

## By the Numbers Bowl Edition

Welcome to the bowl edition of By the Numbers. Here you will find some commentary on each of the (35!) bowl games and the computer's picks. With more than a month off for some teams, the bowl games can be more like a first game of the year than the logical conclusion of the season. In other words, the computer picks are not reliable. Not that picking college football games is a hard science, anyway. Did anybody have Clemson by 28? The last study I saw reported the standard deviation of college football games as 16 points. This implies that about 1 out of 3 games have results that are more than 16 points different than the point spread. And about 1 in 20 games will be more than 32 points different than the point spread (speaking of Clemson). How could there be that much "randomness" in the results? Well, we're talking about 18-21 year-olds (other than Oklahoma State's very senior quarterback) who read and hear about how good or bad they are every day. And the game is a little flaky: you can take 7 points away from LSU if the ref pays attention to where Tyrann Mathieu was when he tossed the ball over. Dropped passes, a deflected pass that is intercepted, a block in the back that is not seen, a key injury, ... , a lot of funny things can happen. LSU has 0 first downs in the first half and only trails 10-7.

The computer picks have never been significantly better or worse than 50% against the spread. If you use these picks for any purpose, you should be aware that the ratings use strength of schedule in a big way, so they sometimes overrate an entire conference. This year, the SEC and Big 12 are the favored conferences. You'll notice that Texas A&M's 6-6 year is rated 15 points better than Northwestern's 6-6 year. The Aggie administration didn't see it that way, firing Coach Mike Sherman for his efforts.

One of my theories of picking bowl games is that coaches make a huge difference. There is a long time to prepare, and some coaches know how to deflect pressure, keep their teams focused but working hard, and pace the workouts so that the team is ready to play on the day. Unfortunately, I haven't yet been able to effectively determine which coaches are good bowl coaches, other than the obvious choices like Les Miles and Nick Saban. And how good is this theory for teams like Penn State who have an interim coach? As new coaching hires domino through the ranks, a lot of teams have makeshift coaching staffs.

Some quick bowl facts: the Big 10 leads the way with 10 bowl teams, the SEC has 9, and the ACC and Big 12 have 8. There are only four bowl-eligible teams not in a bowl: Miami (which declined to participate due to rules infractions), Western Kentucky, Ball State and Eastern Michigan. The computer thinks that 5 games are double-digit mismatches, and 8 games are 1-point nail-biters.

For each game, I have listed the computer's prediction (no home field advantage), the telecast information, some unscientific and possibly useless comments, and the bowl's ranking as determined by the sum of the teams' ratings.

Enjoy the games!

**12/17 New Mexico Bowl**      **Temple over Wyoming by 2**

**2:00 ESPN Albuquerque**

(#31) Here's hoping for a repeat of the 2009 game, won by Wyoming in double OT.

**Temple (8-4):** led by Bernard Pierce's 1381 rushing yards and 25 TDs. Second bowl in 3 years for the Owls after years of ineptitude. Only lost 10-14 at Penn State, beat Maryland 38-7.

**Wyoming (8-4):** Brett Smith threw for 18 TDs, ran for 10, and caught a TD pass. Beat Bowling Green which beat Temple.

**12/17 Idaho Potato Bowl**      **Utah State over Ohio by 1**

**5:30 ESPN Boise**

(#34) Ohio has two ugly 0-5 marks: their all-time bowl record, and the score the only time these two teams played.

**Utah State (7-5):** Won last 5 games, lost a big lead over Auburn in the opener; the Aggies are led by WAC player of the year Robert Turbin's 1416 yards rushing.

**Ohio (9-4):** Won 5 of last 6, blowing large lead in the MAC championship game. Tyler Tettleton threw for 3070 yards and 26 TDs. Third straight bowl game, need to win one.

**12/17 New Orleans Bowl**      **San Diego State over Louisiana-Lafayette by 6**

**9:00 ESPN New Orleans**

(#32) The first meeting of Aztecs and Cajuns. La-La was unbeaten at home, New Orleans may be close enough to not "Fear the Spear."

**San Diego St (8-4):** Ronnie Hillman was 3<sup>rd</sup> in the country with 1656 yards. Team won 4 of last 5; all losses were to bowl teams.

