

Louisville has become Cinderella in cleats

Brandon Vogel / FOXSports.com
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Before the brand new collapsible goalposts at Papa John's Cardinal Stadium could even reach the ground last week following Louisville's 44-34 victory over West Virginia, college football fans across the country were already debating the Cardinals' place in the national title picture.

Would Louisville leap Florida in the BCS rankings?

Does any Big East team have a resumé worthy of title game consideration?

Will the SEC be penalized again for being the toughest conference in the country?

Louisville did overtake Florida in the latest BCS rankings, stoking the fire burning beneath the title game debate and bringing sports talk across the country to a boil.

But through all the strength of schedule and common opponents hemming and hawing, one thing seemed conspicuously absent: our traditional love of the underdog.

This is still America, after all: The birthplace of the Revolution, Bluto's Pearl Harbor speech and the 5-12 upset.

With each passing year the NCAA men's basketball tournament becomes less about crowning a champion and more about seeing if David State can knock off Goliath U. Documenting the fate of basketball "mid-majors" has become its own cottage industry, and schools such as Valparaiso, Hampton and Richmond are reborn every March, whether they're playing or not.

While we're all eager to try and make the glass sneaker fit each spring, it doesn't feel like we're quite ready for a Cinderella in cleats.

Why not?

Proponents of a college football playoff often cite the Big Dance as the model for the excitement a full-fledged tournament could bring to the college gridiron. But whether or not we ever actually get that winter formal, this year may prove that we have to be prepared for a relative newcomer to crash the party.

In 1992, the NCAA trimmed the number of scholarships available to D1-A teams from 95 to 85, effectively ending the days of the eight-man-deep depth chart that had kept schools such as Miami and Nebraska constantly in the hunt and introducing parity as the newest hot topic in college football.

But even with the reduced numbers, since 1992 no team has won a share of the national title with an [all-time winning percentage](#) of less than .610. Over the same time span on the hardwood that number drops to .520 which may help explain the controversy currently surrounding the Louisville football team.

If college basketball is a meritocracy, then college football is a plutocracy run by the Wolverines, Longhorns

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Last week's best



● Scores

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5. [LSU - Idle](#)
6. [Louisville, vs. Connecticut](#)
7. [Wisconsin - Idle](#)
- 8t. [Oklahoma, vs. Nebraska](#)
- 8t. [Arkansas, vs. Florida](#)
10. [Boise State - Idle](#)
11. [Auburn - Idle](#)
12. [Notre Dame - Idle](#)
13. [Rutgers, at West Virginia](#)
14. [Virginia Tech - Idle](#)
15. [West Virginia, vs. Rutgers](#)
16. [Wake Forest, vs. Georgia Tech](#)
- 17t. [Tennessee - Idle](#)
- 17t. [Texas - Idle](#)
19. [Nebraska, vs. Oklahoma](#)
20. [Brigham Young - Idle](#)
21. [California, vs. Stanford](#)
22. [Texas A&M - Idle](#)
23. [Georgia Tech, vs. Wake Forest](#)
24. [Hawaii, vs. Oregon State](#)
25. [Boston College - Idle](#)

and Trojans of the world. As college football fans we've always wanted tradition, fight songs we can hum along to and uniforms that haven't changed since Keith Jackson was calling Pac-8 games.

But it might be time for a change.

Should Louisville run the table and win the national title, they would become the team with the lowest all-time winning percentage to do so in the past 25 years. A veritable new kid on the block.

Sure the Cardinals started the season as the 13th-ranked team in the country and everyone knew that with their schedule they would be a part of the chase, but just four years ago they finished fourth in Conference USA and got smoked by Marshall in the GMAC Bowl 38-15.

And if the idea of Louisville getting a shot to win it all is considered controversial, then the notion that Rutgers could sneak in there should they finish undefeated with victories over Louisville and West Virginia might seem downright laughable.

The prevailing thought is that even if Rutgers ends up as the Big East champion, it has too much ground to make up in the BCS standings to have a chance at the championship game. But if some of us are begrudgingly willing to give Louisville their chance, why not Rutgers? It may be far-fetched, but it's not unprecedented.



Even in August, many figured Brian Brohm and the Cardinals to be a part of the national title picture. (Andy Lyons / Getty Images)

In 1984 BYU started the season unranked, played a WAC schedule that featured no ranked teams and won three of those conference games by a touchdown or less. Must've had a big bowl win, right?

Nope. BYU wrapped up their first and only national title by beating a 6-5 Michigan team in the Holiday Bowl. The Cougars only played one ranked team all season long, beating No. 3 Pitt in the first game of the season.

Louisville's AP ranking heading into their Thursday night tilt at Rutgers? Number three.

I'm not saying. I'm just saying.

In reality, a Rutgers win on Thursday probably dashes the Big East's hopes of gaining the much-needed legitimacy a national title appearance could provide. But it still provides the conference the opportunity to point and snicker at the up-in-arms ACC, where Wake Forest and it's all-time winning percentage of .399 is leading all the Big East defectors who supposedly decimated the league.

Are any of this year's non-trads better than any of the one-loss giants? Probably not, but it might just be time to find out.