

Tyler Welch's Fixes For College Football

I've long loved college football, but being a student at SMU during their ascension to national prominence, joining the ACC and competing in the CFP has only increased my affinity for the sport.

But, I've learned that college football has a lot of problems. Players are getting eligibility for a seventh year, or transferring to their fifth team in as many years. Teams in California are playing in the Atlantic Coast Conference, and all the while the SEC is threatening to leave the NCAA entirely. Even as college football is growing and becoming more popular, it feels like watching an unstoppable trainwreck. At some point, college football is going to go off the rails.

Each problem is egregiously complicated, and won't be solved with the push of the button. Despite that, I'm going to treat this article like my magic button. Every school does my bidding. Current media deals will not trump my plans. What Commissioner Welch says, goes. I'll be fixing the conferences, postseason play and the overall college schedule. To clarify one final time, I understand that these changes can't just happen overnight— but if they did, I think college football would be in a better place.

Issue No. 1- Conference Alignment

I would love to attend more of SMU's away games. I actually did so my freshman year while we were in the AAC, traveling to games at OU, TCU and Rice.

It has become incredibly hard to do that as a member of the ACC, given that the team in closest proximity to Dallas, Louisville, is still a 12.5-hour drive away. Conferences are spread across the country, losing the regionality and rivalries that once made them so special. Even worse, they're overinflated, with each of the P4 conferences sporting 15+ teams and creating controversy about in-conference strength of schedule.

I'm going to solve both of those issues at once.

I propose that the FBS increases from 10 conferences to 13, with seven "power" or "major" conferences. Each conference will have exactly 10 teams, and will play a nine-game conference schedule. Every team will play every other member of its conference— no exceptions.

Conferences are based on historical alignments, bringing back storied rivalries and ensuring that all teams in the conference are in close proximity to one another. Each P7 conference has at least two to three schools that would be considered regular playoff contenders, which I hope will

prevent playoff committee bias towards any one conference (this is not a targeted statement, I promise).

In making 13 conferences of 10 teams, eight of the 138 FBS teams are on the outside looking in. My three service academies, Army, Navy and Air Force, will remain at the FBS level but will be independent. A bit of foreshadowing, but they are my only independent schools. The five getting dropped to the FCS level are Sam Houston State, Charlotte, Massachusetts, Sacramento State and North Dakota State.

Sacramento State and North Dakota State were both meant to make their FBS debut in 2026, but I'm going to delay that for a little bit longer. The other three have compiled just one winning campaign (2024 Sam Houston State) across 19 seasons. In 2025, the three teams were a combined 3-33, so I don't feel terrible about sending them down.

Here's how the rest of the teams shake out.

Pac-10

Members: University of Washington, Washington State, Oregon, Oregon State, Stanford, USC, California, UCLA, Arizona, Arizona State

A trend you'll notice is that a lot of these conferences are recreations of past leagues. The Pac-12 notoriously fell apart over the last decade, with half of its teams fleeing to the Big 10 and the Utah and Arizona schools finding a home in the Big XII. The Pac-12 is being revived this season, but it will include a medley of teams across the country, including Texas State and Colorado State.

I'm bringing the original Pac-10 teams back to the west coast. All 10 of the teams chosen were members of the conference when it expanded to 10 teams in 1978. Before then, every team besides the Arizona schools shared a conference dating back to the 1910s.

"Pac-10 After Dark" will be revived, as will so many fun in-conference rivalries. We'll get the typical in-state pairs— Oregon and Oregon State, Washington and Washington State, Arizona and Arizona State, USC and UCLA, Cal and Stanford— but also some of those cross-state bouts that made the Pacific Conference entertaining.

Big XII

Members: Utah, BYU, Colorado, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Kansas, Kansas State, Nebraska, Iowa State, Missouri

Though there are clearly not 12 teams, we're keeping the Big XII moniker for old-times sake. After all, they've kept the name with 16, so why not with 10?

