

Irish Bowl Scenarios

Written by Sean Stires

Wednesday, 21 November 2012 07:26



The crystal ball is looking much clearer for the Notre Dame Football Team these days. Just a week ago just which bowl they would end up in was up in the air and at least to some extent out of their hands. The Fighting Irish, No. 3 in the BCS standings at this time last week, needed either No. 1 Kansas State or No. 2 Oregon to lose to even have a chance to play in the BCS Championship Game in Miami.

Those teams' respective losses to Baylor and Stanford have paved the way Notre Dame's entry into the Jan. 7 title tilt. All the Fighting Irish (11-0) have to do to punch their own ticket to play for their first championship since 1988 is beat USC this weekend in Los Angeles. However, if the Irish would lose to the Trojans for the 10th time in the last 11 seasons things would be a little less certain.

Let's use that No. 1 light sitting atop Grace Hall on campus to shine some light on the scenarios that would send the Irish to various BCS bowl games. The current order of selection for the BCS Bowls after host contracts (conference tie-ins) are filled go like this:

1. Fiesta Bowl 2. Sugar Bowl 3. Orange Bowl (The Rose Bowl has both the B1G and Pac-12 champions, so would get no pick unless its champion plays in the BCS Title Game.)

BCS Championship Game – Jan. 7 – Miami, FL

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Again, a win by Notre Dame this weekend sends them into the BCS Championship Game. The Irish currently hold the No. 1 spot in the BCS standings and that will not change if they end their regular season with a 12-0 record that would come with a victory over hated Southern Cal.

If Notre Dame were to be upset by the Trojans (7-4) Notre Dame could still find its way to Miami for the title game, but, especially with SEC teams (Alabama, Georgia and Florida) occupying the next three slot in the BCS standings, the odds are severely stacked against them.

Alabama (10-1) closes out its regular season with a win over its arch rival, Auburn (3-8), this Saturday to close the regular season and then would face the Georgia (10-1) in the SEC championship game. Georgia faces Georgia Tech in a non-conference regular season finale this weekend, while Florida (10-1) is at No. 10 Florida State (10-1). Florida's lone loss this season is to Georgia.

Sugar Bowl – Jan. 3 – Glendale, AZ

If Notre Dame loses to USC this weekend the bowl scenarios start to shift a little bit, but an 11-1 Irish team will still be BCS bound. If Notre Dame is the only upset victim the BCS Championship game will likely feature two SEC teams for a second straight year. If that happens, the Sugar Bowl would get the first at-large selection, because of the SEC's tie to that bowl.

The order of at-large picks would then look like this: 1. Sugar Bowl 2. Fiesta Bowl. 3. Sugar Bowl 4. Orange Bowl.

Notre Dame is likely to head to the Sugar in this scenario. Who their opponent would be is a little harder to determine, because the BCS does not allow more than two teams from a single conference to participate in the five BCS bowls.

Conference alignments are also still in play to send B1G and Pac-12 champions to the Rose Bowl, the ACC champion to the Orange Bowl and the Big 12 champ to the Fiesta Bowl. That

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could end-up meaning a clash between the Irish and either Clemson or Florida State, which would be similar to last year's Sugar Bowl that pitted Michigan and Virginia Tech when SEC teams LSU and Alabama played for the national championship.

Fiesta Bowl – Jan. 2 – New Orleans, LA

This is, obviously, again only a destination for the Irish if they were to lose this weekend. In order for Notre Dame to land in the Fiesta Bowl there would also have to be quite a bit more chaos to close the season. If Alabama, Georgia and Florida all fall and No. 5 Oregon somehow slingshots back to the No. 2 spot in the BCS rankings the Fiesta would be ND's likely landing spot against former No. 1 and now No. 6 Kansas State.

There is a chance the Irish could see a rematch with No. 13 Oklahoma (8-2) as well. Kansas State (10-1) closes the season against No. 16 Texas (8-2) on Dec. 1, while the Sooners host No. 21 Oklahoma State (7-3) this weekend and then finishes at TCU (6-4) next weekend.

The Big 12 does not have a championship game this year, so its regular season champion receives the conference's automatic BCS berth. A win by K-State sends the Wildcats to the BCS, but a loss would open the door for the Sooners to claim the bid.

Rose Bowl – Jan. 1 – Pasadena, CA

The odds were fairly long for Notre Dame to go to the Rose Bowl prior to last week's BCS reshuffling and they appear to be even longer now. For the Fighting Irish to be Rose Bowl bound the SEC upsets would again have to occur and Oregon would again get that sling shot to the No. 2 BCS spot.

Along with Oregon ascending to that ranking all of the following would have to take place in the Pac-12:

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No. 8 Stanford (9-2) would have to lose this weekend to No. 17 UCLA (9-2), UCLA would have to lose in the Pac-12 title game (to either Stanford or Oregon) and Oregon would have to be the only team from that conference ranked in the top-14 in the BCS standings.

Stanford currently controls its own destiny to win the Pac-12 North, while UCLA has already wrapped-up the South. A win by the Cardinal over UCLA this weekend sets-up a rematch between those same two schools on Dec. 1 in the Pac-12 title game. If UCLA wins this weekend and Oregon beats No. 15 Oregon State (8-2) the Ducks would face UCLA for the conference championship.

Orange Bowl – Jan. 1 – Miami, FL

Since Miami is hosting the BCS Championship Game the Orange Bowl is at the bottom of the BCS at-large pecking order in every scenario. There is no chance Notre Dame will go to Miami for a bowl if it is not playing for the BCS Championship.