

College Football

TV ratings falter for College Football Playoff

By RALPH D. RUSSO
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DALLAS — Jimmy Kimmel told people to watch. Even soap opera stars on “General Hospital” made not-so-subtle references to making plans to watch the College Football Playoff on New Year’s Eve.

All the prodding and promoting wasn’t enough to convince many fans to tune in.

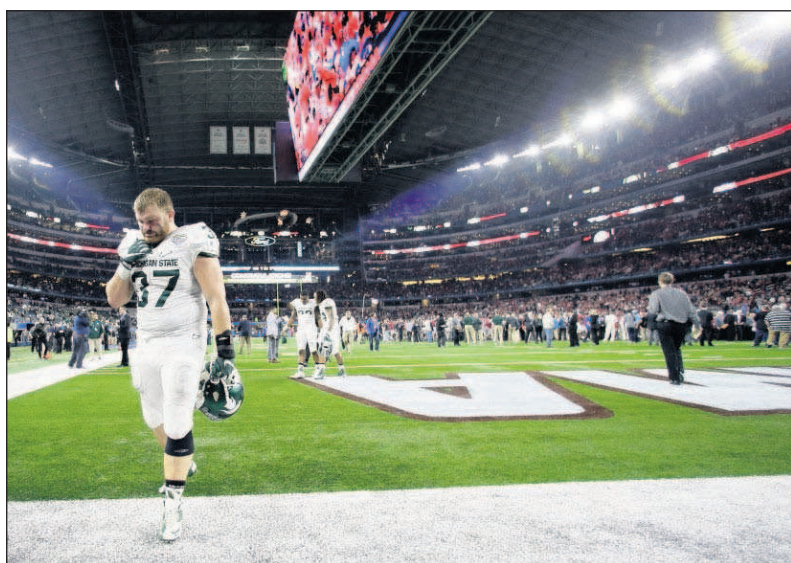
College football’s move to create a new tradition with semifinal matchups on New Year’s Eve drew ratings more than a third lower than last season, when the matchups were held on New Year’s Day.

The Orange Bowl between Clemson and Oklahoma, which kicked off about 4:10 p.m. EST on ESPN, drew a 9.1 rating, a 38.5 percent drop compared to last year’s Rose Bowl, which got a 14.8 rating. The number of viewers dropped 44.5 percent from 28,164,000 for the Rose to just 15,640,000 for the Orange.

The Michigan State-Alabama Cotton Bowl drew a 9.6 rating for ESPN compared to 15.2 for Ohio State-Alabama in the Sugar Bowl last Jan. 1 — a 36.8 percent drop. Total viewership crashed 34.4 percent, going from 28,271,000 to 18,552,000.

College Football Playoff executive director Bill Hancock told the AP he was still awaiting the results of the New Year’s Day games.

“It’s just not appropriate to talk



(AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez)

Michigan State fullback Trevon Pendleton (37) leaves the field after the team's Cotton Bowl NCAA college football semifinal playoff game against Alabama on Thursday. The television ratings for this year's semifinals took a huge hit, down 36 percent from last year.

until all the results are in. I guess it’s like asking a coach to talk about a whole game at halftime,” he said.

The dramatic matchups and results of last year’s first College Football Playoff semifinals led to record-breaking cable audiences for ESPN.

Those games included a face-off between Heisman Trophy winning quarterbacks Marcus Mariota and Jameis Winston in the Rose Bowl. Ohio State and Alabama, two of the most popular programs in college football, played a game that went down to the final play. Ohio State upset the Crimson Tide 42-35.

Those games represented the biggest cable TV audiences ever, until the first playoff championship game with Oregon-Ohio State topped it with 33 million viewers.

The matchups of this year’s games weren’t as attractive and both turned out to be lopsided. Clemson beat Oklahoma 37-17, pulling away in the second half. Alabama routed Michigan State 38-0 in a game that was pretty much over midway through the third quarter.

But the biggest difference was the day the games were played.

