

Testimony of
Mr. LaVell Edwards

October 29, 2003

Written Testimony of Coach LaVell Edwards
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Before the United States Senate
Committee on the Judiciary

Chairman Hatch, Ranking Member Leahy and distinguished members of the committee, my name is LaVell Edwards, and I am honored to be here this morning.

What I want to talk about today are dreams and opportunities.

All of us dream about the great accomplishments we want to achieve in our lives. I've spent my life with young athletes, and I can tell you that dreams are the fuel that drives them to excel.

Now, there are dreams, and there are fantasies. A dream can come true, and a fantasy can't. The difference is opportunity.

The problem with the Bowl Championship Series is that it prevents student-athletes at 54 universities from achieving the dream of ending the season ranked number 1. Being a national champion is only a fantasy for these players.

That's because the BCS is stacked in favor of the teams from their six-conference alliance, who alone can play in the national championship game at a pre-determined bowl game site.

Mr. Chairman, the BCS system not only disadvantages some players' ability to compete, but also negatively impacts all bowl games. In addition, it creates a two-tiered recruiting system as well as an unfair imbalance between universities in terms of revenue derived from football.

The national champion selection has been altered greatly since the mid-80s. As Senator Hatch may have mentioned, I coached at BYU for 29 seasons, and in 1984 we won the national championship beating Michigan in the Holiday Bowl. Under today's BCS scheme, that 1984 BYU team couldn't have played in a title game. The system wouldn't have allowed it.

Over the course of my career, BYU appeared in 22 bowl games, finished 13 times among the top 25 and produced a number of All-American quarterbacks. I've had the pleasure of coaching some exceptional student-athletes through many exciting seasons.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take you back to one of those - the conclusion of the 1996 regular season - the first year under what was then dubbed the Bowl Alliance, now the BCS.

We were 13 and 1, on an 11-game winning streak, and ranked 5th in the nation, heading into the bowl season that year. I was invited, along with the coaches of the other top-ranked teams to New York for ABC's announcement of which teams would play in the Rose, Fiesta, Orange and Sugar Bowls.

Sitting in the green room with the other coaches, I knew I wouldn't be on the set when the BCS match ups were announced. We were 5th in the nation and I had known for weeks that even if we continued winning on Saturdays, the green room was as close as we would get.

It didn't bother me. I was focused on getting my team ready to play, in what we hoped, would be the Cotton Bowl. But I suspect it bothered the kids.

The Cotton Bowl was our first New Year's Day Bowl Game, and our team and university were

excited to play on college football's most prestigious day. We went down to Dallas and beat Kansas State 19-15.

Now, you'd think that with four Alliance bowl games, and eight teams playing in them, the number 5 team in the nation would be one of those eight. But we weren't.

Then again, the BCS isn't set up to take care of teams outside their six conferences. With six automatic qualifiers -seven if Notre Dame finishes in the top 10 - there isn't room for anyone else. Mr. Chairman, the set-up that has created a two-tiered system in college football, which benefits teams from six conferences at the expense of the remaining 54 Division I could ruin college football entirely if allowed to continue.

College football is expensive to operate and it's expensive to play in bowl games.

It's expensive to travel. And it's expensive to bring the band. Don't get me wrong, it's a worthwhile experience for the entire university community, especially in terms of prestige, and recruiting.

But it does cost. And having each season conclude with an imbalanced bowl-game selection process between Division I-A football teams - both on the field and in terms of the financial disparity associated with the Bowl games - is not healthy for the teams and the schools.

Mr. Chairman, my fear is that if the BCS system continues, the gap between elite college football programs and the rest of Division I-A football will continue to widen and many universities will be forced to drop their programs altogether.

I've talked today about the national championship game, but another consequence of the BCS set up is the negative ripple effect it causes on the rest of the bowl games.

After locking up the top four games, teams from non-BCS schools are shut out from the next level of bowl games. The organizers of those bowl games extend invitations to the second place teams from the six-conference alliance, bumping Conference USA and WAC teams, for example, to less prestigious games hosted in cities that frankly, aren't as great destination cities, as Miami and New Orleans. This makes it more difficult to encourage the alumni base to travel, making it less financially rewarding.

Mr. Chairman, teams from the six conferences use this stacked-deck to their advantage - namely in recruiting - which some will argue is the most important component of winning teams. At BYU, a traditional recruiting hurdle was encountering PAC-10 coaches who would tell kids if they attended BYU they would never play in the Rose Bowl.

While that was difficult enough to contend with, after the formation of the 1996 Bowl Alliance, the recruiting hurdle was set higher. With the BCS in place, PAC-10 coaches could, and would, tell kids not only couldn't they play in the Rose Bowl, but they wouldn't play in a national championship game, if they went to school in Provo. And they were right.

Mr. Chairman, over the last 20 years, college football teams have 20 fewer scholarships to offer annually. Reducing scholarships has spread the talent pool beyond the traditional football powerhouses, such as Oklahoma, Penn State, and Michigan. With all schools having fewer football scholarships to offer teams such as Colorado State, Northern Illinois, and Louisville are getting higher quality players. This has caused more parity in college football today.

Many in the university community agree limiting scholarships has been good for the game. Why then, would the NCAA sanction a post-season system that congregates more power and revenue between fewer teams, while also limiting athletes' opportunity? It's inconsistent and counter-intuitive.

The BCS system is not good for the game. And it's not good for higher education. Surely the NCAA and Division I-A football can join the other 23 intercollegiate sports and devise a system

that determines a true champion, preserves the integrity of the game and levels the playing field.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, right now, teachers, counselors, and parents across the country are telling young men or women that if they work hard, commit themselves, and never lose sight of goals and dreams, they too can become a United States Senator.

Every person in our country has the opportunity to turn dreams into reality. It's the reason each of you is here today. The reason I'm here is that because of this flawed system, talented young athletes are denied an opportunity to make their dreams come true. And I believe it's wrong.

Mr. Chairman, thank you and the other committee members for your time.