I've preserved the Holy War between Utah and BYU and the Sunflower Showdown between Kansas and Kansas State, but was also able to revive some awesome rivalries with the new additions of Oklahoma and Missouri from the SEC and Nebraska from the Big 10. Mizzou was a member of the conference from 1907 to 2011, dating back to when it was known as the Big Eight. The Tigers' return means that the Border War against Kansas will become a crucial in-conference rivalry matchup.

Husker fans will be excited to get games against Oklahoma and Colorado every year, and Bedlam between Oklahoma and Oklahoma State returns to the Big XII slate. The current Big XII has received criticism for being one of the weakest P4 conferences, but the omission of teams such as UCF, Baylor, West Virginia and Cincinnati should raise the league's floor.

Southwest Conference

Members: Texas, Texas A&M, Baylor, Texas Tech, SMU, TCU, Houston, Rice, Arkansas, Tulane

That's right. The famed Southwest Conference is back in my college football landscape, renewing some of the longest-standing rivalries in college football. All nine original members are back, but due to the 10-team precedent I set, a newcomer was required. I chose Tulane, which has had a strong stretch in the American Athletic Conference and has history with teams like SMU and Rice because of it. Better yet, it ensures Arkansas isn't the only team outside of Texas while maintaining the regional integrity of the conference.

Texas and Texas A&M will continue on from the SEC and Big XII days, while SMU and TCU's rivalry will be reignited after its death just last year. Truly, you can point to almost any matchup in this conference and there'll be some sort of history between the two programs.

One complaint for the new Southwest Conference could be that it's top heavy. Rice and Tulane are G6 programs (and Rice is a poor one, at that) and Arkansas hasn't had a 10+ win season since 2011. Still, I think this conference could return to the form it had in the back half of the 1900s, minus the recruiting and cheating scandals.

Southeast Conference

Members: LSU, Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Auburn, Alabama, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Tennessee, Vanderbilt, Kentucky

I made one of my hardest, and potentially most controversial, decisions with the SEC. When the conference began in 1932, it contained 13 members. Two of those were Tulane, now in my

reimagined SWC, and Sewanee, now a Division III school. The others were the 10 teams I listed above and Florida.

Although Georgia Tech moved on in 1964 and is a current member of the ACC, I picked them over Florida for the last spot in the SEC. The decision came down to a few factors, but the primary decider was my affinity for in-state rivalries. Clean, Old Fashioned Hate between Georgia and Georgia Tech is now an SEC conference game, and as shown later, the Florida Cup will become an annual tradition in one conference.

Otherwise, the SEC is pretty straightforward. It still has its most iconic programs, such as Alabama, LSU and Tennessee, and is confined once again to truly be the geographic southeastern conference.

Big 10

Members: Ohio State, Michigan, Michigan State, Indiana, Purdue, Illinois, Northwestern, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota

Between 1896 and 1912, the Big 10 added its 10 founding members, which included every team on this list besides Michigan State. The University of Chicago was that tenth, but now competes at the Division III level. As such, Michigan State made the cut, having been a member since 1950.

Penn State didn't join the conference till 1990, and didn't make as much geographical sense as Michigan State. The Nittany Lions also have great rivalry opportunities elsewhere, which made excluding them from the new Big 10 an easy choice.

The Game remains the best in-conference rivalry in college football, and longtime matchups such as Wisconsin versus Minnesota won't be suspended. Now that Indiana has become a powerhouse, there's enough great talent to uphold the Big 10's reputation as one of the nation's best conferences even without Oregon or Penn State.

Atlantic Coast Conference

Members: Florida State, Miami, Florida, Clemson, South Carolina, Duke, Wake Forest, NC State, North Carolina, Virginia

So long to Texas and California teams in the ACC. Staying true to the Atlantic Coast, all of the teams in this ACC are from Florida, the Carolinas or Virginia. As mentioned earlier, Florida is joining from the SEC, which means the Florida Cup will take place entirely within one conference for the first time. It's rare to see a three-way rivalry in college football, so I think increasing its significance through the shared ACC connection would be awesome.

