

Part 1—Extended Postseason Guidelines

As defined here, an “Extended Postseason” for Division I-A football refers to: 1) a single game post-bowl championship, or 2) a condensed playoff. Either approach allows BCS conferences to re-establish traditional commitments with specific BCS bowls. The following guidelines establish postseason pairings and can be applied to either option, both of which are discussed in Part 2.

1. Automatic BCS Bowl Invitations.

Five conferences have automatic BCS bowl invitations, and are responsible for designating their own representatives. Participants in the four BCS bowls are as follows:

- ROSE = Pac 10 champion vs. Big 10 champion
- SUGAR = SEC champion vs. At Large
- ORANGE = ACC champion vs. At Large
- FIESTA = Big 12 champion vs. At Large¹

2. At Large BCS Bowl Invitations.

Remaining At Large BCS bowl spots are filled by the winners of Play-In games held after the regular season. (NOTE: Teams from outside BCS conferences can qualify directly to a BCS bowl by meeting specific criteria, such as a BCS ranking of 6th or higher.)

3. Play-In Game Participants.

The selection of teams for Play-In games is based on the BCS ranking system. Conferences with automatic qualifiers are limited to one At Large team in order to prevent any conference from having more than two representatives in the BCS bowls.

4. Game Assignments.

For Play-In games and three BCS bowls (Orange, Sugar, and Fiesta), the highest and lowest ranked teams are paired together until all games are set unless the pairing includes a “Negative Contingency,” such as:

- a. An overly high combined BCS ranking (such as #1 vs. #3),
- b. Teams from the same conference, or
- c. A rematch of a late regular-season game (i.e., November 1st or later).²

With an Extended Postseason, BCS bowls do not host the championship over New Year’s.

Therefore, top-ranked teams must be separated (a). Other items (b and c) involve pairings the bowls might prefer to avoid. Play-In games can be designated as feeding into a specific BCS bowl, or winners can be assigned to bowls later based on BCS rankings.

Review of Features.

These guidelines accomplish two things. First is the renewal of bowl/conference affiliations, and second is the creation of Play-In games whereby At Large teams earn their BCS bowl invitations. Otherwise, existing seasons and postseasons remain unaffected. Pairings for all Play-In games and BCS bowls are set automatically without input from individuals or committees. As a result, these guidelines provide the impartiality needed to conduct either a single game post-bowl championship or a condensed playoff.

¹ The future status of the Big East is unknown. A continued automatic BCS bowl invitation is still possible, but non-BCS status appears more likely. Compromise is possible through a guaranteed Play-In spot to the highest ranked non-BCS conference over the past three years. (Such a ranking would favor the Big East at first, but allow other non-BCS conferences to claim the spot in future years.) Due to space limitations, only one Play-In spot can be automatic.

² Eliminating all regular season rematches is not recommended, since balanced pairings are diminished whenever a Negative Contingency is applied. Also note that the items listed are descriptive, but an official list would need to be specific. An example of such a list can be provided upon request.

Part 2—Applications for Extended Postseason Guidelines

1. Single Game Championship.

This idea, mentioned in various news articles, has inherent problems. If the top four teams play in two New Year's bowls, which get to host these "semifinal" games? Meanwhile, traditional Rose Bowl pairings continue to suffer. On the other hand, if the Rose Bowl renews its Pac 10-Big 10 alliance, teams from other conferences could have an unfair advantage or disadvantage depending upon how subsequent pairings were made. For example, the #1 team could theoretically play in a minor bowl against an unranked team to protect their chance of qualifying for the post-bowl championship. Yet requiring top teams to meet in one of the three remaining BCS bowls puts the same team at a disadvantage. In other words, if the #2 team plays in the Rose Bowl against a weak opponent, why must #1 face #3?

Adding a fifth BCS bowl to guarantee a spot for a non-BCS team has also been suggested, but is not necessary. Play-In games make it possible for non-BCS teams to compete for At Large spots in existing BCS bowls. And any team (BCS or not) that earns their bowl invitation becomes a more attractive participant by virtue of their extra win.

Again, bowl pairings and assignments are generated automatically. Balanced and impartial pairings for the BCS bowls help clarify and validate the selection of two teams for the championship. Although not as comprehensive as the playoff format described below, these guidelines can make the single game post-bowl championship a workable option.

2. Condensed Playoff.

In the strictest sense, the "playoff" consists of the four BCS bowl winners. Semifinal pairings are made after the bowls are completed, with games played a week or two after New Year's. Home sites (recommended for fan support and reduced travel) are awarded to the two higher-ranked BCS bowl winners, except that conference champions are given priority over At Large BCS teams (with independents exempted from this rule). Once the two home teams are established, the higher ranked home team is paired against the lower ranked visiting team. The championship game would be held the following week, presumably at a neutral site.

Since a single game post-bowl championship is being considered, it might also be worthwhile to contemplate a playoff using these guidelines. Many playoff concerns focus on the expected harm to bowl games, but this approach allows long-time conference affiliations to be restored, and makes each BCS bowl important every year instead of every fourth year. Meanwhile, a single game post-bowl championship must still rely on a ranking system to select two teams, exposing it to problems that a playoff would avoid.

Not every conference champion is included, but each Division I-A team has a chance to earn a BCS bowl invitation (even if BCS conferences continue to claim most—or all—of the At Large spots). So in spite of its condensed stature, the format qualifies as an all-inclusive Division I-A playoff. And unlike most proposals, this approach requires very little change to the current postseason environment. As a bonus, calls for a playoff would cease.

Review of Options.

As described here, an Extended Postseason lets conferences re-establish annual commitments to BCS bowls, and allows those bowls to regain a consistent level of importance every year. The guidelines provide an opportunity to non-BCS schools, yet without forcing their inclusion regardless of merit. By using the approach described in Part 1, both options in Part 2 become viable alternatives.