

Reinventing the Power 5

By: Austin Ragland

July 14, 2019



The NCAA has taken leaps in the right direction in recent years involving the implementation of a College Football Playoff, however they still have many pressing issues holding back the potential of the sport. Chief among them is the fact that the NCAA prides itself in its 'Power 5' Conferences; a label that doesn't quite live up to its name.

First and foremost, I believe that the NCAA doesn't even believe in the system they promote and utilize given that they have 5 'top-tier' Conferences and only 4 College Football Playoff slots. This format automatically excludes one of the Power 5 Conferences from the Playoff by default, and sometimes even excludes two of them. Making matters worse, the composition and construction of conferences is flawed, with each of the power 5 conferences containing its share of inferior teams who have zero chance of winning their league. I mean no disrespect to the teams that fit this bill, however it believe it to be ignorant to deny the fact that a team like Vanderbilt has no business competing in the SEC (or at least in football) considering its limited resources and capabilities. Another glaring example can be found with Rutgers serving as a bottom feeder in the Big 10, but I will touch more on teams like thus later. Today, I will not only identify the programs that have distinguished themselves as second class teams in their conferences, but I will also propose a new conference format to replace the flawed current system. On top of this, I will also propose a new scheduling system and playoff system to advance upon the strides the NCAA made in 2014.

‘Grow’ing Forward



First things first, the changes I will propose will not be easy to swallow at first, and many traditionalists will scoff at some of the moves I suggest. Moving away from the Conference structure we have grown accustomed to will seem unnatural and awkward, but I promise the benefits of the new format will ultimately lead to more competitive games for teams of all calibers. Touching on the remark I made earlier, I will introduce a new conference formation that will bring new life and meaning to the term ‘Power 5’ that the NCAA loves to boast.

To start off, I believe the first move of re-empowering the Power 5 Conferences is to cut out the clear cut bottom feeders in every league. By bottom feeders, I am referring to Kansas in the Big 12, Oregon State in the PAC 12, as well as the teams I listed earlier. In addition to these teams, I feel that there is somewhere between 14 to 16 of the 64 ‘Power 5’ teams that have no business playing in each of their current conferences. Utilizing criteria such as a team’s record the last 8 seasons as well as recruiting ranks over that span, I will point out the teams that are responsible for weakening the Power 5 label and have no chance of flipping their script.

Next, I will form 5 new conferences with the remaining 50 teams that have a proven performance record and/or capabilities to be a respectable Power 5 team year in and year out. From there, I will show how these new conferences should change the scheduling and playoff format, as well as what it means for the Bowl system. These ideas are sure to stir up controversy, however I promise there is a rhyme and a reason for each of the monumental changes I am proposing for the betterment of college football.

The Bottom Feeders

Team Name	Conf. Record last 8 Seasons	Most Wins During Span
Biggest Bowl Win in Span	Avg Recruiting Rank	Program Worth & Rank

Boston College	(22-42)	7 Wins
2016 Quick Lane Bowl	68 th	62 nd (\$81 million)

Virginia	(21-43)	8 Wins
2018 Belk Bowl	45 th	53 rd (\$134 million)

Wake Forest	(22-42)	8 Wins
2017 Belk Bowl	62 nd	64 th (\$76 million)

Syracuse	(17-31)*	10 Wins
2018 Camping World Bowl	58 th	57 th (\$121 million)

*Conference Record over 6 seasons, joined ACC in 2013

Minnesota	(25-42)	9 Wins
2016 Holiday Bowl	53 rd	32 nd (\$269 million)

Illinois	(12-55)	7 Wins
2011 Fight Hunger Bowl	57 th	49 th (\$156 million)

Rutgers	(7-36)*	9 Wins
2011 Pinstripe Bowl	51 st	67 th (\$67 million)

*Conference Record over 5 seasons, joined Big 10 in 2014

Purdue	(19-48)	7 Wins
2011 Little Caesars Bowl	59 th	54 th (\$134 million)

Kansas	(4-68)	3 Wins
N/A	65 th	39 th (\$208 million)

Kansas State	(44-28)	11 Wins
2013 BWW Bowl	63 rd	29 th (\$277 million)

