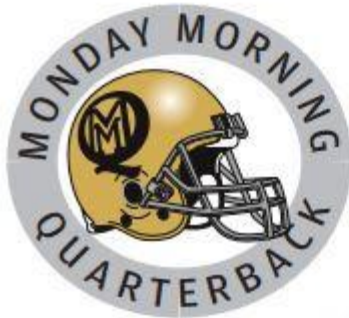


Monday Morning Quarterback: Don't judge a bowl game just by its latitude



COMMENTARY

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MOSCOW - There will be no date in the desert for the Idaho football team later this month. The Vandals won't be winging footballs through the warm Tucson air, nor will their fans be sipping on tequila beverages from poolside cabanas at the JW Marriott Resort that would've been Idaho's temporary home had Arizona Bowl plans not fallen through in the 11th hour.

Alas, the Vandals will be chained inside the lines of the Gem State this December and all Zona Bowl speculation was suffocated for good when the Potato Bowl unveiled Idaho (8-4, 6-2) and Colorado State (7-5, 5-3) as its participants early Sunday afternoon.

If Conde Nast magazine outlined the top 10 bowl destinations in America, the Treasure Valley certainly wouldn't make the cut. Heck, it'd be hard-pressed to even draw second-team recognition.

Sure, there are better places for a Christmas getaway if sun rays and palm trees are part of the criteria. Boise isn't so lush this time of year, but all things considered, the Vandals couldn't have received a better phone call Sunday.

And the Tater Tussle has more sex appeal than you'd think.

In most of its encounters with the blue field at Albertsons Stadium, Idaho hasn't looked much different than the gulls that regularly mistake the playing surface for a liquid landing and take fatal nose dives into the artificial turf. I won't mention UI's all-time record on the Boise State campus, because it's truly a harrowing number.

As for Idaho's record in bowl games down south? That's another tale.

In their first postseason appearance at the FBS level, the Vandals beat Southern Miss 42-35 in Boise. Maybe that game doesn't ring a bell for the younger wave of UI loyalists, but this last one better.

You remember it, don't you? Nate Enderle throws high to Preston Davis, throws low to Max Komar and then zings a fastball to Davis on a gutsy two-point conversion to beat Bowling Green 43-42 - a finish that was made all the better because Idaho's coach called it.

"Watch the second half, you're gonna love it," shouted Robb Akey, warning television viewers what they were in for as long as they didn't flip the channel.

"People still talk about that game around here," Vandal quarterback Matt Linehan said, "so you know how much of an impact that game had on fans and people around this area. I've heard enough about the 2009 Humanitarian Bowl to know that we've got to go out there and be able to top it."

Paul Petrino's bunch would be hard-pressed to replicate the theatrics of '09, but at least if they do, a semi-national audience will be tuned in to see it happen.

For all of the Arizona Bowl's sunny offerings, there was one dark stain. The Tucson-based game is one of a select few that doesn't air on a major TV network and though the television affiliate, American Sports Network, has the option to sell the bowl to regional stations, it isn't a game the casual college football fan in Texas would be able to pop on after getting home from work.

The Vandals certainly won't be lacking exposure in Boise. The Potato Bowl will air on ESPN - yes, THE ESPN, not one of its funky aunts or uncles - and it's the only college bowl game slated for Dec. 22.

Said senior safety Jayshawn Jordan: "This is I think my first time ever playing in a nationally televised game, so that's pretty huge for me, it's a great way to go out."

And the Vandals certainly won't mind the six-figure check they'll get in their stocking this holiday season.

The Potato Bowl is a more lucrative option for the simple reason that it pays \$325,000 per head for merely showing up. That's a \$325K raise from what Idaho would've gotten from the Arizona Bowl, which doesn't offer hard cash and becomes profitable only if the participants can sell a chunk of their allotted tickets.

It's likely that a decent camp of Vandal fans would've migrated to the Southwest for the Dec. 30 Arizona Bowl, but we can assume silver and gold bodies from every corner of the Treasure Valley will flock to the BSU campus in packs much like they did seven years ago. The largest conglomerate of UI alums live in the Treasure Valley as it is, and it's likely many more will make short road voyages from the Palouse, Spokane and Seattle to see the Vandals make a rare postseason appearance.

The Fort Collins Rams will probably bring a healthy crowd, but make no mistake: This is as close as it gets to a home game during bowl season.

"That should really, hopefully be a big homefield advantage to us," Petrino said. "

Really, the advantages here are endless. And the flip side?

"(The turf) will probably be covered by a little bit of snow that day," sophomore linebacker Tony Lashley said.

Vandal fans have never been all that fond of The Blue anyway.

So well it isn't Orlando, San Diego or The Bahamas - even Tucson, for that matter - Boise is a prime landing spot for the team up north.

And both sides, the Vandals and the Spud Bowl, should be happy to see this love affair live another year.

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