**La-Lafayette (8-4):** First bowl in 41 years. Blaine Gautier threw for 2488 yards and 20 TDs against just 5 INTs.

**12/20 Beef O'Brady's Bowl**      **Florida International over Marshall by 1**

**8:00 ESPN St. Petersburg**

(#35) Not much beef here. The coaches have it in perspective: for Marshall, Florida is "the home of over 30 current players and many future prospects." FIU has "the best record in the state."

**Florida Int (8-4):** Won last 3 games, good offense scoring over 26 points per game

**Marshall (6-6):** Vinny Curry led nation with 11 sacks and 6 forced fumbles

**12/21 Poinsettia Bowl**      **TCU over Louisiana Tech by 10**

**8:00 ESPN San Diego**

(#16) Two conference champions, each has won their last 7 games, but TCU hoped to be in a bigger bowl. While TCU fans bawled about the bid, LaTech DB Chad Boyd said "We've just got to go up there and ball."

**TCU (10-2):** Last year's Rose Bowl champs lost early games to old SWC buddies Baylor and SMU before upsetting Boise State. QB Casey Pachall (trivia question; how does he pronounce his last name?) threw for 2715 yards and 24 TDs.

**La Tech (8-4):** The coach's name is Sonny Dykes; that's gotta be worth some points. The WAC champs are led by WR Quinton Patton with 74 catches for 1135 yards.

**12/22 MAACO Bowl**      **Boise State over Arizona State by 12**

**8:00 ESPN Las Vegas**

(#10) Second year in a row that one loss on a missed field goal has sent Boise State to Vegas. No love from the big bowls. The Sun Devils needed body repair by the end of the year.

**Boise State (11-1):** Kellen Moore has started more (D-1) wins than any QB ever, but Boise can run (1148 yards for Doug Martin) and play defense as well.

**Arizona State (6-6):** Lost last 4 games, fired Coach Dennis Erickson. The good news is that Brock Osweiler threw for more yards than Kellen Moore (3641 to 3507); the bad news is that Moore threw for 41 TDs compared to Osweiler's 24.

**12/24 Hawaii Bowl**      **Southern Miss over Nevada by 7**

**8:00 ESPN Honolulu**

(#23) Two offenses averaging over 200 yards rushing and 32 points per game. Southern Miss had the big upset of Houston, but sometimes played down to the opposition, losing to UAB.

**Southern Miss (11-2):** A tip of the hat to Coach Fedora, on his way to be the new coach at UNC.

The defense returned 8 interceptions for TDs, a record. Their Beamer ball against Houston also included a blocked punt by Furious Bradley (what were his parents thinking?). Austin Davis threw 3331 yards and 28 TDs.

**Nevada (7-5):** The offense averaged 523 yards per game, WR Rishard Matthews had 91 catches and 8 TDs.

**12/26 Independence Bowl**      **Missouri over North Carolina by 9**

**5:00 ESPN2 Shreveport**

(#15) Teams in transition, with Mizzou headed to the SEC and Carolina changing coaches.

**Missouri (7-5):** Won last 3 games, led by James Franklin, who threw for 2733 yards and 20 TDs and ran for 13 TDs. Henry Josey ran for 1168 yards.

**North Carolina (7-5):** Good skill players on offense (Giovani Bernard, Bryn Renner and Dwight Jones), good run defense; disappointing year after a 5-1 start.

**12/27 Little Caesars Bowl**      **Purdue over Western Michigan by 1**

**4:30 ESPN Detroit**

(#33) Halftime show by Herman and the Cain-ettes? Wrong pizza chain.

**Purdue (6-6):** Never had 2 wins in a row; they won their last game. QB is Caleb TerBush; I've heard of turducken, not so sure what a TerBush might be.

**Western Michigan (7-5):** Chance for a Big Ten win after 0-2 season; loss at Illinois was by 3. Alex Carder threw for 3434 yards and 28 TDs, Jordan White caught 127 for 1646 yards.

**12/27 Belk Bowl**      **Louisville over NC State by 2**

**8:00 ESPN Charlotte**

(#29) Two teams that started more like WalMart Bowlers, but finished strong.

