The football teams that venture to far-away places and play in half-empty stadiums in December are not the football teams that played in September, October and November. Several- Southern Miss, Toledo, Arkansas State- will be played between teams with either lame-duck or interim coaches. The Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl between Illinois and UCLA is a battle of two teams that fired their head coaches. And there's really no way of knowing how a team will respond to a coaching change. It may be hungry and sharp (West Virginia in the '08 Fiesta Bowl); it may be demoralized and disorganized (Cincinnati in the '10 Sugar Bowl).

You never know how motivated in general a team will be to play in a bowl game, or the affect that motivation- or lack thereof- will affect the game. TCU nearly lost the Poinsettia Bowl due to that lack, coming out flat against an aggressive Louisiana Tech team that was fired up to play in the game. Nebraska beat Washington by 35 points during the 2010 regular season and lost to the Huskies by 12 in the 2010 postseason. Some teams just don't like where they're playing. It's a human emotion, the most unpredictable aspect of sport.

Fortunately, this silly season still gives us great action. Opening Saturday saw two games come down to the final seconds (and congrats to all you OU Bobcat fans for your program's first bowl win), and the Poinsettia Bowl was a riveting affair between powerful TCU and upstart Louisiana Tech, with the Bulldogs coming within a half-quarter of the upset. The Hawaii Bowl between Southern Miss and Nevada was also an excellent game. Seven games will be played between Boxing Day and New Year's Weekend; there will surely be some thrillers in that stew.

One complaint: Boise State played last week against a .500 opponent, a waste for them as a

program and for us as viewers. The Broncos should be playing in January against an opponent worthy of them. It's a sign of this screwed-up season that two of the top eight teams in the country- maybe two of the top five- didn't sniff the BCS, for different reasons. USC because of probation; Boise because, of… I don't know, because of some bullshit in the system.

Believe me- I'm not trying to turn this into a weep-fest for mid-major programs. I just think Boise is one of the best teams in the country and I'd rather watch them play another outstanding team instead of freaking Arizona State.

Hopefully all of you have been happy and safe this holiday season and continue to be so as we move toward the New Year. Season's Greetings and thanks for reading. On to Week Two:

Monday, December 26

Independence Bowl (Shreveport, LA, 5:00 PM): Missouri (7-5) vs. North Carolina (7-5)

It'll be a battle between the irresistible object and the immovable force in the piney uplands of Louisiana, as the Tigers and their yardage-chewing ground game meet the Tarheels and their rugged ground defense. Missouri is led by dual-threat quarterback James Franklin, who threw for 2,740 yards, ran for 839 and accounted for 33 touchdowns with his arm and legs; UNC boasts one of the nation's top receivers in senior Dwight Jones, who made 79 catches for 1,119 yards and 11 scores. These teams last met way back in 1976, when Mizzou defeated UNC in Columbia, 24-3.

Wack Predict-O: Missouri 28, North Carolina 23

Tuesday, December 27

Little Caesars Bowl (Detroit, MI, 4:30 PM): Western Michigan (7-5) vs. Purdue (6-6)

The Boilers are bowling for the first time in Danny Hope's three-year tenure. Their last postseason game took place in Detroit in the '07 Motor City Bowl when they defeated Central Michigan in a wild one, 51-48. Western Michigan has never won a bowl game and hasn't played in one since 2008. The Broncos are playing December football this season thanks largely to quarterback Alex Carder (3,434 yards, 28 touchdowns) and the nation's leading receiver, senior Jordan White (127 catches, 1,646 yards, 16 touchdowns.) Points should be plentiful on the fast track of Ford Field: Purdue is 68th nationally in total defense while Western Michigan is 100th.

Wack Predict-O: Purdue 48, Western Michigan 37

Belk Bowl (Charlotte, NC, 8:00 PM): Louisville (7-5) vs. North Carolina State (7-5)

This game features a matchup of teams that enjoyed successful campaigns despite middling records. Charlie Strong's defensive-minded Cardinals won a share of the Big East title, while Tom O'Brien's Wolfpack finished with rousing victories over ACC Champion Clemson and Maryland to salvage what had been a frustrating season. In sharp contrast to the afternoon game up in Detroit, the evening game down in Charlotte should be low-scoring: N.C. State and Louisville are 93rd and 104th in the nation in total offense, respectively. Expect lots of sacks as well, with both teams ranking in the top twenty in quarterback takedowns.

Wack Predict-O: North Carolina State 19, Louisville 13

Wednesday, December 28

Military Bowl (Washington, DC, 4:30 PM): Toledo (8-4) vs. Air Force (7-5)

If you're an aficionado of the running game, this is the matchup for you. Air Force finished second in the nation in rushing while the Rockets finished 14th. Toledo can throw a little, too, with Eric Page gathering in 112 receptions and the two-headed quarterback monster of Terrance Owens and Austin Dantin combining for 3,210 yards and 30 touchdowns. Overall the Rockets rank eighth in the nation in total offense and have topped the 50-point barrier four times. Though more impressive statistically than the Falcons, Toledo will be at a disadvantage in this game: head coach Tim Beckman is off the scene, having taken the Illinois job earlier this month.

Wack Predict-O: Air Force 41, Toledo 31

Holiday Bowl (San Diego, CA, 8:00 PM): California (7-5) vs. Texas (7-5)

The bloom is off the rose for the once-heralded coaches of these programs. Cal's Jeff Tedford has gone from hot commodity to scrutinized steward of a mediocre team that has gone 20-17 over the last three seasons, while Texas's Mack Brown has limped through back-to-back losing records in conference play, the first time since the Depression that the Longhorns have suffered that fate. For fans of the Golden Bears the matchup presents bittersweet opportunity to settle a longstanding grudge: seven years ago Texas was awarded a Rose Bowl bid over Cal thanks in no small part to Mack Brown's politicking.

Wack Predict-O: Texas 31, California 17

Thursday, December 29

Champs Sports Bowl (Orlando, FL, 5:30 PM): Florida State (8-4) vs. Notre Dame (8-4)

It's been a season of frustration for a pair of programs that harbored BCS dreams back in August. Brian Kelly's Irish were waylaid by back-to-back losses to start the season while Jimbo Fisher's Seminoles were in the top five before a three-game losing streak in September and

October. Both teams have an appetite for self-destruction: Notre Dame's turnover ratio is a woeful -13, while FSU is the most penalized team in the nation, committing 8.2 per game. It's a battle between talented teams that can't seem to get out of their own way; the difference may lie in Florida State's defense, which finished 6th nationally in yards allowed, racked up 37 sacks and faces a Notre Dame offense seemingly addicted to red-zone fumbles.

Wack Predict-O: Florida State 26, Notre Dame 20

Alamo Bowl (San Antonio, TX, 9:00 PM): Baylor (9-3) vs. Washington (7-5)

Heisman Trophy winner Robert Griffin III takes his Bears down I-35 to San Antonio in a bid for the program's first bowl win since 1992. Led by RGIII, Baylor, which finished second in the nation in total offense, won nine games for the first time in a quarter-century. Griffin will be getting the lion's share of the hype for this game, and deservedly so- but he won't be the only prolific quarterback on the Alamo Dome turf. Washington's sophomore sensation Keith Price threw for 2,625 yards and 29 touchdowns for the Huskies, who started 5-1 before fading down the stretch.

Wack Predict-O: Baylor 47, Washington 27