

FWAA writing contest winners

The results from the FWAA's 16th Best Writing Contest, which is sponsored by Insight, are listed below. All places will be recognized at the FWAA's annual Awards Breakfast on Jan. 8, 2009, at the BCS Championship Game Media Hotel

in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Places 1-3 receive certificates and cash prizes, while honorable mention winners receive certificates. First-place winners also receive plaques.



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GAME

First place: Chip Scoggins, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

Second place: Stewart Mandel, *SI.com*

Third place: Cory Giger, *Altoona (Pa.) Mirror*

Honorable mention: Chris Dufresne, *Los Angeles Times*; John Henderson, *The Denver Post*; Eric Hansen, *South Bend Tribune*

LOOSE DEADLINE

First place: Brett McMurphy, *Tampa Tribune*

Second place: O.K. Davis, *The Ruston Daily Leader*

Third place: Brady McCollough, *Kansas City Star*

Honorable mention: Cliff Kirkpatrick, *Corvallis Gazette-Times*; Pete DiPrimio, *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel*; Cory Giger, *Altoona (Pa.) Mirror*

FEATURES

First place: Eric Hansen, *South Bend Tribune*

Second place: Christopher Walsh, *Tuscaloosa News*

Third place: Molly Yanity, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

Honorable mention: Blair Kerkhoff, *Kansas City Star*; Matt Hayes, *Sporting News*; Vahe Gregorian, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*

COLUMN

First place: Bud Withers, *Seattle Times*

Second place: Brent Zwerneman, *San Antonio Express-News*

Third place: David Teel, *Daily Press*

Honorable mention: Dennis Dodd, *CBSSports.com*; Olin Buchanan, *Rivals.com*; Ted Lewis, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*

ENTERPRISE

First place: Stewart Mandel, *SI.com*

Second place: Dennis Dodd, *CBSSports.com*

Third place: Curtis Eichelberger and Mason Levinson, *Bloomberg News*

Honorable mention: Jon Solomon and Erin Stock, *The Birmingham News*; Steve Wieberg, *USA Today*; Brady McCollough, *Kansas City Star*; Tom Stinson, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

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Memphis Commercial Appeal

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Michael Lewis
Salt Lake Tribune

Matt Markey
Toledo Blade

Brett McMurphy
Tampa Tribune

Robbi Pickeral
Raleigh News & Observer

Lenn Robbins
New York Post

Tom Kensler
Denver Post

Phil Steele
Phil Steele Magazine

Maureen Fulton
Toledo Blade

Joseph Duarte
Houston Chronicle

Malcolm Moran
Knight Foundation

Antonya English
St. Petersburg Times

Paul Strelow
The State (S.C.)

Bob Asmussen
Champaign News-Gazette

Ex-Officio
Charles Bloom
Southeastern Conference
Joe Hornstein
University of Central Florida
Mike Finn
Atlantic Coast Conference

President's column



RON HIGGINS

There are many of our FWAA members out there wondering how they can make a difference in our cause toward improved working relationships with coaches and sports information directors.

This is what you do, and it's simple. Complain when you see some-

thing wrong. Give a pat on the back when you see something right.

Here's an example of such give-and-take. There are some schools that bypassed bringing their major name players to various conference media days and brought seniors whom no one really cared to interview.

This happened in the SEC, and I talked to the SID of one of the offending schools which brought nobodies. It was an amicable, but pointed discussion, with someone I respect a great deal.

It also happened in the Big 12, according to past FWAA president Dennis Dodd. Knowing Dennis, I'm sure he let his opinion be known.

When we see something wrong, we have to communicate. We can't sit back. That's what has happened in the past, and look where we are.

Here's another example of how we in the FWAA have attacked a problem.

There are plenty of our members disgusted with press guides becoming recruiting guides. The valuable basic information that we need at our fingertips (such as year-by-year results) was disappearing.

FWAA executive director Steve "Tiger" Richardson, Dodd, me and a few others decided to issue a list of 25 things that must be in a press guide. I got positive response from SIDS at the CoSIDA

convention this past summer about having that guideline.

And I must say, most of the '08 press guides I've seen have tried to maintain their integrity of being a press guide.

There are also those schools that haven't but that have tried to accommodate in other ways.

Here's where a pat on the back comes in: Mississippi State issued a separate 312-page media information and record book, designed in an old-school smaller size with nothing but what we need to do our job. So hat's off to Mike Nemeth, Joe Galbraith and the State SID staff for an idea well executed.

But again, perhaps State wouldn't have done that had there not been more than a few media members who made it known that they weren't happy with the '07 press guide. Either way, State responded.

Tiger is working on a platform for our Website where we can blog our congratulations to various SIDS for jobs well done. As far as the complaints, let the SIDs know directly and you can always call me or Tiger.

The bottom line is that we can't remain mute. If we don't keep pushing the boulder up the mountain, we will never make any progress, even if it is inch by inch.

One last note: There has been some progress in the SEC. League commissioner Mike Slive announced that the league would form a committee including media members, SIDs, maybe a coach or two and SEC associate commissioner Charles Bloom to discuss media operation problems as they arise.

If every conference had a commissioner as media savvy as Slive, who values the media and the job we do, we'd have fewer problems.

Have a good season and keep fighting the good fight.

Column: Bud Withers

Comment of the judge, Mickey Spagnola: This is the winner because the writer was opinionated without hammering the reader over the head and also had some depth to the column, expounding on several different layers. But most of all, the writer carried a singular thought throughout the column, and there was not one graph that could have been edited out. To me, easy call.

By BUD WITHERS
Seattle Times

Early in this decade, before Rick Neuheisel's regime at Washington came crashing down like the Kingdom when somebody yelled, "Zero!" he spent a few pensive, post-practice minutes one day talking about his alma mater.

UCLA, he said, was a strange place right then, a sort of inert athletic program content to watch the world go by. It was without energy, without real leadership, seemingly without any urgency or reason to try to be the best it could be.

As he said it, the Bruins were on their way to becoming the first college program to win 100 national championships. But those were happening in sports nobody pays attention to, like water polo and tennis. Certainly UCLA wasn't making any noise in marquee sports like football.

Well, as they say, everything runs in cycles.

Batten down the hatches. Rick Neuheisel is back in college football. Like operators on those telethons, UCLA compliance officers are standing by.

UCLA football just knocked back a venti triple espresso.

Have to admit, I never really bought the notion of Neuheisel as fallback candidate at UCLA. Given his checkered past at Colorado and Washington, he was either going to sweep the UCLA administration off its feet — he's very good at that — or they were going to treat him like he had bird flu. There would be no in-between.

So the guess here is that the Bruins' plodding search was either a charade to suggest they were thoroughly vetting Neuheisel, or they were getting everybody from the NCAA to the Department of Homeland Security to sign off on him.

Does he deserve to be back as a college head coach of a big-time program? Why not? His two-year participation in a high-stakes NCAA basketball-tournament pool, while monumentally stupid, shouldn't have been a career-killer. Nor should the fact he sued Washington and the NCAA over his dismissal.