The FBS conference commis-

sioners who put together the College Football Playoff in 2012 said they wanted to create a new tradition by playing the semifinals on New Year’s Eve twice every three years over the course of a 12-year contract with ESPN. This is year two of that deal.

The decision was mostly to protect the interests of four conferences and two bowls. The Rose Bowl with the Big Ten and Pac-12 has traditionally been played in the early evening of Jan. 1. The Big 12 and Southeastern Conference decided to have their own Rose Bowl-type relationship with the Sugar Bowl and lock in the television time slot right after the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1.

Those games have their own separate TV deals with ESPN and they were set before the playoff was finalized. The contracts with ESPN for the Rose Bowl, Sugar Bowl and College Football Playoff will pay the major college football conferences about \$7.3 billion over the life of the deals.

ESPN was on board as long as it owned the rights to all the games, though the network did suggest moving this season’s games off Dec. 31 to Jan. 2, an open Saturday with no NFL conflicts. But playoff officials said they wanted to change the paradigm of New Year’s Eve and did not want to push off getting fans acclimated to their new, if unpopular, idea.

ESPN and its sister network ABC, both owned by Disney, did

their best to encourage fans to work football into their New Year’s Eve party plans. ESPN wore out a promo with Kimmel, the late-night talk-show host and comedian, singing a parody of “Auld Lang Syne” with lyrics such as:

“Yes, New Year’s Eve will be so awesome

Watching college football through confetti!

Missing out is not an option

So plan accordingly.”

This week, ABC daytime soap opera “General Hospital” had characters during the show making direct references to watching the College Football Playoff on New Year’s Eve.

Social networks were virtually silent about the games compared to the year before. Last year, 10.1 million people saw one or more of 2.6 million tweets about the first game, according to Nielsen. This year, just 6.5 million people saw one or more of 487,000 tweets sent about the game.

The semifinals rotate through six bowl games — the Sugar, Rose, Cotton, Orange, Fiesta and Peach. Next season the semifinals will again be played on New Year’s Eve, this time in the Fiesta Bowl in Glendale, Arizona, and the Peach Bowl in Atlanta. But Dec. 31 is a Saturday.

The Rose and Sugar host the semifinals again on Jan. 1, 2018, following the 2017 season. Following the 2018 regular season, New Year’s Eve falls on Monday.

GRIFFEY:

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That No. 1 Upper Deck baseball card with Griffey’s smile? It’s never left the protective plastic case from the day it was purchased.

Before every game was available on TV, summer nights were spent sitting outside listening to Dave Niehaus on the radio provide a living narrative to Griffey’s career, then staying up late to watch the local news hoping for a 20-second clip of the latest feat of No. 24.

The homers and the catches are too numerous to list, all looking effortless. The Spider-Man into the wall at the Kingdome. The back-to-back homers with his dad and the shot off the warehouse in Baltimore. Bookend moments like homering in his first at-bat in the Kingdome and the final game there. The 56 homers and MVP in 1997, and a Gold Glove for each finger on both hands.

And the most memorable moment in franchise history when Griffey’s sprinted home from first base to win Game 5 of the 1995 ALDS over the Yankees, accompanied by Niehaus’ radio call: “Here’s Junior to third base. They’re going to wave him in. The throw to the plate will be late. The Mariners are going to play for the American League championship.”

Griffey won’t be the first with a Mariners connection to reach the Hall of Fame.

Gaylord Perry is in, but his link to Seattle is pitching his way to a 300th win during his 1 1/2 seasons there.

Niehaus is in for his years of service as the voice of baseball in the Pacific Northwest, creating a soundtrack that was easy on the ears if the baseball itself was for many seasons tough on the eyes.

Randy Johnson entered a year ago, but he plied his Cy Young form while pitching in Arizona and elsewhere later in his career.

This is where Griffey is different from anyone else with a Seattle connection. Drafted and cultivated through the Mariners farm system, he lived up to all the expectations that came from being a No. 1 overall draft pick and became the best player of his generation.

The criticisms of Griffey are valid. He never embraced the Northwest the way it engulfed him. Part of that was youth, part was demeanor. His departures from Seattle on both occasions were messy; the first time strong-arming a trade from the Mariners to Cincinnati before the 2000 season and then literally driving away in the middle of the 2010 season and calling it a career.

