

fcs week #13: ivy crowns parity



the unquestioned winner of the ivy this season was parity. over 60% of ivy games ended with a single score differential, a trend that held in the final weekend of play. this parity led to a 3 way tie with yale, harvard, and dartmouth all having an equal claim to the title. that has not happened in 8 years. all 3 finished with just 5 wins, and to find the last time any team won the ivy with just 5 wins, you would have to turn the clock back to 1982.

the harvard crimson, who had dominated throughout their out of conference, were expected to run away with the ivy in the early going, but parity had other plans. matched up against yale for the 139th incarnation of “the game”, the crimson missed a pat and a pair of 2 point attempts, leaving 5 points on the table. the bulldogs scored a late td to win the game by—you guessed it—exactly 5 points. the season ending result cemented the unbreakable tie, which while maybe leaving the crimson fans deflated, made for a wild season for ivy fans.

sidelines

- northern iowa kicker matthew cook went a perfect 3 for 3 on pats and 2 for 2 on field goals against north dakota state in his career finale. cook’s performance did not salvage the panthers’ season, as they still fell to their rivals ending their playoff hopes. however, that showing gave cook a career fcs mark of 413 points. the pats means he will end his career with a perfect 155 for 155 record, a number of attempts no other kicker has even remotely approached while still batting 100%.

aps picture

w I aps last week

next week

top dogs

south dakota state jackrabbits	10	0	764	shelve missouri state	bye
south dakota coyotes	9	1	486	eviscerate western illinois	bye
villanova wildcats	9	1	453	beat delaware (below) to secure caa autobid	bye

in the hunt

montana griz	9	1	421	destory archrival montana state in brawl of wild to claim big sky crown	bye
albany great danes	9	1	410	shutout monmouth	bye

<i>harvard crimson</i>	8	2	405	come up short after back & forth 4 th quarter in “the game” against archrival yale	season over
<i>austin peay governors</i>	9	1	381	edge #18 central arkansas to claim 1 st ever united title	chattanooga
<i>lafayette leopards</i>	9	1	354	drub archrival lehigh to claim patriot title	@ #12 delaware

dark horses

<i>florida a&m rattlers</i>	8	0	333	handle bethune cookman	bye
<i>gardner webb runnin' bulldogs</i>	7	2	328	dominate charleston southern	@ #18 mercer
<i>furman paladins</i>	9	1	313	collapse to weak wofford. cough up fumble for 60 yard td the other way then surrender a 50 yard td run on 4 th down.	bye
<i>delaware blue hens</i>	8	2	304	fall to #3 villanova (below)	patriot champ #8 lafayette
<i>holy cross crusaders</i>	7	2	300	blowout georgetown	season over
<i>ut martin skyhawks</i>	8	2	297	surrender 2 tds a minute apart in 1 st quarter to samford and never recover.	season over
<i>north dakota state bison</i>	8	3	296	blowout northern iowa	pioneer champ #23 drake
<i>montana state bobcats</i>	8	3	274	crushed by archrival #4 montana in brawl of wild	bye

dropping back: *central arkansas* lost its opportunity to claim the united title, coming up just short against #7 *austin peay* and ending their season.

also rans: *mercer bears* (8 – 2, 251), *central arkansas bears* (6 – 3, 250), *north dakota fighting hawks* (7 – 3, 250), *idaho vandals* (7 – 2, 248), *yale bulldogs* (7 – 3, 236), *elon phoenix* (6 – 4, 226), *drake bulldogs* (8 – 2, 223), *nc central eagles* (8 – 1, 218)

fcs game of week

V

last week: villanova wildcats (9 – 1, 453, #3) spank delaware blue hens (8 – 2, 304, #12), 35 – 7

the wildcats took over this game in the 2nd quarter and never looked back. rb jalen jackson ran the ball 60 yards on the game's first play and racked up another 70 yards thereafter. wr jaaron hayel caught a deep 50 yard td bomb, 1 of 6 mid-to-long receptions he had on the day. defensively, the cats were equally as dominant. lb brendan bell was particularly active at the line, as the wildcat d held the usually potent blue hens to just 4 yards per play. lb shane hertzell capped the victory with a 70 yard pick-6 to ice the game. it was one of 3 interceptions for the cats. the blue hens were able to pound the ball somewhat behind rb marcus yarns, but as the score got away from them, they had little answer. lb jackson taylor was able to bring pressure as the hen d tightened in the 1st half, but over the course of the game, the wildcat o-line just outmuscled in the trenches. the cats have now gone an incredible 16 - 2 in the last 18 years of this annual matchup.



