

11/19/2013: Big Ten bowl projections

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(Back in August, I made [a list of preseason bowl projections](#) that not only focused on the Big Ten, but projected all 35 bowl games for the 2013-14 season. With the Iowa Hawkeyes now bowl-eligible, I figured it'd be worth re-visiting this matter and providing new projections based off what has actually taken place this season.)

Last week after Iowa became bowl-eligible, I made an attempt at putting together some revised bowl projections from what I had previously. Some shake-up has taken place since those [projections were posted on Nov. 13](#), so I figured I'd offer up a revision of that revision here this week (Yes, this is one day earlier than I initially planned to post these projections).

The following are adjustments made from then to now and other points of note:

1) Big Ten gets two BCS teams

Last week, I felt certain the Big Ten was only going to end up with one BCS team this season after Stanford defeated Oregon. I'm singing a different tune now. Stanford's loss to USC over the weekend puts Oregon back in the driver's seat to win the Pac-12 and that at-large spot I had the Ducks taking in the Orange Bowl is now open again. For now at least, I believe a second Big Ten team will be playing in South Florida on Jan. 3.

2) Still only seven Big Ten teams

This will become a formality over the weekend after Michigan State and Ohio State lock up their respective division titles on Saturday because both Northwestern and Indiana would have seven losses and become ineligible for bowl games. With a second Big Ten team in a BCS bowl, every team left over would be moving up one slot in the pecking order. This leaves the Big Ten with two vacant spots in the Heart of Dallas Bowl (where I previously had Iowa) and the Little Caesars Bowl, respectively.

3) The formula behind putting this all together

Right now, 65 teams are already bowl-eligible and now I have a total of 78 teams reaching this mark (one more than last week), meaning eight teams are going to be left home for the holidays despite reaching the six-win plateau. After filling conference tie-ins, as well as placing BYU in the Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl and Navy in the Armed Forces Bowl, I was left with seven vacancies and a pool of 15 teams to fill those seven spots.

– The following seven bowls have vacancies – the AdvoCare V100 Bowl (SEC tie-in), the BBVA Compass Bowl (SEC tie-in), the Little Caesars Bowl (Big Ten tie-in), the Beef O’Brady’s Bowl (AAC tie-in), the Poinsettia Bowl (Army is no longer bowl-eligible), the Pinstripe Bowl (Big 12 tie-in) and Heart of Dallas Bowl (Big Ten tie-in)

– The following 15 teams were among those considered for the seven vacancies – (8-4): Bowling Green, Ohio, Toledo; (7-5): Maryland, Notre Dame, Western Kentucky; (6-6): Syracuse, Florida Atlantic, UTSA, Central Michigan, Arizona, Washington State, ULM, Troy and Texas State.

Seeing how I had six teams projected as finishing 7-5 or better, it was pretty easy this week to fill six of the seven vacant spots. This left one spot for a 6-6 team and nine of these teams to choose from. The one I picked to take Army’s

place in the Poinsettia Bowl was Washington State, who I now believe will beat Utah. I picked Washington State over Arizona because of the head-to-head this past weekend with the Cougars beating the Wildcats (on the road, no less). Arizona and Syracuse were both teams I had bowling in last week's projections, but now see staying home for the holidays. I also factored in bowl pay-out when filling the seven vacant spots.

Below are my projections as of Nov. 19, 2013 (the next list of bowl projections will take place either Nov. 26 or 27):

BIG TEN BOWLS:

Rose Bowl – Ohio State vs. Oregon

– I previously had Ohio State playing Stanford here, but as I mentioned above, Oregon is back in the driver's seat to win the Pac-12 again after Stanford lost to USC over the weekend. As it turns out, this was my national championship prediction at the beginning of the season. Here, they'd just be meeting in the same stadium five days earlier.

Orange Bowl – Wisconsin vs. Clemson

– Clemson remains in this game as my replacement for Florida State. Now there are two potentially intriguing debates to consider. The one that is obvious and will be there if everything goes as expected in the Big Ten is whether Wisconsin or Michigan State should receive that second at-large. Unless Michigan State upsets Ohio State in the Big Ten Championship Game, this is going to be the debate if Wisconsin's 10-2 and Michigan State is 11-2 with a loss to the Buckeyes. The Badgers are more likely to be in the top 14 of the final BCS Standings if this scenario unfolds, thus why I have Wisconsin in this game (it should also be noted that historically, teams that lose conference title games find themselves on the outside looking in when it comes to scenarios like this, like Michigan State two years ago).

But now here's another thing to consider. Let's say Baylor loses to Oklahoma State and because of the head-to-head, the Cowboys represent the Big 12 in the Fiesta Bowl while the Bears sit there at 11-1. Would the Orange Bowl consider taking Baylor over either a Wisconsin or Michigan State then? My guess (for now) would be no. But it might be in both the Badgers' and Spartans' best interests if Baylor wins that game in Stillwater on Saturday because I don't think a 10-2 Oklahoma State would get taken over either team.