Even with those blemishes he is still beloved. Consider that when Griffey was inducted into Seattle’s Hall of Fame in 2013 it was the only sellout of that season and even Griffey was left wiping away tears by the end.

“Sometimes I may have been standoffish. I didn’t mean to,” he said that night. “I just wanted to play baseball. And that was really the only thing that mattered was me going out there and playing and trying to win ballgames for this team.”

ALAMO BOWL: Adams excited to make first and only bowl game appearance

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running back Royce Freeman, went from a slight underdog to a touchdown favorite after Boykin was suspended within hours after his arrest outside a bar near San Antonio’s famed River Walk around 2 a.m. Thursday.

Adams, the graduate transfer who succeeded 2014 Heisman Trophy winner Marcus Mariota after the Ducks were national runner-ups last season, has thrown for 2,446 yards with 25 touchdowns and six interceptions. He has played only nine games because of a broken finger.

“This is my first and last bowl game, but I’m excited to get out here and show what I got too,” Adams said.

TCU (10-2) and Oregon are two of the nation’s top offense.

The Frogs are third at 564 yards a game, and Oregon fourth at 548 yards per game.

But TCU will also be without star receiver Josh Doctson, who set school records with 79 catches for 1,327 yards and 14 touchdowns even while missing two games and parts of two others with a broken left wrist.

Boykin has accounted for 56 percent of TCU’s offense since 2012. He threw for 3,575 yards with 31 touchdowns and ran for 612 yards and 10 more scores this season.

After sharing the Big 12 title and getting snubbed for a playoff season last season, TCU started this season ranked No. 2 in the AP poll. The Frogs started 8-0 before losing at Oklahoma State, then lost at Oklahoma with Boykin out because of a sprained right ankle.

“Our motto this year was prove them right. I mean, everybody counted us out,” TCU receiver Kolby Listenbee said. “For this game, it’s prove them wrong.”

Some other things to know when the Alamo Bowl has two top 15 teams for the second year in a row after no such matchups the first 21 games:

DUCK CALLS: Matt Lubick has been promoted from Oregon’s receivers coach to offensive coordinator to replace Scott Frost, who left to become Central Florida’s coach. Third-year coach Mark Helfrich made the expected move official Friday, and said Lubick will call plays in the Alamo Bowl.

GO GREEN: Senior running back Aaron Green leads TCU with 1,171 yards rushing and 10 touchdowns. He is the Frogs’ first 1,000-yard rusher in five seasons,

and has the most yards since LaDainian Tomlinson’s 2,158 in 2000.

BIG GAINS: Oregon sophomore running back Royce Freeman is the only FBS player with at least 100 yards from scrimmage in every game this season, and has a national-best 71 plays that have gained at least 10 yards. His is the Pac-12 leader with 142 yards rushing per game, and needs 100 yards to break LaMichael James’ single-season record 1,805 set in 2011.

IN HONOR: Oregon sophomore receiver Darren Cunningham is switching from No. 7 to No. 22 in honor of late New Mexico safety Markel Byrd. Cunningham’s longtime friend and former prep teammate in San Diego was killed in a single-car crash Dec. 22. Byrd wore No. 22 for the Lobos.

STANFORD: Cardinal set first-quarter scoring record

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all-purpose yards, propelling No. 5 Stanford to a 45-16 victory over the sixth-ranked Hawkeyes on Friday.

Kevin Hogan passed for 223 yards and three TDs in his final game for the Cardinal (12-2), who won the Rose Bowl for the second time in three trips over the past four years for this unlikely football powerhouse.

McCaffrey was sublime in his debut at the Granddaddy of Them All, breaking the all-purpose yards record set by Wisconsin’s Jared Abbrederis in 2012.

McCaffrey finished second behind Alabama’s Derrick Henry in the Heisman voting, but the speedy sophomore left no doubt about his brilliance with one of the most dynamic performances in the 102-game history of the Rose Bowl.

