

Highest Ranked Bowl Opponents in the Pre-BCS Era, 1936-1997

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Later this month, the BCS selection process will take place...but what was it like before 1998?

The purpose of the **BCS Championship Game** is to pit the two teams with the highest rank against one other: i.e., *No. 1 vs No. 2*.

And since 1998, the Top 2 ranked/rated teams have appeared in the BCS matchup seven times: 1999-2000-03-05-06-07-08; with the No. 2 winning the 2003-05-06-07 games.

Before this era of major college football came into being, there were 11 times when a bowl pitted No. 1 vs No. 2 with the latter emerging victorious six times—all consecutive in the 1979-93 bowl era.

The initial 1-2 post season contest was the 1963 Rose Bowl classic as USC held on to defeat Wisconsin 42-37 to give John McKay his first title (USC would go on to play as either No. 1 or 2 three times, while losing twice.)

A decade breakdown shows this matchup took place three times in the 1960s and 1980s and 1990s and twice in the 1970s—all before the BCS creation.

Such matchups in the 1990s were a precursor to the BCS by using the **Bowl Alliance** format.

As college football fans know, pre-BCS National Champions were selected/named by the winners of the AP-UP/UIP, *USA Today*/Coaches' polls (with the FWAA and NFFHF also being part of the mix). These selectors are considered official ones by the NCAA.

Which is better: BCS? Voting by coaches, writers and broadcasters? A plus-one game? Full-scale playoffs?

This story isn't about which method is best, correct or should be implemented; rather, it's a look back at the bowls using the rankings of the AP poll and showing which teams should have battled it out for bragging rights and claiming "We're No. 1" over the winter and into the next season.

The AP final regular-season poll (1936-64, 66-67) served as the last poll; in 1965, 1968-2008 a post-bowl poll was released. To make this compilation unified, the final regular-season poll rankings are used from the post-bowl era.

This report lists which bowl opponents entered the game as the two highest ranked teams and did not meet to decide the title. Also listed will be the rank of the opponent each season's National Champion and, if different, the regular-season No. 1.

➤ *During the pre-post bowl poll era, five teams entered the post season ranked No. 1—and lost all five times: 1950-51-53-60-64—but still were named AP National Champions.*

But from a historical prospective, the two ranked teams weren't always the ones matched-up to battle it out for the title as it has been done so since 1998.

In exclusively over the 52 seasons during this era, the lower ranked teams were celebrated 9 more victories, 35-26 (with a tie in the 1947 bowl); including a streak of 7 in-a-row, between 1982-87. The higher ranked team won 5 straight starting with the 1954 Sugar Bowl.

Overall, teams with the lower ranking were victorious 9 more times, 35-26—compiling strings of success with 3 or more consecutive wins: 7 between 1982-87; 5, 1976-80 and 3, 1938-40.

Entering a respective bowl as the higher ranked eleven and emerging as the winner, also had 3 sets of consecutive seasons with triumphs (5, 1954-58; 4, 1960-63 and 3, 1993-95.)

A composite by ranking order:

RK	W	L	T
1	10	18	
2	13	11	
3	13	9	1
4	7	8	1
5	10	3	
6	4	3	
7	2	4	
9	0	1	
10	0	1	
12	0	2	
UR	1	1	

The first time an AP No. 1 team participated in a bowl game was in the 1951 Sugar Bowl, as Tennessee fell to No. 3 Maryland, 28-13.

The Terrapins were also involved in when the AP's top-ranked team won for the first time: 1955 Bud

Between the years of 1971-74, saw each win two straight: with the highest ranked units claiming the 1971-72 bowl wins. (Lower ranked bowl opponent also won 2 straight in 1996-97.

Pre-BCS era No.1 met No. 2 the nation's top-ranked team won 4 straight: 1962-63-68-71; before No. 2 won not only 6 straight, 1978-92 but it was the only times when it was victorious; before 1995 No. 1 Nebraska put-up the most points by a National Champion in a bowl, flattening Florida, 62-24.

No. 1 vs No. 2 shows at 5-5 slate.

Wilkinson's eleven defeated Maryland—coached by former Sooner Jim Tatum 20-6.

A side note, Wilkinson replaced Tatum in 1947 on the Sooners' sideline.