Florida isn't the only SEC defector. South Carolina also joins the ACC, solidifying its rivalry against Clemson. The Gamecocks actually were a founding member of the ACC, but departed after roughly 20 seasons in 1971. All of the other Carolina-based schools stay put, having been members since its founding in 1953. The same goes for Virginia.

All of the ACC schools further north had to find new homes, but the quality of the ACC remains intact. With the addition of Florida, the ACC will have four schools that have won an FBS championship since 2000.

Big East Conference

Members: Notre Dame, Penn State, Louisville, Virginia Tech, West Virginia, Cincinnati, Maryland, Boston College, Pittsburgh, Syracuse

At first, I was worried seven power conferences was too many, and that this region in particular wasn't going to have the strength that groups like the SEC or PAC-10 would. However, I was pleasantly surprised with the quality of the rejuvenated Big East. Instead of looking at founding members, which included teams like Georgetown, Providence and Seton Hall, I looked to the Big East from the 1990s to its demise in 2013, which consisted of teams like West Virginia, Louisville and Pittsburgh.

The Fighting Irish will no longer coast by, picking and choosing their schedule as an uncommitted ACC affiliate. I'm forcing Notre Dame into a conference. Penn State also was never a member of the Big East, but there are old rivalries that can be reimagined once they join. The Nittany Lions can play an annual series against Pittsburgh, their in-state rivals, and bring back some traditional regional games against West Virginia and Syracuse.

There are a few other historical contests to return with the creation of the Big East that are worth a mention. Cincinnati and Louisville will run back the Keg of Nails, and Virginia Tech and West Virginia will vye for the Black Diamond Trophy, both of which haven't been played since 2022.

Mountain West Conference

Members: Boise State, Wyoming, Colorado State, Utah State, Nevada, UNLV, San Jose State, Fresno State, San Diego State, Hawaii

Time to head down to the group of six, and to do so we're going to head back west. Whereas many of my upcoming G6 conferences are an amalgam of all of the lower-tier FBS conferences, the Mountain West is fairly straightforward. All 10 members were, at some point in time, members of the Mountain West.

UNLV and Wyoming are founding members and still play in the conference to this day, making them easy selections. Nevada, San Jose State and Hawaii are all current members as well, and won't be going anywhere else. The remaining five all were members of the Mountain West as recently as 2025, but are joining the newly formed Pac-12 for the 2026 season. Since I'm bringing back the old-school Pac-10 as a power conference, I'm bringing these teams back to the Mountain West.

With plenty of history already established amongst these 10 teams, rivalries won't be hard to come by. Whether it's the Boise State-Fresno State Milk Can, the Border War between Colorado State and Wyoming or the obvious Battle of Nevada, there's plenty of enticing matchups here.

Western Athletic Conference:

Members: New Mexico, New Mexico State, UTEP, Texas State, UTSA, North Texas, Tulsa, University of Louisiana-Monroe, Louisiana Tech

Ignore the conference name on this one. The majority of these teams have no connection to the old WAC, I just chose the name due to the region it's located in. This conference feels like a mini version of the Southwest Conference, anchoring around a core of Texas schools. North Texas and UTSA are some of the stronger competitors in the conference, while UTEP and Texas State have been competitive as of late.

Outside of Texas, both New Mexico-based schools come over, protecting the Rio Grande Rivalry. Similarly, the two Louisiana schools will continue the I-20 Derby in the WAC. Admittedly, Tulsa does feel like the odd man out, but the Golden Hurricane have faced North Texas and UTSA frequently within the AAC.

