

12/3/2013: 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.)

More shake-up has taken place since my most recent [bowl projections back on Nov. 26](#). As a result, I've made some revisions to my projections for this week.

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

1) Big Ten still gets two BCS teams

As of this moment in time, I still believe the Big Ten gets two teams into BCS bowl games. Now because Wisconsin lost to Penn State last weekend, there's an outside shot in play where Ohio State beats Michigan State and the Spartans fall more than four spots below their current No. 10 BCS ranking. If Michigan State drops to 15th or lower, then the Rose Bowl can't take the Spartans as a replacement for Ohio State if the Buckeyes play for the national title. As long as Michigan State is 14th or higher in the BCS standings when they get released Sunday night, the Spartans are Pasadena bound unless an undefeated Ohio State got jumped over by the SEC champion for the national title game (which SHOULD'N'T happen). If that happens, then maybe the Orange Bowl picks up Michigan State, but the odds of that are slim.

Now, let's discuss the other scenario: If Michigan State beats Ohio State. The Spartans would obviously go to the Rose Bowl and play whoever wins the Pac-12 title game between Stanford and Arizona State. If this happens, I believe Ohio State still gets at-large consideration (probably the Orange Bowl since the Sugar Bowl would get to replace the SEC champ with Alabama) for a BCS bowl, possessing a 12-1 overall record. So if the Spartans win, it should be a lock for the Big Ten to get two BCS teams. The only scenario where the Big Ten has only one team is if Ohio State beats Michigan State and the Spartans drop five or more spots, which is unlikely. Not impossible, but unlikely.

One other thing to consider: If Northern Illinois loses the MAC title game to Bowling Green on Friday, the Huskies won't be in position to take a BCS at-large spot and the Spartans shouldn't fall five or more spots if they lose Saturday, meaning two at-larges would be open instead of one after the two replacements for the national championship game teams are determined. If that happens, the Big Ten should get one of those two spots and the other going to possibly a second Big 12 or second Pac-12 team.

2) Officially seven bowl-eligible teams from Big Ten

Nothing new here. This was established before last week's games. The Big Ten's spot in the Little Caesars Bowl will be vacant for sure. If the conference gets two BCS teams, the Heart of Dallas Bowl will also have a vacancy. That's really the only question right now.

3) The formula behind putting this all together

Right now, there are already 78 bowl-eligible teams, which means all 35 bowl games will be filled without any unusual circumstances and eight teams are for sure getting left home. Two teams – SMU and Rutgers – can still become bowl-eligible and would be guaranteed a tie-in with an AAC bowl should

either win Saturday (SMU plays UCF; Rutgers plays USF). South Alabama (from the Sun Belt) can also become bowl-eligible if it upsets league champion UL-Lafayette on Saturday. I now have a total of 79 teams in total being bowl-eligible, meaning nine teams are going to be left home for the holidays despite reaching that six-win plateau.

After having eight vacancies last week, I now have six of them this week. The two changes are the SEC being able to fill one of its vacancies with a 6-6 Mississippi State after it beat Ole Miss on Thanksgiving and the MWC being able to fill its entire allotment now with Fresno State no longer in position to be a BCS at-large after losing Friday to San Jose State (who also became bowl-eligible itself in the process). This week's pool has a total of 15 teams to fill those six spots. Syracuse, ULM, San Jose State and UTSA all moved back into the pool this week and I swapped UTSA out of a C-USA bowl in favor of Tulane. I also moved Bowling Green up into a MAC bowl with Northern Illinois being in position to take a BCS spot now.

– The following six bowls have vacancies – the AdvoCare V100 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 the Heart of Dallas Bowl (Big Ten tie-in).

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

Six teams are 7-5 or better, but I do not have UTSA projected to take an at-large since it's no longer among my group of teams filling the C-USA's slots. This left me one spot for a 6-6 team and nine of those to choose from. At 6-6, Oregon State has lost five straight games. However, it did beat Washington State head-to-head this season (on the road and in

convincing fashion, no less). This is why for now, I have the Beavers taking that last spot in the Poinsettia Bowl instead of the Cougars, even though Washington State would probably be more thrilled about a trip to San Diego.

With Mississippi State now in the projections for a SEC bowl, the lone team no longer in this week's projections is UTSA. I also factored in bowl pay-out when filling the eight vacant spots.

Below are my projections as of Dec. 3, 2013 (the final list of bowl projections will take place the morning of Dec. 8, when all 35 bowl match-ups will be announced):

BIG TEN BOWLS:

BCS National Championship Game – Ohio State vs. Florida State

– If both the Seminoles and Buckeyes win their respective conference championships Saturday night, this *SHOULD* be the national championship. If either loses, then go ahead and insert whoever wins that SEC title bout between Missouri and Auburn. If Ohio State loses to Michigan State, I would move the Buckeyes into the Orange Bowl against Clemson.