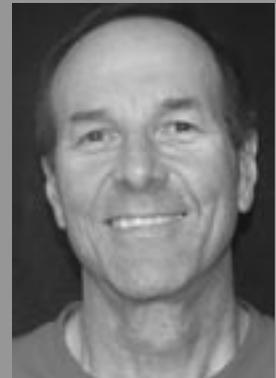
Now he parachutes into Los Angeles to match personalities with USC's Pete Carroll. In one of the nation's

BUD WITHERS — *Seattle Times*

Age: 60

College: Washington State

Background: Withers is married, with two sons — one a recent Washington State graduate, one a junior at Gonzaga, ensuring that the boys pretty much don't speak to each other during basketball season. Withers has written three books and contributed to ESPN's 2005 encyclopedia of college football. Away from the laptop, he runs (frequently) and golfs (badly). A former president of U.S. Basketball Writers Association, he has previously received awards from several organizations, including the FWAA.



recruiting mother lodes, Neuheisel could be absolute dynamite.

Or he could blow UCLA up.

You'd like to think he's learned something along the way. Like, in the first three weeks on the job, you don't improperly send five assistant coaches out in the middle of a recruiting "quiet" period, and then claim it's because your NCAA manual was still packed away in boxes.

You don't incessantly commit improper "bumps" with recruits, which formed the bulk of the 51 NCAA violations committed at Colorado and adjudicated after he was at Washington. The funny thing about Neuheisel is, he's good enough, dynamic enough, not to need to pull the junior-high antics, but he could never help himself.

As one of the jurors in Neuheisel's 2005 trial put it, referencing him and Washington, "They had this culture of looking for the gray areas."

You don't need to pour endless hours into romancing splashy talents like Reggie Bush and Lorenzo Booker. Go find some 6-5, 290-pound guys with bad teeth and a foul disposition, people who like to knock somebody down.

And oh yeah, try something different and be straight with people, especially your employer. Act like it's a privilege to be making \$1.25 million a year coaching the school that gave you a college education, because it is.

Wanderlust shouldn't be a problem anymore, but if it is, at least just couch the ambiguity in coachspeak. Denying a dalliance with the 49ers by faxing out a lie on university letterhead is not exactly the stuff of role mod-

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Game: Chip Scoggins

Comments of the judge, Gene Duffey: Excellent lead with a touch of humor, playing off coach's prior statement. Delivered the facts quickly, such as North Dakota State having 22 fewer scholarships and Minnesota's sixth loss in a row. Liked the way the monetary guarantee for the game was delivered. Good job using meaningful quotes from players first instead of a routine coach's quote. Good quote from North Dakota State coach, telling both sides of story.

By CHIP SCOGGINS
Minneapolis Star Tribune

Gophers football coach Tim Brewster made it clear last week that he doesn't think his team should be playing North Dakota State.

Given what transpired Saturday, that's probably a good idea.

In what will go down as one of the lowest points in program history, the Gophers were dominated in every way, shape and form by the Bison, who avenged a heartbreaking loss here last season with a 27-21 victory before an announced crowd of 63,088 at the Metrodome.

The Gophers were overpowered by a team that is a member of the Football Championship Subdivision (formerly I-AA), has 22 fewer scholarship players, does not have one player who was offered a scholarship to Minnesota and was 0-6 all-time against the Gophers.

It didn't matter. The Bison (7-0 and ranked No. 1 in the FCS) stormed into town with a huge following of fans, took the Gophers' money (\$300,000 payout) and used a punishing running game to hand Minnesota its sixth consecutive loss.

The defeat also made official what had become obvious: The Gophers (1-7) can't qualify for a bowl game. They will be home for the holidays for the first time since 2001.

This is as bad as it gets.

"This is very, very frustrating," Gophers linebacker Steve Davis said. "Most of us have never been a part of a losing team. This year has come as a huge surprise. It's disappointing, but we've got four more games."

Which means things could really spiral downward for this team, starting next week at Michigan. The Gophers were so physically dominated and emotionally deflated that a one-victory season is looking more like a reality at this point.

Most Gophers fans expected growing pains under the new regime this season, but Saturday's performance felt like something else entirely.

"It seems like we're in every game but we just don't have the killer instinct to put a team away or jump out on

CHIP SCOGGINS —
Minneapolis Star Tribune

Age: 36

College: University of Missouri

Background: Chip joined the *Star Tribune* in 2000 and covered the University of Minnesota and college football for the paper since 2003. He recently moved to the Minnesota Vikings beat. Before arriving in the Twin Cities, Scoggins worked at papers in Houston, Connecticut, North Carolina and Chicago. He also has covered the Minnesota Wild National Hockey League team for the *Star Tribune*. Scoggins and his wife, Amy, have three children. He enjoys running and spending time with his family when he's not working.



them," senior center Tony Brinkhaus said.

The Bison certainly do. NDSU rushed for 394 yards (including a school-record 263 by Tyler Roehl), rolled up 585 total yards and had an edge in time of possession of nearly 14 minutes.

The final score could have been even worse if not for two missed field goals, a turnover that led to a touchdown and a roughing-the-passer penalty that led to another touchdown.

"Today didn't happen by chance," Bison coach Craig Bohl said. "It was no fluke."

He's right. A year ago, the Gophers underestimated the Bison but escaped with a 10-9 victory despite being outplayed. The Gophers knew what to expect this time and still got steamrolled by NDSU's running game.

"We just weren't good enough," Brewster said. "They were just more physical than we were."

The Gophers thought they had one final chance at a victory, but senior Dominique Barber was called for roughing the punter with 1 minute, 48 seconds left. The Bison kept the ball and ran out the clock.

Afterward, nobody from either team viewed it as an upset.

"Certainly a lot of people thought we had the short end of the stick as far as our resources," Bohl said. "But we were pleased with how we played."

For good reason. Facing a team that ranks last nationally in pass defense, the Bison used an old-school approach and ran it down the Gophers' throat.

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Game (continued)

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Roehl powered his way for 263 yards on 22 carries, including a 77-yard touchdown run in the first quarter. With the score tied 14-14 and NDSU pinned at its 7 with 34 seconds left until halftime, Roehl went up the middle for 68 yards. That led to a 37-yard field by Shawn Bibeau at the horn.

Pat Paschall added 87 rushing yards on 12 carries. As a team, the Bison averaged a whopping 8.0 yards on 49 carries.

"Mistakes," Davis said when asked why NDSU rushed for nearly 400 yards.

"We struggled to tackle," Brewster said. "It's been an issue for us all season long. It's evident."

The Gophers offense didn't help the cause. Freshman quarterback Adam Weber completed only 10 of 22 passes for 162 yards and one touchdown. The Gophers managed only 125 rushing yards on 30 carries, lost starting tailback Jay Thomas to a knee injury and had four three-and-out series.

"When you have a combination of bad things going on, it's hard to win," Weber said.

That was never more evident than Saturday.

2008-09 Contest Rules

Rules and procedures for the 2008-09 FWA Best Writing Contest.

1. FWA members in good standing can now begin sending entries for the following categories:

- GAME Story (Immediate Deadline)
- LOOSE Deadline (Spot News and Second Day Game Stories)
- FEATURE Story/Profile
- ENTERPRISE/Investigative
- COLUMN/Analysis/Commentary

2. Deadline: June 15, 2009. Entries sent after June 15, WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

3. Limit: One (1) article per category.

4. Entries had to appear in print or on-line between Feb. 1, 2008, and Jan. 31, 2009.

5. Entries MUST BE SENT electronically via e-mail to contest@sportswriters.net. Entries not sent to this e-mail address WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

6. At the top of each entry, this information should be included:

- Publication or on-line service where story appeared.
- Writer or writers
- Category
- Date of publication
- E-mail address and telephone numbers for the writer or writers

7. The entries will be sorted and stripped of identifying information and forwarded to the judge(s).

8. Entries MUST BE SENT in MS Word or text files only. DO NOT SEND HTML files, Word Perfect files, stories in other word processing software or links to stories

on the Internet or electronic libraries.

