

## West Virginia not ready to give up on its dream

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. (AP) — West Virginia, which has been beating the odds all season, will have to hope for a miracle if it hopes to win its first national title.

But the Mountaineers believe miracles can happen.

"Our season was just a great feeling," receiver Jay Kearney said. "Any time you can go 11-0, you have to be proud of yourself... It didn't make a difference who we played or how bad we played."

"In the end, a true champion will find a way to pull out all victories."

Finding a way to win the national championship will certainly be a test of that theory.

The Mountaineers were ranked third in The Associated Press poll Sunday, second in the USA Today-CNN poll, and, most importantly, third in the bowl coalition tabulations.

That means Nebraska (11-0), top-ranked in the coalition, and Florida State (11-1), No. 2 in the combined poll, probably will play in the Orange Bowl in what is being called the national championship game.

Not even a big win over No. 7 Texas A&M (10-1) in the Cotton Bowl, which is the almost certain destination for West Virginia on New Year's Day, might be enough for the Mountaineers.

But backup quarterback Darren Studstill said his teammates aren't done, just like they weren't when they trailed Boston College 14-3 in the fourth quarter of Friday's game, nor when they were behind Miami late in the game the previous week.

"People say we don't put up the points like Florida State or the other teams," Studstill said. "But when our backs are against the wall, we come through."

"We might not be the best individual talents, we might not have the Charlie Wards of Florida State, the receivers or the Derrick Brooks, but on the field, pound-for-pound, I think

we are the best team in the nation... We just have a will to not quit this year."

West Virginia, the Big East champion, has come much farther than expected. The Mountaineers received only three votes in The AP's preseason poll, with Big East teams Syracuse, Miami and Boston College all getting more support.

"But we played everybody tough..." Kearney said. "West Virginia wanted to show people that we should get respect. We've gained a little respect but not the respect an 11-0 team should get."

Coach Don Nehlen agreed.

"This senior class has been outstanding," Nehlen said. "They've worked hard and tried to do a great job for us, so I have nothing but good things to say about this team."

"Every single thing we asked them to do, they did. And that's the tough thing about the polls. You ask kids to do everything, and they do it and then they're not rewarded. It makes it difficult."

"I've always been under the assumption in athletics that your second chance comes next year, not this year," he said, apparently referring to Florida State's loss to Notre Dame this season.

While Nehlen didn't mention the Seminoles by name, Kearney did.

"I think (the poll voters) wanted Florida State to win the national championship at the beginning of the year and didn't think Notre Dame could do it," Kearney said.

"And then Notre Dame beat them, and they didn't drop them too far after the loss... (The voters) kept them in the national championship race, even when they lost to Notre Dame."

But Kearney said West Virginia can't dwell on its disappointment too long.

"I think the team will just have to forget about it because if we don't, we will lose in the bowl game," he said.

## Bowls, polls, 'Noles and coalitions

(AP) — Florida State handed West Virginia its first loss of the season Sunday. The defeat came in the polls, however, not on the field.

The Seminoles edged the Mountaineers by 69 points in the combined Associated Press and USA Today-CNN polls, setting up a probable Orange Bowl showdown between Florida State and Nebraska for the national title.

The AP media poll ranked Florida State No. 1, Nebraska No. 2 and West Virginia No. 3. The USA Today-CNN coaches' poll had Nebraska first, followed by West Virginia and Florida State.

In the combined polls, which determine the major bowl matchups, the order was Nebraska (11-0), Florida State (11-1) and West Virginia (11-0).

Since No. 1 vs. No. 2 games are mandated by the bowl coalition when possible, Nebraska will play Florida State in the Orange Bowl Jan. 1 if both teams hold their positions in the last combined poll, to be released next Sunday. Nebraska, Florida State and West Virginia have completed their regular seasons, so there's little chance of a major shift in the polls next week.

If Florida State meets Nebraska in the Orange Bowl, West Virginia will go to the Cotton Bowl and play No. 7 Texas A&M (10-1). Because West Virginia is No. 2 in the coaches' poll, the Mountaineers might win a share of the national title if Florida State beats Nebraska.

"Maybe there'd be a co-championship — who knows?" said West Virginia coach Don Nehlen, who has lobbied hard to get his team in the Orange Bowl.

Florida State coach Bobby Bowden said the Seminoles deserve a shot at the title because they probably played the most difficult schedule in the country. The Seminoles' opponents have a combined record of 77-57, compared to 56-63-2 for West Virginia's foes.

"I have no animosity toward Don Nehlen, and I know he doesn't have any toward me," Bowden said. "But we've got to get our point across. And mine is one thing — strength of schedule."

Florida State and West Virginia staked their claims to a title game over the holiday weekend by beating highly ranked opponents. The Seminoles beat No. 9 Florida 33-21 Saturday, snapping the Gators' 23-game home winning streak. The Mountaineers won 17-14 on the road Friday against No. 15 Boston College, which upset Notre Dame two weeks ago.

**'We had a perfect season, and it's very difficult for our kids to understand how the bowl coalition works.'**

— Don Nehlen, West Virginia coach

Nehlen's campaign for a game against Nebraska almost paid off. The Mountaineers rose from No. 5 to No. 3 in the AP poll and climbed from No. 3 to No. 2 in USA Today-CNN, but they remained behind Florida State in the combined polls.

Although he was disappointed by the poll results, Nehlen said he wasn't going to get upset over the situation.

"We had a perfect season, and it's very difficult for our kids to understand how the bowl coalition works, especially when the coaches voted us No. 2," Nehlen said. "But there's no way I'm going to get bent out of shape because we get a chance to go to a great bowl and play a great football team."

Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said Saturday he would prefer to play West Virginia in the Orange Bowl. That's understandable considering that the Cornhuskers have lost bowl games to Florida State three times in the past six years.

"Ideally, you'd like to play another school from a similar climate that plays on AstroTurf and has the same logistics problems of getting everybody transported down there," Osborne said. "But if we don't play West Virginia, it isn't going to happen."

Florida State received 42 first-place votes in the AP poll, while the rest went to Nebraska (17), Auburn (2) and West Virginia (1). In the coaches' poll, Nebraska got 43 first-place votes, followed by Florida State (10), West Virginia (8) and Notre Dame (1).

No. 4 Auburn (11-0) is the only undefeated team besides Nebraska and West Virginia, but the Tigers are barred from postseason play because of NCAA probation.

If Nebraska and West Virginia lose their bowl games, Auburn probably would finish No. 2 behind Florida State in the AP poll. That would give Bobby Bowden and his son, Auburn coach Terry Bowden, the first 1-2 family finish in the poll.

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4. He once opened for Pearl Jam
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William Raspberry, syndicated columnist for *The Washington Post*, will speak on Friday, Dec. 3, at 3:30 p.m. in the EMU Ballroom. He will be available for a student question and answer period from 11:30 until 12:30 that day.

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