**Louisville (7-5):** Very young, won 5 of their last 6

**NC State (7-5):** Won 3 of last 4. QB Mike Glennon is VT Sean's brother. Coach Tom O'Brien had 7 straight bowl wins at BC, won last year for the Wolfpack.

**12/28 Military Bowl** Toledo over Air Force by 6

4:30 ESPN Washington

(#27) Should be a LOT of offense. Toledo has Rockets on offense and Rockettes on defense, with back-back games of 60-63 and 66-63.

**Toledo (8-4):** Lost their coach, won 7 of their last 8. Led by Eric Page, 112 catches for 1123 yds.

**Air Force (7-5):** Averaging 320 yards rushing and 138 passing, led by QB Tim Jefferson.

**12/28 Holiday Bowl** Texas over California by 7

8:00 ESPN San Diego

(#12) It seems that Cal is still mad at Texas, going back to the 2004 season when Mack Brown successfully lobbied pollsters to rank the Horns above the Bears and cost Cal a Rose Bowl.

That's a long grudge to hold against the Longhorns

**Texas (7-5):** Lost 3 of last 4, with only a last-second win over A&M. Little brothers McCoy-to-Shipley not nearly as effective as their big brothers. Runs well, stops the run well.

**California (7-5):** Not a great sign when your most decorated player is your punter (Bryan Anger).

Won 3 of last 4. Isi Sofele ran for 1266 yards, enough to buy all those vowels from Vanna.

**12/29 Champs Sports Bowl** Notre Dame over Florida State by 4

5:30 ESPN Orlando

(#14) A couple of second-year coaches trying to wake the echoes.

**Notre Dame (8-4):** QB problems. Led by Michael Floyd (95 catches) and LB Manti Te'o. Website assures us they will wear blue jerseys and gold pants, so they have that going for them.

**Florida State (8-4):** Won 6 of last 7. EJ Manuel has settled in at QB, but has not been great. The defense has been tough, except for early losses against Clemson and Wake.

**12/29 Alamo Bowl** Baylor over Washington by 13

9:00 ESPN San Antonio

(#11) Both teams pass well (Baylor #5 in the country, Washington #49), neither team defends the pass (Baylor #111, Washington #115). Sounds like fun!

**Baylor (9-3):** Last game for Heisman winner Robert Griffin III? He's a grad student, elevated a program with 15 conference wins in 15 years to a 6-3 conference record. Terrence Ganaway ran for 1347 yards, Kendall Wright caught 101 for 1572 yards.

**Washington (7-5):** Keith Price threw for 29 TDs, Chris Polk ran for 1341 yards. Coach Sarkisian says he is tickled to be spending Christmas in a Texas hotel.

**12/30 Armed Forces** Tulsa over BYU by 2

12:00 ESPN Dallas

(#18) Played on the SMU campus, where Doak Walker did his thing.

**Tulsa (8-4):** Lost to 4 good teams, beat 8 not-so-good teams. GJ Kinne threw for 25 TDs.

**BYU (9-3):** A different BYU, led by leading rusher JJ DiLuigi and a strong defense. Won 8 of their last 9.

**12/30 Pinstripe Bowl**      **Iowa State over Rutgers by 5**

**3:20 ESPN Bronx**

(#21) Two teams whose QBs have great names (Steele Jantz and Gary Nova), mediocre stats.

**Iowa State (6-6):** Won 3, lost 4, won 3, lost 2; a pattern? Lost offensive coordinator to Ohio State.

**Rutgers (8-4):** Won 3 of last 4. Mohamed Sanu had 109 catches for 1144 yards.

**12/30 Music City Bowl**      **Mississippi State over Wake Forest by 6**

**6:40 ESPN Nashville**

(#28) Disappointing finish for both teams. I'm not sure this first meeting of the teams helps ease the pain much.

**Miss. State (6-6):** Won last 4 bowl games. Coach Dan Mullen is high on several shopping lists.

Pretty good defense, and Vick Ballard ran for 1009 yards.

**Wake Forest (6-6):** Lost 4 of last 5, including bad loss to Vandy. Tanner Price threw for 2803 yards and 20 TDs, Chris Givens caught 74 for 1276 yards.