9. Delete any advertising, photos or cutlines from the files. The file should contain only your story and your identifying information.

10. Take out unnecessary carriage returns to improve the readability of your entry for the judges.

10. Files containing your entries should follow this naming convention:

yourname-category.doc

The category must be one of these five words:

Game, Loose, Feature, Column or Enterprise

Questions? E-mail ken.stephens@sbcglobal.net

Column (continued)

(Continued from page 3)

els.

While the NCAA enforcement staff must today be considering setting up a satellite location near Neuheisel's new office, this could be a win-win for a lot of people — Neuheisel, desperate to resurrect a career; UCLA, in need of somebody with a pulse after firing Karl Dorrell; media folks who love the good story.

A movie buff, Neuheisel always said he liked happy endings. This could be one of those.

His call.

Features: Eric Hansen

Comment of the judge, Mickey Spagnola: Wow, what a wonderful storyteller this writer was, and the story was very complete. This was as complete and well-written piece as I've seen in quite some time, and to tell you how good it was, this category was very hard to judge, with so many excellent entries. So that tells you what I thought of this story of Corwin Brown. Beginning to end the writer never lost me, almost as if this was a mini-book. Wonderful job.

By ERIC HANSEN
South Bend Tribune

CHICAGO — There are children playing on 90th Street, with real smiles and untainted dreams, 20 feet from a drug deal in the making.

The well-kept houses and tiny manicured lawns in this South Side Chicago neighborhood reflect the pride of the people who live here as much as they betray the cycle of desperation.

Corwin Brown stands in the middle of the street, in front of the house he grew up in, admiring a development that promised to upgrade the facade of progress even more — before, that is, the builder inexplicably aborted the project in midstream. It's not the buildings that need a makeover, though, Brown is convinced. It's the culture.

It's not enough for Brown that he got out, went to the University of Michigan, put himself on the fast track for law school before a longer-than-expected run in the NFL changed the trajectory of his thinking and his mission.

Notre Dame's first-year defensive coordinator suddenly wasn't comfortable being the cliché — the guy who escaped his brutal past, merged with the white-bread world and made good. He needed to make peace with his past, then reframe it.

"In my mind, I don't know what it is, but I feel like I have a purpose," said Brown, who came to ND following a three-year stint as an assistant coach with the New York Jets. "God made a plan, and he's using me. It sounds corny to a lot of people, but not to me. That's why it was a real good deal for me to come to Notre Dame. It's because I'm going to affect more people than I will in the League."

He is now in a job at a school that once preferred to airbrush résumés like his, sometimes people like him all together, out of the big picture. But Notre Dame's original creed looked nothing like the uptight, sanitized version that now seems to be reaching an expiration date.

Heck, Knute Rockne himself enrolled at Notre Dame in 1913 as a 22-year-old high school dropout from Chicago, the connection forged from a promise to work his way through school and toil even more diligently in the classroom in exchange for a clean slate, an open mind and an opportunity.

There's a parallel in the recent resurrection of the ND-Chicago football connection that Brown and ND head coach

ERIC HANSEN — South Bend Tribune

Age: 47

College: Hansen is a graduate of THE Ohio State University but has diligently worked to avoid interjecting the word THE unnecessarily into his everyday conversations.

Background: Hansen is a Cleveland, Ohio, native and managed to overcome it over the years. He has worked for the *South Bend Tribune* for

the past 20 years in a variety of roles, including seven years as managing editor of the paper's *Irish Sports Report* publication. This is Hansen's fourth year as assistant sports editor and Notre Dame football beat writer. He has written two books (*Notre Dame Stadium Stories* and *Notre Dame, Where Have You Gone?*) and has won nine previous FWAA awards (seconds, thirds and honorable mentions) as well as a number of state awards. A single father, Hansen has raised two sons, Antonio (19) and Blake (17), so he has no hobbies. He previously worked at the *Times of Northwest Indiana* and the *Columbus (Ind.) Republic*.



Charlie Weis have fueled. It's an embracing of diversity, an understanding of culture, a muting of stereotypes.

Notre Dame, through its football program, is becoming less about packaging and rigid, sometimes archaic, thinking and more about what people stand for at their core. Yet if all Brown was about was massaging his old ties for recruiting glory, he could gloss over his darkest moments, skip a few pages of his life, stand up in recruits' living rooms and proclaim to the parents, "Look at me now."

But because it's as much about bringing a piece of Notre Dame to Chicago - see, the connection runs forward and back - Brown also says, "Look at me then."

It is his belief that the past imperfect makes the message stronger, more penetrating. And the message is that there is something better and our children deserve better - but it's locked in a mindset that seems to be sliding the other way. Where once kids ages 16, 17, 18 carrying guns was the baseline for shock, now it starts at 10, 11, 12. What were once fistfights are now bloodbaths.

Too many drugs, too many influences, too much entitlement, too many funerals.

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Features (continued)

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And everywhere you look, there are children, still full of hope, still full of bliss and unaware and unaffected to this point by what the \$1,500 car with \$4,000 rims is doing on their street.

"I know what it's like outside of this circle," Brown said. "But at one time I didn't know. I thought I was a pretty sharp kid, but I didn't have a clue until I got out.

"It wasn't a big deal to be shot and killed, it just wasn't. I want kids to at least see what else there is to life. It's one thing if you have an opportunity and you don't seize it, but it's another thing when you just don't know what's out there.

"I want these kids to do better than I did. I don't have all the answers, trust me. I've got a lot of parts of me to clean up. I'm a work in progress. But I do want the next kid to be better than me, to have a better situation, whatever that looks like."

Corwin Brown's head is bleeding still, 12 hours after the undercover cop hit him from the blind side.

It started innocently enough, a skirmish about who lives where in the grid that is Chicago. A cap turned the wrong way, a few harsh words. It doesn't matter if you're invested in gang life or not - if you live on a certain block, that's who you're associated with.

It was Brown's junior year at Chicago's Julian High School. He was a rising football star there and a whiz in the classroom. The jagged scar from that night is still with him. So is the lesson of just how easy it is to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Not that he hadn't been warned before and after. His friend Mimi's brothers, Yusef and Abdullah, were gunned down in separate incidents when someone in a rage started shooting before he found who he was really looking for.

And then there was the old man at Wendy's, South Chicago's version of Arnold's of Happy Days fame, at least that's how Brown remembers it. The man had just celebrated his birthday, albeit modestly. A gunman looking for someone else came down the alley that runs behind Wendy's and shot blindly through a wooden fence.

"I was determined I wasn't going to be a victim of circumstance," Brown said, "but it wasn't always easy."

And his intentions weren't always innocent. He and his friends used to throw eggs at cars, hoping the drivers would chase them. And before he got to Julian High School, he'd constantly pick fights - with bigger kids.

"I would say my natural instinct is that I didn't want to get hurt," he said. "I would fight out of fear more than anything else. Because I was skinny, I didn't want people knowing how scared I was, so I would fight dudes. And I'd fight the bigger cats to make people think I shouldn't be messed with."

Athletes largely got a pass in Chicago - except in Benji Wilson's case. The former Simeon basketball star should have been celebrating his 40th birthday last spring. Instead he died at age 17, gunned down on the eve of his senior basketball season.