American Athletic Conference

Members: Northern Illinois, Missouri State, Western Kentucky, Arkansas State, Memphis, Middle Tennessee State, Eastern Carolina, Coastal Carolina, UAB, Southern Mississippi

When I mentioned hodgepodge conferences earlier, the American may be the strongest example. The American is tied with the Big East with the most states represented at nine, blending teams from the American, Sunbelt and Conference USA groupings. Though some rivalries are preserved, others like NIU and Coastal Carolina are separated from their main adversaries.

With that said, you get some great regional opponents in the American, such as Memphis' three rivalries with UAB in the Battle for the Bones, Southern Miss in the Black and Blue Bowl and Arkansas State in the Paint Bucket Bowl. The Red Wolves will also get to face off against Missouri State in ARMOgeddon, while WKU and Middle Tennessee will extend 100 Miles of Hate from their shared time in CUSA.

Mid-American Conference

Members: Ohio, Kent State, Akron, Miami (OH), Toledo, Bowling Green, Central Michigan, Western Michigan, Eastern Michigan, Ball State

What do you do when you have perfection? Absolutely nothing. In my opinion, the MAC had no need for reenvisioning, save for cutting down to my 10-team threshold. Massachusetts and Buffalo weren't hard to cut, given that they were the two most recent additions and the furthest away geographically.

The remaining 10 all joined between 1946 and 1992, the earliest being Ohio and the latest Akron. There are too many rivalries to name within the conference, much thanks to the MAC's stability and tight proximity. Between the 10 members, the longest distance between any two schools is under 400 miles, a mere six-and-a-half hour drive from Central Michigan to Ohio University. And don't worry— weekday MACTion will live on in my college football.

Sunbelt Conference

Members: UCF, USF, Florida International, Florida Atlantic, Kennesaw State, Georgia State, Georgia Southern, Jacksonville State, South Alabama, Troy

The Sunbelt Conference features UCF, one of just two programs to get dropped from a power conference to the group of six. The Knights stuck out in the Big XII, and with no room in the SEC, ACC or Big East, they became the odd man out. Still, the Sunbelt should offer decent competition for UCF, including its longtime rival USF.

Similar to the MAC, every team in the SBC is confined to just three contiguous states. It'll feature heated matchups between the three Georgia schools and the three Alabama schools, who all share some form of in-state rivalries. In Florida, FIU and FAU have a longstanding conflict too. I imagine the Sunbelt would become one of the most competitive G6 conferences, with UCF offering P4 experience and many of the teams trending towards the top of their current groupings in recent years.

Conference USA

Members: Rutgers, Connecticut, Buffalo, Temple, Delaware, Marshall, Old Dominion, JMU, Liberty, Appalachian State

Rutgers is my second P4 school getting dropped. They've struggled since joining the Big 10, and despite a decent stretch in the late 2000s, have just two 10+ win seasons in 111 years. They do have some history with UConn and Temple, which makes the transition to Conference USA more suitable.

Speaking of the Huskies, they will join a conference for the first time since 2019. Delaware and Liberty are members of CUSA and will stay put in the realignment. James Madison University and Liberty, who have both seen great success in recent years, provide CUSA with a needed boost and an additional rivalry. Additionally, Marshall and Appalachian State have experience playing both JMU and Liberty in the SBC East.

Independents

Members: Army, Navy, Air Force

My only independents are the three service academies. All three will have protected matchups with one another, including the classic Army-Navy game at the end of the season. Additionally, each team will have protected rivalry games throughout the year. For example, Air Force will always play Colorado State, Army will play Notre Dame and Navy will play Maryland.

Issue No. 2- Scheduling

There are a few things wrong with the current college football schedule, the most problematic of which we've already solved. With 16-18 team conferences, teams could go an entire season without playing half of their conference. In turn, conferences needed complicated tiebreakers to determine which teams made the championship. A 10-team conference is my answer to this problem.

