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Scorecard

Leveling the Playing Field

The case for congressional hearings into the BCS | BY SENATOR ORRIN HATCH

Complaints about the college football Bowl Championship Series are nothing new. Indeed, it seems every year an obviously deserving team is left out of the BCS due to its arcane and, to put it bluntly, biased nature.

Leaders in Washington are catching on to—and even echoing—the negative feelings about the BCS. During his campaign for president, Barack Obama said he believed the system should be scrapped in favor of a playoff, a stance he reiterated after he was elected. In May the House Energy and Commerce Committee held a hearing on the BCS. And the Senate Antitrust Subcommittee, of which I am a member, has announced it will hold hearings later this month to investigate the antitrust implications of the system.

Although there seems to be a fair amount of public support for these efforts to expose and potentially remedy the unfairness of the BCS, some have questioned whether, given all the challenges our nation faces, it is appropriate for the federal government to expend time and resources on college football's bowl system. However, I believe the case for government

involvement—whether from Congress, the courts or the Justice Department—is compelling.

First and foremost there are serious questions regarding the legality of the BCS. The Sherman Antitrust Act prohibits contracts, combinations or

The system intentionally and explicitly FAVORS CERTAIN PARTICIPANTS.

conspiracies designed to reduce competition. I don't think a more accurate description of what the BCS does exists.

Under the current plan six conferences, which include slightly more than half of the teams in Division I-A, receive automatic bids to play in the five most prestigious and lucrative bowl games—even if teams from the other five conferences have had better seasons. For instance, in 2008 the only two undefeated I-A teams (Utah and Boise State) were from non-BCS conferences. And two other outside teams (Brigham Young and Texas Christian) finished higher in the BCS rankings than at least one of the champions of an automatic-bid conference. Yet only Utah was invited to play in a BCS game. And although the



Utahs had plenty of big wins, the BCS system denied them the chance to play for the national championship. So while every conference is technically part of the BCS agreement, the existing arrangement intentionally and explicitly favors certain participants.

In addition, every team from a preferred conference automatically receives a share from an enormous pot of revenue generated by the BCS, even if they fail to win a single game. On the other hand, teams from the less-favored conferences are guaranteed to receive a much smaller share, no matter how many games they win. The numbers are

staggering. Last year the Mountain West Conference had one team qualify for the BCS, Utah, as did three of the automatic-bid conferences. Yet under the BCS formula the Mountain West received \$9.8 million—roughly half of what the three bigger conferences got. And despite having the nation's only other undefeated team, Boise State, the Western Athletic Conference received just \$3.2 million in BCS revenue.

This disbursement scheme places teams from these smaller conferences at a disadvantage when it comes to hiring staff and improving facilities. Because of their increased visibility and status BCS schools also receive an

unfair advantages in recruiting top players and coaches. These inequities also extend far beyond the football field, as many schools in the country depend on the revenue generated by their football teams to fund other athletic programs and academic initiatives.

There's no denying that college football is a business. Most schools advertise and market their teams as they would a commercial product. There are also television networks, advertisers and the corporate sponsors that invest in and profit from these bowl games. All told, the BCS games generate hundreds of millions of dollars every year. If the government were to ignore a similar business arrangement of this magnitude in any other industry, it would be condemned for shirking its responsibility. In essence, those making the argument that the BCS is too trivial a matter to receive governmental attention are saying that we should hold colleges and universities to lower standards of fairness and ethical behavior than we would a commercial entity. I must respectfully disagree.

These justifications aside, government intervention into the BCS would be regrettable. There are many issues and challenges competing for Congress's attention. Those with the power to reform the system should do so voluntarily. If not, legislation may be required to ensure that all colleges and universities receive an equal opportunity. Most have argued that some sort of playoff system would be the fairest approach; frankly, almost anything would be better than what we have now. One thing is clear: No changes will take place if Congress does nothing.

Longtime football fan Orrin Hatch is the senior Republican in the senate.

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CARY A. VASQUEZ/US PRESSWIRE (MATTHERS); FERNANDO MENDOZA/GETTY IMAGES (CARTER); MITCHELL STERNBERG/ICM (HANSON); MICHAEL COHE/GETTY IMAGES (SHIN); RON VESSEL/MLB PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES (GUILLÉN); JOHN BIEVER (PINELLA)

Who's Hot Who's Not

ANGELS ▶

Winning 12 of 15 (and five straight) put them atop the AL West. They can hit (league-best .278 batting average) and they can run (outfielder Gary Matthews Jr., right, stole home on Sunday). More good news for the Halos: Injured righty Ervin Santana, sharp in a rehab start, is ready to rejoin the team.



A'S

Losing 11 of 15 (and five straight) dropped them into the AL West cellar. They've got little offense (league-worst .238 batting average) and pitching's an issue. Young lefty Josh Outman had been living up to his name with a 4-1 record and a 3.48 ERA, but he's out, man, for at least 60 days and may need elbow surgery.

VINCE CARTER ▶

Going home is sweet, and sweeter still when it means you'll get to play alongside Dwight Howard. Carter's trade to NBA finalist Orlando—he lives in that city, at Isleworth, in the off-season—also liberated him from the 34-win Nets. Said Carter, "I'm still pinching myself."



DENNIS NORTHCUTT

After the rebuilding Jaguars drafted three receivers and signed free agent Torry Holt, veteran wideout Northcutt figured he'd soon be gone. He just didn't think he'd go in a trade to the winless-in-2008 Lions, who used five QBs last season and spent this year's No. 1 pick on another.

TOMMY HANSON ▶

The Braves rookie has been rolling since his June 7 debut: 4-0 with a 2.48 ERA through Sunday. His stuff isn't all that's sick. The 22-year-old complained of flu symptoms before he shut down the Red Sox on Sunday to run his scoreless-innings streak to 20.



DAVID HUFF

The Indians rookie has had an uneven ride since his May 17 debut: 3-3 with a 6.26 ERA. Things were especially bumpy on Sunday, when he let in six runs in five innings to the Reds. Huff fell behind hitters, and, said catcher Kelly Shoppach, "that's when bad things happen."

JIJAI SHIN ▶

Is it really this easy? After pulling away to a seven-stroke win at Locust Hill—the biggest margin in the Pittsford, N.Y., event in 17 years—the 21-year-old had her fifth LPGA victory in 11 months and a tour-best \$1 million in winnings for '09. "My goal is rookie of the year," she said.



VICTOR ORTIZ

Not up to the hype. The rising star of Golden Boy Promotions (and an upcoming MTV reality show) was knocked off course in a welterweight bout against Marcos Maidana. Ortiz had the crowd behind him at L.A.'s Staples Center, but Maidana got the sixth-round TKO.

SI PLAYERS MLB POLL

WHICH MANAGER DO YOU LEAST WANT TO PLAY FOR?



- ◀ Lou Piniella, Cubs 26%
- Ozzie Guillen, White Sox 21%
- Tony La Russa, Cardinals 10%
- Joe Torre, Dodgers 4%
- Eric Wedge, Indians 4%



FAST FACTS Players couldn't vote for the manager of their own team. . . . Torre finished second in last week's poll asking players which manager they *most* wanted to play for. . . . Last week Piniella and outfielder Milton Bradley had words after Bradley threw a dugout tantrum; Piniella insulted Bradley but later apologized and the two reconciled. . . . Guillen, the AL Manager of the Year in 2005, has publicly disparaged several former players.

Based on a survey of 380 MLB players

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