

CONSOLATION PRIZE

BY WAYNE STAATS COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER



The BCS prize may have been taken away at the last minute, but the perfect consolation gift fell right into Penn State's lap.

Although the Nittany Lions were passed over by the BCS (Bowl Championship Series) in favor of Iowa, they get to play one of the nation's national powers in LSU at 1 p.m. on Jan. 1, 2010, in the Capital One Bowl at Florida Citrus Bowl Stadium.

"You beat them, you can definitely get some respect," ESPN.com's Adam Rittenberg said. "I think definitely it's probably not the game Penn State fans wanted, but I think in the long run, it could be a good deal."

Penn State enters the bowl season at No. 13 in the BCS, one spot behind the Tigers. As such, while playing in a BCS bowl would mean facing a top-10 team, LSU may provide the best chance to make a statement.

Not only is the Capital One Bowl typically the highest-rated non-BCS bowl — last year's game was even rated higher than the Orange Bowl — but the tie-in with the SEC provides a perfect situation.

The Big Ten has taken a lot of criticism in recent seasons regarding its competitiveness against the SEC, especially with Ohio State's defeats to Florida and LSU in consecutive national title games in 2006 and 2007.

Regardless, former Penn State star and assistant

coach Kenny Jackson isn't too concerned about conference respect.

"No conference that is as big as the Big Ten needs to fight for respect," Jackson said. "The Big Ten doesn't have to worry; those ebbs and flows will happen each and every year. There are good football players everywhere."

In terms of today's football climate, Rittenberg had a different take. He said the conference will be counting on the Lions because it is the highest matchup of Big Ten and SEC teams. Still, don't expect the Capital One Bowl to possibly overshadow the Orange Bowl despite the higher-profile programs than Iowa and Georgia Tech. The Orange has its own night and the Capital One is one of five New Year's Day games.

However, even though both teams came into the season with top-10 rankings in the coaches' poll and have combined for five losses, the postseason credentials for both coaches rank among the best.

Joe Paterno is the all-time bowl wins leader with 23 and will try to avoid losing two straight bowl games for the first time since 1975-76. He is also 8-5 against SEC teams, including winning six of the last eight. LSU's Les Miles is no slouch either, going 4-0 in bowls with the Tigers.

Jackson called Paterno a master when it came to bowl preparation and added how he has the advantage of no classes for his players for the first time since the season started. He continued by adding

Although the Collegian will not be publishing a print edition over break, we'll still provide complete bowl coverage from Orlando: psucollegian.com

that this is important because of the emphasis Paterno and the rest of the league put on academics.

But perhaps nothing else proved to Jackson Paterno's ability to handle bowl games than how Penn State bonds during such experiences. From getting two-a-days and a lot of time that acts like another spring practice, bowl preparation gives one thing most teams don't have during the season: time, for practice and to bond.

"The freedom the kids get and discipline — you don't want any knuckleheads going down there and acting like idiots," Jackson said. "When you were old enough, Joe made sure all the kids had cars, legal at that time. The older guys would take us out at night, show us around and we got a chance to bond."

"Some of the best experiences I ever had was with my teammates at the Fiesta Bowl driving around on go-karts. We had a blast at the Fiesta Bowl — a blast. I just wish I knew how to play golf then. I was so young I didn't understand. It's something that these kids earn. I'm glad for them."

To e-mail reporter: wms5012@psu.edu

DAILY COLLEGIAN PREDICTIONS

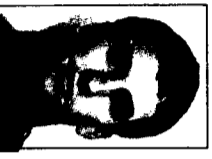
Matt Brown

Score: PSU 16, LSU 13

What's good: Clark goes out on a high note.

What's bad: PSU O-line struggles.

What to look for: Risky coaching move backfires on Les Miles.



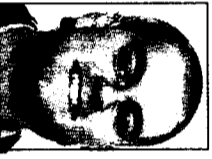
Matt Fortuna

Score: LSU 24, PSU 13

What's good: Lots of Newsome.

What's bad: More special teams horrors.

What to look for: Mike the Tiger vs. the Nittany Lion.



Mate Mink

Score: LSU 17, PSU 7

What's Good: It doesn't rain.

What's Bad: Farewell, Navorro Bowman.

What to Look for: Penn State wears its rare road blue jerseys



Wayne Staats

Score: PSU 21, LSU 14

What's good: Lions earn signature win of season.

What's bad: Offense sputters against tough LSU "D."

What to look for: Mickey Mouse.

