New Year's Day is the traditional final day of the college football season. Unfortunately, it isn't that way anymore. The advent of the BCS and the expansion of the bowl field stretched the season more than a week beyond the first day of the year, an uncomfortable situation that turns this wonderful sport into a visitor that overstays his welcome. With the NFL Playoffs and the college basketball conference season underway and the NBA season heating up (at least in cities other than Cleveland) it's tough to stay interested in college football, autumn's sport, in the second week of January. But, these are the times in which we live.

Fortunately there is still a nice slate of games to be played on New Year's Day, from noon to night, and here they are. So sit back on the sofa, nurse that hangover and take in the action as twelve teams duel in six New Year's Day bowl games.

Saturday, January 1

Ticket City Bowl (Dallas, TX, 12:00 PM): Northwestern (7-5) vs. Texas Tech (7-5)

Under normal circumstances the Wildcats would have a very good chance against the mediocre Red Raiders, losers to Texas, Iowa State and Colorado. But the loss of Dan Persa crippled Pat Fitzgerald's team, which fell by lopsided scores in its last two regular-season contests against

Illinois and Wisconsin. The Wildcats collapsed defensively down the stretch, giving up 123 points and a whopping 848 yards rushing to the Illini and Badgers. That's bad news against Texas Tech, which finished eighteenth nationally in total offense this season. Northwestern hasn't won a bowl game since 1949. The purple partisans may have to keep waiting for that streak to end.

Whack Predict-O: Texas Tech 45, Northwestern 31

Fun Fact: Two of Texas Tech's last three bowl victories have come over Big Ten opponents. The Red Raiders came back from a 38-7 deficit to defeat Minnesota in the 2006 Insight Bowl and knocked off Michigan State in last season's Alamo Bowl.

Outback Bowl (Tampa, FL, 1:00 PM): Penn State (7-5) vs. Florida (7-5)

The Lions and Gators had similar seasons- same overall record, same 4-4 conference record, same inconsistencies, especially on offense. It's their coaching situations that contrast. While Urban Meyer sits on the sidelines after (temporarily) burning out at the age of 46, Joe Paterno keeps soldiering on at the age of 84. What does this mean for the game? Who knows? What we can count on is unpredictable weather, a sloppy field and a winner that simply makes fewer mistakes than the opponent. That's the Outback Bowl for you.

Whack Predict-O: Florida 17, Penn State 13

Fun Fact: Joe Paterno was an assistant coach for Penn State when the Lions lost their first meeting to Florida in the 1962 Gator Bowl.

Capitol One Bowl (Orlando, FL, 1:00 PM): Michigan State (11-1) vs. Alabama (9-3)

Every year there's a game that could be a BCS bowl if only, well, it wasn't- and this is it. In the days before the BCS Michigan State would be in the Rose Bowl but in this brave new world the

Spartans will be in rainy Orlando to take on defending BCS Champion Alabama, armed with a stable of veteran offensive stars and saddled with a disappointing three losses. Both teams have reason to wish they were someplace else; the edge will go to the team that sucks it up and plays with a chip. Alabama is probably more talented, but Michigan State probably has more to play for. This is Sparty's chance to show it belongs in the elite.

Whack Predict-O: Michigan State 28, Alabama 24

Fun Fact: Nick Saban had a 0-3 record in bowl games as head coach at Michigan State, losing those games by an average score of 45-16.

Gator Bowl (Jacksonville, FL, 1:30 PM): Mississippi State (8-4) vs. Michigan (7-5)

Both the Bulldogs and Wolverines are making their first bowl appearance since the 2007 season, but they arrive in Jacksonville in markedly different frames of mind. For Mississippi State and head coach Dan Mullen a New Year's Day bowl game is a sweet surprise; for Michigan and head coach Rich Rodriguez it's a consolation prize for another disappointing season. The Wolverines rank sixth in the nation in total offense and 107th in total defense; the Bulldogs are solidly mediocre in both categories. Give the edge to Denard Robinson and Company.

Whack Predict-O: Michigan 38, Mississippi State 35

Fun Fact: This matchup comes exactly twenty years after Michigan's only other meeting with a school from Mississippi. The Wolverines buried Ole Miss in the 1991 Gator Bowl , 35-3.

Rose Bowl (Pasadena, CA, 5:00 PM): Texas Christian (12-0) vs. Wisconsin (11-1)

TCU went undefeated behind the nation's best defense in terms of statistics. The Frogs were first in scoring defense, first in total defense, first in pass defense and third in rush defense. But

they haven't seen a team like Wisconsin. The Badgers were perhaps the best team in the country down the stretch, winning their last eight and averaging 42 points per game during that streak. They've won their last three Rose Bowls and are sure to bring a massive crowd of cheese-head supporters to Pasadena. TCU may be regretting a lost opportunity to play for all the marbles, but Gary Patterson's team has as much of a challenge as it could possibly want here.

Whack Predict-O: Wisconsin 27, Texas Christian 14

Fun Fact: The only previous meeting between the schools, in 1970 at Madison, ended in a 14-14 tie.

Fiesta Bowl (Glendale, AZ, 8:30 PM): Oklahoma (11-2) vs. Connecticut (8-4)

If Bob Stoops doesn't get off the BCS schneid this year he never will. Connecticut lost to Temple, Rutgers, Louisville and Michigan- the latter two by 26 and 20 points, respectively- but the Huskies did win the Big East title, which entitles them to a BCS bid. The Sooners bounced back from a frustrating 2009 with eleven wins and their seventh Big 12 title since 2000. They've lost five consecutive BCS bowl games, but that streak will end this season- at least, you'd think it would. Of course, Oklahoma barely beat Big East bottom-feeder Cincinnati , a team U-Conn manhandled by three touchdowns , so you never know. The best chance the Huskies have is to get the ball to running back Jordan Todman, who finished fourth in the nation with 1,574 yards.

Whack Predict-O: Oklahoma 35, Connecticut 10

Fun Fact: The last New England region major college school to win a major bowl game was Boston College, who behind Heisman winner Doug Flutie defeated Houston in the 1985 Cotton Bowl . (This was back when the Cotton was a major bowl.)

I'll be back soon with Part III of the 2010 Bowl Preview covering the post-New Year's Day games, including Ohio State's Sugar Bowl matchup with Arkansas. Make it fun, make it festive and make it safe this New Year's Eve, folks.