"That was taboo, that he got shot," Brown said. "He was the No. 1 player in the country. He had his whole life ahead of him. Everybody idolized him. Everyone wanted to be like him. I know I did."

Brown's mind drifts back to the brawl in his high school junior year. The memory of Wilson flashes through Brown's mind as he throws a bottle in the senseless fight that could end his life. Somehow he was lucky that the whack on the head came from an undercover cop. Somehow he ended up not being arrested that night.

He wanted to avoid his father's wrath, so he went straight to his room and went to sleep. In the morning he awakened to a blood-stained pillow and a screaming father.

"He went through the roof," Brown said. "He never told me this until I went away to Michigan, but every time I went out, he stayed up and worried that I was going to get hurt. But he wasn't so worried that he would make me come home at 10 or 11 o'clock. He'd just stay up and wait for me. And that became a source of tension in our house.

"He was physical with me. He screamed at me so many times and embarrassed me in front of my friends. Years later, we would make our peace. My dad was a good dude, a wise dude, but the message got lost in the delivery."

The rift grew into a chasm between father and son, but life kept bringing more positives into Brown's world - Julian head football coach J.W. Smith, a Wisconsin assistant football coach named Lovie Smith - yes that Lovie Smith - and friends who wouldn't let Brown cross the line into a life with no future.

"When I think back on it, it was a lot of fun growing up here," Brown said, "I do love Chicago. It really teaches you in your own way how to survive. Everybody's got their own way of doing it. Some cats are more thuggish and fight more. Some cats are more cerebral. Some cats have got to be somewhat of a punk.

"When people see you're weak, they're going to take advantage of you. So there's a certain image that you have to uphold. If you don't, they're going to prey on you here. Then the word travels and spreads, and then you're going to have real problems."

Brown went to grammar school just down the street from his house, but eventually his parents sent him to schools out of the neighborhood with the best of intentions and the worst of consequences. Gillespie, his middle school, for instance, was in rival gang territory. And the street code, the culture, wouldn't allow Brown to tell his parents.

The break of his life came when it was time to go to high school. Brown's father, Albert, was a teacher at Julian, so Brown went to the relatively new school, rich in football pride but short on facilities.

Once the practice field next to the school became unplayable from weather and overuse late each fall, the team mem-

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Features (continued)

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bers would have to walk more than a mile - through the bushes, across the Dan Ryan Expressway overpass - to a public park to prepare for their games.

In the classroom, though, serious students could get a serious education, thanks to the football team.

"Our football team was the pride of the school, but it had always been that way," Brown said. "From Carl Boyd to George Streeter to Howard Griffith, if you came to Julian and you did something that was out of order - gang or no gang - the football team was going to beat you up. That's how it went down.

"Julian was a unique school that way. Now if you tried doing that now, everybody would wind up getting killed."

Getting home, though, was a lot more of a challenge for a lot of Brown's teammates. Because Julian drew kids from a geographically diverse area, the shortest route was often through a death trap.

"Julian sits on 103rd," Brown said. "The dudes from that live near Corliss and in London Town that went to Julian, they couldn't take the 103rd Street bus home, because they would get killed, even back then. And you certainly couldn't go through the L station. You didn't even think about going through there.

"So what the dudes would do is take the 24 Wentworth bus down to 87th Street, take the 87th Street bus all the way over to Cottage Grove. From there, you take the Cottage Grove bus up to 95th and then catch the 111 bus up there. That's probably an hour and a half out of their way.

"The tradeoff is you lived. About a month ago, a kid got shot right here on 103rd. A dude who used to go to Julian, he got on the bus, started shooting people and he killed a kid who was destined to go to college."

Brown's destiny also pulled him toward college. Both of his parents were educators, so valuing education was in his DNA. Football made it a reality.

And J.W. Smith is why college recruiters flocked to Julian in the Public League. Not only was Smith way ahead of the curve in terms of strategy, not only did he demand, motivate, inspire, he could reach kids.

So charismatic was Smith that Griffith begged his parents to let him transfer from Mendel Catholic to Julian for his senior year.

"I think the biggest thing for me is that coach Smith was a leader on and off the field," said Griffith, who went on to star at Illinois and play with the Denver Broncos. "He expected guys to perform in the classroom, at home and also on the football field.

"He was all about family and doing things the right way. So really, for a lot of people who weren't fortunate enough to have a father, he was a father figure."

It wasn't fear of Smith that drove the Julian players. It was respect. It was pride. So instead of getting lured into selling drugs like a lot of Brown's friends were doing, Brown worked at White Castle Hamburgers - including the graveyard shift once a week.

"There were times I'd get off at 7 a.m. and have an 8 a.m. track meet, but I never regretted it," Brown said. "When you hustle drugs, there's only two things that can happen - you get locked up or you get killed."

Notre Dame was briefly involved in Brown's college recruitment, and the star defensive back could very well have ended up in South Bend had the courtship lasted.

"Gerry Faust was the coach when my recruiting started," Brown said. "And I can remember when he came to Julian to see me (and some older prospects on Julian's team), it was the talk of the whole school."

So was the fact that Faust's car was stolen while he was inside the school. Lou Holtz took over at ND shortly thereafter, and the Irish lost interest. So did a lot of other schools. Brown was a hot commodity healthy, but he wasn't breathtaking enough as an athlete to keep them coming when he suffered a knee injury during his senior season.

Even Michigan, the school he ended up playing for, slow-played him. "I remember assistant Les Miles (now LSU's head coach) telling me they weren't sure they had a scholarship for me."

So it came down to Illinois, Northwestern and Wisconsin - and he almost scared off Wisconsin.

Brown's father had gotten into an altercation with a female student the day Lovie Smith first showed up at Julian.

"My dad is a strong dude," Brown said. "If a student talks back, he's going to slam you through a locker. because you can't show weakness to these kids. The moment that you do, they're going to run over you."

Word got around that the female student's brother and his friends were going to jump Brown's father after school. Brown and the football team went to intervene.

"When I got upstairs, I hit the first dude I saw," Brown said. "And it's on. The teachers were all breaking it up and Lovie Smith is sitting there through the whole thing. And when it was over, someone asked Lovie, 'Now who are you here to see?' And Lovie says, 'Corwin Brown.' And I just kind of waved at him, 'Here I am.'"

"Lovie was real cool. He was the reason I wanted to go to Wisconsin, and we still have a great relationship today. We never talk about X's and O's, though - just life. I really liked Wisconsin, but my parents wanted me to go to Michigan."

Ann Arbor, Mich., took Brown away from the violence and the temptations but also threw him out of his comfort zone. The only white people he had encountered in 18 years on Chicago's South Side were some of his teachers.

"I got along with those teachers, too," he said. "But it was just different at Michigan. We all grew up wanting to be teachers and sports players. And these kids in Ann Arbor wanted to be doctors, physicists and nuclear this and that.

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"I didn't look at it as hard. I looked at it as, this is what I've got to do. When I left, everyone had been saying, 'Well, you shouldn't have gone to Michigan. You'll never play there.' In my mind, I was going to prove everybody wrong. And even if I didn't play, I was going to get my degree and I was going to be able to do something when I got done. I mean, I love my neighborhood to death, but I didn't want to stay there for the rest of my life."

The more Brown talks, the more it becomes apparent that his 3-4 defense is the vehicle, not the octane, toward a better Notre Dame defense.