Rose Bowl – Michigan State vs. Stanford

– Now, I'm in the group that believes Michigan State will make Saturday's Big Ten Championship enough of a game that even if the Spartans lose, they'll remain top 14 in the BCS standings on Sunday. Again, if that happens, Michigan State will be in the Rose Bowl regardless of Saturday's outcome against Ohio State. If the Rose Bowl can pick the Spartans as the Buckeyes' replacement, it won't blink twice. The only two ways Michigan State won't be here is if either it falls five or more spots in the BCS standings or if Ohio State gets jumped. Assuming the Spartans do smell roses, they'd face the winner of the Stanford/Arizona State game in Tempe on Saturday. I know the Sun Devils at home, but I still think Stanford prevails, thus

why I have the Cardinal as the Pac-12 representative.

Capital One Bowl – Wisconsin vs. Auburn

– Wisconsin's loss guarantees Michigan State's taking that second at-large spot (assuming there is one). If the Big Ten gets two BCS teams, the Badgers go to Orlando. If the Spartans somehow fall here, then Wisconsin also moves down. I think the loser of the SEC title game ends up here. I'm putting Auburn here for now (mainly because it seems like Wisconsin and Auburn seem to cross paths a lot in bowl games). If Auburn wins the SEC Championship, then I think Missouri falls here.

Outback Bowl – Iowa vs. LSU

– Two things that need to be established: 1. As long as the Big Ten gets two BCS teams, I truly believe Iowa has now done enough to warrant being the league's representative in the Outback Bowl. Wins over all three of Minnesota, Michigan and Nebraska, combined with the fact that Iowa fans will travel to Tampa for a New Year's Day bowl is enough to convince me here. If the Capital One Bowl's able to take Wisconsin, then the Hawkeyes' have the most compelling argument of the Big Ten teams remaining to play in this game.

2. Regarding the SEC opponent, yes, typically a SEC East team ends up in the Outback. But let's say the SEC gets two BCS teams and the Missouri/Auburn loser goes to the Capital One. The two most likely candidates here are South Carolina and LSU. The Gamecocks were just in this bowl game last year against Michigan. Conversely, LSU opened its season at JerryWorld (where the Cotton Bowl is played) against TCU and the Cotton gets to pick after the Capital One. It wouldn't surprise me if a back-room deal gets done here that sends the Head Ball Coach and Jadeveon Clowney to Arlington and sends the Mad Hatter and his team down to Tampa. There's an outside possibility that the Outback Bowl comes out of left field and takes Texas A&M, but I don't see that happening now with the

Aggies losing last weekend to Missouri. If the SEC does stick with sending an East team here, then South Carolina's the most likely bet.

One last thing to watch for is which SEC team ends up in the Capital One Bowl. If it's the Missouri/Auburn loser, then the odds of South Carolina ending up here are better. However, if the Gamecocks end up in Orlando, the Missouri/Auburn loser can't fall any further in the SEC pecking order than the Cotton Bowl, meaning LSU would be a likely candidate to end up in Tampa.

Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl – Nebraska vs. Texas

– Now here's where this gets interesting, because my hunch is Nebraska ends up in Tempe now regardless of what happens with the Big Ten. The thought of Husker fans invading the desert to see their team play the very Big 12 team that prompted Nebraska's move to the Big Ten is enough of a selling point here. Now, if Texas were to somehow win at Baylor on Saturday, then it could be Oklahoma ending up in this game from the Big 12. Either way, this looks too intriguing for the Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl to pass up if Nebraska is sitting there for it.

Gator Bowl – Michigan vs. Georgia

– Yes, Minnesota has a better Big Ten record and better overall record than Michigan and the Wolverines lost four of five to end the season. However, Michigan has the head-to-head (which was a 42-13 slaughter of the Golden Gophers).

But here's why I think the Wolverines end up getting picked here – because it almost beat Ohio State. Yes. Almost. Hear me out here. I think had Michigan packed it in against the Buckeyes and got humiliated in "The Big House" on Saturday, that could have done enough damage to where the Gator Bowl might consider Minnesota instead. But the final was 42-41. Yes, Michigan lost. But because the Wolverines put up enough of a fight against their biggest rival (who had a ton at

stake), there might still be enough interest in Michigan here. From the SEC perspective, the question is whether the Chick-Fil-A Bowl takes Texas A&M or Georgia. I have the Bulldogs ending up here for now, but if the Chick-Fil-A stays local with Georgia, then it could be Johnny Manziel and Texas A&M ending up here, which would make taking Michigan here even more intriguing.