**Consensus #1 (NC-
Opps' Rank—if NC
wasn't #1;**

Season Opponent; Score) (Bowl) Highest Ranked Teams, Score

1936	Minnesota*	(Rose) 3 Pittsburgh 5--Alabama, 21-0
1937	Pittsburgh*	(Rose) 2 California 4--Alabama, 13-0
1938	TCU (6/Carnegie Mellon, 15-7)	(Orange) 2 Tennessee 4--Oklahoma, 17-0
1939	Texas A&M (5/Tulane, 14-13)	(Rose) 3 USC--2 Tennessee, 14-0
1940	Minnesota*	(Sugar) 5 Boston College--4 Tennessee, 19-13
1941	Minnesota*	(Sugar) 6 Fordham--7 Missouri, 2-0
1942	Ohio State*	(Sugar) 7 Tennessee--4 Tulsa, 14-7
1943	Notre Dame*	(Rose) UR USC--12 Washington, 29-0
1944	Army*	(Rose) 7 USC--12 Tennessee, 25-0
1945	Army*	(Sugar) 5 Oklahoma A&M--7 St. Mary's (Calif.), 33-13
1946	Notre Dame*	(Rose) 5 Illinois--4 UCLA, 45-14
1947	Notre Dame*	(Cotton) 3 SMU--4 Penn State, 14-14 (tie)
1948	Michigan*	(Sugar) 5 Oklahoma--3 North Carolina, 14-6
1949	Notre Dame*	(Rose) 6 Ohio State--3 California, 17-14
1950	Oklahoma (7/Kentucky, 0-7)	(Cotton) 4 Tennessee--3 Texas, 20-14
1951	Tennessee	(Sugar) 3 Maryland--1 Tennessee, 28-13
1952	Michigan State*	(Sugar) 2 Georgia Tech--7 Mississippi, 24-7
1953	Maryland	(Orange) 4 Oklahoma--1 Maryland, 7-0
1954	Ohio State (17/USC, 28-13)	(Sugar) 5 Navy--6 Mississippi, 21-0
1955	Oklahoma	(Orange) 1 Oklahoma 3--Maryland, 20-6

1956	Oklahoma*	(Rose) 3 Iowa 10--Oregon State, 35-19
1957	Auburn*	(Rose) 2 Ohio State--UR Oregon, 10-7
1958	LSU (12/Clemson, 7-0)	(Orange) 6 Oklahoma--9 Syracuse, 21-6
1959	Syracuse (4/Texas, 23-14)	(Sugar) 2 Mississippi--3 LSU, 21-0
1960	Minnesota (6/Washington, 7-17)	(Orange) 5 Missouri--4 Navy, 21-14
1961	Alabama (9/Arkansas, 10-3)	(Cotton) 3 Texas--5 Mississippi, 12-7
1962	USC	(Rose) 1 USC--2 Wisconsin, 42-37
1963	Texas	(Cotton) 1 Texas--2 Navy, 28-6
1964	Alabama	(Orange) 5 Texas--1 Alabama, 21-17
1965	Alabama	(Orange) 4 Alabama--3 Nebraska, 39-28
1966	Notre Dame*	(Sugar) 3 Alabama--6 Nebraska, 34-7
1967	USC (4/Indiana, 14-3)	(Orange) 3 Oklahoma--2 Tennessee, 14-13
1968	Ohio State	(Rose) 1 Ohio State--2 USC, 27-16
1969	Texas (9/Notre Dame, 21-17)	(Orange) 2 Penn State--6 Missouri, 10-3
1970	Nebraska (3-8/LSU, 17-12)	(Cotton) 6 Notre Dame--1 Texas, 24-11
1971	Nebraska	(Orange) 1 Nebraska--2 Alabama, 38-6
1972	USC	(Rose) 1 USC--3 Ohio State, 42-17
1973	Notre Dame	(Sugar) 3 Notre Dame--1 Alabama, 24-23
1974	Oklahoma*	(Rose) 5 USC--3 Ohio State, 18-17
1975	Oklahoma	(Orange) 3 Oklahoma--5 Michigan, 14-6
1976	Pittsburgh (5/Georgia, 27-3)	(Rose) 3 USC--2 Michigan, 14-6
1977	Notre Dame	(Cotton) 5 Notre Dame--1 Texas, 38-10

1978	Alabama	(Sugar) 2 Alabama--1 Penn State, 14-7
1979	Alabama (2-6/ Arkansas, 24-9)	(Rose) 3 USC--1 Ohio State, 17-16
1980	Georgia (7/Notre Dame, 17-10)	(Orange) 4 Oklahoma--2 Florida State, 18-17
1981	Clemson	(Orange) 1 Clemson--4 Nebraska, 22-15
1982	Penn State	(Sugar) 2 Penn State--1 Georgia, 27-23
1983	Miami (Fla.)	(Orange) 5 Miami (Fla.)--1 Nebraska, 31-30
1984	BYU (UR/Michigan, 24- 17)	(Orange) 4 Washington--2 Oklahoma, 28-17
1985	Oklahoma	(Orange) 3 Oklahoma--1 Penn State, 25-10
1986	Penn State	(Fiesta) 2 Penn State--1 Penn State, 14-10
1987	Miami (Fla.)	(Orange) 2 Miami (Fla.)--1 Oklahoma, 20-14
1988	Notre Dame	(Fiesta) 1 Notre Dame--3 West Virginia, 34-21
1989	Miami (Fla.) (2- 7/Alabama, 33-25)	(Orange) 4 Notre Dame--1 Colorado, 21-6
1990	Colorado (5/Notre Dame, 10-9)	(Cotton) 4 Miami (Fla.)--3 Texas, 46-3
1991	Miami, Fla. (11/Nebraska, 22-0)	(Rose) 2 Washington--4 Michigan, 34-14
1992	Alabama	(Sugar) 2 Alabama--1 Miami (Fla.), 34-13
1993	Florida State	(Orange) 1 Florida State--2 Nebraska, 18-16
1994	Nebraska	(Orange) 1 Nebraska--3 Miami (Fla.), 24-17
1995	Nebraska	(Fiesta) 1 Nebraska--2 Florida, 62-24
1996	Florida	(Sugar) 3 Florida--1 Florida State, 52-20
1997	Michigan (9/Washington, 21-16)	(Orange) 2 Nebraska--7 Tennessee, 42-17

**Did not participate in a Bowl Game.*