

## 2008: Who Will Play?

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In an effort to provide fans with the best possible post-season matchups, Poinsettia Bowl organizers last year secured a contract with one of the nation's marquee conferences, the Pacific-10. The agreement stipulates that the conference send its 7th place team to San Diego in 2008 (assuming bowl eligibility), and its 6th place team in 2009. The bowl gets the second selection from the Mountain West. "We're thrilled to bring the Pac-10 into the San Diego County Credit Union Poinsettia Bowl mix," said 2008 Bowl President Larry Baber. "The Mountain West versus Pac-10 matchup is one fans can really get excited about."

Pac-10 teams and their fans now have a two in ten chance of spending the holidays in San Diego. This new partnership may be particularly appealing to schools that have yet to play in San Diego's other post-season event, the Pacific Life Holiday Bowl. Oregon State, UCLA, Stanford and USC could very well be bowling in "America's Finest City" this December. Oregon State, under the tutelage of former San Diego Chargers Head Coach Mike Riley, seeks to overcome losing all front-seven defensive starters and put together a third straight winning season. UCLA begins a new chapter as Head Coach Rick Neuheisel takes over and endeavors to reclaim Los Angeles bragging rights from USC. He has his hands full, however, as injuries to QB's Ben Olson (out two months) and Patrick Cowan (out for season) leave them thin at that position. Last year's upset victory over USC in the Coliseum and a season-ending win against Cal could provide Stanford the confidence needed to catapult Head Coach Jim Harbaugh and his Cardinal squad to its first winning season since 2001. Trojans' Head Coach Pete Carroll has his team's sights on the BCS Championship. If USC survives the Pac-10 and a non-conference schedule that includes Ohio State, Virginia and Notre Dame, they'll deserve a date in Miami's Dolphin Stadium on January 8th.

So who will represent the MWC and face the Pac-10 in the 4th annual bowl game?

Most pundits foresee BYU repeating as champions of the Mountain West Conference. And why not?

The Cougars have swept through conference play without a loss the past two seasons. The title, however, could come down to their November 22nd showdown with in-state rival Utah in Salt Lake City. The Utes, under 4th year Head Coach Kyle Whittingham, are poised to repeat as conference contenders with a favorable home schedule and a veteran offensive unit. TCU returns 15 starters to a team that capped its season last year with a 20-13 win over Houston in the Texas Bowl. Horned Frog opponents will have a hard time moving the ball on a stingy defense led by senior MLB Jason Phillips. New Mexico looks to make it six bowl games in seven years. Lobos' fans hope junior QB Donovan Porterie builds on his 15 TD, 3,006 yard season last year. The conference's surprise team in 2008 could be UNLV. Standout WR's Casey Flair and Ryan Wolfe should help sophomore QB Omar Clayton gain momentum through a tough, yet manageable non-conference schedule.

The Rebels may be poised to earn a spot in their first bowl game since 2000. And of course, local San Diego State alums would love to see their Aztecs bowling for the first time since

1998.