Now if the Big Ten ends up with only one BCS team, that's where a team like Iowa could come into play here. Especially if the Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl sticks with taking Nebraska.

Texas Bowl – Minnesota vs. Texas Tech

– If in the event the Gator Bowl does decide to pick Minnesota over Michigan, then the Wolverines would fall here. Again, this is under the premise of two BCS teams from the Big Ten. If the Golden Gophers are the only team here, then you're looking at a rematch of last year's game unless the "Northern Illinois losing" scenario I mentioned earlier happens. Then the Big 12 could be looking at two BCS teams, which would create a vacancy here for an at-large.

THE OTHER BCS BOWLS:

Orange Bowl – Clemson vs. Alabama

– Well, this is interesting now. Assuming the national title game is Florida State vs. Ohio State, I still believe Clemson is picked to replace the Seminoles to keep the ACC tie with this game. Then assuming Michigan State's able to take that Rose Bowl spot, Alabama will be right there for the Orange Bowl to take as an at-large. Something to also keep in mind: If the Crimson Tide don't play for the national title, but remain in the top four of the final BCS standings (this looks very likely to occur), then they are guaranteed a BCS bowl somewhere. Now if Michigan State wins Saturday night, I think Ohio State ends up here against Clemson because Alabama can be taken by the Sugar Bowl to replace whoever wins the SEC title

game.

Sugar Bowl – Missouri vs. UCF

– I had Auburn pegged here for weeks under the premise it lost to Alabama last weekend. Well, that didn't happen. If the national title game remains Florida State/Ohio State, then the winner of Saturday's Missouri/Auburn game ends up here to represent the SEC. If the SEC winner goes to the title game, then Alabama probably ends up here as outlined earlier. Assuming Northern Illinois wins Friday night and guarantees itself another BCS bid, then I think UCF ends up here (assuming either it wins Saturday or Louisville wins at Cincinnati on Thursday). If Northern Illinois loses, this is where a team like Baylor could end up as that extra at-large team. For now, I have Missouri here, but it would be Auburn if it beats Missouri on Saturday.

Fiesta Bowl – Oklahoma State vs. Northern Illinois

– If Oklahoma State handles its business at home against Oklahoma on Saturday, the Cowboys win the Big 12 and get the spot here. If the Sooners pull the upset, then the winner of Saturday's Texas/Baylor game goes here. If Northern Illinois beats Bowling Green on Friday, this is where the Huskies will end up. If Bowling Green wins, then the AAC champion (which again will probably be UCF) goes here instead.

ALL OF THE REST:

New Mexico Bowl – Arizona vs. UNLV

*Previously had Colorado State representing the MWC

Las Vegas Bowl – Fresno State vs. USC

*Previously had Utah State vs. UCLA

Idaho Potato Bowl – Buffalo vs. Colorado State

**Previously had Oregon State filling the MWC vacancy that now no longer exists*

New Orleans Bowl – Tulane vs. UL-Lafayette

**UL-Lafayette has already accepted a bid to this bowl; Previously had UTSA representing C-USA*

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

**Previously had North Texas representing the C-USA and Western Kentucky filling the AAC vacancy*

Hawaii Bowl – Rice vs. San Diego State

**Previously had East Carolina vs. UNLV*

Little Caesars Bowl – Ball State vs. Maryland*

(Remember what I've been saying about Maryland and the ACC)

