

Football Bowl Games

FOOTBALL BOWL GAMES

History

Through the first half of the 20th Century, Penn State participated in only two bowl games – the 1923 Rose Bowl in Pasadena (the first played in the current stadium) and the 1948 Cotton Bowl, in Dallas. At mid-century, very few bowl games were played, with the significant ones being the Cotton, Rose, Sugar, Orange, and Gator.

The 1948 Cotton Bowl was historic for several reasons. Undefeated Penn State had one of the great defenses in the history of college football, and still holds the record of allowing opponents an average of only 17 yards per game and 0.64 yards per rush. Its opponent that afternoon, Southern Methodist University, of Dallas, featured one of the greatest players in college and later pro football history – Doak Walker. More importantly, the game marked the first time that African-American players participated in a major bowl game in the South. Penn State's Wally Triplett and Denny Hoggard both played important roles in the game. Triplett scored the game-tying touchdown in the second half to make the score 13-13. Then, on the last play of the game, Hoggard barely missed making the game-winning catch in the end zone, and Penn State had to settle for a 13-13 tie. Showing its team first attitude, the entire team stayed at an army base outside of Dallas when Triplett and Hoggard were denied rooms at any downtown hotels.

In 1959, two new bowl games, the Liberty Bowl and the Bluebonnet Bowl, made their debut. Philadelphia's Municipal Stadium was a windy icebox when it hosted Penn State and Alabama in the inaugural Liberty Bowl. Still, it was a memorable game for several reasons:

It was Bear Bryant's first bowl game as head coach at Alabama

It was a close game, with current Penn State assistant coach Galen Hall throwing for the only score in a 7-0 victory on a fake field goal play

Most importantly, the game marked the beginning of an almost uninterrupted streak of Penn State bowl appearance. Beginning with that game, Penn State has appeared in a bowl game in 45 out of 59 seasons.

Joe Paterno's first team (1966) did not qualify for a bowl game, but in 1967 he coached his first bowl team in a 17-17 Gator Bowl tie with Florida State. A key moment of that game occurred in the third quarter with Penn State leading 17-0. After stopping the Seminoles with a goal line stand, Paterno elected to gamble on a fourth down short yardage play deep in Penn State territory. The gamble failed, and Florida State stormed back to tie the game on a last-second field goal.

It was the 1967 team that started a school record 31 game undefeated streak. In both of the following years, Penn State took 10-0 records into the Orange Bowl to face powerful Big Eight Conference opponents. The 1968 victory over a Kansas team led by future pro stars Bobby Douglas and Hall of Famer John Riggins was highlighted by a last-second touchdown and another Paterno gamble – a 2-point conversion attempt for a win instead of a safer 1-point kick for a tie. The conversion was successful - on Penn State's second attempt, because Kansas was flagged for having 12 men on the field when it stopped the Nittany Lions' first try. A year later, the Lions shut down one of the nation's most prolific offenses when it intercepted an all-time bowl record seven passes in a 10-3 victory over Missouri. Even with these wins, and with teams that included five eventual members of the College Football Hall of Fame and two members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Penn State finished only number two in both of those years.

Two years later, Penn State faced Texas in the 1972 Cotton Bowl. In 1969, Texas edged Penn State for the national championship, and so the 1972 Cotton Bowl game was viewed by many as an opportunity to justify the Longhorns' earlier triumph in the polls over the top team in the "weak East." Not many teams shut down Texas' wishbone offense at that time, but after trailing 6-3 at the half, the Lions blitzed the Longhorns in a 30-6 victory that validated the quality of Eastern football.

From that time on Penn State became an annual bowl participant, not missing a game until the 1984 season. Including the 1968 and 1969 teams, Penn State has taken seven undefeated teams into a bowl game, winning five of these contests. The 1978 and 1985 teams both were ranked first in the nation, but lost to Alabama in the 1979 Sugar Bowl and to Oklahoma in the 1986 Orange Bowl. Penn State's two national championship teams were both ranked number two at the time. They defeated top-ranked Georgia and Heisman Trophy winner Herschel Walker, 27-23, in the 1983 Sugar Bowl, and number one Miami and Heisman Trophy winner Vinnie Testaverde, 14-10, in the 1987 Fiesta Bowl. Ironically, the 1982 squad was not undefeated when it entered the game. Also of note is that the 1982 team was the first national champion ever to have more season passing yards than rushing yards (2,369 vs. 2,283). The 1986 championship team defeated the heavily-favored Hurricanes with a stifling defense that intercepted Testaverde five times and lambasted Miami receivers (including Michael Irvin) whenever they crossed the field. The game was one of the most viewed in college football history, it remains perhaps the greatest victory of the Paterno era, and it is one of six Fiesta Bowl victories by the Lions.

