

Playoff backers must solve bowl, monetary issues

Editor's Note: This is the second of a two-part series by Daily Collegian Sports Writer Eric Yoder on the prospects for initiating a playoff to determine the champion of Division I-A, the big-time of college football. Yesterday's article dealt with the dispute over the principle of a playoff system, today's with what must happen for one to become reality.

Any playoff plan would have to be introduced as an amendment at a National Collegiate Athletic Association meeting, such as the next one, in San Francisco in January. The NCAA staff cannot generate policy, and while it is reported the people at the league office in Shawnee Mission, Kan., are opposed, only member schools have the authority to introduce, approve or kill the legislation. Such ideas have met a quick death before, but there's nothing stopping proponents from trying again.

Penn State Athletic Director Edward Czekaj has this plan for getting the legislation through: "My thinking is they will have to come up with three or four complete plans and give the members options and the ability to compromise. The whole plans must be explained in detail, especially the monetary consideration. But first, someone must take the initiative."

Why not Penn State?

"When I was commissioner of the Big 8 and Bud Wilkinson was winning the championship every year at Oklahoma, they called us 'Oklahoma and the Seven Dwarves.' Now they call the Big 10 'The Big Two and the Little Eight.' We have a responsibility to close that kind of gap and a playoff is a step in the wrong direction."

— Big 10 Commissioner Wayne Duke.

Czekaj paused and smiled as if to say "I wish we could" but faced reality, saying, "we'd be blamed for it im-

mediately. You have to be careful who submits it or it's going to be, 'Here we go, the rich are trying to get richer.' We need the support of the College Football Association and the American Football Coaches Association (which have no votes as autonomous bodies at NCAA meetings). We need wide-spread backing so when someone objects with, 'The rich are acting selfishly,' we can say, 'Look how many schools are in favor of it.' That way, they couldn't single out any one school."

But regardless of how many schools present the plan, the "rich are trying to get richer" argument will crop up. And from some unexpected sources.

"One problem we have in college football is the domination of the polls, bowls and television by the select few," Big 10 Commissioner Wayne Duke said. "A playoff would provide a further line of demarcation, damage the difference between the privileged and the rest."

"If you look at the Top 10 teams the last 10 years, you'll find that Michigan has been in the Top 10 nine times, Ohio State and Penn State eight, Oklahoma and Nebraska seven, Alabama, Texas, USC and Notre Dame six. The championship would be determined among these same teams."

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Put simply, the fate of Division I-A playoffs rests with how objections like this are handled, meaning how the money is handled. Parity between the "haves" and "have nots" won't be gained easily, and domination of the playoff by the select few—at least in the short run—is almost certain to occur.

All colleges could use the money, even the "have" schools like Penn State, which is now paying off the costs to expand Beaver Stadium and will begin renovating the indoor sports facilities soon. Football alone bears this weight—although the athletic department hopes for the basketball program to start making money soon. Football also supports 30 varsity teams and the intramural program. And since the inception of Title IX, which requires women's sports to be brought up to the level of men's, the big-time schools find more money is a necessity, not a luxury.

The "have nots" need it worse, and Duke and others fear these schools will become discouraged by the windfall a playoff promises the "haves," and will grow ever weaker in comparison, possibly scrapping some programs.

Lions coach Joe Paterno has a plan to prevent that.

"I'd give the participating teams a fixed sum, enough to make it worth their while," he said, "then take the bulk of the money and establish an NCAA bank, just like the world bank that helps underdeveloped countries. I wouldn't touch the money for maybe five years, until it reached a certain figure, maybe \$50 million."

After that, the bank, administered by a board from the NCAA schools, could operate on the interest that money accumulates. With additions every year, the total could reach into the hundreds of millions.

"With this money," Paterno said, "we could help schools with financial need. We could build golf, swimming or academic facilities. If a college wanted

to build a field house, I'd lend them a million at two or three per cent interest. Think of what we could have done to help in that Evansville (Ind.) basketball tragedy."

The only thing preventing this, Paterno said, is "we just don't have enough people who think big. Nobody wants to buy this idea because they think it's too big, too much to accomplish. But it would be very easy to do."

Closely related to the monetary issue is the question of the bowls. The bowls, to be blunt, have enormous power, and as much as anyone else, will have their way. For now, they are waiting, like hunters if you will, saying little, but watching. "We are going to wait and see what comes up," Cotton Bowl Executive Vice-President Jim Brock said. "The bowls are an integral part of college football and certainly we would be against anything that would damage the bowls. We do a lot for college football—we gave them \$14 (actually 13.8) million last year."

"At one time," Brock added almost

incredulously, "it was rumored they were going to pick our games for us. I'll tell you this: We would be against that in a midnight minute." And they'd be listened to.

The bowls are here to stay, so if a plan is to survive it should detract as little as possible from them. So a recommendation like the one advocated by Arkansas coach Lou Holtz—and supported by Paterno and others—would seem to have the best chance.

In the Holtz plan, the bowls would be left alone, with the Big 10 and Pac 10 winners meeting in the Rose, and the Southwest, Southeast and Big 8 winners going to the Cotton, Sugar and Orange bowls, respectively. From those games and the second-string bowls like the Gator and Fiesta, four teams would be selected to play a semi-final the next weekend, the championship game to be held a week later, perhaps the day before and in the same city with the Super Bowl.

Holtz would have the semi-finalists selected by a committee—sure to

arouse controversy—based on a point system considering their records and the strength of opponents. Others would simply take the four major bowl winners. Under the latter plan, for example, the Nittany Lions would have been ineligible for a playoff had one been held last year, while with Holtz' system, Arkansas would have been replaced by Penn State.

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— Lions quarterback Chuck Fusina.

The optimal championship, like Holtz', wouldn't prolong the season more than a week or two to satisfy the academicians and the players.

"I'm in favor of a playoff," Lion quarterback Chuck Fusina said, "but I don't think it should go too long into January. If it would mean playing only one more game, heck, that's only one week of practice. If it meant playing two or three more games, though, I might reconsider."

That plans are being considered at all is a positive sign for those wishing to see a championship series. And with respected men with solid ideas like Paterno and Holtz behind it, a playoff system can become reality, perhaps—but not likely—for next season. Will it ever happen? Holtz, who is as in tune to the situation as anyone, offers this assessment:

"It all depends on whether people look at it objectively. Is it in the best interests of college football? Nobody ever said it wouldn't be. I don't know if they'll use my plan and I don't much care. What's needed is a fair, equitable plan which answers all questions. Looking at that objectively, I don't see how they could refuse.

"Unfortunately, the powers that be have little interest in it. Everybody's passing the buck. Too many people are content with the status quo, they like things the way they are. I say things never stay the same. You either improve or you get worse."

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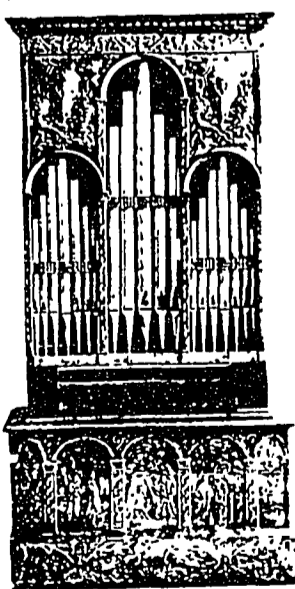
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