**12/30 Insight Bowl**      **Oklahoma over Iowa by 18**

**10:00 ESPN Tempe**

(#8) The obvious insight into Oklahoma is that they badly missed Ryan Broyles down the stretch. Unfortunately, they won't have him for this game, either.

**Oklahoma (9-3):** Landry Jones threw for over 4302 yards, but the numbers soured when Broyles was injured. This is not the Arizona bowl the Sooners wanted.

**Iowa (7-5):** Won the Insight Bowl last year. James Vandenberg threw for 23 TDs against only 6 picks, Marcus Coker ran for 1384 yards.

**12/31 Meineke Bowl**      **Texas A&M over Northwestern by 15**

**12:00 ESPN Houston**

(#17) Two outstanding quarterbacks. The rules require that somebody wins. A&M hasn't won a bowl since 2001, Northwestern since 1949. Several overtimes, perhaps?

**Texas A&M (6-6):** A frustrating season of blown halftime leads and losses by 1, 2, 3, and 4 points. Ryan Tannehill threw for 3415 yards and 28TDs. A new coach, a new conference; a fresh start?

**Northwestern (6-6):** Won 4 of their last 5, after getting Dan Persa back. A&M was #112 in pass defense, so Persa and his boys may have some fun.

**12/31 Sun Bowl**      **Utah over Georgia Tech by 1**

**2:00 CBS El Paso**

(#20) The 7<sup>th</sup> ranked rushing defense against the 3<sup>rd</sup> ranked rushing offense. One other matchup: Utah is 6-1 in bowls under Coach Whittingham, GT has 6 straight bowl games.

**Utah (7-5):** The Utes had an uneven introduction into the PAC-12, but with All-American nose tackle Star Lotulelei (a cross between a lute and a ukulele?) they can stuff the run.

**Georgia Tech (8-4):** The Mud-dobbers averaged 316 yards rushing, Tevin Washington threw for 1515 yards and 10 TDs while running for 890 yards and 14 TDs; 6-0 start and then a bad finish.

**12/31 Liberty Bowl**      **Cincinnati over Vanderbilt by 1**

**3:30 ABC Memphis**

(#19) A challenge for picking: Cincinnati adjusted to a new quarterback after their star was hurt. The starter may be healthy in time for the bowl. Hard to know what the Bearcats will bring.

**Cincinnati (9-3):** Isaiah Peed ran for 1110 yards, DT Derek Wolfe is a stud. If star Zach Collaros is not ready to go, Cincy will have to Munchie Legaux. (Seriously, would I make that name up?)

**Vanderbilt (6-6):** Good defense gets Vandy to its 5<sup>th</sup> bowl game ever after back-to-back 2-10 seasons. Zac Stacy ran for 1136 yards.

**12/31 Fight Hunger Bowl**      **Illinois over UCLA by 1**

**3:30 ESPN San Francisco**

(#26) Two interim coaches will try to keep these teams hungry for a win.

**Illinois (6-6):** 6-0 start plus 0-6 finish equals new coach. The pass rush is merciless (DE Whitney Mercilus, that is) and Nathan Scheelhaase leads the offense.

**UCLA (6-7):** Jim Mora leads the Bruins into the postseason (not the playoffs, though; *playoffs*?). QB Kevin Prince's stats were not princely.

**12/31 Chick-Fil-A Bowl**      **Auburn over Virginia by 5**

**7:30 ESPN Atlanta**

(#24) Two teams blown out by in-state rivals in their last games. Which is better, to have nobody on the team with bowl experience (UVa) or several veterans of last year's national championship who may not be impressed by Chick-Fil-A? Auburn has suspended one unimpressed veteran, star runner Michael Dyer.

**Auburn (7-5):** A new defensive coordinator. QB issues, but a good running game. The first half could be big; 4 Auburn losses were by 24 points or more.

**Virginia (8-4):** Strong defense kept them in most games, Michael Rocco and Perry Jones improved on offense. A bowl well above reasonable preseason expectations.

**1/2 TicketCity Bowl**      **Houston over Penn State by 4**

**12:00 ESPNU Dallas**

(#9) A high ranking for the only of Dallas' three bowl games to use the Cotton Bowl. For different reasons, other bowls didn't want these teams, and both coaching staffs are in flux.