"I think being successful as a coach is a blend of X's and O's and who you are - J-dub taught me that," Brown said of his high school coach. "Football is football. Cover 2 is Cover 2. But there's a certain way I want my guys to play when the ball is snapped. There's a certain way I want my guys to run to the ball. It's all about mindset. And I tell my guys this, 'You're an extension of me.'"

So who is Corwin Brown?

He's a guy who's as comfortable in the houses off the alley as he is visiting the kids in the cul-de-sac. While playing for the New England Patriots, for example, he gave a speech at Harvard and one in a prison in the same day.

He can switch his vernacular in mid-sentence. He likes to see the good in every situation, but won't ignore the bad. He is smart enough to learn from his mistakes and from others'.

When his 10-year-old son, Corwin Jr., was 4, Junior bumped his 2-year-old sister. Had Brown not been in the right place at the right time, well, the mental picture of his toddling daughter standing at the top of the stairs still brings tears to his eyes.

So does the fact that his rage that day was squelched by his compassion. He saw the fear in his son's eyes, and he kept the promise he made to himself when having a family of his own was just a dream.

"I broke the cycle that day," he said.

He believes there's something synchronistic about the presence of Bill Parcells, Bill Belichick, J.W. Smith and now Weis in his life.

"Charlie Weis fits into this picture," he said, gazing down 90th Street. "Charlie understands people. Charlie understands culture. He really does. If there's one dude that's not prejudiced, it's Charlie. He's real. Charlie may not agree with the rules of the street, but he understands."

He understands that Brown once fought a boy named Eric, just a few yards away from his house, just beyond the makeshift end zone of their street touch football games.

And only by getting cerebral, making Eric believe he was going into his house to get a weapon, did Brown survive. There was no weapon, only fear. But Eric was the one who ran away from the fight.

"That fight goes the other way," Brown said, "my whole life changes in that moment."

"I think at some point growing up, there's a time and a place where you're going to have to stand up for yourself," Griffith said of Brown, "and sometimes you're forced into those types of situations. I could see Corwin as being a kid who would have to maybe prove himself."

"On the football field or in the streets, people are going to try to test you to see how far they can push you. And once you make your claim, 'I'm not putting up with it,' people know where the line is drawn. But so many times growing up, there's always going to be a turning point where you have to put your foot down and stand up for what you believe in."

And now Brown is doing it again. But this time, Weis is fighting with him too, and Griffith and J.W. Smith and all his buddies from the old neighborhood. He does it for Abdullah's son. He does it for ND quarterback Demetrius Jones, whose own Chicago neighborhood mirrors Brown's. He does it for every kid in the Chicago Public League with a dream.

And it's here for the long term. So is Brown.

"Me and coach talk about this. I wouldn't mind it someday to be a head coach," Brown said, "but I wouldn't be incomplete if I don't. The thing that's most important to me right now is to get my defense together and playing well, and have a real effect on guys."

"If I'm a D-coordinator for six, seven, 10 years and we have success and a lot of kids respect me and admire me and all that stuff, I'll be more than happy to go off into the sunset like that. I told Charlie that."

"I'm not trying to go anywhere right now. I even told Charlie I'd like it to be set up so that I really didn't have that option. I don't even want to think about it. And not even money can talk me into changing my mind, because money doesn't mean anything."

"You saw how I came up. I didn't have money and I don't need money. What I need is for people around me to be happy. I need to feel like I'm making a difference in people's lives. That's who I am."

Enterprise: Stewart Mandel

Comment of the judges, Joe and Martha Jansen: This is an excellent example of taking a hot issue and presenting all sides and arguments - from those making the decisions to those affected to the realities - in a manner that makes it easy to understand why it's so, well, complex. Facts past and present fortify the story and spin it forward, ultimately providing a sort of cliffhanger quality. Many well-chosen and meaningful quotes, and the supporting statistics are interesting without being overwhelming. In sum, a smartly written, informative and well-executed story.

By STEWART MANDEL
SI.com

While the 2007 college football season will conclude with Monday night's BCS National Championship Game between Ohio State and LSU, a different sort of season is about to commence -- one that will take place in conference offices, network suites and hotel board rooms.

"The season for analysis and consideration [of the BCS' future] will take place now through the summer," said BCS coordinator Mike Slive.

The BCS' four-year contract with Fox is in its second year. (ABC's exclusive deal with the Rose Bowl extends an additional four years). The conference commissioners and bowl executives who oversee the BCS will soon hold potentially historic discussions about the possibility of adding a so-called plus-one game -- in which the BCS bowls would serve as a play-in to the national championship game -- starting with the 2010 season.

But as is often the case when it comes to college football's convoluted governance, the conflicting agendas of the various parties will make for a potentially contentious debate over any possible changes to the BCS.

The plus-one concept was first talked about four years ago, but at that time received only cursory consideration by the commissioners. They were more preoccupied with implementing the new five-bowl, double hosting model that the presidents from the six BCS conferences had brokered as a compromise to appease their largely excluded colleagues from the five non-BCS conferences.

The following season, however, SEC commissioner Slive watched as his league's champion, Auburn, was excluded from the national title game despite finishing the regular season undefeated. Throughout his two-year run as BCS coordinator (which concludes following Monday's game), Slive has continually reiterated to reporters that he is "open minded" about possible modifications to the postseason format.

In multiple discussions with Slive for this story, as well as interviews with commissioners, bowl and TV ex-

STEWART MANDEL --
SI.com

Age: 32

College: Northwestern

Background: Mandel is a senior writer for *SI.com*, covering the national college football and basketball beats. Mandel's first book, *Bowls, Polls and Tattered Souls: Tackling the Chaos and Controversy That Reign Over College Football*, was published



in 2007. In 2005, he took first place in the column category of Football Writers Association of America's best writing awards, and in 2004, he placed third. A native of Cincinnati, Mandel currently resides in New York City, where he pitches for his league-champion co-ed softball team, Sporting Wood, waits intently for the new season of *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* and is quickly approaching expert level at guitar on the video game *Rock Band*.

ecutives across the sport, it's apparent that interest in the plus-one has become far more serious than at any point previously. When BCS officials convene in Miami in April for their annual meetings, Slive -- who has the support of ACC commissioner and incoming coordinator John Swofford -- will present several plus-one options to his colleagues.

"We are in the midst of doing a very careful and thorough analysis of the plus-one model," Slive told *SI.com*. "In doing this analysis, we're looking back on historical data and then thinking ahead to what we know. We need to put together a model that is one that some people will be comfortable with, and see if there is acceptance to it."

Those people Slive is presumably referring to are Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany, Pac-10 commissioner Tom Hansen and school presidents from both leagues. The two conferences, which, along with their longtime partner, the Rose Bowl, have repeatedly stated their adamant opposition to any postseason modification that might impinge on their arrangement. The fact that their ABC deal is locked in through 2014 will make any such discussions trickier.

"My sense," said one major bowl executive, "is that Mr. Delany is unconvinced [about a plus-one]. Mr. Hansen is uninterested. Everyone says, 'Why can't we get to this yet?' Until they look at it through each party's respective self-interest, nobody understands how hard it is to come

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 to an agreement."

Plus-one doesn't mean Playoff

Any discussion about the future of college football's post-season must start with the requisite disclaimer that "the one thing [all] of us are in agreement on is there isn't going to be a playoff," said Big East commissioner Mike Tranghese.