Capital One Bowl – Michigan State vs. South Carolina

– Because I have Wisconsin getting the at-large spot in the Orange Bowl, my Capital One Bowl projection remains the same with the Spartans and Gamecocks meeting in a battle of likely conference championship game losers. A storyline worth noting, too, if this happens – Michigan State head coach Mark Dantonio is a South Carolina alum.

Outback Bowl – Nebraska vs. Missouri

– Now is where you'll see teams start moving up with Wisconsin in the Orange. Here, I have Nebraska in the Outback Bowl and what do you know? A match-up against another old Big 8 foe in Missouri, who I still have in this game representing the SEC.

Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl – Michigan vs. Oklahoma

– Michigan moves up to the Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl and something to keep in mind: Let's say Iowa does beat Michigan on Saturday and both teams have identical 7-5 records. Iowa would have the better conference record and head-to-head, but the Hawkeyes have also been in this game twice in consecutive years fairly recently (2010 and 2011 back when it was the Insight Bowl) and this game won't have a Big Ten tie-in anymore starting next year. Throw in the fact that Oklahoma remains my Big 12 pick to land here and I think this bowl would still pick Michigan regardless of Saturday's outcome, not just because of historical context but also because Iowa

and Oklahoma just played each other in this game two years ago.

Gator Bowl – Minnesota vs. LSU

– For now, this is where I have Minnesota. A very important caveat to point out here – IF the Hawkeyes win either of their final two games in addition to the Golden Gophers losing both this week to Wisconsin and next week to Michigan State, then I believe a 7-5 Iowa gets picked before an 8-4 Minnesota. Now if the Gophers win either of their final two games, the Outback and Buffalo Wild Wings Bowls both become very much in the discussion for them. If Iowa finishes 6-6, then this will be the worst-case scenario for Minnesota. On the SEC side, I still have LSU ending up here, but the Tigers may move up if they beat Texas A&M on Saturday or possibly even down if they don't beat the Aggies and Missouri also loses to Ole Miss.

Texas Bowl – Iowa vs. Texas Tech

– Again, this is where I have the Hawkeyes FOR NOW. A 6-6 record virtually guarantees Iowa a trip to the Lone Star State, whether it's this game in Houston if the Big Ten has two BCS teams or the Heart of Dallas Bowl in Dallas if the Big Ten only ends up with one BCS team. If Iowa reaches 7-5 (either by beating Michigan on Saturday or Nebraska next week), I believe the Gator Bowl would then be very much in play for the Hawkeyes as long as they're within one game of Minnesota. If the Hawkeyes win out and get to 8-4, then the Outback and Buffalo Wild Wings both become possibilities.

Unless Texas Tech wins at Texas on Thanksgiving, the Red Raiders remain the team I see representing the Big 12 here, even though this would be their second consecutive trip to Houston. Now, the possible 11-1 Baylor vs. 10-2 Wisconsin/11-2 Michigan State debate would very much affect this game if Baylor ended up with an at-large spot over a Big Ten team. Not only would that bring every other Big Ten team down one spot,

but every other Big 12 team would move up one spot and the Texas Bowl would then have a vacancy since no one else from the Big 12 is eligible now with West Virginia losing to Kansas over the weekend. This is a moot point if Baylor wins Saturday night; if Oklahoma State wins, it's something to maybe think about.

THE OTHER BCS BOWLS:

BCS National Championship Game – Alabama vs. Florida State

– Yeah, this hasn't changed. Still think Alabama and Florida State win out and this would absolutely be the title game if that happens.

Sugar Bowl – Auburn vs. UCF

– Because Auburn snatched victory from the jaws of defeat against Georgia last weekend, I didn't change anything as far as the SEC is concerned, so I still think (for now) Auburn gets picked as Alabama's replacement here. This projection's still the same since I have UCF winning the AAC and ending up here. Again, the AAC champion is guaranteed a BCS bowl this season, and as long as either Fresno State or Northern Illinois remains undefeated, that AAC champion is probably ending up in this game.

Now here's what could get interesting: Let's say Texas A&M wins out and is also 10-2 with Auburn after the Tigers lose to Alabama next week. Auburn has the head-to-head and having seen first-hand how Iowa's win over Penn State in 2009 got the Hawkeyes into the Orange Bowl over the Nittany Lions, I do believe the Sugar Bowl would put head-to-head into account here and take the Tigers over the Aggies. But having said that, the Johnny Manziel factor could certainly come into play because of TV, so it wouldn't be a total surprise if Texas A&M got picked over Auburn here. Obviously, if the Aggies lose either of their remaining games at LSU or at Missouri, the only thing that would then be in Auburn's way of a Sugar Bowl

appearance (regardless of next week's outcome) would be South Carolina winning the SEC Championship Game.

