

8/24/2012: Big Ten preseason bowl projections

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Before we shift our attention towards the first week of the college football season, I wanted to first conclude my preseason coverage with some bowl projections I have for games featuring Big Ten teams.

Two things before I delve into these: 1. This wasn't easy to put together. Not only did I have to think about where I foresee Big Ten teams ending up this winter, but also had to think about the other conferences and know the bowl orders for all of them so I can attempt to justify opponents. 2. I believe this year the Big Ten's streak of sending two teams to BCS bowls ends this year for two reasons. First, the fact that only 10 teams are even bowl eligible to begin with is significant, especially with one of those teams being an Ohio State squad that would probably compete for a conference title this year if it didn't have a postseason ban. Secondly, I ultimately believe both the Big 12 and ACC are more top-heavy entering this season, which is why I think they're the two conferences that end up having two BCS teams and not the Big Ten. I also don't see any non-AQs ending up in BCS bowls this season either.

**The four BCS games I don't have a Big Ten team playing in I see shaking out as follows: BCS National Championship – USC (No. 1) vs. LSU (No. 2), Fiesta – West Virginia (Big 12 champion) vs. Virginia Tech (at-large), Sugar – Alabama (replacement for LSU) vs. Texas (at-large), Orange – Florida State (ACC champion) vs. Louisville (Big East champion).*

This year, I see the Big Ten sending eight teams to bowl

games. Below are those projections:

Rose Bowl – Michigan (Big Ten champion) vs. Oregon (replacement for USC)

Jan. 1, 2013; Pasadena, Calif.

I have Michigan winning both the Legends Division and Big Ten Championship Game this season. I also have the Wolverines being the lone Big Ten team that reaches a BCS bowl. Assuming USC – who I have winning the Pac-12 – plays in the national title game, I'm projecting Michigan's opponent to be defending Rose Bowl champion Oregon.

As a sidebar, this and the 2013 NHL Winter Classic at The Big House both happening the same afternoon would make for quite an eventful New Year's Day in Ann Arbor.

Capital One Bowl – Wisconsin (Big Ten No. 2) vs. South Carolina (SEC No. 2)

Jan. 1, 2013; Orlando, Fla.

Since I don't foresee the Big Ten sending two teams to BCS games this season, Orlando is my landing spot for Wisconsin, who I have winning the Leaders Division by default, but losing the Big Ten Championship Game to Michigan. I'm projecting the Badgers to face South Carolina, who would be making a second straight trip to this bowl after beating Nebraska last season. If this match-up happens, it would feature two of the best running backs in college football – Wisconsin's Montee Ball and South Carolina's Marcus Lattimore.

Outback Bowl – Nebraska (Big Ten No. 3) vs. Arkansas (SEC No. 3/4)

Jan. 1, 2013; Tampa, Fla.

If the Big Ten sends two to the BCS, Nebraska's a team that could ideally get that at-large spot. With Michigan State

having played in this bowl last season, my hunch is the Outback would prefer to invite Nebraska if this scenario unfolds since the Cornhuskers have never played in this game. As for Nebraska's opponent, I'm throwing in a twist here and projecting it to be Arkansas. Usually, a team from the SEC East winds up in this game. But if the Cotton Bowl opts to take Georgia instead of having the Razorbacks for a second straight year, then I have a hard time seeing any other SEC team be considered for this bowl.

Gator Bowl – Michigan State (Big Ten No. 4) vs. Auburn (SEC No. 6)

Jan. 1, 2013; Jacksonville, Fla.

With the Gator receiving the fourth pick of Big Ten teams, I have it selecting Michigan State, a team that has played four bowl games in the state of Florida under head coach Mark Dantonio. I'm projecting the Spartans' opponent to be Auburn because I don't see the Chick-Fil-A Bowl taking the Tigers two years in a row. This would also be the third straight bowl game Michigan State has played against an SEC opponent.

Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl – Purdue (Big Ten No. 5) vs. TCU (Big 12 No. 4)

Dec. 29, 2012; Tempe, Ariz.

This game formerly known as the Insight Bowl has featured Iowa each of the past two seasons. I also think there's enough in place at Purdue that the Boilermakers could win at least seven games in 2012. Past history suggests Purdue would be picked before Iowa if the Boilermakers finish with a better record. In 2006, the Champ Sports Bowl opted to take an 8-5 Purdue squad that got destroyed by a 6-6 Iowa head-to-head, and the Alamo Bowl followed by taking the Hawkeyes. Also in 2003, Purdue finished second in the Big Ten and was selected over an Iowa team it beat head-to-head for the Capital One Bowl while the Hawkeyes played in the Outback Bowl.

Now with all that established, I foresee Purdue playing TCU, who would be the beneficiary here of the Big 12 sending two teams to BCS bowls. With this being the Horned Frogs' first season in that conference, this wouldn't be a bad bowl destination for them at all.

Meineke Car Care Bowl of Texas – Iowa (Big Ten No. 6) vs. Baylor (Big 12 No. 6)

Dec. 28, 2012; Houston, Texas

So this is where I have Iowa winding up in 2012. This is a season where the Hawkeyes would be a huge beneficiary of the Big Ten sending two teams to the BCS because then a bowl game in Florida on New Year's Day becomes a lot more realistic. If this does play out and Iowa ends up playing in Houston on Dec. 28, I'm projecting the Hawkeyes' opponent to be Baylor, who I have finishing seventh in the Big 12 this season. This would be the Bears' second trip to this bowl game in three seasons.

TicketCity Bowl – Illinois (Big Ten No. 7) vs. Marshall (C-USA)

Jan. 1, 2013; Dallas, Texas

My feeling on Illinois is that it will be good enough to reach a bowl game for the third straight year in what is Tim Beckman's first season as the Fighting Illini head coach. This game would match Illinois against an opponent from C-USA, who I'm projecting in this scenario to be Marshall.

Little Caesars Bowl – Minnesota (Big Ten No. 8) vs. Ohio (MAC No. 1)

Dec. 26, 2012; Detroit, Mich.

You're reading this correctly. I think Minnesota goes 6-6 and gets rewarded with a trip to Detroit for the Little Caesars Bowl. I have the Golden Gophers playing Ohio, who I'm picking to win the MAC in 2012 and be the logical choice for this

bowl, which gets its first choice of MAC teams.

Indiana – no bowl

Northwestern – no bowl

Ohio State – ineligible for postseason play in 2012

Penn State – ineligible for postseason play from 2012-15

I'll post new projections sometime in October after Big Ten play gets going, but for now, this is what I have and I'm willing to stick with it, no matter how right or wrong these ultimately wind up being.