Such sentiments routinely frustrate the large segment of the public that clamors for a playoff and can't comprehend why Division I-A football remains the nation's only major sport -- and only NCAA football division -- which refuses to implement a full-scale tournament to determine its champion.

Leaders of the sport generally point to two primary concerns that would arise from a playoff -- that it would devalue college football's uniquely gripping regular season, and that it would unduly interfere with players' academics.

"Whenever my [league's] presidents have asked me about the positives and negatives of a playoff, I tell them the two positives are [more] money and people will stop yelling and screaming," said Tranghese. "And the negative is that the value and meaning of the regular season will be diminished. Playoff proponents who say that's not true -- that's just pure stupidity."

Tranghese points to Pittsburgh's upset of West Virginia the final night of the regular season, a riveting game that severely impacted the national-championship picture. "If there had been a playoff, who would have watched that game?" he said. "It would have no meaning. West Virginia would already be in the playoff."

"The BCS has created what I call cross-watching," said Tranghese. "An LSU fan had interest in that game, an Ohio State fan had interest in that game. Most of that would go away if we had a football playoff -- that is one thing I'm certain of."

Indeed, there have been numerous examples in recent years of games garnering high national interest that likely would not have happened without such high stakes involved. Last year's Thursday night game between undefeated Big East teams West Virginia and Louisville drew the second-highest rating (5.3) in ESPN history. A similar game the following week between Louisville and Rutgers did nearly as well (5.0).

Meanwhile, this year's late-season Friday night game between WAC foes Hawaii and Boise State earned the second-highest rating (2.8) in ESPN2's history (that channel's season average: 1.1). The next night's ABC duel between No. 2 Kansas and No. 4 Missouri -- a rivalry game long ignored by the rest of the country -- drew a 6.6, well above the network's season average of

3.9. This season, CBS recorded its highest college football ratings since 1999 and ESPN had its most viewers for college football since 1994.

"Whether you like the BCS or don't like the BCS, no matter how cynical you may be, you have to agree it has contributed to the popularity of college football, particularly in the regular season," said Slive. "Years ago, when Hawaii played Boise State, it was of interest solely to those communities. It's now of interest to everyone."

The other common argument against a playoff -- the one regarding academics -- tends to draw more rolled eyes from the public. University presidents have repeatedly stressed their opposition to any postseason arrangement that would interfere with first-semester finals (usually held in mid-December) or would carry the season into a second semester (usually starting in mid-January).

Playoff proponents counter that plenty of other sports, such as baseball and basketball, cross over two semesters (though those sports also account for many of the NCAA's lowest APR scores), and that Divisions I-AA, II and III all hold their playoffs during the mid-December finals season.

"Don't insult my intelligence," said Tranghese. "Don't compare I-AA football to I-A football. Appalachian State-Delaware, that's a great game, but they are not operating in the limelight that I-A is. For anyone to think there could be a I-A playoff during exams -- the press demands, the television demands, they're just huge."

"People criticize us for low graduation rates -- then those same people want us to play playoffs during exams."

Many of those same concerns will come up in the discussion of a plus-one, but apparently they're not so mitigating as to hinder interest.

"A plus-one," said Tranghese, "is not a playoff."

That much is clear, if for no other reason than the fact that executives for most of the major bowls -- which, understandably, are opposed to a full-scale playoff -- are supportive of the plus-one concept. Rather than diminishing their games' importance, as a playoff would, the bowls see a plus-one as a possible upside for their business.

"A plus-one is helpful because it gives every major bowl the opportunity to have the winner of that game mean something," said Fiesta Bowl CEO John Junker. "We're bowl enthusiasts, and we think there's plenty of meaning in the games already, but if we can add even more meaning, that's a positive."

"We're open to it. We certainly are," said Orange Bowl CEO Eric Poms. "Anything that enhances the

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meaning of your bowl game as it relates to a national-title game is worth considering."

Other leaders across the sport are interested as well. "My view is very similar to Mike Slive's," said Swofford. "I think the plus-one model deserves to receive consideration and discussion."

"I am hearing all the clamoring for a plus-one," said Tranghese. "Our conference is interested in listening to everything."

"What effect would [a plus-one] have had in the history of BCS?" said Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe. "I think it could have provided the Big 12 a number of opportunities to participate in the semifinals."

Even NCAA President Myles Brand -- whose organization would have to sign off on an extra game -- recently voiced his support for a plus-one. "I have some concerns about the academic side," Brand told *USA Today* recently. "But two teams? I don't think that's overwhelming."

By no means, however, should one view such sentiments as a sign that change is imminent. "I haven't had a direct conversation with Mike [Slive] about [the plus-one], but I'm surprised he's so interested in going forward," said Pac-10 commissioner Hansen. "Because the Big Ten and Pac-10 have made it clear we're not interested in that."

Delany, the Big Ten commissioner, declined to be interviewed for this story, but recently told *Sports Illustrated* his conference's original decision to join the BCS "was not considered the first step toward a playoff, but the last step."

Determining a True Champion

Officials across the sport universally agree that despite the criticism, the 10-year-old BCS has accomplished precisely what it was designed to do since its 1998 inception: turn what used to be a sporadic occurrence -- the No. 1 and 2 teams met in a bowl game just 11 times from 1936 to '97-- into an annual event.

That the plus-one discussion has even reached their agenda is an acknowledgment of the increasing difficulty and ambiguity in determining those two teams. Earlier controversies surrounding a particular title-game participant -- such as Nebraska's 2001 inclusion following a 62-26 loss to Colorado in its regular-season finale, or USC's 2003 exclusion despite finishing No. 1 in both the AP and coaches polls -- were addressed by near-annual tweaks to the BCS standings.

The current ratings system, however -- which primarily emphasizes the opinions of human voters -- has remained virtually unchanged since 2004, yet only once in

the past four seasons (in 2005, when USC and Texas were the nation's only undefeated teams) has there been an absence of controversy regarding the championship matchup. Following an upset-riddled 2007 regular season, voters were left to choose between a cluster of similarly accomplished one- or two-loss teams, ultimately tabbing 11-1 Ohio State and 11-2 LSU over 11-2 Oklahoma, 10-2 Georgia and others.

"In a year like this, while most people view the two teams that are playing in the national championship game as being deserving, you could also make the case for another team when you look at its body of work over the entire season," said Swofford. "In some people's minds, that means maybe more than two [teams] should have that opportunity."

How exactly a plus-one would work remains entirely undecided. Any number of potential models could be up for discussion, though all generally fall into one of two categories: a seeded plus-one or a pure plus-one.

A seeded plus-one is exactly like it sounds -- the top four teams at the end of the regular season would meet each other (No. 1 playing No. 4, No. 2 playing No. 3) in two of the BCS bowls. (Because the BCS wants to remain at 10 berths, a fifth non-title game -- either a newly created one or an existing one like the Capital One or Cotton -- would likely need to be added.) The winners would advance to the championship game, which, conveniently, is already being played about a week after New Year's.

Most proponents of a plus-one feel this would be the most effective format. "We've had quite a few years where there were three unbeaten or three one-loss teams," said Junker. "Unless you have two of them playing in a bowl game, you still might end up with three unbeaten or three one-loss teams."

A seeded plus-one probably seems insufficient to resolve this year's controversy, considering it would have included two teams (No. 3 Virginia Tech and No. 4 Oklahoma) that have since lost their BCS games while excluding two others (No. 5 Georgia and No. 7 USC) that dominated theirs. Most observers agree, however, that 2007 was an anomaly, considering there had never been more than four popular title claimants in any of the BCS' previous nine seasons.

