

Civil War win could mean bowl game for Ducks

Representatives from four bowls say they have Oregon on their list

By Ryan Frank
Sports Editor

Once again bowl implications surround Oregon's season finale Civil War matchup against Oregon State.

Should Oregon defeat Oregon State for the third straight time this Saturday at Autzen Stadium, the Ducks could be back in the postseason after a one-year hiatus.

Four bowl games have at-large bids that can go to any team in the country, and a representative from all four selection committees said Oregon is on their list.

The Sports Humanitarian Bowl, the Motor City Bowl, the Independence Bowl and the Las Vegas Bowl are the bowl games with open bids that could take the Ducks.

That's news to Oregon Athletic Director Bill Moos. Moos said Wednesday he has yet to be contacted by either the Independence Bowl or the Motor City Bowl. Moos did say that Oregon would not turn down any invitation from a bowl.

In addition to the four bowls with at-large bids, Oregon could have the opportunity to play in two other bowl games. The Insight.com Bowl (formerly known as the Copper Bowl) is scheduled to take the No. 2 team from the Western Athletic Conference and the No. 6 team from the Big 12, but unless Colorado upsets Nebraska this Saturday, the Big 12 will have only five teams eligible for the postseason, taking into account the Big 12's automatic Bowl Alliance berth.

The other bowl possibility for the Ducks would come about if the Fiesta Bowl decided to take Arizona State. The Big East champion is locked into the Fiesta Bowl and the other team is an at-large bid up to the selection committee.

Considering the fact that the bowl and Arizona State University reside in the same town, the Sun Devils could be a likely selection for the bowl, assuming they beat Arizona and do not qualify for the Rose Bowl.

The Pacific-10 Conference has contracts with four bowl games:

the Rose, the Cotton or the Holiday, the Sun and the Aloha. Should Arizona State go to the Fiesta Bowl, that opens a spot in one of the contracted bowls, which could mean an open spot in the Aloha Bowl for the Ducks.

Last season, the Ducks finished with a flurry to end the season at 6-5 after winning their final three games, including a 40-23 drubbing of California. However, the 6-5 Golden Bears were selected to play in the Aloha Bowl over the 6-5 Ducks.

This season, there are a number of teams with seven, eight, nine or even 10 wins that could be left for the picking by any of the aforementioned four at-large bids.

But Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said neither the Oregon players nor coaches are thinking about a bowl berth.

"I think there's some talk [among players and coaches]," Bellotti said. "Obviously everybody wants to know what's going on. But that's been very low key for us. Not because we don't want it, but simply because it's going to be outside of our control."

A bowl game would just be icing on the cake for Oregon, Bellotti said.

"The bowl game is just sort of gravy or dessert," he said. "It's something that we can hope happens but again we don't control that. What needs to do is focus on this football game."

There has been some talk among Oregon fans and supporters that a trip to a smaller bowl such as the Humanitarian Bowl is not worth the weeks of preparation and practice.

"I don't worry about it very much at all," Bellotti said. "I think there's a lot of kids on this football team that really want to play in a bowl game, that have never had that chance. Or that this would be their last chance or opportunity."

"I think certainly, as I've said many times, it was really a shame that that team did not get to play in another game together. I would feel the same way about this team if we win on Saturday."

The following is a list of the four bowls with open bids and the possibility of the committee selecting the Ducks should they win Saturday.

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Mike Bellotti
UO head coach

Sports Humanitarian Bowl: Dec. 29, Boise, Idaho

Steve Schmuder, the president of the Humanitarian Bowl, said if Oregon wins, it will be on the bowl's short list of candidates.

Utah State has already locked up the other spot in the bowl by winning the Big West championship with a win over Nevada last weekend. Schmuder said Utah State, ESPN and representatives from the Big West will have a say in the decision. Utah State lost to Oregon State earlier this season 26-14 and is 6-4 going into its final game.

While Schmuder said the Ducks' regional drawing power makes them a strong candidate, he said the committee is not limiting itself to the West region. North Carolina State, Louisiana State and Kentucky have all contacted Schmuder.

The committee will narrow the selection field to two or three teams after this weekend's games and hopes to have the at-large bid filled by Thanksgiving.

As of this week, Schmuder said the committee's list includes 10-12 teams.

He said the decision could come down to whether they want to take a 6-5 Oregon team that would bring a strong following or a 10-2 Air Force team that may not bring as many fans.

Las Vegas Bowl: Dec. 20, Las Vegas, Nev.

The Las Vegas Bowl, which is the first bowl of the year on Dec. 20, pits the No. 3 team from the WAC against an at-large team.

Branan Allison, a member of the selection committee, said the No. 1 thing the committee will be looking for is a team that has a large fan following. He said after talking with representatives from bowls Oregon has played in in past seasons, the Ducks stack up well.

Oregon's strong fan base in Southern California is also of interest to the committee, Allison said.

"They're definitely still in the mix, and we are giving them serious consideration," Allison said.

The committee's decision could come as early as Sunday or Monday.

Independence Bowl: Dec. 28, Shreveport, La.

The Independence Bowl has been a familiar place for Oregon in the last decade, and according to Glen Krupica, the executive director of the bowl, it could become even more familiar this season.

"We are looking at them from afar," Krupica said.

Oregon has made two trips to Independence Bowl in the last eight years, and, according to Krupica, has traveled well.

"We had a great experience with them both times they were down here," he said.

In 1992, Oregon lost 39-35 to Wake Forest in the Independence Bowl and in 1989, the Ducks beat Tulsa 27-24.

The automatic bid for the bowl goes to the No. 5 team from the Southeastern Conference, which means that team may not be chosen until after the conference championship game.

Krupica also admitted that a 6-5 record would be a concern for the committee, considering the SEC team could be 8-3. He said the committee is looking at 10-12 teams for the open bid, but that the Ducks past experiences there bodes well for them.

Motor City Bowl: Dec. 26, Pontiac, Mich.

This bowl must be considered an outside shot for Oregon, considering it has not been contacted by a representative from the selection committee.

Dave Appoliti, manager of external affairs for the Motor City Bowl, said the committee is looking at 10-20 teams for the at-large bid.

Should the Ducks go, they will square off the with No. 1 team from the Mid-American Conference.

Appoliti did stress that the committee is not limiting itself to the region. Any team across the country could be selected for the bowl.

OSU: Beavers rank 10th in conference in total offense

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passing game.

Riley's first order of business when he took over as head coach was to revamp Oregon State's sagging passing attack. He chose to institute a more "vertical" attack, like nearly every other team in the Pac-10 has.

It hasn't taken flight.

The Beavers rank ninth in the conference in passing and 10th in total offense. Alexander has not shown the touch needed to play quarterback, Riley said, but he has shown the ability to lead his team on the field and the players look ready to respond.

"I think that we won games that people expected us to win," Riley said. "But to not win a Pac-10 game yet has been a big disappointment. We've had a couple of opportunities but haven't been able to close games out."

"Confidence might have played a role in that. It's always a concern for us, having such a long history of not winning. Our players sometimes feel the here-we-go-again syndrome."

It's impossible to say exactly what a win over Oregon this weekend would mean to Oregon State, its alumni or the city of Corvallis. What is known is that it would be the first Pac-10 win for Riley and complete one of the best seasons by a first-year Beaver coach.

"I think a win over Oregon would be great for our team," Riley said. "It would be great for our program, great for our seniors. It would be the kind of victory that we could build on"

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