With college football's regular season down to its final week, Jesse checks in to take a look back at some of the year's superlatives, developing storylines, and musings on the game, as we move closer and closer to what passes for crowning a champion in this sport. Jesse hands out his awards, reflects on the season, and has the Buckeyes with an appealing opponent in the Sugar Bowl in his BCS bowl projections.

With college football's regular season down to its final week, let's take a look back at some of the year's superlatives, developing storylines, and musings on the game, as we move closer and closer to what passes for crowning a champion in this sport.

Best Team of the Regular Season: Florida- The 11-1 Gators have won every game by at least 23 points and lost their only game by one. They're outscoring their opponents 556-147 and are third in the nation in scoring offense, fourth in scoring defense. With the exception of the loss to a solid Ole Miss team, Florida hasn't played in a competitive game all season. Not leaving the state out of conference helps, as well as playing Hawaii and the Citadel, but the Gators have the bona-fides, as well as Tim Tebow, who has thrown two interceptions this year- two- and is back in Heisman form.

By the way, Alabama is getting precious little respect for a team that ran the table

in the SEC. Nine-and-a-half point dogs to Florida? Where is Corky Simpson when you need him?

Worst Team of the Regular Season: North Texas- The 1-11 Mean Green lost nine games by 28 points or more, including a 77-20 flattening by Rice on September 27, and needed to rally late to get their only win over Western Kentucky after blowing a 17-point second-half lead. Quite a comedown from a program that won three straight Sun Belt Conference titles earlier in this decade.

Best Game of the Regular Season: I'll put forth the November 1 Big Ten slate: Northwestern beats Minnesota on a last-second interception return, Michigan State rallies to beat Wisconsin on a last-second field goal, Illinois beats Iowa on a last-second field goal, and Purdue beats Michigan on a last-minute hook-and-lateral, all in the same afternoon.

Player of the Year: Chase Clement, Rice- The heir to a Rice quarterback tradition that includes King Hill, Frank Ryan, Tobin Rote, and Tommy Kramer, Clement passed for 3,880 yards and 41 touchdowns, ran for 621 and 11, and was the triggerman for a team that went from three wins in 2007 to nine in 2008. With Clement at the controls and a pair of 1,000-yard receivers in Jarett Dillard and James Casey, the Owls will have a great shot at their first postseason victory since beating Alabama in the 1954 Cotton Bowl.

Coach of the Year: Brady Hoke, Ball State- Just so Jason Whitlock doesn't find me and fold, spindle, and mutilate me in one of his Fox Sports columns/jeremiads. Or sit on me.

Freshman of the Year: Jacquizz Rodgers, Oregon State: The Quizz Show ran

for 1,253 yards, caught 29 passes, and scored 12 touchdowns, and had the 5'6" dynamo from Texas stayed healthy for one more game, he might have carried the Beavers all the way to the Rose Bowl.

Quarterback State of the Year: Texas- Five of the quarterbacks ranked in the top 12 of passer rating- Colt McCoy, Chase Daniel, Chase Clement, Graham Harrell, and Case Keenum of Houston- hail from the Lone Star State, as do Matthew Stafford, Jevan Snead, Brian Johnson of Utah, Robert Griffin, and Todd Reesing. Pretty impressive group, and for all I know I'm missing some other good ones.

Most Pleasant Surprise: Buffalo- the Bulls hadn't had a winning season since moving up to I-A in 1999 and in the last decade have endured losing streaks of 14, 18, and 10 games, among others. This week, having already clinched a winning record at 7-5, the Bulls will play for the Mid-America Conference championship. Better enjoy Turner Gill while you can, Bulls fans.

Biggest Disappointment: LSU- There was some ugly seasons by traditional powers in 2008, but nobody saw this kind of meltdown coming out of Baton Rouge. Ryan Perrilioux's ejection from the program was the killer; LSU quarterbacks completed barely 50 percent of their passes and threw 18 interceptions, seven of which were returned for touchdowns. Throw in an imploding defense, and you get a 7-5 record, 3-5 in the SEC- a drastic slide for a defending MNC. Included in the swoon were home losses to Georgia, Alabama and Ole Miss, a 51-21 beat-down at Florida, and the near-catastrophe against Troy. A year ago, Leslie the Hat was hailed as a mad genius. Now LSU fans have to hope he isn't merely the second coming of Mike Archer.

