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Ranking the nonconference schedules: The Big 12

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This is the second in a series of columns that rank nonconference schedules in the six BCS leagues and the best and worst schedules overall in the nation. The [SEC](#) ^[1] came out on Monday. Next up on Saturday, Pac-10. To follow: Monday, Big Ten; Wednesday, ACC; June 26, Big East; June 28, Bottom 10 overall; June 30, Top 10 overall; July 2, Conferences overall.

We've been through this argument over and over. We see it one way, coaches see it their way: Play quality opponents in your non-conference schedule, and lessen your chances of playing for the national championship in this poll-driven world.

Or, if you're Colorado, you can look at it another way.

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"You've got to raise the bar," says Buffs coach Dan Hawkins. "Why not push yourself and see how far you can go?"

This is nothing new for CU, which annually is one of a handful of teams with teeth in the nonconference schedule. These aren't just home games, either. Since the beginning of this decade, the Buffs have had big non-con BCS road games against USC, UCLA, FSU (twice, once in Jacksonville), Washington State (in Seattle), Miami, Georgia and Arizona State.

No surprise then that CU is back at it this fall, traveling to West Virginia as part of yet another tough non-con schedule. A look at the Big 12 breakdown:

From best to worst

1. **Oklahoma:** vs. BYU (in Arlington, Texas), Idaho State, Tulsa, at Miami
2. **Colorado:** Colorado State, at Toledo, Wyoming, at West Virginia
3. **Oklahoma State:** Georgia, Houston, Rice, Grambling State
4. **Baylor:** at Wake Forest, Connecticut, Northwestern State, Kent State
5. **Texas A&M:** New Mexico, Utah State, UAB, vs. Arkansas (in Arlington, Texas)
6. **Missouri:** vs. Illinois (in St. Louis), Bowling Green, Furman, at Nevada

- 7. Nebraska:** FAU, Arkansas State, at Virginia Tech, Louisiana-Lafayette
- 8. Texas:** Louisiana-Monroe, at Wyoming, UTEP, UCF
- 9. Texas Tech:** North Dakota, Rice, at Houston, New Mexico
- 10. Iowa State:** North Dakota State, Iowa, at Kent State, Army
- 11. Kansas:** Northern Colorado, at UTEP, Duke, Southern Miss
- 12. Kansas State:** Massachusetts, at Louisiana-Lafayette, at UCLA, Tennessee Tech

The scoreboard

Games against Division I-AA teams: 9 of 48 (19 percent)

Games against BCS teams: 11 of 48 (23 percent)

Games against non-BCS, I-A teams: 28 of 48 (58 percent)

Five best games

1. Georgia at Oklahoma State: A big test for the 'Pokes, and as important, the Big 12. The last time we watched the league with the bloated numbers, Oklahoma scored 14 points and lost in the BCS national title game, Ole Miss humiliated Texas Tech and Texas needed a last-second touchdown—courtesy of a blown coverage—to beat one-dimensional Ohio State.



Dez Bryant and the Cowboys host Georgia in one of the best early-season games

2. Nebraska at Virginia Tech: Absolutely love this game. Nebraska and its large road-tripping contingent get to enjoy/experience the madness that is Lane Stadium.

3. Colorado at West Virginia: Thursday Night primetime in Morgantown. Ask Auburn what happened the last time a BCS non-con team accepted this quaint invite.

4. Oklahoma at Miami: Two years from now—after those Miami recruiting classes take shape—this one would be magical. Now it's simply the Sooners tuning up for bigger things.

5. Missouri vs. Illinois: This neutral-site game has produced some memorable moments, and now the schools back off after 2010. Great, I'm sure Eastern Illinois and Western Illinois will be grateful rent-a-wins.

Five worst games

1. Idaho State at Oklahoma: Let's put this in perspective, shall we? WAC tomato can Idaho beat Idaho State by 15 last season.

2. North Dakota at Texas Tech: Why should you pull for the Fighting Sioux? Because they took on the big, bad NCAA and didn't blink.

3. Grambling State at Oklahoma State: Rod Broadway has done a terrific job in two years at Grambling (hello, BCS athletic directors), but he'll be lucky to leave Stillwater losing by 50.

4. Northern Colorado at Kansas: Why is KU's one I-AA patsy worse than K-State's two? Because KU is in much better position as a program.

5. Furman at Missouri: So you're Furman and you play in I-AA's version of the SEC (the SoCon), and you get two games at Mizzou and Auburn. And pick up about \$1.5 million for your troubles.

Quick hits

- K-State coach Bill Snyder was in on this I-AA thing before anyone realized the utter gravy train it has become. FIU (still I-AA—provisional I-A—in 2005), Western Kentucky (still I-AA in 2004), McNeese State and UMass (2003), Western Kentucky and Eastern Illinois (2002). And now UMass and Tennessee Tech.
- Here's why Art Briles is going to make a terrific coach at a major BCS school: Instead of scheduling four cupcakes—Baylor could get away with it—the Bears play two of the most underrated BCS programs (at Wake Forest, home against UConn). When Baylor returns to the postseason this fall, Briles will have his pick of big jobs.
- The curious case of Wyoming. Texas' unusual road game at Wyoming was a late addition after Arkansas asked to move a return game to Fayetteville to 2014. So the Longhorns added Wyoming in a two-for-one (two in Austin, one in Laramie). At least Texas is actually traveling for a game against a non-BCS team—which is more than can be said for schools from a certain conference that has won four of the last six national titles.
- I'm on Oklahoma State—the 'Pokes may not lose until November. But Week 2 against Houston could be the toughest game of the season until Texas comes to Stillwater on Oct. 31. It's a natural letdown game after what could be a huge win against SEC heavyweight Georgia, and the Cougars' offense will score on anyone.

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