**Houston (12-1):** The Cougars were in line to bust the BCS until falling apart against Southern Miss. Case Keenum's 5099 passing yards and 45 TDs didn't make him a Heisman finalist.

**Penn State (9-3):** A good challenge for the nation's 5<sup>th</sup> ranked pass defense. Not much good mojo going for the Lions, even the women's volleyball team lost.

**1/2 Capital One Bowl**      **South Carolina over Nebraska by 2**

**1:00 ESPN Orlando**

(#6) Both teams really wanting a bowl win. South Carolina's #2 ranked pass defense is not a big plus when facing a tough running team.

**South Carolina (10-2):** Called a "quiet 10-2 team." With Spurrier? Connor Shaw has grown as QB but this team is all about defense.

**Nebraska (9-3):** Taylor Martinez and Rex Burkhead each ran for over 800 yards. Lost their defensive coordinator.

**1/2 Gator Bowl**

**Florida over Ohio State by 2**

**1:00 ESPN2 Jacksonville**

(#22) The “Urban legends” bowl. When both teams are 6-6, focus on the ghost of Coach Meyer past and future.

**Florida (6-6):** Chris Rainey and Jeff Demps have speed, can Jeff Brantley produce?

**Ohio State (6-6):** Braxton Miller has talent, it helps to have Dan Herron back. Coaching wise, how will the Fickell finger of fate treat the Buckeyes?

**1/2 Outback Bowl**

**Georgia over Michigan State by 2**

**1:00 ABC Tampa**

(#7) The consolation game for the SEC and Big 10 championship games. Both defenses are (surprising to me) highly ranked, but the focus is on the quarterbacks.

**Georgia (10-3):** Aaron Murray had 33 TDs and was a handful of dropped passes from putting 21 points on LSU in the first half. The Dawgs started 0-2, rebounded to save Coach Richt’s job.

**Michigan State (10-3):** Kirk Cousins threw for 3016 yards and Le’veon Bell ran for 900 yards. A narrow loss in an exciting game against Wisconsin kept them from the Rose Bowl. How excited are they to be in Tampa?

**1/2 Rose Bowl**

**Oregon over Wisconsin by 2**

**5:00 ESPN Pasadena**

(#3) The “Grand-daddy of Them All” gets a traditional PAC-12/Big 10 matchup with great offenses. This should be very high scoring.

**Oregon (11-2):** Darron Thomas threw for 2493 yards and 30 TDs, but he is overshadowed by the running game featuring himself, LaMichael James (1646 yards) and De’Anthony Thomas (the Ducks’ leading receiver).

**Wisconsin (11-2):** Two long passes away from being unbeaten. Russell Wilson’s great year of 31TDs against 3 INTs was overshadowed by Montee Ball’s 1759 yards and 38 TDs. The wide receivers play the usual Wisconsin Toon.

**1/2 Fiesta Bowl**

**Oklahoma State over Stanford by 6**

**8:30 ESPN Glendale**

(#2) Great game! Except that it’s unclear who will show up. Oklahoma State wanted the title game (reportedly, Coach Gundy had \$500,000 reasons), Andrew Luck wanted the Heisman.

**Oklahoma State (11-1):** Great skill people: Brandon Weeden with 4328 yards passing and 34 TDs, Joseph Randle with 1193 yards rushing and 25 TDs, Justin Blackmon with 113 catches for 1336 yards. As Oklahoma found out, the defense isn’t that bad.

**Stanford (11-1):** The Heisman unLuck-y Andrew had 3170 yards passing with 35 TDs, supported by Stepfan Taylor’s 1153 yards rushing and Coby Fleener’s 10 TD receptions. Like most teams, the defense was torched by Southern Cal and Oregon, but was generally good.

### **1/3 Sugar Bowl**

**Michigan over Virginia Tech by 4**

**8:30 ESPN New Orleans**

(#5) Boo! (I'm contractually obligated to start comments about the Sugar Bowl with rude comments about their selection process.) Actually, it doesn't strike me as especially egregious, but maybe I'm just pleased that the ACC got its first at-large bid ever.