He had 172 yards rushing, 105 yards receiving and 91 on kick returns, putting an appropriate cap on the season in which he set

the NCAA record for all-purpose yards. McCaffrey also became the first player ever to rack up more than 100 yards rushing and 100 yards receiving in a Rose Bowl.

Stanford and Iowa finished in the final two spots outside the College Football Playoff field, but the Cardinal showed they belong among the best with their 12th win in their final 13 games.

With a powerful offensive line and a sturdy defense, they also ruined the first trip to Pasadena in 25 years for the Hawkeyes (12-2), who followed up their remarkable 12-0 regular season with two post-season losses.

C.J. Beathard passed for 239 yards and two fourth-quarter touchdowns for the Hawkeyes, whose thousands of fans proudly filling the venerable stadium with old gold and black. The faithful had painfully little to cheer after Iowa fell behind in the opening seconds, putting a daylong damper on Kirk

Ferentz’s first Rose Bowl after 17 years as a head coach.

Just 11 seconds in, Hogan hit McCaffrey with a TD pass down the middle. After Hogan rushed for an 8-yard score and Quenton Meeks returned an interception 66 yards for another TD, the Cardinal had the highest-scoring first quarter in the Rose Bowl’s lengthy history.

The rout was really on after McCaffrey’s 63-yard TD return in the opening minute of the second, and Stanford comfortably sat on its 35-point halftime lead while improving to 7-7-1 in the Rose Bowl in school history.

Michael Rector caught two touchdown passes for Stanford, which reigned atop the Pac-12 and conquered the Rose Bowl again with coach David Shaw’s brand of simple, powerful football. That style has led to a renaissance for Stanford, which beat Wisconsin in the 2013 Rose Bowl and lost to Michigan State two years ago in the

100th edition.

Hogan became the third quarterback to start three Rose Bowls, but he hadn’t thrown a TD pass in the game until he hit McCaffrey over the middle on the opening snap. It was the second-longest TD pass in Rose Bowl history and the longest play given up all season by the stingy Iowa defense.

Hogan then showed off his elusiveness on a TD run to cap a 74-yard drive, and Meeks erased Iowa’s first solid drive with a TD interception return down the Stanford sideline.

Iowa had never trailed by more than seven points at any point in its magical season, which included the first 12-0 start in school history before a narrow loss to Michigan State in the Big Ten title game.

McCaffrey then took a return through the heart of Iowa’s coverage unit, juking Iowa linebacker Josey Jewell on the way to his first TD on a punt return this season.

HERMISTON: Three Bulldogs finish first day undefeated

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Bulldogs going again. After an overtime loss by 145-pounder Will Sharkey, Hermiston’s Valen Wyse knotted the team score at 24-all when he pinned Lucky Brockman in the first round (1:19).

Park Hill secured victory by pinning the final two Bulldogs, however, sending Hermiston into a consolation match against Rio Rancho of New Mexico.

The Bulldogs put the Rams away 51-20 with relative ease, and had a 12-0 lead before forfeits at 195 and 220 pounds.

Heavyweight Beau Blake made it 18-0 with a first-round pin (1:12) of Elijah Goodwin, and Hermiston never allowed the Rams to get within tying range in the team tally.

The closest Rio Rancho would come was 18-10 following Tyler Deen’s major decision win over

Isaiah Aguilar at 113 pounds, but back-to-back Bulldog wins ballooned the lead back to 27-10 before the Rams would score again.

Wyse picked up his second first-round pin of the day in 1:33 over Cody Glenn at 152 pounds to push Hermiston’s lead to 36-20 and begin a streak of four Bulldog wins to close the dual.

Hermiston then faced small-school co-op Zumbrotta-Mazeppa of Minnesota in the fifth-place dual and again cruised to a 41-18 win that was never in question.

Colbray pinned Luke Dahlen in 36 seconds to open the match and the Bulldogs won six of the next seven bouts to take a commanding 31-6 lead.

Joining Colbray in going 3-0 on the afternoon were Wyse and Hendon. Wyse earned a tech-fall (19-4) in his final match and Hendon capped his day with a major decision (10-2).

