

Sports

Bowl system gets a 'C' at finals time

By Hal L. Hammons
Assistant Sports Editor

So, as we merrily skip along between finals, I'm sure we all have the same, all-pervasive thought running through our brains.

No, silly, not "What's happening, people?" I'm talking about serious incompetence here. And it's most evident in the great old dinosaur we have grown to know and loathe: the bowl system.

And it shows in the grade-out, and I grade very leniently. I actually failed only two of the bunch.

Are you ready? A whopping 76.8 percent (a solid C) for the group of 18. Yes, 18. And that's after the Cherry Bowl was dropped for being, excuse the pun please, the pits.

Space does not allow me to properly analyze each one, more's the pity. But let's take them quickly.

Dec. 12, California Bowl, Fresno, Calif. — San Jose St. vs. Eastern Michigan. Grade: D

I'm not kidding. *Eastern Michigan*. The only thing that keeps this game above passing is, well, passing. San Jose St. has the original 50-percentage pass attack. Unfortunately that means the game will last longer.

Dec. 19, Independence Bowl, Shreveport, Louis. — Washington vs. Tulane. Grade: F

The founding fathers are turning over in their graves. Where did Washington place in the Pac-10, one of the weakest conferences known to

man, fourth? Fifth? This game died with Chris Chandler, ex-Heisman Trophy candidate, at Kyle Field.

Dec. 22, All-American Bowl, Birmingham, Ala. — Brigham Young vs. Virginia. Grade: D

Boy, the viewers are going to flock to the boob tube for this one, huh? Maybe there'll be a "Leave it to Beaver" rerun on.

Dec. 25, Sun Bowl, El Paso — Oklahoma State vs. West Virginia. Grade: D

Isn't Oklahoma State the other school up there? Orange/black vs. Yellow/black. Color unnecessary on this one. At least OSU's ranked.

Dec. 25, Aloha Bowl, Honolulu, Ha. — UCLA vs. Florida. Grade: B-

The battle of the could've-beens. The Bruins ought to be in the Rose Bowl; Florida lost five games to great opposition. Possibly the most talent in the pre-1988 games.

Dec. 29, Liberty Bowl, Memphis, Tenn. — Georgia vs. Arkansas. Grade: C+

Two boring, second-division teams pound on each other. Whee. And what's with all this patriotic stuff?

Dec. 30, Holiday Bowl, San Diego, Calif. — Iowa vs. Wyoming. Grade: C-

Take heart, it's almost New Year's Day.

Dec. 31, Freedom Bowl, Anaheim, Calif. — Arizona State vs. Air Force. Grade: C

Yes, you too can have a mediocre bowl game in your local suburb.

Dec. 31, Gator Bowl, Jacksonville, Fla. — South Carolina vs. Louisiana State. Grade: B+

By far the best one so far. South Carolina lost to Nebraska and Miami; LSU tied Ohio State and lost to Alabama on bad days. Good game.

Dec. 31, Bluebonnet Bowl, Houston — Pittsburgh vs. Texas. Grade: C+

Watch a human battering ram named Ironhead pound into non-existent Longhorn defensive tackles. Serves UT right for playing on New Year's Eve with five losses.

Jan. 1, Florida Citrus Bowl, Orlando, Fla. — Penn State vs. Clemson. Grade: C-

Battle of the over-rateds. Most had Clemson contending for the national championship — they couldn't even pull it off with eight games at home. Penn State is just bad, and we're not talking Michael Jackson here.

Jan. 1, Fiesta Bowl, Tempe, Ariz. — Florida State vs. Nebraska. Grade: A

Now we're talking football! The Huskers beat UCLA, Arizona State and South Carolina before finally losing to Oklahoma. The Seminoles lost by a heartbeat to Miami, and you can't convince me they aren't the best team in the country.

Jan. 1, Cotton Bowl, Dallas — Notre Dame vs. Texas A&M. Grade: B

Are you going to try to tell me people are going to watch *this* instead of the Fiesta Bowl? Too bad — oughta be a good one if you like defense. Tim Brown notwithstanding, 20 points probably will win the game. (Insider scoop: take the Aggies.)

Jan. 1, Sugar Bowl, New Orleans,

La. — Auburn vs. Syracuse. Grade: B+

People will finally figure out what the Orangemen (what a name — yuck!) have. Auburn's a lot better than I gave them credit for a few weeks ago.

Jan. 1, Rose Bowl, Pasadena, Calif. — Southern California vs. Michigan State. Grade: B-

The Granddaddy draws the weak one of the New-Year's-Day bunch, as usual. State's one-dimensional, but that's more dimensions than USC has. How they beat UCLA is anybody's guess.

