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The Never-Ending Debate to Revise the Format of College Football: BCS or Playoff?

Throughout the past years, there has been an ongoing debate as to whether the format of college football should be converted from the Bowl Championship Series, to a playoff system.

For now, the majority of commissioners, presidents, athletic directors and coaches believe the BCS system is best for determining a national champion while maintaining the most meaningful regular season in sports. I've always believed the best way is to take the top 8 teams in the BCS -- regardless of which conference they're in -- and let them play. This is something university presidents will need to take a serious look at (Obama …Football Playoffs).

In 1995, the six most powerful conferences created a system involving college football teams who hold the highest seeds, dueling it out at one of the several bowl games. Critics argue that a playoff system would be much more efficient, in proving that the best team each year is crowned national champion. The BCS system allows media polls the power to decide which team deserves the highest rank, even after they have been proven to be extremely unreliable, and in many occurrences, faulty. College football should convert to a playoff system because it would give each team more opportunity to prove itself, it would provide a limited amount of power between the media polls and the commissioners of the conferences, and it would evenly distribute the mass amount of revenue to all of the different schools.

To begin, if the format of college football were to convert from the BCS to the playoff system, it would give each team the opportunity to prove itself. For instance, it is very hard for a team to stay confident after only one loss, because they know that they have been excluded from playing in one of the bowls games at the end of the season. A playoff system would allow a team the chance to revitalize themselves after being defeated. Also, a playoff system would give the better teams less of an opportunity to be upset by a lower ranked team.

If you've got a bunch of teams who play throughout the season and many of them have one loss or two losses, there's no clear, decisive winner. We should be creating a playoff system... It would add three extra weeks to the season. You could trim back on the regular season. I don't know any serious fan of college football who has disagreed with me on this (Weiss).

This quote states that a creation of a playoff system would give each team more time to prove that they are worthy enough to be crowned national champion. By adding three weeks of postseason, there could be as many as 32 plus teams dueling it out at the end of the season. Look at how successful the NCAA Basketball championship system is. If college football were to convert to a similar system, it would run more smoothly, and lower the amount of controversy that surrounds the sport.

Secondly, if the BCS system were abolished from college football, it would provide a limited amount of power between the media polls and the commissioners of the conferences. For example, since the BCS system was established, there has been an ongoing argument about the amount of power that has been given to the media polls, and how they shouldn’t be allowed to provide each team with a rank. It is very frustrating for the fans to see that there team is doing incredible for many weeks at a time, but there is still no change in the way that the media polls see their improvement. “Despite reaching the top of the AP poll for the first time this season Sunday, the University of Alabama found itself behind top-ranked Florida in the BCS standings” (Anniston). It is hard to believe that this team has reached the highest rank for a media poll, yet they are behind another team in the BCS standings. Even a minor mistake like this could keep a team from being able to compete in one of the bowl games. This depicts a perfect illustration of one of the many occurrences where the media polls have been faulty, and misleading.

In its early form the BCS title game was meant to match up the top two teams in the polls. However, the AP and the football writers who vote in its poll balked. ‘They wanted to report the news, not make it,’ says Kramer. ‘So a system was created that used not only the two polls but also computer rankings, which have become the biggest target on the BCS's back, for an obvious reason.’ ‘The system couldn't guarantee a One versus Two,’ says Tranghese. ‘We knew that from the beginning.’ (Layden).

Layden provides an amazing description of the reason why there has been a large amount of controversy regarding these polls. In a sport where over 37 million people watch every year, how is it that the computer rankings and media polls can be so flawed?

The unfortunate by-product of all this chaos is that it’s created an unmistakable case of paranoia among both fans and participants of the sport. Nobody trusts anyone in college football – not the opposing coaches, not the rule makers, and certainly not the media. After all, there is the only sport on the planet where the media has a say in the final outcome (Mandel 18).

Mandel explains how there has been so much confusion in the college football system that it has created a cycle where people don’t trust each other any longer. Media has played a big role in this confusion, because they take every story to higher levels of drama, and misconception. In a system where media has the most control, there is no telling how far this issue could be drawn out. Establishing a playoff system would solve this issue, and those once existing bonds could be recreated. Also, since the beginning of the BCS to present, the commissioners of the conferences have been given an increasing amount of power. This is frustrating because the simple decision to convert the BCS system to a playoff system rests in their hands. Even after the commissioners have heard the cries from fans, and participants, they continue to ignore them. In his book, *Death to the BCS: The Definitive Case against the Bowl Championship Series*, Dan Wetzel states, “The single most frustrating notion is, ‘We understand it’s not perfect, but it’s the best we can do,’” Mountain West commissioner Craig Thompson said. “That’s just irritating. There are a lot of smart people, creative people” (6). Wetzel explains how there are many people with interesting ideas about how to change college football, and the ways that they could get around the controversies of the sport. These people could provide these ideas to the commissioners and spark come change, but cannot because their voices are being ignored, and will continue to be ignored while the commissioner’s level of power continues to rise.