Going 2-1 for the Bulldogs were Tuia, Bob Coleman at 182 pounds, John-Henry Line (195), Andy Wagner (126), Beau Blake (285) and Liam Tarvin (120).

Coleman was 2-0 before losing his final match 2-1 on a tiebreaker when two overtime periods ended with the score knotted at 1-1.

Today Hermiston will begin round robin action at 9 a.m. against the other three fifth-place teams from the tournament’s four brackets.

First up for the Bulldogs is Jefferson City (Missouri), then Prifer Lake (Minnesota) and last Hastings (Minnesota).

Park Hill 36, Hermiston 24
182, B. Coleman (H) def. T. Hullaby, 5-3 (0-3)
195, J. Sobbing (P) def. J. Line, 5-2 (3-3)
220, S. Colbray (H) pins N. Smith, :47 (3-9)
285, L. Brown (P) def. B. Blake, 6-0 (6-9)
106, K. Eblen (P) pins R. Madrigal, 3:24 (12-9)
113, J. Steele (P) def. I. Aguilar, 3-0 (15-9)
120, A. Kolvek (P) def. L. Tarvin, 8-5 (18-9)
126, W. DiBiasi (P) def. A. Wagner, 3-0 (21-9)
132, A. Tuia (H) def. C. Goslee, 3-0 (21-12)
138, C. Hendon (H) pins E. Dantscher, :33 (21-18)

145, B. Hopson (P) def. W. Sharkey, TB-1 4-3 (24-18)
152, V. Wyse (H) pins L. Brockman, 1:19 (24-24)
160, D. Winston (P) pins J. Gutierrez, :30 (30-24)
170, C. Marriott (P) pins B. McDonough, 4:33 (36-24)

Hermiston 51, Rio Rancho 20
195, J. Line (H) win by forfeit (6-0)
220, S. Colbray (H) win by forfeit (12-0)
285, B. Blake (H) pins S. Goodwin, 1:12 (18-0)
106, D. Vargas (R) pins R. Madrigal, 2:46 (18-6)
113, T. Deen (R) def. I. Aguilar, 4:45 (18-10)
120, L. Tarvin (H) def. J. Emmer, 5-3 (21-10)
126, A. Wagner (H) def. O. Gutierrez, 1:13 3:22 (27-10)
132, K. Gonzales (R) def. A. Tuia, MD 13-3 (27-14)
138, C. Hendon (H) def. Z. Vigil, 5-1 (30-14)
145, R. Rochford (R) pins W. Sharkey, :36 (30-20)
152, V. Wyse (H) pins C. Glenn, 1:33 (36-20)
160, J. Gutierrez (H) def. E. Pakozdi, 5-0 (39-20)
170, B. McDonough (H) pins E. Chavez, 2:22 (45-20)
182, B. Coleman (H) pins G. Hermanns (R), 2:50 (51-20)

Hermiston 41, Zumbrotta-Mazeppa 18
220, S. Colbray (H) pins L. Dahlen, :36 (6-0)
285, B. Blake (H) win by forfeit (12-0)
106, C. Heitman (Z) pins R. Madrigal, :26 (12-6)
113, I. Aguilar (H) def. M. Vath, 11-8 (15-6)
120, L. Tarvin (H) pins S. Defang, 2:46 (21-6)
126, A. Wagner (H) def. H. Stensland, 7-2 (24-6)
132, A. Tuia (H) def. L. Tupper, 5-2 (27-6)
138, C. Hendon (H) def. V. Nordquist, MD 10-2 (31-6)
145, M. Johnson (Z) def. W. Sharkey, 7-1 (31-9)
152, V. Wyse (H) def. H. Voxland, TF 19-4 (36-12)
160, J. Bennett (Z) def. J. Gutierrez, 3-1 (36-12)
170, D. Manzy (Z) def. B. McDonough, 6-4 (36-15)
182, C. Steffen (H) def. B. Coleman, TB-1 2-1 (36-18)
195, J. Line (H) pins J. Haglund, 5:35 (41-18)