The season will begin, for all schools, with two non-conference games. There will be guidelines placed on who teams have to schedule. At minimum, each team will have to play one P7 team and one FCS or G6 team in its first two games. The third non-conference game is encouraged to be used for out-of-conference rivals, but has no real restrictions.

Starting in week three, teams will play nine conference games, their last non-conference game and two bye weeks. Though bye weeks and non-conference games will vary for each team, weeks nine and 14 will serve as in-conference rivalry weeks, with the biggest matches happening the final week of the season.

Here are some examples of what that would look like.

SMU Mustangs- SWC

- Week One: SMU vs Missouri State (G6 Opponent)
- Week Two: SMU at California (P7 Opponent)
- Week Three: SMU at Houston (Conference Opener)
- Week Four: SMU vs Texas
- Week Five: SMU vs Texas A&M

- Week Six: Bye
- Week Seven: SMU at Baylor
- Week Eight: SMU at Rice
- Week Nine: SMU vs Tulane (Conference Rivalry No. 1)
- Week Ten: Bye
- Week Eleven: SMU vs Louisville (Open Non-Conference Opponent)
- Week Twelve: SMU at Arkansas
- Week Thirteen: SMU at Texas Tech
- Week Fourteen: SMU vs TCU (Conference Rivalry No. 2)

Notre Dame- Big East

- Week One: Notre Dame vs USC (P7 Opponent)
- Week Two: Notre Dame at Army (P6 Opponent)
- Week Three: Notre Dame at Syracuse (Conference Opener)
- Week Four: Bye
- Week Five: Notre Dame vs Maryland
- Week Six: Notre Dame vs Louisville
- Week Seven: Notre Dame vs West Virginia
- Week Eight: Notre Dame at Virginia Tech
- Week Nine: Notre Dame at Pittsburgh (Conference Rivalry No. 1)
- Week Ten: Notre Dame vs Navy (Open Non-Conference Opponent)
- Week Eleven: Bye
- Week Twelve: Notre Dame at Cincinnati
- Week Thirteen: Notre Dame vs Penn State
- Week Fourteen: Notre Dame at Boston College (Conference Rivalry No. 2)

Kennesaw State- Sunbelt Conference

- Week One: Kennesaw State vs West Georgia (FCS Opponent)
- Week Two: Kennesaw State at Tennessee (P7 Opponent)
- Week Three: Kennesaw State vs UCF (Conference Opener)
- Week Four: Kennesaw State vs Troy
- Week Five: Bye
- Week Six: Kennesaw State at South Alabama
- Week Seven: Kennesaw State at Troy
- Week Eight: Kennesaw State vs Jax State
- Week Nine: Kennesaw State at Georgia Southern (Conference Rivalry No. 1)
- Week Ten: Kennesaw State vs FIU
- Week Eleven: Kennesaw State at FAU
- Week Twelve: Bye
- Week Thirteen: Kennesaw State at Missouri State (Open Non-Conference Opponent)

- Week Fourteen: Kennesaw State at Jax State (Conference Rivalry No. 2)

Air Force- Independent

- Week One: Air Force vs Duquesne (FCS Opponent)
- Week Two: Air Force at Oregon (P7 Opponent)
- Week Three: Air Force vs BYU (Conference Opener)
- Week Four: Kennesaw State vs Troy
- Week Five: Air Force at Tulsa
- Week Six: Bye
- Week Seven: Air Force vs Colorado
- Week Eight: Kennesaw State vs Jax State
- Week Nine: Air Force vs Navy
- Week Ten: Air Force vs Hawaii
- Week Eleven: Air Force at Colorado State
- Week Twelve: Bye
- Week Thirteen: Air Force at Wyoming
- Week Fourteen: Air Force at Army

Because every member of a conference will play one another, a conference championship is no longer needed in the postseason. The champion will be the team with the best record at the end of the season. Tiebreakers still may be needed on occasion– for instance, if three teams all go 8-1, with the losses being to one another– but it would be straightforward and uniform across all conferences.

