

*Paying for wins: An examination of football non-conference game scheduling
by BCS schools, 1994-2009*

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On September 1, 2007, the University of Michigan, a member of the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) and the Big Ten Conference, shocked the college football world by losing a home football game to Appalachian State, an NCAA Division I-AA (now FCS) school with reported athletic revenues roughly 85% less than Michigan. That the game was scheduled at all is indicative of the economic risk-reward dance many BCS schools face.

Beginning with the 2006 football season, teams competing in the NCAA Division I-A (now FBS) were permitted to schedule 12 regular season games. Most BCS schools have used that additional game to schedule inferior, low-risk, competitions in an effort to increase program revenues. A home football game on a BCS campus can generate more than \$5 million in ticket revenues alone. The inferior competition is often compensated generously for its willingness to play a larger school and, presumably, lose. According to a database of 2008 non-conference schedule payouts assembled by the Des Moines Register, schools spent as much as \$825,000 to attract a FCS school to its campus for a football game (NCAA payouts, 2008). Louisiana State spent \$2.85 million to play home games against three FBS, non-BCS schools and one FCS opponent in 2008.

The purpose of this study was to examine, longitudinally, the scheduling patterns of BCS institutions between 1994 and 2009. The time frame was chosen to allow for comparisons of schedules before the implementation of the BCS in 1998 as well as comparisons of schedules before and after the NCAA rules change permitting schools to schedule 12 regular season games.

Results showed that both events had a negative impact on the quality of competition scheduled. For example, the Big Ten Conference exhibited an overall decline in non-conference games scheduled against other BCS opponents between 1994 and 2009 (from 20 to 14), while the number of non-conference games scheduled against FBS, non-BCS schools (from 13 to 21) and FCS opponents (from 1 to 9) both rose significantly.

Similarly, the Big East Conference showed a 500% increase in the number of non-conference games scheduled against FCS institutions between 2003 and 2009 (from 2 to 10).

The research concludes with thoughts as to why the scheduling changes are occurring including the role of the BCS format and NCAA legislation, what benefits are derived by BCS and non-BCS schools from the scheduling, and recommendations for the future.