Jan. 1, Orange Bowl, Miami, Fla. — Oklahoma vs. Miami (Fla.). Grade: A+

Give me a break. Just how perfect can a game get? A recreation of the 1986 Orange Bowl. The revenge-minded lunatics of Oklahoma. The conceit-crazed apes of Miami. An illegal-jobs scandal in Soonerville. Three championship games in a row for the Hurricanes. Unstoppable offense vs. unbreakable defense. Other unstoppable offense vs. other unbreakable defense. An undisputed national championship. And on and on and on. . . .

Jan. 2, Hall of Fame Classic, Tampa, Fla. — Alabama vs. Michigan. Grade: C+

Jan. 2, Peach Bowl, Atlanta, Ga. — Tennessee vs. Indiana. Grade: C

Take these together as games unfortunate enough to be played while everybody reads the paper about The Big Game and all the ones they missed while watching other ones. Not bad matchups, but poor timing, fellas.

Smart money on A&M to beat hefty spread

By Hal L. Hammons
Assistant Sports Editor

I'm not a betting kind of guy. But if I was, I wouldn't let the line drop any lower on the Cotton Bowl.

I saw opening lines with Notre Dame as eight-point favorites over Texas A&M. It's not by accident that it's dropped to less than six.

People in the know realize A&M isn't eight points weaker than Notre Dame. They aren't six points weaker, either, and the line probably is going to drop some more to show that.

The straight fact of the matter is that A&M will very likely win the game, and the Aggies certainly are going to keep the game close. Note:

- The Irish are on a down note. Their last two games, both losses, destroyed their already-bleak hope for a national championship, and the Cotton Bowl and A&M look a lot less inviting and intimidating than the Orange Bowl and Oklahoma.
- Tim Brown did not deserve the Heisman Trophy, no matter how weak the competition was. He's had two atrocious games in a row against Penn State and Miami, and he's coming off a shoulder injury he got diving for a ball.
- Jackie Sherrill isn't going to let Tim Brown take a punt or kickoff back for a touchdown. The Aggies faced a similar threat in Eric Metcalf in the Texas game. Craig Stump just didn't punt it to him, and all of the Aggie kickoffs were grounders.
- The Cotton Bowl/Heisman Trophy jinx. Trophy winners don't do well in post-season, and the Cotton Bowl is especially notorious. Witness mediocre showings by Bo Jackson, Doug Flutie and Earl Campbell in their farewell performances.
- Despite having a Heisman Trophy flanker, the Irish have no passing game. Remember what

happened to Arkansas when they brought a running attack alone — one much more potent than Notre Dame's — into Kyle Field.

- The Aggie defense is incredible. It's even tougher against the run.
- The only time Notre Dame has faced a defense as good as A&M's — at Miami — they did not score.
- The weakness of the Aggie defense — overpursuit — is no secret. A&M will be working on misdirection plays constantly until New Year's Day. Remember: Texas and Metcalf were the perfect combination to exploit the weakness, and they couldn't do it.
- Craig Stump probably will start at quarterback for A&M. Yes, Aggies, that's good. He proved against Texas Christian that he can pass effectively sometimes. The important thing is that he will pass, opening up the rushing lanes for Keith Woodside, Matt Gurley and Darren Lewis. If the offense stagnates, Bucky Richardson will be more than capable of coming off the bench to save the day, much like in the Texas game.
- Notre Dame won't score many more than 20 points against John Roper and the Aggie defense. A&M's offense, working against an average-at-best Irish defense, ought to be able to supply that much.
- The Cotton Bowl crowd will not exactly be non-partisan. The Aggie alumni and students should outnumber the Irish, and practically all of the local fans will be behind the Aggies. Not only are there a lot of Aggies in the Dallas area, there is, . . . well, let's face it: a significant degree of hatred in Texas directed toward South Bend, Ind., due in part, like it or not, to an anti-Catholic sentiment that does exist in this state. Many Texans have two favorite teams: their own and the team playing Notre Dame. That should put a few more Aggie supporters in the seats.

Opinion

A&M hoopsters back in action against SFA

The Texas A&M basketball team will be back in action Sunday afternoon at G. Rollie White Coliseum against Stephen F. Austin State.

A&M Head Coach Shelby Metcalf said, "We wanted to give the kids a study break with the 2 p.m. starting time. You need a relaxed body for an alert mind."

This will be the second time the two teams have met this year. In the first round of the Jowers Jamboree Dec. 4 in San Marcos, A&M defeated the Lumberjacks 72-67.

A&M, 4-2 so far this year, has surprised many with their strong shooting this season. The Aggies lead the

Southwest Conference with a 53.4 percent average from the field. Their 55.2 percent average from the three-point area also leads the conference.

SFA lives and dies by the three-point stripe. Guards Scott Dimak and Eric Rhodes ranked second and

fourth, respectively, last year in three-point shooting.

As of Tuesday, A&M's Darryl McDonald was leading the conference in scoring with an average of 19.8 points per game.

Tipoff for the game is scheduled for 2 p.m.

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