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**September 6, 2009****ESSAY****Few Are Cheerleading for a College Football Playoff****By KEVIN O'MALLEY**

The arrival of September foreshadows sun-splashed Saturday afternoons at the stadium, ancient rivalries, the blaring brass of colorful halftimes, tailgating behind the end zone grandstand, fight songs after touchdowns — the full panoply of college football's timeless charms.

It is also the cue for the annual emergence of a discordant and plaintive cry across the land, "Why can't we have a playoff?"

Over the last 11 years, college football's postseason has been centered on a still relatively new creation, the [Bowl Championship Series](#). It replaced a system that was really no system at all, and offered the prospect of a championship game matching (hopefully) the two most deserving teams. To a large extent, the B.C.S. has met that objective, but it has also become an inevitable bogeyman for those who want more: a series of showdown games, a tournament, a playoff.

The arguments advanced by advocates of a playoff need no reprising. Using comparisons to professional and other college sports, they have a certain logical merit and are embraced by broad groups among fans and the news media.

I have been employed as a television and marketing consultant by a number of college sports organizations, including the B.C.S., but I do not speak for them in any way. My purpose is to summarize the views of others — views that are well known to me.

The reason college football does not have a playoff is that most of the people responsible for administering the sport do not want one. I include in this group college presidents, conference commissioners, athletic directors and coaches. It is not a unanimous view, by any means of measurement, but I believe a significant majority opposes a playoff because of a number of specific factors.

One factor is the uniqueness of college football's regular season, possibly the most exciting and competitively meaningful in all of sports. Most administrators do not want to see it overshadowed by a huge monthslong focus on the postseason. This has happened in college basketball, but the trade-off there has been more acceptable than it would be in football. This is an important element in the opposition to a playoff.

College football is not the [N.F.L.](#), and does not want to be. It is essentially a regional sport with teams that play two-thirds of their games in their conferences, and regular-season nonconference games matching top national programs are rare. A postseason tournament that would fairly match teams of different strengths with similar records from around the country would not be easy to devise, and would not dispel all

controversy.

The playing of football games during exam periods, with a December playoff schedule, or the expansion of a sport involving so many athletes into a two-semester format, with a January playoff, are each viewed as undesirable. Many university presidents feel the season is already too long, and cite injuries as a particular concern in further lengthening the schedule.

The leadership of college football is also intent on protecting the bowl system, in which several dozen communities around the country participate in the sport's postseason celebration. The bowls have provided considerable resources to colleges and their own localities, and it is thought that the focus on a national tournament would also diminish their individual and collective efforts.

Logistically, a December playoff is viewed as impossible because of the 12-game schedule, conference championship games and the exam calendar. A January format would compete directly with the N.F.L., and would probably further erode interest in college basketball's brief in-conference regular season. Many feel that advocates of a playoff do not recognize the difficulties inherent in the devilish details.

In my view, the attitudes of college administrators in opposition to a playoff are sincere, and they have strong belief in their positions. They can do nothing about the fact that bandwagon-jumping legislators somehow believe that the determination of college football's national champion ought to be grist for their political mill. They understand that some among the fan base and the news media want what they want, and they want it now.

Take my word, it's not going to happen anytime soon.

Kevin O'Malley was a senior executive for CBS Sports and Turner Sports and now works as a consultant to college and professional sports organizations.

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