**Michigan (10-2):** Led by Denard Robinson's 2056 yards passing (18 TDs) and 1163 yards rushing (16 TDs). A much improved defense (how could it have been worse?).

**Virginia Tech (11-2):** Led by David Wilson, who ran for 1627 yards before a puzzling power outage against Clemson. Logan Thomas and an excellent defense are strengths, but no Beamer Ball this year.

### **1/4 Orange Bowl**

**Clemson over West Virginia by 3**

**8:00 ESPN Miami**

(#13) Dabo Swinney is "taking my Clemson talents to South Beach, baby!" I hope he's more successful than LeBron. Another high-scoring bowl in the making.

**Clemson (10-3):** Very young and very skilled, with Tajh Boyd (3578 yards, 31 TDs), Andre Ellington (1062 yards rushing) and Sammy Watkins (1<sup>st</sup> team All-American as freshman). The Tigers have not been good in bowls lately, but this year has been a breakthrough year.

**West Virginia (9-3):** First Orange Bowl. Led by Geno Smith's 3978 yards passing and Stedman Bailey's 67 catches for 1197 yards.

### **1/6 Cotton Bowl**

**Kansas State over Arkansas by 1**

**8:00 ESPN Arlington**

(#4) Another strong bowl in the Dallas area, where the selectors took the best teams available instead of worrying about fan base and TV ratings. Odd strategy, especially in a fashion city. Arkansas' strengths match up with K-State's weaknesses and vice versa. More points here.

**Kansas State (10-2):** Only lost to the Oklahomas, had several close wins. Speaking of fashion, K-State is led by QB Cullin Klein, who threw for 1745 yards and ran for 1099 more.

**Arkansas (10-2):** Only lost to LSU and Alabama. Bobby Petrino's offense is always innovative and efficient, but he has new coordinators on both offense and defense.

### **1/7 Compass Bowl**

**Pittsburgh over SMU by 3**

**1:00 ESPN Birmingham**

(#30) In 1983, these teams played for a national championship (kind of). Eric Dickerson and Craig James (the Pony Express) beat Dan Marino 7-3 on a miserable day in Dallas to give the unbeaten Mustangs a piece of a national championship.

**Pittsburgh (6-6):** QB Tino Sunseri was inconsistent, RB Ray Graham good. Coach Todd Graham is looking for three new assistant coaches.

**SMU (7-5):** Coach June Jones is rumored to be leaving. An unusual Jones offense that runs well (Zach Line went for 1224 yards) and only throws OK (JJ McDermott had 3182 yards but 16 INTs). After a good 5-1 start, the Ponies struggled down the stretch.

**1/8 GoDaddy Bowl**

**Arkansas State over Northern Illinois by 1**

**9:00 ESPN Mobile**

(#25) A solid matchup between conference champions with long winning streaks and good quarterbacks.

**Arkansas State (10-2):** Won their last 9. Ryan Aplin threw for 3235 yards and ran for 605 more. Dwayne Frampton came alive with 90 catches for 1125 yards.

**Northern Illinois (10-3):** Won their last 8. Chandler Harnish threw for 2942 yards and 26 TDs and ran for 1382 yards and 11 TDs.

**1/9 BCS Championship**

**LSU over Alabama by 3**

**8:30 ESPN New Orleans**

(#1) The rematch! I thought that Alabama was the better team the first time around, losing because of some bad field goal kicking and an amazing LSU interception at the goal line late in the game. My guess is that the long layoff will help the two offenses, which moved the ball better in the first game than the 9-6 score would indicate. Still, these are two defensive monsters.

**LSU (13-0):** The focus has been on the Tiger defense and Tyrann Mathieu, whose nickname of "Honey Badger" is first rate. Still, LSU scored 35 points or more in all but 2 games. Granted, the defense and special teams scored often, but Jordan Jefferson and his slew of running backs are good. We'll see what wrinkles the "Mad Hatter" has for this game.

**Alabama (11-1):** The #1 defense in the country. #1 against the run, #1 against the pass.

Offensively, the Tide is more star oriented than in the Bear's days. Trent Richardson ran for 1583 yards and was a Heisman finalist. AJ McCarron's stats are good (66.7% completion, 16 TDs against 5 INTs). The kicking game was a weakness and cost them the first game.