One of the most heated debates in all of sports is the annual debate over major college football's national champion. Since its implementation in 1995, the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) system has often failed to quell the controversy concerning what team is the Division 1 Football Bowl Subdivision football champion. Many of the BCS controversies have spawned changes in the title selection format, while others are perhaps the result of certain changes. What remains now is the cry from some college football fans for an expanded 'national championship playoff,' though college and university presidents and many college football coaches continue to resist these cries. We try to explain this resistance to expanding the number of teams invited to compete for the BCS championship and the persistence of the two team playoff format in college football. For three championship eras-pre-BCS, BCS and a futuristic post-BCS expanded playoff-we first relate some of the controversial details to concepts such as optimal tournaments and the public goods concept of collective consumption (Swofford Sub Optimal Tournament…).

Swofford speaks on behalf of the fans, participants, coaches, etc, to help them express how it is unreasonable to keep disregarding what they have to say. Some of their opinions could prove to be fairly powerful, but will remain powerless until they have the chance to be heard. In his book, *Bowls, Polls & Tattered Souls: Tackling the Chaos and Controversy That Reign over College Football,* Stewart Mandel states, “It has given the commissioners power and significance,” said Gene Bleymaire, the athletic director at Boise State University. “Prior to this, conference commissioners had very little power. No one knew them. They had very little significance outside of their conference” (3). Mandel illustrates the little roles of conference commissioners before the BCS was implemented. They had barely even been heard of, and today they stand in front of the gates of college football, denying fans, participants, coaches, etc. of a system of equality amongst each team, good or bad.

Lastly, if the BCS system were to be converted to a playoff system, it would evenly distribute the mass amount of revenue that the sport gathers throughout the season. For instance, every year after the bowl games, a substantial amount of the revenue is given to the host city of the games. This is inefficient because there are several places that the money could go, to enhance these schools’ academic programs, extra curricular programs, and other college sports. “The money college football teams make from ticket sales, television broadcasting rights, merchandising, a sources is often an important part of funding for their schools” (Weiss Procon.org). This quote explains the different ways that the money is brought in throughout the years, and the places that it could go to be most beneficial for each school and it programs. In fact, Weiss states, “The earnings for the host cities of the five BCS games in Jan. 2010 was estimated to exceed $1.2 billion” (Procon.org). This is an unbelievable statistic that further explains why the playoff system should be implemented. It is unreasonable to think that each host city makes this much money, and the majority of it is going to that city just of hosting that bowl game. Even though these bowl games are extremely helpful in stimulating the local economies, they shouldn’t be given a majority of the revenue. There are several other areas surrounding college football, which could benefit from even a small portion of those gains. If this were a playoff system, this money would stimulate a number of different cities, instead of just five. NCAA March Madness is held in several cities throughout the duration of the playoffs, all of which benefit from hosting only four or five games. If college football took advantage of opportunities like these, there would be no boundaries of how well the economy would do. Mark Emmert explains, "Some want a four-team playoff after the bowls. Some want an eight-team playoff. Some want 12, 16. I've even had a couple say, 'Do this 32-team playoff and all your problems will be solved' " (The System Works). Basically, whatever the commissioners have to do to create even the slightest form of a playoff system, they should do it. This issue has reached an explosive level, and it is about time for each conference to realize that it is time to revise the format of college football. Otherwise, the debate will continue to heat up, and will eventually exasperate the dilemma.

College football should convert to a playoff system because it would give each team more opportunity to prove themselves, it would provide a limited amount of power between the media polls and the commissioners of the conferences, and it would evenly distribute the mass amount of revenue to all of the schools. "There'll be a very open and robust discussion about a variety of options," Pac 12 Commissioner Larry Scott predicts. "But I absolutely would not take anything as a foregone conclusion"(Wieberg BCS is the Works…). Wieberg mentions that creating a playoff format is unlikely in the near term because the commissioners have been here before. They have held meetings to discuss their options when it comes to formatting college football, and nothing productive has ever surfaced. Thus, the controversy that surrounds college football will continue to grow until somebody decides to limit, or evenly distribute, the power of the commissioners. It is an ongoing debate that sweeps the nation, yet shows no potential for improvement.

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Abstract

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