Poinsettia Bowl – Oregon State* vs. Utah State

**Previously had Ohio filling the Army vacancy and San Diego State representing the MWC*

Military Bowl – East Carolina vs. Pittsburgh

**Previously had Middle Tennessee representing C-USA*

Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl – BYU vs. Washington

**BYU is locked into this bowl game*

Pinstripe Bowl – Houston vs. Notre Dame*

Belk Bowl – Cincinnati vs. Georgia Tech

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

Armed Forces Bowl – Boise State vs. Navy

**Navy is locked into this bowl game*

Music City Bowl – Mississippi vs. Boston College

Alamo Bowl – Oregon vs. Oklahoma

**Previously had Stanford vs. Texas*

Holiday Bowl – Arizona State vs. Kansas State

**Previously had USC representing the Pac-12*

AdvoCare V100 Bowl – North Carolina vs. Toledo*

**Previously had Tulane filling the SEC vacancy*

Sun Bowl – Virginia Tech vs. UCLA

**Previously had Arizona State representing the Pac-12*

Liberty Bowl – Marshall vs. Vanderbilt

Chick-Fil-A Bowl – Duke vs. Texas A&M

**Previously had Missouri representing the SEC*

Heart of Dallas Bowl – North Texas vs. Western Kentucky*

**Previously had Rice representing C-USA and Bowling Green filling the Big Ten vacancy*

Cotton Bowl – Baylor vs. South Carolina

**Previously had LSU representing the SEC*

BBVA Compass Bowl – Mississippi State vs. Rutgers

**Previously had Toledo filling the SEC vacancy that now no longer exists*

GoDaddy Bowl – Arkansas State vs. Bowling Green

**Arkansas State has already accepted a bid to this bowl; Previously had Northern Illinois representing the MAC*

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

- *Big Ten Championship (Ohio State vs. Michigan State):* This is pretty obvious, so I'm not going into any further explanation since I feel I've outlined everything here already.
- *Louisville at Cincinnati:* If Louisville wins, UCF secures the AAC's BCS bid regardless of its game Saturday at SMU. If Cincinnati wins, the Bearcats still have a shot at taking that bid if UCF were to get upset by SMU. A Cincinnati win would also have me drop Louisville down to the Belk Bowl.
- *MAC Championship (Bowling Green vs. Northern Illinois):* Northern Illinois winning would assure the Huskies a spot in the Fiesta Bowl, who has the final BCS at-large selection and nothing would change with MAC projections. However, a Bowling Green win would open up a BCS at-large for another AQ conference and would probably guarantee the Big Ten of two teams since Northern Illinois wouldn't be able to leap Michigan State if it loses to Ohio State.
- *Oklahoma at Oklahoma State:* Bedlam. Oklahoma State goes to the Fiesta Bowl if it wins. If Oklahoma wins, the winner of the Texas/Baylor game would win the Big 12 outright and end up in Glendale instead.
- *C-USA Championship (Marshall at Rice):* The winner goes to the Liberty Bowl. If it's Marshall, nothing in my C-USA projections will probably change. If Rice wins, then Rice would be in the Liberty Bowl and Marshall would wind up in a different C-USA bowl.
- *UCF at SMU:* UCF win guarantees it a BCS bid and makes SMU ineligible at 5-7. If SMU wins, the Mustangs would not only become bowl-eligible, but would end up in an AAC bowl (either the BBVA Compass Bowl or Beef O'Brady's Bowl pending Rutgers' result against USF). SMU winning also opens the possibility of Cincinnati taking the league's BCS bid, which would then

result in me placing UCF in the Russell Athletic Bowl.

– Texas at Baylor: If Oklahoma pulls the Bedlam upset in Stillwater, the winner of this game would win the Big 12 outright. Even if Oklahoma State wins, go back to the “Northern Illinois losing” scenario, because if that happened, a spot in the Sugar Bowl might open up for Baylor if it wins and finishes 11-1. If Texas loses, the Longhorns are likely looking at the Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl.

– SEC Championship (Missouri vs. Auburn): This kind of goes without saying. If either Florida State or Ohio State loses, then I think the winner out of Atlanta here goes to the national title game. At the very least, a bid in the Sugar Bowl is on the line here. The loser of this game will likely appear in either the Capital One Bowl or Cotton Bowl, depending on whether the Capital One Bowl ends up preferring South Carolina instead of whichever team loses.

– South Florida at Rutgers: After inexplicably losing to UConn last week, Rutgers now has to win its final regular-season game before becoming a full-fledged Big Ten member in order to be bowl-eligible. If Rutgers somehow loses at home to a 2-9 USF squad, a spot in at least one AAC bowl and possibly two AAC bowls (pending SMU’s outcome against UCF) will be vacant for one of the pool teams that maybe I don’t have projected this week.

– Pac-12 Championship (Stanford at Arizona State): Obviously, the winner here goes to the Rose Bowl. Seeing how both teams have two losses already, the loser probably doesn’t end up in a position to be an at-large for a BCS bowl. If Stanford wins, I would think the Sun Devils drop out of the top 14 (they’re currently 11th). This could prove key for the Big Ten if Ohio State wins on Saturday.

– ACC Championship: Duke vs. Florida State: The Seminoles assure themselves a spot in the BCS National Championship Game

if they handle their business Saturday night in Charlotte. If Duke somehow wins, total chaos ensues and Clemson drops to the Chick-Fil-A Bowl.

– MWC Championship: Utah State at Fresno State: The winner goes to the Las Vegas Bowl now as a result of the Bulldogs' loss last week to San Jose State, which removed Fresno State from any consideration for a BCS bowl.