Watching Monday

Watching Monday's thrilling finish to the Boise State-Oklahoma game led to one undeniable conclusion: the BCS should be disbanded. Boise State's victory didn't so much make the case for a playoff system as much as it made the case that the BCS Championship Series is a worthless veneer that has served only to minimize the impact of any bowl game not labeled "The National Championship."

It's pretty clear at this point that we are years away, at the earliest, of ever having a true playoff system at the Division I level. If you saw the article in last Sunday's New York Times (see the article here) it's clear that the major college presidents simply have no interest in disaffiliating with the bowl game structure that has served them well and paid them handsomely for so many years. That being the case, continuing to try to pound the square hole that is the BCS into the round hole that is the traditional bowl games ends up creating a situation that ends up satisfying no one.

The only thing the BCS really has done is to make virtually every bowl game meaningless except the final game. In the process, fan interest in the bridesmaid games has dwindled and it wouldn't surprise anyone if the Fox suffers a ratings nightmare for all but the Ohio State-Florida game next week in Glendale.

Which takes us back to the Boise State-Oklahoma game. Going in, it held some intrigue in that Boise State crashed the BCS party like a little Peter Brady wearing a fake moustache and tagging along on his brother Greg's date. Some of us wanted to see if Boise State could pull off

the con, if it was really who it was portrayed to be. Whether Oklahoma took Boise State too lightly (which seemed pretty apparent, particularly at the outset) or whether Boise State was better than advertised, or both, this game was as exciting as the Ohio State-Miami national championship game in 2002. The problem is, how many actually watched or cared? Not many, not many.

Even the Michigan-USC Rose Bowl suffered by being an also-ran bowl, despite the fact that it featured a traditional Big 10-Pac-10 match-up. There were some commentators who tried to build some extra-game excitement by suggesting that if Michigan handled USC and Florida beats Ohio State then maybe, just maybe, Michigan might be crowned national champs by the Associated Press. But that was just so much puffing. No one actually bought into it, particularly since, with the advent of the BCS, no one cares much who the Associated Press votes as its number one team. The BCS, through extreme marketing, has done a marvelous job of insinuating itself in the national psyche as the purveyor of the only true national champion. Besides, by contract, the coaches are obligated to vote the winner of the BCS National Championship game as *the* national champion.

The major bowl games date back to the days long before television had any say in sporting events. At that time, teams rarely ventured outside of their region to play opponents. The bowl games served as a way of bringing together the best teams from different regions of the country in one final celebration of college football. While a national champion was still being crowned each year that was hardly the focus of the bowl games.

But, as with everything, if something is worth doing it is also worth finding out who does it best. That's our nature. We want to know if this player is better than that player, if this team is better than that team. But, as with everything, eventually our wants became our needs and it was no longer good enough to debate among several worthy teams in college football which was the best that year. We needed a system. But this need has clashed head on with the college presidents strong desire to keep the bowl games. As a result, we've jerry-rigged a system that not only doesn't definitively accomplish what it sought out to do, but is chock full of all sorts of unintended results.

It's clear, for example, that until a few years ago, a team like Boise State would never have gotten into a BCS game. Even now, the chances of more than one Boise State-type team

clawing its way into a BCS game are virtually nil. It's also clear that whichever team gets anointed as the pre-season number one has a berth assured in next year's BCS championship game if only they can run the table during the 2007 season. This year, Ohio State had that privilege and obligation. Even if it wins next Monday, it looks like the media geniuses will place that yoke around USC's necks given their performance against a highly overrated Michigan team in the Rose Bowl. It's just the way the BCS works.

But the current system's biggest sin is that it has robbed fans of compelling match-ups that possibly carried some additional significance and has replaced it with a system in which only one game really matters. And, as a result, the fans have responded with abject indifference to anything but the championship game.

To say that a playoff system would solve all of this is convenient because it's true. But to also say that we aren't likely to see a playoff system in this or any other lifetime is just as convenient because it's just as true. Given this fact, it seems rather ridiculous to continue to pretend that a definitive way to pick the national champion exists. Instead, we should go back to where we were before the BCS mess was foisted upon us and return the bowl games to the glory they once served. It may not settle any arguments about which team is better in any given year, but at least it would give us a reason to want to watch the other bowl games.