

BCS facing challenge as several teams undefeated this season

(AP) — That sure didn't take long. The BCS trotted out just its second poll of the season earlier this week, but the man-vs.-machine debate is already at a full-throated roar. Most people wait until the end of the season to crank up the volume because by then, the number of teams getting hosed has been trimmed to a manageable few. What's given the debate more immediacy is that more big-time programs are unbeaten some two months into the season — the largest number in 21 years — and as many as five legitimate title contenders could hit the tape with perfect records. What's made it impossible to ignore is that Notre Dame, college football's lightning rod, has landed squarely in the middle of that pack. This past Saturday, the Fighting Irish ventured into Doak Campbell Stadium, a very hostile environment, and punished what was supposed to be a good Florida State team.

After being put through the BCS ringer, the Fighting Irish came out of the weekend in exactly the same place they began it, ranked No. 3. The strong move in the media poll trimmed a full point from Notre Dame's BCS poll average, but the computers put some of it back on. A week after ranking first in four of the seven BCS computer systems, the Fighting Irish managed to snag only two. "People see Notre Dame rising in the polls at the same time they're slipping in the computers and you can almost hear them thinking, 'Stupid humans,'" Andrew Bagnato of the Chicago Tribune said. "On top of that, half the fans think we're rabid, pro-Notre Dame and half think we're hopelessly biased against the school. The truth," he said, "is if you're doing the job right, it takes too much effort to be biased."

How good does that make Notre Dame? Everybody has an opinion. This was FSU coach Bobby Bowden's: "They kept us bumfuzzled all day." Turns out the Seminoles weren't the only ones left bumfuzzled. For some reason, the coaches who vote in the USA Today-ESPN poll looked at ND 34, FSU 24 and decided to leave the Fighting Irish exactly where they were Saturday morning, at No. 6. The writers and broadcasters who vote in The Associated Press poll were impressed enough to reshuffle the deck, moving them up two places to No. 4. Disagreements between the humans who vote in the AP and coaches polls are nothing new. They've been going on for decades; that's why the national championship came to be called a "mythical" title in the first place.

The simple fact is that you only learn so much about a team without watching them play. No team is the same in November as it was in September. Injuries crop up and roles change. All the other factors in a long college season, from margin of victory to the timing of a loss to the way a team looks heading into the fourth quarter of a tough game on the road, are open to interpretation. The suits in charge of the BCS would have you believe otherwise. One of the computer operators-for-hire last year boasted, "I don't have to watch a minute of football. That's the whole point of having an objective system. I could be dead and gone and it wouldn't matter."

But most of the guesswork was supposed to be taken out of the process five seasons ago, with the advent of the BCS, or Bowl Championship Series. There isn't room here to go into the intricacies of the latest BCS formula, but the simplified version is this: Each team's total in the rankings is determined by four components — the average of the two polls; the average of seven computers (worst score thrown out); number of losses; and strength of schedule. Bonus points are subtracted for "quality wins" over schools ranked in the BCS Top 10, but it doesn't apply in all cases. Finally, the teams with the two lowest scores at the end of the season are matched in the national championship game, this time at the Fiesta Bowl on Jan. 3.

That kind of suspense is exactly what makes the BCS the smashing success it's become. Fans of every team love complaining about injustices, and never more than when a solution exists — a playoff system — and yet remains out of reach. But this year, the BCS is treading on some dangerous turf. Oklahoma, Notre Dame and defending national champion Miami — currently No. 1 in both polls — could all wind up undefeated and one would get squeezed out of the title game. "The argument for the BCS is that computers don't have biases," Bagnato said. "But let Notre Dame or Miami miss out and a lot of people would suddenly want to know exactly who was programming them."

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1.00	K	VS ₁	2950 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	1.06	H	VVS ₂	4810 ⁰⁰
.95	I	VS ₁	3450 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	1.01	H	SI ₃	2750 ⁰⁰
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.92	G	SI ₂	2950 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.90	G	VS ₁	3791 ⁰⁰
.90	F	SI ₂	3400 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.72	E	VS ₂	3100 ⁰⁰
.88	I	SI ₂	1900 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.66	E	VS ₂	1650 ⁰⁰
.88	G	SI ₂	2624 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.65	E	VS ₂	1610 ⁰⁰
.78	G	VS ₂	2975 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.64	G	VS ₂	1450 ⁰⁰
.77	G	SI ₁	2475 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.62	H	VS ₂	1350 ⁰⁰
.76	I	VS ₂	2255 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.61	G	VS ₁	1450 ⁰⁰
.75	K	I ₁	1150 ⁰⁰	Old European Cut	.61	H	VS ₁	1325 ⁰⁰
.74	F	VS ₂	2850 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.60	H	VS ₁	1400 ⁰⁰
.74	G	VS ₂	2850 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.60	G	VS ₁	1375 ⁰⁰
.73	E	SI ₂	1690 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.59	G	VS ₁	1500 ⁰⁰
.72	K	SI ₂	1690 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.57	E	VS ₁	1545 ⁰⁰
.71	H	I ₁	950 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.57	G	VS ₁	1285 ⁰⁰
.70	H	SI ₁	2450 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.56	D	VS ₁	1680 ⁰⁰
.64	H	VVS ₁	2350 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.56	H	VS ₂	1250 ⁰⁰
.59	I	SI ₃	2700 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.55	H	VS ₁	1250 ⁰⁰
.58	I	SI ₂	890 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.52	G	VS ₁	1170 ⁰⁰
.57	J	SI ₁	1350 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.51	F	SI ₁	1125 ⁰⁰
.57	J	SI ₁	930 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.51	G	SI ₂	985 ⁰⁰
.55	I	VS ₁	1550 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.49	E	VS ₂	1100 ⁰⁰
.51	F	VS ₂	1650 ⁰⁰	EGL Cert.	.46	G	VS ₂	865 ⁰⁰
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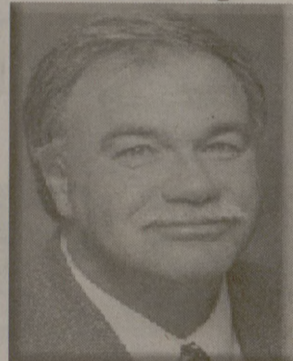
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