In Joe Paterno's 46 seasons, he coached more bowl teams (37) and bowl victories (24) than anyone. He is the only coach to take a team to, and to win, each of the five major bowls (Rose, Sugar, Orange, Fiesta, and Cotton). Paterno's immediate successor, Tom Bradley, led Penn State into the 2012 Ticket City Bowl in the Cotton Bowl, losing to Houston, 30-14.

Before the 2012 season, the NCAA banned Penn State from participating in bowl games for 4 years. However, that ban was rescinded during the 2014 season, and the Nittany Lions defeated Boston College in overtime 31-30 (after trailing by 2 touchdowns in the 3rd quarter) in the Pinstripe Bowl in Yankee Stadium. After BC took a 3 point lead with 2:10 remaining in the game, Christian Hackenberg drove the Lions into field goal range, and Sam Ficken tied it with a 45 yard kick with 20 seconds left. Ficken then kicked the game winning extra point in overtime.

In 2016, the Nittany Lions stunned the college football world by winning its last 8 regular season games, including a come-from-behind 4th quarter victory over at the time top-ranked Ohio State in Beaver Stadium. Penn State was the Big 10 East regular season champion, and then defeated Wisconsin 38-31 (after training 28-7 in the 1st half) in the Big 10 Championship Game. In a Rose Bowl for the ages, the Lions trailed USC by 13 in the 1st half, took a 15 point lead in the 3rd quarter, but eventually lost 52-49 on a field goal on the last play of the game.

In the 2019 Citrus Bowl, the Nittany Lions fell behind the underdog Kentucky Wildcats 27-7 in the Citrus Bowl in Orlando, Florida. In his final game for Penn State, quarterback Trace McSorley led a furious comeback that just fell short as Kentucky prevailed, 27-24.

Bowl Record(29-18-2)

Rose Bowl (1-3)

1923 – Southern Cal (L)
1994 – Oregon(W)
2009 – Southern Cal (L)
2016 – Southern Cal (L)

Sugar Bowl (1-3)

1973 – Oklahoma (L)
1976 – Alabama (L)
1979 – Alabama (L)
1983 – Georgia(W)

Orange Bowl (4-1)

1969 – Kansas (W)
1970 – Missouri (W)
1974 – LouisianaState (W)
1986 – Oklahoma (L)
2006 – FloridaState(W)

Fiesta Bowl (7-0)

1977 – ArizonaState(W)
1980 – OhioState(W)
1982 – Southern Cal (W)
1987 – Miami,FL (W)
1992 – Tennessee(W)
1997 – Texas(W)
2017- Washington (W)

Cotton Bowl (2-0-1)

1948 – Southern Methodist (T)
1972 – Texas (W)
1975 – Baylor (W)

Gator Bowl (1-2-1)

1961 – Georgia Tech (W)
1962 – Florida (L)
1967 – Florida State (T)
1976 – Notre Dame (L)
2016 - Georgia (L)

Citrus Bowl (2-4)

1988 – Clemson (L)
1994 – Tennessee(W)
1998 – Florida(L)
2003 – Auburn(L)
2010 – Louisiana State(W)
2019- Kentucky (L)

Outback Bowl (3-0)

1996 – Auburn (W)
1999 – Kentucky (W)
2007 – Tennessee (W)
2011 - Florida (L)

Alamo Bowl (2-0)

1999 – TexasA&M (W)
2007 – TexasA&M (W)

Liberty Bowl (3-0)

1959 – Alabama(W)
1960 – Oregon(W)
1979 – Tulane (W)

Holiday Bowl (1-0)

1989 – Brigham Young (W)

Aloha Bowl (1-0)

1983 – Washington (W)

Blockbuster Bowl (0-2)

1990 – FloridaState(L)
1992 – Stanford (L)

Ticket City Bowl (0-1)

2012 - Houston (01)

Pinstripe Bowl (1-0)

2014-Boston College (1-0)