40, Colo St. 42, New Mexico 45, SDSU 46, Wyo 50.**

Median SOS: BCS teams 34th; non-BCS teams 92nd

1998

BCS #1 **Tennessee** (SOS 20) vs. BCS #2 **Florida State** (SOS 4)

Undefeated teams: **Tennessee & Tulane 11-0** (SOS 97)

Non-BCS top SOS(under 54): **So. Miss 35, Houston 48, UNLV 50, Wyoming 51**

Median SOS: BCS teams 33rd; non-BCS teams 92nd

FIVE YEAR DATA:

***Chance of going undefeated** (during regular season) $9/575$ Div IA seasons over 5 years = **1.6%**. **POINT—it's not easy for ANYONE in Div IA to go undefeated regardless of their schedule—therefore, undefeatedness should be rewarded. Teams should be able to play until they lose.**

***Chance of non-BCS school having lowest SOS required** (lowest SOS #53—mean SOS 17th) to qualify for national championship game. $22/255 = 8.6\%$

***Combined chance of going undefeated and a non-BCS school having the lowest minimum SOS required = 0.14%, or roughly one out of a thousand.**

So, how did **Virginia Tech** do it in 1999? (well, Michael Vick helped eh?). But seriously, they got into the title game with a SOS at 53rd; shouldn't non-BCS teams be able to do this? Theoretically, yes, but the BCS guys are one step ahead of the game. **Va Tech** was only able to attain such a high ranking because the margin of victory component was still used by most of the computers—they won each game by an average of 30 points; with only one game being closer than 20 points. Remember however that MOV had been removed from the BCS computers systems. **Va Tech** only beat out 11-1 **Nebraska** by a slim margin—apply today's BCS formulas and **Neb** not only gets the "quality win" bonus for beating #6 **KSU**, but they would come out in the computers as the #2 team because the MOV component that helped **Va Tech** would be removed. I find it no coincidence that Anderson-Hester (the only original and intact BCS computer ranking system—never crediting MOV) has the **Hokies** ranked #3 behind **Nebraska**. I find it pretty easy to conclude that today, the 11-0 Va Tech team would NOT be playing for a national championship because of their non-BCS-like SOS of 53rd.

“Poll Position”

Although I think that the national polls (AP & Coaches) may be the best method for choosing teams that should play for a NC (or alternatively, a selection committee), I still have a few of gripes with them.

Firstly, I do not think that there should be any preseason rankings—teams should play at least 4 games before any ranking occurs. It happens every year that the preseason top 25 has no (or sometimes one—usually a token #24 or #25) non-BCS teams. However, there are usually 3-4 non-BCS teams who finish the season in the polls. Also, a preseason #1 could go 2-3 to start the season and still be in the top 25. Teams generally don’t drop more than 7-9 poll spots after a loss. What this does is artificially inflate the number of impressive wins vs. ranked opponents that BCS teams get within conference play (or BCS conf vs. BCS conf OOC play.) Both **USC** and **Auburn** started this season as top 10 preseason picks. When **USC** won, it looked that much more impressive and the Trojans skyrocketed in the rankings (even though that **Auburn** team is not looking like top 10 material at all). These rankings represent a system where the rich get richer by playing each other and the poor get poorer by the same manner.

Second, the poll voters strongly factor in SOS. I’m not saying they shouldn’t, but it is another reduplication of this overused component. Ideally, the BCS points/ranking system should be done away with and coaches and media writers could decide who the most impressive teams are and who is most worthy of a BCS bowl. Maybe I shouldn’t trust humans more than computers, but I believe humans would have put **Oregon vs. Miami** in 2001 and **Miami (or Washington) vs. Oklahoma** in 2000.

Lastly, **pollsters should be more “flexible” in their rankings.** I would guess that nearly all voters will not drop a team from their spot if they win. While I would hate to be a team who won and went down in the rankings, this mentality locks voters in to their preseason favorites. **Most non-BCS schools must start the year 5-0 or 7-1 before they break into the rankings at all.** After that, they must depend on losses by the teams 1-8 spots ahead of them in order to climb in the polls. If that group of teams doesn’t lose, you don’t climb in the rankings. This is exactly what happened to Tulane in 1998 (11-0 but couldn’t get a national ranking higher than 10th) and Marshall in 1999 (11-0 but had a pre-bowl ranking of 11th in both polls.) **Voters need to “make room” for these surprise teams (especially if they’re undefeated)** and vault them over other teams that may not have lost that week. The problem is that few, if any, voters do this. For example, both **Northern Illinois** and **Minnesota** are currently undefeated and started the year unranked. The Coaches seem to believe that **Minnesota** has been more impressive thus far because they have them ranked 16th while **No. Illinois** is 20th. Can anyone make the case that **Minnesota’s wins (Tulsa, Ohio, Troy State, LA Lafayette & 2-3 Penn State)** are more impressive than **No. Illinois (then #13 Maryland, then #22 Alabama, Tennessee Tech, and Iowa State)?**

A Telling Scenario

The following is a contrived scenario (and one many have heard before), but it proves a point. Let’s say the defending Super Bowl champs **Tampa Bay Buccaneers** strapped on the uniforms of the **Marshall Thundering Herd** for the 2003 season. They play the following schedule: **Hofstra, @ Tennessee, Toledo, @ Kansas State, @ Troy State, Kent State, @ Buffalo, @ Western Michigan, Akron, @ Miami (OH), @ Central Florida and Ohio.** Imagine they went undefeated and would also go to the MAC title game. Let’s say they win by an average of 50-7 (including @ **Tenn** & @ **KSU**) and go undefeated at 13-0. **While voters may give them the nod to be in the top 2 in the polls so that they could play for a NC, there is NO WAY they would climb into the BCS top 2 with this schedule** (as of Sept 29th, 2003 www.collegebcs.com predicts that Marshall’s SOS will be 97th). It is even likely that they would not make it into the BCS top 6 and secure a guaranteed position in any BCS bowl. It would be apparent to everyone in the nation that they were the best team in the nation, but the BCS formula and computers would not be convinced nor impressed.