That said, a seeded plus-one is sure to be met with considerable resistance from the Big Ten, Pac-10 and Rose Bowl. The Pasadena game -- which has a relationship with the two conferences dating back to 1946 -- has lost at least one league's champion to another site six of the past seven seasons. There was no Big Ten-Pac-10 matchup in four of the five seasons from 2001-05.

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"The idea at the time [of the BCS' original creation] was we would lose a team potentially once every three to four years, based on the rankings the previous 10 to 15 years," said Rose Bowl CEO Mitch Dorger. "Coach Tressel and Coach Carroll appear on the scene, and all of a sudden we are almost perennially losing one of our champions. That has had a negative effect. It's impacted the tradition of the Rose Bowl."

A seeded plus-one would presumably require releasing those champions if they were ranked Nos. 3 and 4 as well, which would only increase the frequency of such occurrences.

"We're not in favor of a seeded event that would break up conference tie-ins," said Hansen.

A pure plus-one would theoretically alleviate those concerns. All of the BCS bowls would host their traditional partner conferences' champions, regardless of ranking, and then the BCS' No. 1 and 2 teams left standing would advance to the title game.

The biggest positive to such a plan is that, in the event of upsets, the two title participants could theoretically emerge from nearly any of the major games, increasing the magnitude of all. The downside, as Junker noted, is that it might not solve much of anything.

"If you don't seed, you don't really have a fair system," said Hansen. "The No. 1 conference champion might end up playing the No. 2 team, and then you haven't accomplished anything except prolong the season. And if you do seed, you're going to have to take teams out of their traditional bowls, and we're very much opposed to that."

That, in a nutshell, sums up the political quagmire Slive will likely face come April.

Television Influence

The first official proposal to move to a plus-one was made not by Slive or any of the other commissioners, but by a since-retired television executive. In February 2004, at a meeting in Miami, a group of presidents from the BCS and non-BCS schools -- with the help of NCAA president Brand -- stunned officials across the sport by agreeing on their own to a revised BCS format that added a fifth bowl and loosened eligibility requirements for champions from conferences without automatic bids. (Boise State and Hawaii's berths the past two seasons were made possible by the agreement.)

Unexcited by the seemingly watered-down system, ABC senior vice president for programming Loren Matthews -- whose network's original, eight-year deal with the BCS was about to come up for renewal -- proposed

an alternative plan at the BCS' meetings in Phoenix two months later involving a pure plus-one.

When BCS officials balked, Matthews, whose network had seen its ratings for the non-championship BCS games decline and claimed to have lost money on its original investment -- chose to re-up solely with the Rose Bowl, paying a reported \$300 million to air the eight Rose Bowl games and two national-title games to be played in Pasadena from 2007-14. Fox stepped in to claim the rights to the Fiesta, Sugar and Orange bowls, paying a reported \$320 million for the 2007-10 games (which includes three championship games). The deal represented a meager five percent spike from what ABC had been paying.

Both the BCS and Fox have been pleasantly surprised by the newly forged relationship. Following initial concerns about Fox's ability to promote the games without any regular-season college football package, last year's Ohio State-Florida championship game drew a 17.4 rating, the third-highest of the nine BCS title games played to date. Fox reportedly sold nearly all its ad time for the four 2008 bowls (at a cost of \$500,000 for a 30-second commercial, \$900,000 during the championship game) before the teams were even announced.

At least one of Matthews' concerns has come to fruition. The three BCS bowl games to date involving non-BCS teams -- Utah-Pittsburgh (2005), Oklahoma-Boise State (2007) and Georgia-Hawaii (2008) -- have produced three of the four lowest-rated broadcasts in BCS history. That hasn't seemed to deter Fox's enthusiasm.

"We love the relationship," said Fox Sports President Ed Goren, whose network's coverage has included live pregame shows from all four bowls and a dramatically enhanced BCS Selection Show. "It's our top priority to extend the relationship, whatever format it ends up."

Meanwhile, ABC/ESPN -- whose season-long ads this season proudly proclaimed that "College Football Lives Here" -- is itching to reclaim its stranglehold on the postseason. Matthews retired in 2006. His replacement, Chuck Gerber, executive vice president for college sports programming, has hinted at regret over ceding the BCS rights to Fox. ("Some of those who made those decisions are no longer in the same positions they were then," he recently told the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*.)

"I've said to [the commissioners] on behalf of ESPN and ABC that we'd be interested in getting back in the BCS business," Gerber told SI.com.

Four years after accepting a lowball offer from Fox just to keep its product afloat, BCS officials could find themselves at the center of a bidding war next time

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around. (Fox has an exclusive negotiating window before other networks could make a bid.) Analysts have estimated a plus-one model could generate an additional \$40 to \$50 million annually, about a 50 percent hike from the current deal.

Both Goren and Gerber said they are content with the current format -- but it's no secret their ratings would benefit from an added layer to the postseason.

"There's a difference between making a suggestion and trying to force policy," said Gerber. "We were supportive of the plus-one the last time around. If the Rose Bowl decides they want to be part of it, we're going to find a way to make sure our agreement [can be revised]. But it's not going to be up to us to convince them to go one way or the other."

Added Gerber: "I think the fan base is going to get them to have to seriously consider making some sort of switch to a plus-one."

ABC's degree of flexibility could play a key role in determining whether the Big Ten/Pac-10/Rose Bowl ultimately soften their plus-one stance, as officials from all three parties consistently cite their extended contract with the network as a mitigating factor. "We've got an eight-year deal between the Big Ten and the Pac-10 and the Rose Bowl and ABC," Delany told SI. "We intend to honor that agreement."

A Long Way from Reality

Television arrangements are hardly the only issue Slive and other plus-one advocates will have to work through. Among the other chief questions: How would the rotation work regarding the semifinal sites? Would one of the current BCS sites still host the championship game? And logistically, how difficult would it be for two teams to play an extra game on roughly a week's notice?

"If we had our druthers, we'd like to keep the double-hosting model," said Sugar Bowl CEO Paul Hoolahan. "[Hosting the title game every] five years is not a desirable proposition, because we can't entice the sponsors if the separation is that far in between."

One question that can't possibly be answered ahead of time is how a plus-one would impact fans' attitude toward the bowl games. Would fans of the top-ranked teams still travel en masse to the New Year's games? Or would they hold off in hopes of a potential championship appearance? And considering it's unlikely a large number of fans would be able to travel to a bowl site two straight weeks, who would fill their seats? Would the championship game come to mirror the NFL's Super Bowl, where the spectators are predominately sponsors

and other corporate types?

Opinions vary among bowl organizers. Junker said his game would likely counter reduced bowl travel by selling more local tickets, and that the continued impact of hosting the championship game every four years would help "make it work." The Rose Bowl's Dorger, on the other hand -- whose game allocates nearly twice as many tickets to the participating schools (62,000) as the other BCS games (35,000) -- is more worried about potential ramifications.

"If [the Rose Bowl] is a semifinal game, I don't know how much [fan] support there would be," said Dorger. "If I'm hosting the championship game, and I don't know who the teams are until a week ahead of time, that's a terribly difficult task."

Slive, a former lawyer who's brokered his share of negotiations, has presumably factored these and other contingencies into his ongoing analysis. Nearly all the affected parties will be in the room in Miami in April when the much-anticipated discussion finally takes place.

