

ACC, USC rising; BCS revising

ACC additions make it a powerhouse

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The latest power shifts in college football are complete and could have a lasting effect.

The Atlantic Coast Conference — both new and improved — can now lay claim to the title of best league. Southern California is the team to beat this year — and potentially for the foreseeable future. And it's power to the people in the Bowl Championship Series as poll voters get a greater say in which teams play for the national title.

After the contentious departure of Miami and Virginia Tech from the Big East, football no longer plays second-string to basketball in the ACC.

"The atmosphere is a little more electric, I think, because it's a new challenge," Miami coach Larry Coker said of the ACC. "You know, you like newness, you like freshness. I think that's something this gives us, it gives our players, it gives our fans and it gives other members of the league. Trust me, these people are excited about us coming to their venues also."

The ACC now has two perennial national title contenders in Miami and Florida State and a half-dozen other formidable programs. The Big East, meanwhile, is left to search for an identity.

The ACC's new era begins in grand fashion Labor Day night when Miami plays arch-rival Florida State. The championship hopes of both are riding on enigmatic quarterbacks — Chris Rix for the Seminoles and Brock Berlin for the Hurricanes.

Boston College is set to become the 12th member of the ACC next season, giving the conference enough teams to play a lucrative league title game. The fallout from the ACC's raid of the Big East is a major overhaul for much of Division I-A, with about 20



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Pete Carroll's University of Southern California Trojans are the preseason's top-ranked team.

Bush is part of backfield flush with talent.

"I picked them third this year — in the NFC West," Washington coach Keith Gilbertson said.

USC might get one All-American back if the NCAA lets receiver Mike Williams return to college football. Williams planned to follow former Ohio State star Maurice Clarett into the NFL draft before the courts left them both in limbo.

The biggest change in the Big Ten comes from above the field as the league becomes the first to use instant replay to review officials' calls.

The BCS standings produced a worst-case scenario last season, when the Trojans and LSU split the national championship. USC was No. 1 in The Associated Press media poll and the coaches poll after the regular season, but was left out of the championship game.

LSU beat Oklahoma in the Sugar Bowl for the BCS title and the top spot in the coaches poll, three days after USC dispatched Michigan in the Rose Bowl. The result was the first split title since the BCS system was installed in 1998.

So it was back to the drawing board for the BCS. What they came up was kind of retro, relying more on the opinions of poll voters than computer numbers.

Under the new formula, the writers poll, the coaches poll and a combination of computer rankings will each count for one-third of a team's BCS ranking. In the past, results from the AP and coaches polls were combined.

Components such as strength of schedule, team record and quality wins have been eliminated.

Now the chances of a consensus No. 1 not playing in the Orange Bowl for the BCS title in January are remote.

"I still don't think we've addressed the issue of if we have more than two teams, like last year we had three that were all very close to the top," said LSU coach Nick Saban.

percent of 117 teams changing conferences in the next two years.

"You have to take all of that, what I call political stuff, and put it to the side, because the players, they want to play games," Big East commissioner Mike Tranchese said.

The players will have one less game to play this year. The 11-game regular season returns after two seasons of 12-game schedules (a calendar quirk: 12 Saturdays fell between Labor Day and

Thanksgiving two years in a row).

The next 12-game season is slated for 2008, but college football officials are hoping to make the extra game — and the extra money — a fixture.

Under coach Pete Carroll, USC is again a fixture among the nation's best.

After years of underachieving, the Trojans finished No. 1 in The Associated Press poll last year. Carroll's infectious enthusiasm has awakened the dormant giant and

made USC the place to be for top college football players. The Trojans followed up their first national title since 1972 with the best recruiting class in the country and are being talked about as the new Miami.

Despite losing four All-Americans, the Trojans start the season as the top-ranked team in the country.

Quarterback Matt Leinart put up Carson Palmer-type numbers in his first season as a starter and tailback Reggie