1. Overall Record
2. Head-to-Head Record
3. Record Against Best-Placed Conference Opponent (proceeding through conference standings)
4. Combined Head-to-Head Point Differential (if between 3+ teams)
5. Conference Point Differential

With the conference champions selected at the start of December, it's time to fix the next part of the schedule: the postseason.

Issue No. 3- The College Football Playoffs

One of the things I hate most about CFB, in its current state, is how the transfer portal window in January overlaps with the playoffs. It opened on January 2 this year, just one day after the last three quarterfinals games took place. In the week following, players poured into the portal at the same time Indiana and Miami were qualifying for the national championship.

As such, my first priority is shifting the schedule to not overlap with the transfer portal. Week zero is now week one, meaning that all programs start around August 22, roughly the same time students will be back on campus anyways. The start of conference play will be the first weekend of September, the first rivalry week will happen in mid-October, and the final week of the season (and the biggest rivalry games) will happen the last week of November.

The first week of December will be a bye week, with the exception of the Army-Navy game. After that, the postseason will officially begin.

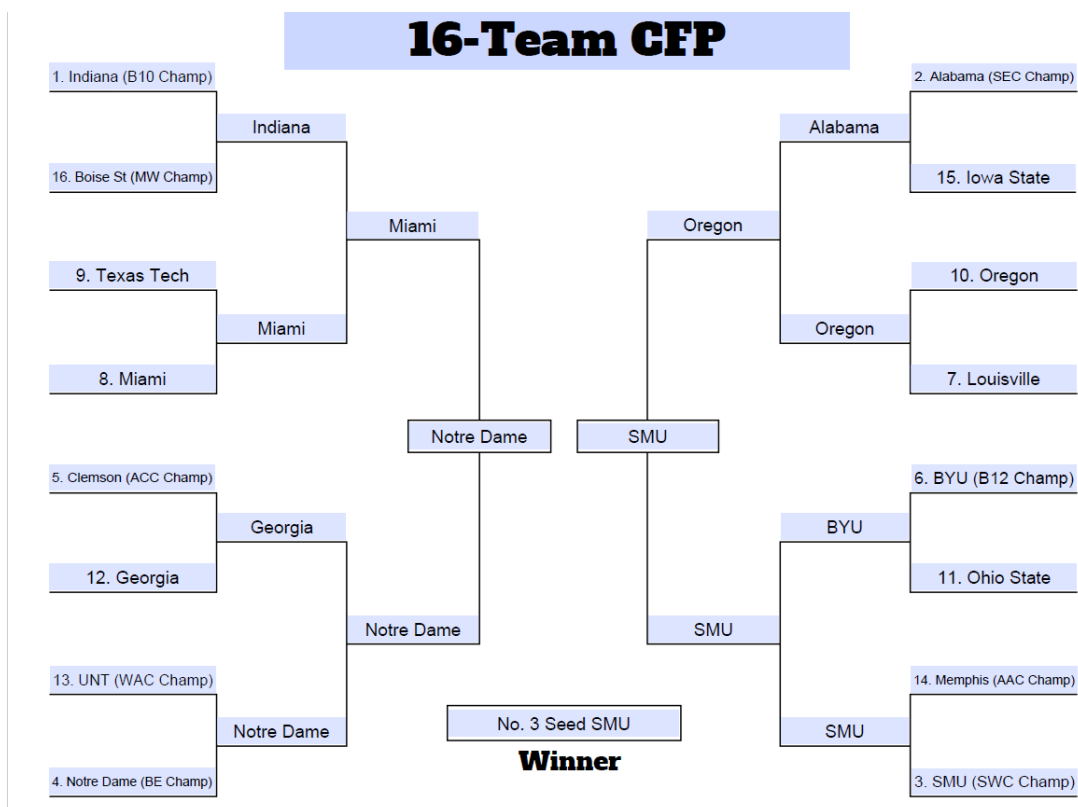
I've never been a major fan of expanding the College Football Playoff, but due to my new conference realignment, I've decided to expand my dream playoffs to 16 teams. With 16 teams, no team gets a bye, eliminating the issue top-seeds have faced the past two years. Additionally, the first two rounds will not be bowl games— they will be played at the higher seed's home stadium, giving students and fans more opportunities to watch the playoff games live.