Don’t believe me? The real 1999 **Marshall Thundering Herd** had an undefeated season. However, they languished in the BCS ratings and national polls. **While most know that Marshall attained a BCS ranking of 12th and poll ranking of 11th, few realize that, even if Marshall had been ranked #1 in both major polls, they would have only attained a BCS final ranking of 10th!** Similarly, **Tulane** in 1998 ran the table and attained a BCS and poll ranking of 10th. However, **even if the whole nation of coaches and AP voters would have been convinced that they were the #1 team in the nation, they would have only managed a final BCS ranking of 8th.** If the BCS formula would exclude these hypothetically poll #1 teams from even getting a BCS locked position of #6 or higher, how can they claim that the national title game would really pit #1 vs. #2.

Thinking only non-BCS teams can be effected? Just last year (2002) the pollsters agreed (Coaches and AP) that **Iowa** was the 3rd best team in the nation at the end of the year. However, because the computer’s had them ranked 5th best and their

BCS SOS was 49th they ended up with a BCS ranking of 5th. **That's a two spot drop similar to what could happen to a consensus human poll #1 team that ends up with a BCS ranking of #3 or lower and loses out on the title game.** Further, **Kansas State** ended #6 in both national polls, but thanks to a computer ranking of 11th and a BCS SOS of 54th, they were relegated to a #8 BCS ranking—again a two spot drop.

If these BCS teams with just so-so BCS SOS rankings can be two spots lower than their national poll rankings, just imagine what would happen to the **Marshall/Tampa-Bay Buccaneers** team, likely with a BCS SOS near 100. Never mind that they would represent the most talented and best team in college football, they just had the bad luck of being in the wrong conference.

Still think a team can't miss out on a chance at a national championship game when they're deserving? Never forget **Oregon** in 2001. They were 10-1 and a solid #2 in both national polls. Their SOS seemed solid at 31st (nearly the top quartile). We all remember too well the 2001 BCS fiasco which put an undeserving **Nebraska** in the NC title game. What we don't remember is that **Oregon** didn't just get "inched out" of that 2nd spot. They were a distant 4th in the BCS rankings (behind a two-loss **Colorado** team; that, by the way, had a loss to a non-BCS team—WAC representative **Fresno State**). This was due to the fact that the computers felt they were the 4th best team in the country. **Oregon** was really not even close to being able to play for the national championship even though most of the nation knew that was their rightful place. If it can happen to these BCS teams, how in the world would it be possible for a non-BCS team with a weaker SOS to get a shot at proving that they might just be the best team in the nation that year? Even if they were, under the present system we would never know.

2003—A football oddity?

"Hypocrisy" is a word that the BCS system should know a lot about. One often hears arguments such as "the MWC is 5-9 vs the BCS conferences this year, so that shows that they are inferior and not BCS-worthy." First off, the SEC is currently (Sept 29th) 5-7 vs. other BCS conference teams. Additionally, they are a sorry 2-5 vs C-USA opponents (a non-BCS conference). Are we hearing that **the SEC is not BCS worthy** for these records? If the logic applies in one direction, it should apply from the other. Extending the hypocritical trend of the BCS, **from 1996-2001 the current BCS member Big East is only 33-53 vs. non-Big East BCS teams. If you exclude Miami and Virginia Tech (which will be a reality sooner than later), their record is an abysmal 14-41.** Although the MWC and C-USA records vs. BCS teams during the same time period is nothing to get too excited about (27-64 & 50-121 respectively), they're not far from how the Big East has performed. If you also factor in the home/away component, the top non-BCS conferences are right there at the competitive level.

A Time For Change

The winds of change are swirling around the world of college football. The big questions are how much change, and when? **The solution is easy, a playoff.** Everybody but BCS big-wigs seems to want this. The time seems right for a movement in such a direction. **However, the BCS will probably try to limit this change and simply extend their contract a few more years with a PR campaign that will appease the little guy. They will suggest adding a 5th BCS bowl with a guaranteed spot to the highest ranked non-BCS team. However, this is not the solution.** Under this likely scenario, they will still control the money, recruiting, and, power of college football. Most importantly, **THEY WILL STILL HAVE MAINTAINED THEIR SYSTEM OF PRECLUDING NON-BCS TEAMS FROM ACHIEVING A #1 OR #2 BCS RANKING AND PLAYING FOR A NATIONAL TITLE.**

The ABC-BCS contract is up after the 2004-5 season and will be renegotiated during the next off season. The Big East/ACC sideshow has started a domino effect which may lead to changes in the makeup of most conferences. Non-BCS presidents (led by **Tulane** president Scott Cowen) have united in an effort against the exclusionary BCS system (**The Presidential Coalition for Athletics Reform-- <http://coalition.tulane.edu/>**) The BCS and non-BCS presidents/conference commissioners are in talks about the BCS's future. Congress is debating the "legality" of the BCS. Sadly, under the current system, many Div IA coaches can only tell players: **"No matter what you do this year, you cannot win a national championship.** However, if the planets align and we catch some breaks, you may be lucky enough to play in a major bowl and bring more money to your conference." **Join in the efforts** (such as the CF16 Coalition- <http://www.cf16.org>) and help lead college football toward it's destiny of a playoff. Some day, all Div IA coaches can tell their squads at the start of the year: **"If you work hard and give it your all, you can end this year as true national champions."**