next week: lafayette leopards (9 – 1, 354, #8) @ delaware blue hens (8 – 2, 304, #12)



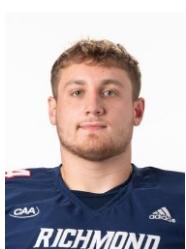
the leopards won the patriot and returned to the playoffs for the first time in a decade, but as surprising a story as the leopards may have become this season, the narrative entering this game centers around the blue hens, who are once again limping through november after looking like a national contender earlier in the season. the hens are traditionally a defensive powerhouse but have on the season been much more of a high scoring team than usual. rb marcus yarns deservedly get the attention, but it is the efficiency of qb ryan o'connor that has powered the hens to so many big wins. against a defense like the leopards, o'connor will definitely try to take some looks downfield. his biggest obstacle is a sacky happy defense led by lb billy shaeffer which should make things uncomfortable in the backfield. the leopards will counter on offense with their own star rusher, rb jamar curtis. the leopards are good enough to grind out a win with that running game, but will still need some big stops from that aggressive d to shock the hens at home and certainly cannot afford to get into a shootout. the blue hens have underperformed pretty consistently of late, so the question will be whether they can play like their former selves. the leopards are unlikely to fold because of reputation alone.

richmond spiders (8 – 2, 184)

last week: hold on against william & mary tribe (6 – 4, 84), 27 - 26



the spiders played an absolutely fantastic game for about 55 minutes, then simply hung on for dear life as the tribe tried to steal the win right back. the spiders controlled the pace of play most of the game, controlling the line and pounding the ball on the ground. every now and then, though, they worked in a surprise. case in point, 2 of the spiders' 3 tds came on trick plays, where the ball was flipped to someone other than the qb to launch it downfield. nevertheless, the tribe managed to come roaring back in the 4th quarter. rb malachi imoh was tremendous for the tribe throughout, but down 2 scores twice in the 4th quarter, the team took some shots down field. the tribe would score on each of their 3 4th quarter drives, the last two of which came in the final 4 minutes. big catches by receivers jt mayo and hollis mathis moved the chains quickly downfield. meanwhile, the tribe d highlighted by oft overlooke lb kevin jarrell kept the spiders' drives short. only once in the 2nd half did the spiders take more than 5 snaps. the end of the game was particularly controversial. mathis made a diving catch to keep a last minute drive alive which was initially ruled out of bounds and then overturned. the game clock would expire seconds later, but the tribe got second life after a head scratcher of a pass interference call. that gave them just one play to score a game saving td, which imoh again would do surprisingly not with his legs but on a short pass. even more surprisingly, coach london did not elect to force ot with a kick instead going for 2 and the win. in the chaos that ensued, the tribe qb was chased almost back to midfield before heaving the ball toward the end zone. the ball hit the ground with a thud short of its mark, and the spiders survive. the team earned a piece of thecaa championship and a return bid to the postseason.



spider of week—martei fitz

for most of the game, the vaunted tribe rushing attack looked pretty pedestrian, and fitz deserves a lot of credit for that. the biggest disruptor on an active d-line, fitz recorded a pair of sacks, 3 tfl, and singlehandedly made the last stop the spider d would record (granted, abck in the 3rd quarter), which given what followed looks all the more critical in retrospect.

next week: vs nc central eagles (8 – 1, 218, #24)

the eagles are the only bubble team not excited to make the playoff field.

 they had a return bid to the celebration bowl essentially in hand until being ambushed 2 weeks ago by howard, so this game is essentially a consolation prize for a team hoping for far more notoriety. the eagles will try to rekindle the fire, but they will by no means surprised by the level of competition. they have already beaten 3 other caa opponents this season. the eagles will rely on star qb davius richard to carry them. richard can sling, but he is far more dangerous when he (and rb latrell collier) can move the ball on the ground. the interesting challenge will be how they match up

against the spider d. aaron banks and the spider secondary rank tops in the nation in interceptions, but the eagles don't turnover the ball. the spider d-line is extremely good at generating pressure, but between a strong o-line and richard's scrambling, the eagles are seldom vulnerable to it. if the spiders can make the eagles offense one dimensional and keep the score manageable, the more balanced spider o can probably do enough to prevail, but there are a lot of ifs going into this game. nevertheless, the intangibles give hope. the spiders are riding a crazy winning streak, needing to gut out every game since september to make this field, while the eagles stumbled into this game unintentionally and without fanfare.