Baylor	(40-32)	11 Wins
2011 Alamo Bowl	32 nd	59 th (\$108 million)

Oregon State	(19-53)	9 Wins
2013 Hawaii Bowl	56th	55th (\$127 million)

Colorado	(17-55)	10 Wins
N/A	55th	38th (208 million)

California	(22-50)	8 Wins
2015 Armed Forces Bowl	43rd	40th (\$198 million)

Vanderbilt	(20-44)	9 Wins
2012 Music City Bowl	48th	61st (\$81 million)

Listed above are what I believe to be prime examples of teams that classify as bottom feeders in their respective conferences. Between their unimpressive track records and lackluster recruiting ranks, I see no hope for this grouping of teams to evolve into a contender any time in the near future. I will reiterate that I mean no disrespect to any of these teams, but I feel that given their circumstances that they would be better suited in a Group of 5 Conference if they wanted to be more competitive in their conferences.

Right off the bat, some may question why teams like Baylor and Kansas State find themselves on this list given their relative success in the Big 12 in the last decade. To that, I object that Baylor will be plagued with the aftermath of the scandals committed under the Art Briles administration, and Kansas State will take a slide down after the retirement of legendary coach Bill Snyder. A school like Colorado or Minnesota might argue that they are big enough to contend with top tier programs, but their consistent conference record says otherwise. Another school that almost fell into this boat was Arkansas who has played even worse than many teams on this list during the last several years. However, I took into consideration that they have the resources and recruiting capabilities to climb out of their slump and possess the potential to transform into a competitive force in the near future.

It should also be noted that this list is very fluid and that I don't necessarily believe that these specific 15 teams should be relegated to a lesser conference, the data displayed above is merely to provide examples of candidates that should be considered for this movement. The debate of which 14-16 specific teams deserve to be moved down is a debate for another day and requires more data points in order to make a final judgement. Along with this is the discussion of whether any new teams should be annexed into the newly formed Power 5 Conferences I am proposing. To this, I say there is one obvious candidate in Notre Dame who should leave behind their status as an Independent and commit to a Conference as they have in every other major sport. Another name that is thrown around in this discussion is UCF, however the fact that they don't even have a 4-Star recruit on their roster doesn't impress me regarding their reputation as a desired program to play for. All this being said, hopefully this gets across the point that there are only around 50ish programs that qualify as respectable Power 5 candidates.

New Conference Formation & Scheduling

<u>ACC</u>	<u>Big 10</u>	<u>Southwest</u>	<u>PAC 10</u>	<u>SEC</u>
Clemson	Ohio State	Texas	Oregon	Alabama
Notre Dame	Michigan	Oklahoma	USC	Georgia
Florida State	Penn State	LSU	Washington	Florida
Virginia Tech	Wisconsin	Texas A&M	Stanford	Auburn
Miami	Iowa	Oklahoma State	Utah	Ole Miss
Louisville	Michigan State	Nebraska	Washington State	Mississippi St
Pitt	Northwestern	Arkansas	Boise State	Tennessee
NC State	Missouri	TCU	UCLA	South Carolina
North Carolina	Iowa State	Texas Tech	Arizona	Kentucky
Duke	Indiana	West Virginia	Arizona State	Georgia Tech

You're going to want to sit down when you read this list, because there are some re-alignments that will likely trigger traditionalists to the point where they stop reading this altogether. For those of you that are still with me, allow me to explain some of the thought processes behind my decision making. My first priority in this conceptual layout was to preserve the core of each major conference, as well as taking geography into deep consideration in all cases. With that, the movement of some teams was completed in order to strengthen the weaker unadjusted conferences and to weaken the stronger conferences. An example of this can be found with the move of LSU to the Southwest Conference, and their replacement of Georgia Tech in the SEC.

Moving on to scheduling, I would like to warn you that I will not be scaling back on controversy, so don't get comfortable quite yet. Continuing with the underlying objective of enhancing the amount of competitive football, I believe that the NCAA should scale back to a 10-game regular season, featuring a 9-game conference gauntlet for all Power 5 teams. What this means is that all Power 5 teams will play against every team in their conference, as well as having one out of conference game in which they can schedule whoever they'd like to kick off the season. This removes the boring landscape that has shaped the first month of the season for decades now, in which teams schedule junior varsity opponents to beat up on and bolster their records. One such 'warm up' game is fair, however 3-4 of them is a waste of time for everyone involved. This new format also sets up every team in the conference to play the same strength of schedule, and removes any discretion surrounding tiebreakers at the end of the season.