Not Michigan? Nope, not Michigan. I expected them to suck.

The Geeks Shall Inherit the Earth... or at least some mid-tier bowl games: Rice wasn't the only academics-heavy school that prospered in 2008.

Northwestern went 9-3, finished with a winning record in the Big Ten, and has a crack at a January 1 bowl game. Vanderbilt is going bowling for the first time since 1982. Stanford was done in by a schedule with only five home games, and Duke sagged down the stretch, but both programs show tangible signs of moving in the right direction.

You don't want to face... Ole Miss: The only team to conquer Florida- and they did it in Gainesville- the Rebs also made Alabama sweat in Tuscaloosa and roll into bowl season riding a five-game winning streak that includes two shutouts and a 31-13 road whipping of LSU. Suddenly the SEC doesn't look like such a two-team league anymore. With strength on both lines and Jevan Snead at quarterback, Ole Miss will be a load for whoever they face in whatever bowl they play (probably the Cotton).

You do want to face... Notre Dame: The Irish stagger into bowl season with four losses in five games, and looked horrible in their last four against BC, Navy, Syracuse and USC. Charlie Weis's job status is openly in question, Irish students pelted their own players with ice-balls... it's just a bad scene in South Bend these days. Someone is going to get healthy at the expense of Notre Dame in bowl season, not exactly a new development.

How about a BSU Bowl? Boise State is 12-0 and ranked a healthy ninth in the BCS standings, but the chances that the Broncos will land an actual BCS bid ahead of 10-2, tenth-ranked Ohio State inhabit the gray area between slim and none. Ball State is 12-0 with the MAC title game against Buffalo still to play, but the Cards have no shot at the BCS. As of now- although the Poinsettia Bowl would love to arrange a Boise-TCU match-up- the two unbeaten teams are headed to automatic bids for the Humanitarian and Motor City Bowls, respectively, where they will face middle-tier foes from the ACC and Big Ten. Giddy-up.

A match-up between the Broncos and Cardinals has been discussed . The problem is the venue. Shockingly, Ball State doesn't want to play in Boise, and

Boise State doesn't want to play in Detroit. How about this: With Utah BCS-bound, the Las Vegas Bowl's Mountain West auto-bid has been vacated. Instead of wasting the vacancy on those Mormon squares from BYU, how about setting aside the Vegas Bowl for a match-up between Boise State and Ball State? It's a fairly convenient trip for Boise fans, and plenty of Ball State partisans will want to leave snowy Indiana for a holiday in Vegas- enough to help fill up 37,000-seat Sam Boyd Stadium, at any rate. A made-for-TV battle of unbeatens in Sin City beats than relegating these two accomplished teams to a drab, cold-weather fate.

BCS-related cluster* of the year:*** Oklahoma is headed to the Big 12 Championship Game in Kansas City instead of Texas, despite UT's 45-35 victory over the Sooners in October, because the conference uses the BCS standings as a tiebreaker, and because Oklahoma, for whatever reason, is ahead of Texas in the BCS standings. So much for that airy "the regular season *is* the playoff" talk idiots like me engage in. The Big 12 would be better off with a three-way coin flip between the coaches at a West Texas truck stop, *a la* "Friday Night Lights."

If the regular season really was the playoff, here's how it should work for the Big 12 South: Texas Tech is out, not because of the nightmare in Norman, but because the Red Raiders have two wins over FCS teams (Eastern Washington and UMass.) Then you put Texas ahead of Oklahoma, because the Longhorns beat the Sooners at the neutral site in Dallas. The University of Texas would be the Big 12 South champion, the championship won on the field, at the State Fairgrounds in October. It's that simple.

Instead, it's going to go like this. Oklahoma will beat Missouri in the Big 12 title game, go to the BCS Championship and get housed by an SEC opponent that will make big plays against the Sooner defense, cave in the Sooner offensive line, hit Sam Bradford repeatedly, and force turnovers that will snowball the game into a rout. Meanwhile Texas, which has a mobile quarterback, at least *tries* to play defense, hasn't been dump-trucked in four straight BCS games, and again, BEAT OKLAHOMA ON THE FIELD AT A NEUTRAL SITE, will go to the Fiesta Bowl, an

outcome which is great for that game, not so much for the rest of us.

