

# 8/21/2014: Big Ten preseason bowl projections

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As I've done annually here on *HawkeyeDrive.com*, I conclude preseason coverage with Big Ten bowl projections. Now this year is much different. For one, the College Football Playoff is now a thing. Also a thing is that this is going to be a much more challenging exercise now because the conferences have more say than ever about where these teams go. Because of this, I'm not going to project every bowl like I did last year.

I have two teams – Michigan State and Ohio State – playing in the group of major bowl games being used for the College Football Playoff. I do not have either the Spartans (my pick to win the Big Ten) or the Buckeyes being among the four teams in this year's College Football Playoff and because the Rose Bowl is one of the national semifinal games this season, I do not have a Big Ten team in these projections smelling any roses on New Year's Day.

In total, I have nine Big Ten teams making bowl games, but with two teams in the major bowls, I don't have the league filling its entire bowl allotment.

Below are my projections involving those nine teams:

**Cotton Bowl – Michigan State (Big Ten champion) vs. UCLA (at-large)**

***Jan. 1, 2015; Arlington, Texas***

Even before the news surfaced earlier this week about Ohio State quarterback Braxton Miller being out for the 2014 season

with an injured shoulder, Michigan State has been and remains my pick to win the Big Ten this season. But since I don't have the Spartans making the College Football Playoff, I have them playing in the third New Year's Day bowl down at JerryWorld against a UCLA team that I believe wins the Pac-12 South this season. Speaking of JerryWorld (which is really called AT&T Stadium), this would be the Bruins' second trip there if this happened because they play Texas in Arlington on Sept. 13.

### **Fiesta Bowl – Ohio State (at-large) vs. Baylor (at-large)**

***Dec. 31, 2014; Glendale, Ariz.***

Three things: 1. Even without Miller, have you seen the Buckeyes' schedule? I don't see them winning the Big Ten because at this moment, I don't see them beating Michigan State. However, every other game on Ohio State's schedule remains winnable. 2. Putting Ohio State here versus in the Orange Bowl (again) is pretty significant because if the Big Ten has a team in the Orange Bowl, it automatically relinquishes its Capital One Bowl bid over to the ACC. 3. Since the Big 12's tie-in is now the Sugar Bowl and that's one of this year's semifinals, I have Baylor returning for its second straight Fiesta Bowl to face the Buckeyes.

### **Capital One Bowl – Wisconsin vs. Florida**

***Jan. 1, 2015; Orlando, Fla.***

Now because I don't have a Big Ten team in the Orange Bowl, I'm putting Wisconsin back here in the Capital One Bowl because I think the Badgers win the Big Ten West given the way their conference schedule is shaped. I also believe that even though the Big Ten gets more say in who goes to this game, the Capital One Bowl will continue to value assembling the best match-up it could. Now I have the Badgers playing Florida because it avoids two possible rematches – it avoids a rematch of last season's Capital One Bowl with South Carolina and it

also avoids a rematch of Wisconsin's season opener against LSU next week in Houston.

### **Outback Bowl – Nebraska vs. South Carolina**

***Jan. 1, 2015; Tampa, Fla.***

Iowa was just in this game last season and Nebraska has never been to the Outback Bowl. Since LSU was also in this game last season, I have South Carolina going here. At least Husker fans can take solace in knowing it's not another bowl game against Georgia.

### **Holiday Bowl – Iowa vs. Stanford**

***Dec. 27, 2014; San Diego, Calif.***

Keep in mind that the bowl selections are now done in tiers and the Holiday is in that first tier with the Capital One and Outback. Barring a win in the Big Ten Championship Game, I believe Iowa ends up in this bowl as long as it finishes in the top three of the Big Ten West because Nebraska played in this bowl frequently when it was in the Big 12 and prior to last season, Wisconsin had played in three straight Rose Bowls. Plus the Hawkeyes haven't played in the state of California since their last trip to the Holiday Bowl in 1991. I have Stanford as the opponent for two reasons. One is I only see two Pac-12 teams featured in those six major bowls. The other is the Cardinal's road schedule this season might be the most challenging of any team in college football. Stanford's road games are at Washington, Notre Dame, Arizona State, Oregon, archrival California and UCLA. If the Cardinal go 4-2 or better against that gauntlet, I will strongly consider voting David Shaw for National Coach of the Year.

### **Music City Bowl – Michigan vs. LSU**

***Dec. 30, 2014; Nashville, Tenn.***

As far as I understand the stipulations, this can be either

the Music City or Gator Bowl picking a Big Ten team here as long as both games feature a Big Ten team three times each over the next six years. Meanwhile, I believe this game's higher on the pecking order for the SEC than the Gator. With that in mind and because of the storyline this game would have with Les Miles coaching against his alma mater, I got Michigan facing LSU down in Nashville and the Gator Bowl settling on an ACC team this season.

### **San Francisco Bowl – Northwestern vs. Oregon State**

***Dec. 30, 2014; Santa Clara, Calif.***

Even without Venric Mark or Christian Jones, I believe Northwestern has just enough of a bounce-back season to earn a bowl invitation and its reward is a trip to Levi's Stadium for a date with Sean Mannion and the Oregon State Beavers.

### **Pinstripe Bowl – Maryland vs. Louisville**

***Dec. 27, 2014; Bronx, N.Y.***

I was tempted to project Maryland for Detroit since Randy Edsall spoke in such high regard of the Motor City back at Big Ten Media Days. But all kidding aside, I think the Terrapins have a decent enough season to reach six wins and assuming they do, this match-up would carry quite the intrigue with Maryland facing the very team the ACC replaced it with in Louisville.