Fiesta Bowl – Oklahoma State vs. Fresno State

– Yes, I believe Oklahoma State beats Baylor on Saturday, which is why I have the Cowboys now winning the Big 12 and playing in the Fiesta Bowl instead of the Bears. I just mentioned how this particular scenario could lead to discussion of Baylor maybe getting an at-large spot, but even at 11-1, part of me has a hard time believing it would help fill Sun Life Stadium the way Wisconsin fans would, which is why (for now) I have the Badgers getting picked instead. As for Fresno State, I still believe it goes unbeaten and ends up qualifying since it'll probably be ranked higher in the BCS Standings than UCF when the season's complete.

ALL OF THE REST:

New Mexico Bowl – Oregon State vs. Colorado State

**Previously had San Jose State from the MWC*

Las Vegas Bowl – Boise State vs. USC

Idaho Potato Bowl – Buffalo vs. UNLV

New Orleans Bowl – Tulane vs. UL-Lafayette

Beef O'Brady's Bowl – Middle Tennessee vs. Western Kentucky*

**Previously had Ohio filling the AAC vacancy*

Hawaii Bowl – East Carolina vs. San Jose State

**Previously had Colorado State representing the MWC*

Little Caesars Bowl – Ball State vs. Maryland*

**Previously had Notre Dame filling the Big Ten vacancy*

(Something to consider now that I have Maryland projected for

a bowl unlike last week: As long as the ACC is able to fill its allotment – which it appears it will – there is absolutely no way Maryland ends up in any of its bowls given the Terrapins' pending move to the Big Ten. Even though both North Carolina and Pittsburgh could end up with worse records than Maryland, those teams are getting picked for ACC bowls before the Terps are, period. The difference between this case and Rutgers is the AAC likely isn't filling its entire allotment, so as long as the Scarlet Knights reach six wins, they'll be in a bowl with an AAC tie-in. As long as Maryland wins at least one of its two remaining games, it should end up somewhere this winter without worry.)

Poinsettia Bowl – Washington State* vs. Utah State

*Previously had Western Kentucky filling the Army vacancy

Military Bowl – Rice vs. Pittsburgh

*Previously had Syracuse representing the ACC

Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl – BYU vs. Washington

*Previously had Arizona representing the Pac-12; BYU is locked into this bowl game

Pinstripe Bowl – Cincinnati vs. Notre Dame*

*Notre Dame now takes the Big 12 vacancy here; previously had West Virginia representing the Big 12

Belk Bowl – Houston vs. Georgia Tech

Russell Athletic Bowl – Miami (Fla.) vs. Louisville

Armed Forces Bowl – San Diego State vs. Navy

*Navy is now locked into this bowl game after reaching eligibility over the weekend

Music City Bowl – Mississippi vs. Boston College

Alamo Bowl – Stanford vs. Texas

**Previously had UCLA vs. Oklahoma State*

Holiday Bowl – Arizona State vs. Kansas State

AdvoCare V100 Bowl – North Carolina vs. Ohio*

**Previously had Pittsburgh representing the ACC and Bowling Green filling the SEC vacancy*

Sun Bowl – Virginia Tech vs. UCLA

**Previously had Duke vs. Washington*

Liberty Bowl – Marshall vs. Vanderbilt

Chick-Fil-A Bowl – Duke vs. Georgia

**Previously had Virginia Tech representing the ACC*

Heart of Dallas Bowl – North Texas vs. Bowling Green*

**Bowling Green takes the Big Ten vacancy that's now here; previously had Iowa representing the Big Ten*

Cotton Bowl – Baylor vs. Texas A&M

**Previously had Texas representing the Big 12*

BBVA Compass Bowl – Toledo* vs. Rutgers

GoDaddy Bowl – Arkansas State vs. Northern Illinois

WHAT I'M KEEPING AN EYE ON FOR NEXT WEEK'S PROJECTIONS:

- Iowa's game against Michigan for reasons already mentioned.
- Baylor at Oklahoma State: Again, for reasons already mentioned regarding the Big 12 bowl order and if Baylor maybe gets considered for a BCS at-large if it finishes 11-1 with this being its one loss.

– *Pittsburgh at Syracuse: The winner of this game will have six wins and be bowl-eligible. If the Orange win, I'll be putting them back in a bowl with an ACC tie-in and likely removing Pitt, who would then need to beat Miami on Black Friday in order to avoid seven losses.*

– *Vanderbilt at Tennessee: The Volunteers need to win out in order to become bowl-eligible. If Tennessee wins Saturday, it will be featured in next week's projections and that current vacancy in the BBVA Compass Bowl will be no more, meaning one less spot for whichever teams are among the leftovers in next week's pool.*

– *Utah at Washington State: If Washington State wins, the Cougars become bowl-eligible and the Utes would have seven losses, making them ineligible. If Utah wins though, both teams would have to win next week. Something to keep in mind in the event the Utes reach six wins: Arizona beat Utah head-to-head last month.*

– *Western Kentucky at Texas State: Don't laugh. Both teams have six wins and are already bowl-eligible. I also still have the Hilltoppers among the 70 teams I project to be bowling this winter. If Western Kentucky wins, it'll remain in the discussion to fill one of the available vacancies. If Texas State wins though, then it replaces Western Kentucky in any future discussions where the possibility of a third Sun Belt team getting a bowl exists.*