I'm not sold on Oklahoma. The TCU and Cincinnati wins are nice, but the Sooners don't have an impressive road resume, and they lost their only meeting with an elite opponent away from Norman. They don't play good defense. The Bedlam Game was a travesty; great teams shouldn't play in 102-point games- that stuff is for BYU-San Diego State circa 1991. And yeah, I'm holding their recent bowl history against them. If people want to do the same to Ohio State, so be it. I'm doing it to Oklahoma. Hopefully the Sooners will lose the Big 12 title game to Missouri. Alas, that probably isn't going to happen, although playing in Kansas City might help Gary Pinkel's team.

The BCS bowls, sans the BCS:

Rose Bowl (Big 10 vs. Pac-10): Penn State vs. USC

Orange Bowl (Big 12 vs. at-large): Texas vs. Alabama

Sugar Bowl (SEC vs. at-large): Florida vs. Oklahoma

Fiesta Bowl (at-large vs. at-large): Ohio State vs. Utah

Is this really less preferable to what we're going to get, and if so, how?

Question for advocates of an eight-team playoff consisting of the six BCS-conference champions and two at-large teams: Why would you replace the BCS yet preserve the artificial and outmoded "power conference" status conferred on the ACC and Big East by the BCS system?

My playoff idea? Sixteen teams bracketed 1-16, automatic bids for every conference champion, five at-large bids with no Notre Dame guarantee of any kind, and, at minimum, first-round games held at campus sites. That, or go back to the old bowl system. Either way, enough of this foolishness with computers.

Bowl I'd like to see: Iowa vs. Missouri in the Alamo Bowl- Iowa's Shonn Greene-led ground game and Mizzou's Chase Daniel-led passing attack meet in San Antonio in a clash for border bragging rights. It'd be the biggest donnybrook between the two states since Iowa's Samuel Curtis and Missouri's Sterling Price exchanged musketry at the
Battle of Pea Ridge
.

BCS Bowl Predictions

Rose: Penn State vs. USC- Oregon State can still make the Pasadena trip if USC loses to UCLA on Saturday, but I wouldn't bet the ranch on that outcome. A lot of people don't think Penn State can compete in this game, to which I ask- when do you remember the Nittany Lions ever looking really bad in a bowl? Penn State *will* show up.

Orange: Virginia Tech vs. Cincinnati- The ACC hasn't won a BCS game since 2000, but the conference, derided early, was deeper and tough in 2008 than it has been in quite a while, and this could be the year it breaks its onerous losing streak against the Bearcats, who help make Ohio the only state with multiple BCS entrants. Remember when the Orange Bowl used to decide
National Champions
? Now it's a balmier, more expensive version of the Cotton Bowl.

Fiesta: Texas vs. Utah- There's talk that the Fiesta Bowl will invite Ohio State over Utah, but seeing as the game has all but secured the massive drawing power of Texas, I think (okay, hope) the bid will go to the undefeated Utes, a western

team that played well here in 2005. Maybe that's wishful thinking- actually it is wishful thinking- because I'd rather the Buckeyes not play in a Monday night game if there is an ideal alternative. And there is.

Sugar: Alabama vs. Ohio State- A January 2 re-match of the 1978 Sugar Bowl provides a chance to wrench the SEC monkey off the back of the OSU program and is on a Friday night, ideal for game-related merriment. Whether the Buckeyes could beat the Tide is another thing altogether- I'm not at all sure that Ohio State's offensive line could handle 'Bama's front four- but they're not going to fly in Mississippi State for us, so there's no sense in bemoaning the match-up. I do think the Buckeyes will play well in whatever bowl game they attend. The seniors will lead, Beanie will be relatively healthy, Terrelle will be confident, and the team shouldn't lose its composure like it did against Florida, LSU and USC.

BCS Championship: Florida vs. Oklahoma- Grumble, grumble. Seeing Ashtabula St. John's grad Urban Meyer and Cardinal Mooney grad Bob Stoops square off would be nice, for state pride. Otherwise, though...