### **Detroit Lions Bowl – Minnesota vs. Boston College**

***Dec. 26, 2014; Detroit, Mich.***

At least it's not Houston again for the Golden Gophers? In all seriousness, I like what Jerry Kill has done with Minnesota and I do believe the Gophers will at least one of its games against TCU, Michigan or Northwestern to ensure themselves of bowl eligibility for the third straight year. Boston College is good enough to go 6-6 again, so I have it representing the

ACC here just because.

### **Illinois – no bowl**

I went back and forth on whether to place the Fighting Illini in the Heart of Dallas Bowl. Illinois has two home games in November against Iowa and Penn State and basically has to win one of those games to even have a shot at six victories. I think Illinois just barely misses out.

### **Indiana – no bowl**

Just about everything was in place for Indiana to make a bowl last season and it failed to do so. Now the Hoosiers have a tougher schedule in 2014 which includes non-conference road games against Bowling Green and Missouri back-to-back weeks, one less quarterback on the depth chart and questions still exist about their defense. If Indiana wins its Big Ten opener against Maryland, maybe I'll have a change of heart about the Hoosiers here. Right now though, I'm just not seeing it.

### **Purdue – no bowl**

Record-wise, Purdue should be better and I do think the Boilermakers are capable of possibly winning a game or two they shouldn't. But as far as making a bowl game, not yet. I think Darrell Hazell will eventually do some good things at Purdue, but I don't see it making this step just yet.

### **Rutgers – no bowl**

I know Rutgers has a lot of experience back on both sides of the football. But the schedule is brutal and unless the pass defense significantly improves from a year ago, Washington State might be laying the blueprint on beating Rutgers for every Big Ten team when the Cougars and Scarlet Knights play up in Seattle next week. The absolute best-case scenario I see in Big Ten play for Rutgers is 2-6 with wins over Penn State and Indiana at home. I don't think that will be enough.

**Penn State – ineligible for postseason play from 2012-15**

**Other noteworthy bowls:**

**Peach Bowl – Auburn (at-large) vs. Cincinnati (top non-Big 5 team)**

***Dec. 31, 2014; Atlanta, Ga.***

I have Auburn as the third SEC team being picked for a major bowl game by the College Football Playoff Committee. Now there's a rule that the highest-ranked team from a non-Big 5 conference has to be picked for one of the six major bowls. Marshall's probably going to go 12-0 this season and because of that, the Thundering Herd will get strong consideration. But if strength of schedule plays a big role in determining these match-ups, I can see Cincinnati (my pick to win the AAC) leaping over Marshall and ending up here against Auburn. By the way, if this match-up happens, you'd have Tommy Tuberville coaching against his former school.

**Orange Bowl – Georgia (at-large) vs. Notre Dame (at-large)**

***Dec. 31, 2014; Miami, Fla.***

Since I don't see a second ACC team being selected for the Orange Bowl here, I have the committee killing two birds with one stone here because the Orange Bowl has tie-in agreements in place with both the SEC and Notre Dame. The one reason I think the Fighting Irish end up being pretty good this season is because they have Everett Golson back at quarterback after he missed all of 2013. I can also see Notre Dame being 6-0 when it goes to Florida State on Oct. 18 (if this happens, the amount of pre-game hype will be insane). Meanwhile, I have Georgia winning the SEC East and setting up the "What Could Have Been in 2012" game had the Bulldogs not run out of time against Alabama in that SEC title game.

**2015 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF:**

**Rose Bowl – No. 2 Oregon (Pac-12 champion) vs. No. 3 Alabama (SEC champion)**

***Jan. 1, 2015; Pasadena, Calif.***

If this plays out like I think it will, my hunch is Oregon will eventually leap Alabama in the committee's rankings so this doesn't appear on the surface as disadvantageous to the Crimson Tide. Alabama's probably better than Oregon and if this match-up happened, I'd take the Crimson Tide to win. But the Pac-12 might actually be better than the SEC this season (yeah, I said it). Plus the Ducks have that game early in the season at home against Michigan State.

**Sugar Bowl – No. 1 Florida State (ACC champion) vs. No. 4 Oklahoma (Big 12 champion)**

***Jan. 1, 2015; New Orleans, La.***

Florida State's the best team in the country and because I see the Seminoles staying No. 1 all year, the committee will reward them by giving them the semifinal in New Orleans (which geographically speaking is much closer to Tallahassee than Pasadena). Since I have Oklahoma winning the Big 12, I'm putting the Sooners back in the Sugar Bowl here to round out the first College Football Playoff.

**National Championship – No. 1 Florida State vs. No. 3 Alabama**

***Jan. 12, 2015; Arlington, Texas***

This would be quite the match-up for two reasons: 1. Jimbo Fisher was once an assistant at LSU under Nick Saban. 2. Alabama's likely starting quarterback this season, Jacob Coker, was Jameis Winston's backup at Florida State last season. This would also be the Seminoles' second trip to JerryWorld since they open the season there next week against Oklahoma State. I believe Florida State repeats because while both teams are loaded with NFL talent, I think the Seminoles

have more of it and have fewer weaknesses. I also have a hard time believing Coker's a better QB than Winston because if that were the case, he'd be the guy starting for Florida State right now.