This model fits into our schedule better. The first three rounds will happen through December, with the final game of the year, the national championship, taking place on the first weekend of January— right around the January 1-4 mark. The day after the national championship, the transfer portal will open, giving plenty of time for players to enter before the spring semester starts.

So who makes the tournament? First and foremost, the conference champions from each of my P7 conferences receive an automatic bid, as do the three highest-ranking G6 champions. The remaining six slots can come from any conference, with the exception that no conference may receive more than three bids in a single year. So even if Oregon, Washington, USC and Arizona State were to have outstanding years, only the top three in the Pac-10 would be eligible to move on. I feel this won't be too big of an issue, as whoever finished fourth in a 10-team league is bound to have two to three losses in conference play.

The P7 auto-bid conference champions will fill the top seven seeds. The six at-large bids and the three G6 champions will then be ranked and placed into the bracket based on seeding.

Here's what the bracket could hypothetically look like.



Trust me, SMU winning the championship is very realistic. Regardless, the point is that winning your conference is rewarded. I'd actually almost prefer that non-conference games are not taken as strongly into account for the CFP, and instead conference play is the primary focus when selecting the at-large bids. That way, teams can maintain out-of-conference rivalries without fear that it will harm their playoff potential.

Again, rounds one and two will be home games for the higher seed, so in the simulation provided, Alabama would've played at Bryant-Denny Stadium in both rounds. The semifinals and the championship will be at neutral sites, with the semifinals using two of the NY6 bowls on a rotating basis.

The other four NY6 bowls will still be played in the week leading up to the national championship. In a hypothetical where the Rose Bowl and the Cotton Bowl host the semifinal matchups, the Sugar Bowl may serve as a third-place game between the losers of the CFP Semifinals and will be played the day before the National Championship.

Then, two more NY6 bowls, let's say the Orange and Peach Bowls, will host bowl games for the losers of the quarterfinal rounds. In our simulation, Georgia may play Indiana in the Orange Bowl, while Alabama plays BYU in the Peach Bowl. Last but not least, the Fiesta Bowl would

take place between the two teams just outside of the top-16 of the CFP, a consolation prize of sorts for just missing the tournament.

Bowl games need to become worth competing for again. Players are opting out left and right because the risk of injury doesn't outweigh the reward of winning a bowl game anymore. I think the first step to solving this is to increase the prestige of the postseason. First, only seven-win teams will be eligible, cutting the total number of bowl games. Payouts for the winning teams and their conferences will continue, but I think an additional, larger payout should go out to the conference with the most overall bowl game winners.

Even still, these incentives prioritize the teams more so than the players. As such, the final change will include a guaranteed, NIL package with the bowl game sponsor for every winning player that opts in and competes in the game. The package would consist of a direct cash payout and the opportunity for future brand deals with the bowl game sponsor. A good example is the Pop Tart Bowl. In the 2025 edition, BYU defeated Georgia Tech. Under this model, every player that stepped foot on the field for the Cougars would get an NIL cash prize and would get a brand deal with Pop Tarts doing promoted content on social media or even showing up in advertisements.

For the fans, I would just say bowl games, while remaining competitive, need to be more fun. Take a page out of the Pop Tarts Bowl's book, get custom mascots, have ridiculous in-game promotions, while the NCAA ensures that only the best possible product is showing up on the field.

That concludes my fixes to college football. There's still much that needs to be done, especially looking at NIL, the transfer portal and eligibility. But if I had to pick the main changes I want to see to the game, this is what they would look like.