Following those meetings, the BCS commissioners will bring their own recommendations and conclusions back to their respective conference's presidents and athletic directors at each league's annual spring meetings in May and June. Whether any formative change actually gets pushed through will ultimately depend on whether the plus-one proponents can somehow convince the Big Ten and Pac-10 to go along with it.

"There are six [BCS] conferences, and one-third of the six are not favorable to a certain position," said Beebe. "We have to face the reality of what that means and if there can be any persuasion. How persuasive can our position be?"

Some, like Sun Belt commissioner Wright Waters, are optimistic. "I think there's a lot of talent in that room right now," he said. "It's the best spirit of cooperation that I've seen in the room in the long time."

Others, like Traghese, remain supportive but cynical. "Even if the details can be worked out, it's still going to take everybody to agree to do this, and I just don't think the support is there," he said. "I may be wrong, but I don't think I will be."

Meanwhile, the man who's most championing the plus-one cause remains coy about its prospects. "There is no model or solution that will satisfy everyone," said Slive. "What each of us has to do is determine what's in the long-term best interest of the game, and what's in the long-term best interest of our conference."

In other words, can a plus-one encompass both agendas? Plenty of reasonable minds across the sport think it can, but it's going to require a gigantic dose of compromise by a group of vastly conflicting parties.

Loose deadline: Brett McMurphy

Comment of the judge, Gene Duffey: The writer delivered all the key information in the first paragraph, then followed that up with a great quote about how the player "doesn't know how to spell" and "cheats." Further quotes from the wife are very powerful, such as "He's been awful to me and the kids." Also liked how the defensive coordinator contradicted the statement by the grad assistant. Good job talking to every one involved, including those non-denial quotes from the player and his lawyer.

By BRETT McMURPHY
The Tampa Tribune

TAMPA - Shauna Moffitt, the wife of University of South Florida senior linebacker Ben Moffitt, said she wrote nearly every paper for him during his five years at USF and also completed two online courses for him.

"Ben Moffitt has never written a paper," Shauna said. "Never. Ever. I love him, but he doesn't know how to spell. He cheats."

Ben Moffitt, 23, who filed for divorce on Thursday from his wife of five years, called the accusations "hearsay. That's all I can say. It's very unfortunate for my kids," he said, referring all questions to his attorneys. Ben Moffitt left his wife and 5-year-old son and 3-year-old daughter on Nov. 11, Shauna said.

Shauna Moffitt, 26, e-mailed to The Tampa Tribune copies of six assignments she said she wrote for her husband between Jan. 17, 2007, and Oct. 10, 2007. She said she wrote all of the assignments on her computer at the Sumter County appraiser's office, where she is a data specialist.

Sheree Ellis, Shauna's twin sister, also provided copies of three papers from her home computer in Wildwood that she said she wrote for Ben Moffitt when he was pursuing an education degree. Those papers are dated between Nov. 6, 2005, and March 24, 2006. Stephanie Jordan, the mother of Shauna and Sheree, said she was aware her daughters wrote papers for Ben.

A four-year starter at USF, Ben Moffitt completed his eligibility in Monday's Sun Bowl. If it is found that Moffitt committed academic fraud, the school could be subject to NCAA investigation.

USF coach Jim Leavitt would not comment. Defensive coordinator Wally Burnham, who is Moffitt's linebackers coach, said he had no knowledge of Moffitt not doing his own school work.

"It's hearsay, it's a domestic issue and there's nothing at this point to consider," university spokesman Ken Gullette said.

Ben Moffitt retained attorneys Mary Hatcher and A.J. Roye on Thursday. Roye would not address the specific

Brett McMurphy – Tampa Tribune

Age: 46

College: Oklahoma State

Background: McMurphy has worked at the *Tribune* since 1987, where he has covered high schools and colleges, including the last nine years as the beat writer for the University of South Florida. Before coming to Tampa, he worked two years at the *Odessa American*, covering Permian High School. A native of Oklahoma City, McMurphy has won an APSE award and has received three FWAA honorable mentions. He and his wife, Susan, have a 4-year old daughter, Chesney.



allegations that Moffitt's wife did his class work and online courses.

"Our comment is the media is the improper place to try these things," Roye said. "But without a doubt, she's attempting to damage him. Whether it's true or not, she's attempting to damage his reputation and will have an effect on his children and she's harming the family."

Among the papers Ellis said she wrote for Moffitt and provided to the Tribune was one for his Intro to Education and Field Experience class in which Moffitt described visiting Ellis' first-grade class. Ellis said it was part of Moffitt's class requirement to observe 15 hours during a semester.

However, Ellis said Moffitt never observed her classroom, but she filled out the paperwork indicating he had.

"He asked me for my help," Ellis said. "I knew he had football. He was a dad, he was going to school. I wanted to help, because everything I did to help was for him to get his degree and help Shauna and the children."

Ellis said she stopped writing papers for Moffitt in the spring of 2006 when he changed his major from education to communications. USF sports information director Chris Freet confirmed that Moffitt's major is communications.

Moffitt carried 14 hours this past semester.

The Moffitts were married June 16, 2002, the summer before Ben's senior year at South Sumter High School.

After Ben left the family on Nov. 11, the Sunday after USF played Syracuse, Shauna said she didn't know

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Loose deadline (continued)

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Ben's whereabouts and that he stopped using his scholarship money to make the mortgage payment.

Frustrated, Shauna said she drove to Tampa on Dec. 3 and went to the USF coaching offices, where she talked to graduate assistant Patrick St. Louis.

"Pat's exact words: 'I know your name should be on that diploma. I know you did all the work,'" Shauna said.

St. Louis denied that conversation took place. He said he hasn't seen Shauna since "one of the football games" and he did not talk to her in the coaches' office. Burnham said he met with Shauna on Dec. 3 in his office and remembered seeing St. Louis talking with Shauna.

Burnham said his conversation with Shauna was about the Moffitts' marital situation and nothing was mentioned about academic accusations.

Shauna said neither Burnham nor Leavitt was aware she had written papers for Ben, but it was common knowledge among the players, including St. Louis, who played linebacker the past four years and is in his first season as a graduate assistant at USF.

"We were a team," Shauna said. "I did the papers in order for Ben to play. I'd write his paper and he'd go clean the kitchen.

"I wrote those papers because I love him and I was trying to help our future. I don't want to do anything that

won't please Christ. I'm tired of him [being portrayed] as Mr. Wonderful. He's been awful, awful to me and these kids for two months."

Shauna initially e-mailed the Tribune on Thursday morning that Ben was being falsely portrayed in the media.

USF had heavily promoted Moffitt to the media as a devout family man, pushing him for national honors with the phrase: "Linebacker. Leader. Husband. Father."

He was the focus of features by the New York Times and ESPN in part because of his daily 110-mile round-trip drive from the family's South Sumter home to USF.

He earned All-Big East honors, was a third-team All-American and was nominated for various national defensive awards, including the Butkus Award and Lott Trophy.

In El Paso, Texas, last week for the Sun Bowl, Moffitt talked about the difficulty of his five years juggling school, family and football.

"It's extremely hard, but you find a way to do it," Moffitt said. "It's been a long road the last five years."

Moffitt is projected as USF's third-best NFL draft prospect and is expected to be a mid-round selection.

"I'm not a liar, I don't have anything to hide," Shauna said. "I'm still supporting Ben. We have two children.

"I keep waking up and hoping he wakes up. This isn't the real Ben."



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