northern arizona lumberjacks (5 – 5, 44)



last week: overcome eastern washington eagles (4 – 6, -93), 49 – 42

the lumberjacks win a thriller. they scored 5 tds and forced 4 turnovers in the opening half, then watched helplessly as the eagles stormed all the way back to tie in the 3rd quarter. the lumberjacks rallied in the 4th, and a pair of late tds would win the

day. the gamebreaker was a deep post to qr bj fleming that he would convert into an 80 yard td. at the time, that put the lumberjacks up by 2 scores with just 3 minutes to go, but the eagles being the eagles, they would find a way to break through one last time before the clock ran out on their hopes. qb angel flores had his best game yet, throwing downfield darts in the 2 long scoring drives in the final quarter. before that, he was more of his typical role as a scrambler, racking up 110 yards and scoring 3 tds on the ground on back-to-back-to-back drives in the 2nd quarter. rb devon starling was also hugely effective with 130 yards rushing, an average of 7 per carry. the defense also had a huge day, at least through halftime. freshman phenom db alex mclaughlin made an amazing pick to set up one of those scoring drives, and almost continuous pressure from dl nehemiah magalei kept the eagles off balance. things did fall apart quickly though. eagle qb kekoa visperas recovered from some early miscues to engineer 3 long scoring drives of his own down the stretch. his top target, wr efton chism, would haul in 3 clutch tds. then s zane thornton, who had already collected an early interception, pulled a fumble free, which was followed on the very next snap by a 60 yard td run from rb tuna altahir. add in some big stops from the d-line, particularly de da'marcus johnson, and the lumberjacks looked to be on the edge of incredible collapse. of course, the late rally and big td catch let them end the season on a high note.



sideline: ball's out

the chris ball era came to an end shortly after the last whistle blew. ball, who had never been a head coach prior but had extensive experience as a dc, was tasked with replacing lumberjack legend jerome sauers. ironically, his last season was clearly his best. the l-jacks racked up 5 wins against their most difficult schedule to date, including knocking



off big sky champ montana. however, ball only won 40% of his games overall and never had a winning season. ball had managed to bring in a lot of transfers in recent years to right the ship, but he lost just as many too, evidenced most notably in the qb position, where he has rotated through nearly a dozen starters in his 5 year tenure.

season over

playoff redux: who got woofed?

in fairness to the selection committee, it is really hard to complain about this year's field. while there were many teams who have deserving resumes left out, there were not really any inclusions that did not seem to belong. every selection committee has its leanings, and this one seemed to heavily favor fbs upsets and power conferences. the two bubble teams with fbs upsets (sacramento state, southern illinois) leapfrogged over a few with better fcs only records. (for that matter, comfortably in idaho drew a very high seed in large part due to its of own fbs upset.) the committee also awarded 11 of the 14 at-large bids to the big 3 conferences, with the mo valley collecting 6. nevertheless, the logic here was both defensible and consistently applied. moreover, selection chair kent haslam—montana's ad in his day job—was pretty clear and transparent in what to expect in both the weeks leading up to the announcement and the explanations offered since. this is something of a stark contrast from the chaos that transpired last year, and maybe that's because haslam was part of that committee too (and quick to point out not the chair). the playoff bubble was one of the deepest ever this year, and while that likely made those final selections hard, it may have also given this committee a lot of cover too because so many teams had a legitimate claim on consideration and so few had it locked up. nevertheless, in honor of tradition, who has the most right to gripe this week:

- **holy cross:** the crusaders' run of 4 straight patriot titles was blown up when they were surprised by eventual champion lafayette last month. the crusaders played two fbs teams and nearly beat both of them. their only fcs losses came to lafayette and ivy co-champ harvard. they otherwise rumbled through the patriot, which in a weaker 2022 still was awarded an at-large, and even collected a quality win over the other ivy co-champ yale early on. the extra fbs game capped them at 7 wins when they likely needed 8, but these playoff regulars are still just a year removed from a seed.
- **ut martin:** it was somewhat surprising to see a figurative coin flip decision go against the skyhawks this year after a literal coin flip eliminated them the season before, making them a sympathetic favorite. the big south and ovc had both held their own autobids previously but combined this season with a single conference winner. the skyhawks would have won the ovc if it still existed but lost the head-to-head against gardner webb, coming from the big south side, and hence were placed on the at-large bubble. the skyhawks' 8 wins compare favorably together, but their biggest victory came over eastern illinois, another ovc team that just missed the cut. the real torpedo for the skyhawks was probably ending the season on a loss. this committee like so many before them embrace that “win and you’re in” narrative. in fact,

3 of the 4 bubble teams who ended on a loss were also left out. so given the opportunity to all but guarantee an at-large and coming up short in the finale against samford was this team's undoing.