Shortening the schedule might frighten people that they'll have to watch less football, but my plan for the season does not stop there. Upon conclusion of the regular season, I believe the two teams with the best Conference records should meet up again to determine a Conference Champion at a neutral sight game, as the Big 12 has re-introduced in recent years. From there, each Conference Champion should receive an automatic bid into an expanded College Football Playoff, which I will elaborate on further.

Now what we've all been waiting for, I will explain the expansion of the College Football Playoff that was introduced in 2014. The transition to this model 5 years ago was a great start, yet I feel that the inclusion of only 4 teams in this bracket is limiting the potential of postseason play in this sport. For this reason, I believe the playoff should not only be expanded to 8 teams as many analysts have proposed, but I want to take it a step further and expand to a 16 team format unlike anything we've ever seen before.

In determining who earns these 16 slots and how the playoff games will work, I think the obvious first step in this process is granting an automatic playoff bid to each Power 5 Conference Champion. From there, the College Football Playoff Committee will serve in an expanded role and rank the top remaining 11 teams in order to fill out the 16 team bracket. There is one caveat I would like to insert into the seeding format, and it will make more sense later. I believe that each Power 5 Conference Champion should be guaranteed a top 8 seed in the Playoff, rather than automatically filling out the top 5 slots.

More on the structure, I believe the higher seeded teams (1-8) in the Round of 16 should be rewarded with home games in their first round matchup. This includes all Power 5 Conference Champions and the top 3 At-Large Power 5 teams who were right behind them, distinguishing themselves throughout the entire season to show they too deserve a home playoff game. Shifting to the next couple of rounds, the New Year's Six Bowl Sites will host the Round of 8 and Semi-final matchups, rotating every year between rounds (2 years as a quarterfinal game, one year as a semifinal). As sort of a quirk compared to years past, the Championship site should bounce around the country's best stadiums as seen with the mode of the NFL and the Super Bowl.

Adding these playoff games to the regular season (plus Conference Championship Game for many teams) will result in a schedule of 11-15 games for all Playoff teams depending how far they make it in the postseason. Not only will the total amount of games for these teams be relatively similar to years past but will undoubtedly feature more competitive and exciting games week in and week out. As for the teams that miss the playoff, I believe that all teams above .500 as well as the top 8 teams in each Power 5 Conference should be granted bowl bids whether that falls in the Playoff or not. Utilizing a system like this still continues on the Bowl system that has been prevalent in College Football since the beginning of time, while also adding new meaning to the New Year's Six Bowls in the Playoff.

Digesting all this change and understanding all the changes I laid out is probably tough to process in your head, but I promise it all adds up for the betterment of the competitive nature of the game. These changes are all made in order to increase the sense of urgency of each game, increase the amount of quality matchups, and grow the popularity of the sport. Below, I will provide a sample graphic to show an example of what my new style Playoff could look like.

Sample Playoff Bracket



As seen in this sample, each Power 5 Conference Champion earned a top 8 seed and a home game but aren't necessarily guaranteed a top 5 seed in the case they don't distinguish themselves worthy of such a rank. That being said, this system still rewards each Champion in each conference taking into consideration that one team might have suffered a tougher road throughout their gauntlet schedule that put a ding or two on their record.

Addressing one major concern of scaling back the length of the regular season schedule, the simple notion of playing less football may baffle the minds of many. To that, I ask how much you will really miss watching your team beat up on Central Michigan or South Alabama at the end of August? Very rarely do we see upsets in these cupcake games, and the majority of them come against many of the bottom feeder Power 5 teams I listed above. Relegating those teams to a less competitive conference will allow them to compete against peers for a change, rather than posting a 4-8 record every year.

The underlying purpose of this plan as I have tried to convey all along is to create a system that promotes more competitive football, and more primetime games each and every week. Hopefully, ESPN's College Gameday will have headaches trying to decide which thrilling game to host their show at each week because it seems like there's too many to choose from!