

Outback Bowl wins, regardless of result

By Andrew J. Cassavell

Jim McVay is grinning from ear to ear. Never mind the Outback Bowl president has two 7-5 teams coming off extremely disappointing seasons playing at his New Year's Day contest.



MY OPINION

When Penn State and Florida take the field Jan. 1, it's a pair of tradition-rich football programs with massive fan bases. To McVay, that can mean only one thing: dollars. Lots of them. "We are thrilled with the matchup," McVay said on Monday's bowl teleconference. "We can't think of two teams that we are more proud of to have in our game than the Gators and the Nittany Lions." McVay's decision to select

Florida and Penn State for his game just goes to show the entire college football landscape is shaped by dollars and cents — not just the BCS.

Take the jerseys away and the contest has no ring to it. No star quarterback. No high ranking on the line. No dominant defense.

Even the all-important conference bragging rights won't be too relevant in the game. The Outback Bowl is one of three New Year's Day Big Ten-SEC matchups — not including Jan. 4's Sugar Bowl pitting Ohio State and Arkansas.

Mix the Gator Chomp with Nittany Nation, however, and McVay shouldn't see many empty seats. Ratings will be high — or at least as high as they can get for a bowl named after a steakhouse.

That's why he chose the Lions over the Iowa Hawkeyes, who cruised against Penn State, 24-3, Oct. 2 and finished the season

with the same record. But that decision is at least justifiable from a football standpoint. Iowa struggled in November, losing its final three games. South Carolina, on the other hand, won its final three regular season games in an impressive run to the SEC east crown. Forget the Gamecocks' blowout loss to Auburn last Saturday. Less than a month ago, they went to The Swamp and walked the Gators by 22 points.

Nonetheless, it's Florida-Penn State in the Outback Bowl, while the Gamecocks and Hawkeyes, who were relegated to pre-New Year's Day bowl games, will be sitting home watching.

"We're not trying to put on a national championship here," Outback Bowl representative Mike Schulze said earlier this week. "We have two teams that don't traditionally get to play each other ... On local TV sets and on TV sets all over on New Year's Day, people will be excited."

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Mike Schulze
Outback Bowl representative

And those people likely won't be disappointed with a game that will likely be close because both teams are so similar — not necessarily because they have much talent.

Penn State and Florida each rank in the top-15 of all-time winningest programs, and both have been featured prominently in the BCS recently. Joe Paterno has the chance to capture his 25th bowl victory against a Florida program he has yet to beat and a coach with similar success winning percentage-wise in bowl games. And Wednesday's announce-

ment that Florida coach Urban Meyer will retire after the game was McVay's proverbial cherry on top.

Come game time, there won't be much rooting interest in McVay's suite. The head man at the Outback Bowl already got exactly what he wanted. Whatever else happens at Raymond James Stadium on Jan. 1 is just icing on the cake.

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Men's volleyball ready for Hawaiian opener

By Joe McIntyre
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

While most students are trudging around campus during syllabus week in sub-freezing temperatures, the Penn State men's volleyball team will be enjoying 80-degree weather in Hawaii.

For the fourth straight season, the Nittany Lions will begin their season in Honolulu, Hawaii for the Outrigger Invitational. Each of the teams they play were ranked in the final AVCA Division I/E top 15 rankings: No. 9 UCLA, No. 4 Hawaii and No. 14 Ball State.

The Lions won the tournament two straight seasons from 2007-2009 but failed to make it a triecta last year, losing to Southern California in the team's opening game.

Since these games are the Nittany Lions' first regular season matchups, coach Mark Pavlik said the team plans on using the tournament as a measuring stick to see where it stands against some good opponents early in the season.

"I want to see where we're at," Pavlik said. "It's one thing to be in the gym

everyday against your own teammates, it's another thing to go someplace and play Ohio State and mix and match lineups. But when it counts and points go up on the scoreboard, you're looking for performance over time with the guys you're counting on."

The Lions have been competing in Blue and White contests nearly every Friday afternoon. While the Lions had a few scrimmages in between, red-shirt junior Joe Sunder said it's difficult to get a good sense of the team when it doesn't play against top-tier opponents.

"We don't really get many opportunities to play West Coast teams," Sunder said. "So we've got to take advantage of that and see what the caliber of player is in comparison to our team, but also to how our team really compete."

Leaving the contiguous United States for Hawaii is something coach Pavlik said the Lions have been doing since 1995. The older players on the team have gotten used to the trip and the younger players will have no choice but to get used to it.

Although traveling nearly 5,000 miles away may seem more diffi-

cult that playing a much closer opponent, Pavlik said it's the exact opposite.

"We go to Fort Wayne and we're on the bus for eight or nine hours," Pavlik said.

"We travel, we're on the plane for eight or nine hours, you get off and you're in Honolulu. Do the math on where you'd rather be getting off at."

While the majority of Penn State students will be wearing winter coats, scarves and boots, the volleyball team will be turning all that in for swim trunks, sunglasses and sandals.

Coach Pavlik said the team will arrive in Honolulu the evening of Jan. 11 and have practice the next morning.

The team will leave the rest of the day to enjoy the sandy beaches of the island instead of the snowy sidewalks of the valley.

"We'll be mainly going to the beach, doing a little sightseeing and stuff like that," sophomore Kyle Mars said. "Maybe see some of the mountains, you know, get a taste of what life is like over there in Hawaii."



To e-mail reporter: jrm5401@psu.edu Joe Sunder (back) goes for the kill against Springfield last season.

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