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West Virginia-Missouri title game might lack large audience

By Thomas O'Toole, USA TODAY

If Missouri and West Virginia advance to the Bowl Championship Series title game Jan. 7, the matchup clearly would lack the luster of recent showdowns between traditional powers Southern California-Texas and Florida-Ohio State.

But would that matter to college football fans or make a difference in the quality of the game?

"People didn't know anything about Boise State when it played Oklahoma last year," says consultant David M. Carter of the Sports Business Group, referring to the 43-42 overtime upset in the Fiesta Bowl. "Then they woke up the next morning and were mad they missed it."

Carter says the buildup on Fox, which airs four of the five BCS games, including the championship, could be crucial to how the game is received.

"I think it's going to be important for Fox to tell the story throughout the other BCS games and entice viewers to tune in," he said. "The hard-core college football fan might tune in, but the casual fan might be overdosed on college football by then and will need a reason to tune in."

What the teams don't bring:

•A top 20 TV market or national following (St. Louis is 21st and Kansas City, Mo., 31st; Charleston-Huntington in West Virginia is 65th).

•Easily recognizable and familiar names. Quick: Is it Daniel Chase or Chase Daniel? See below.

•Championship pedigree. Neither has won an established national title.

What they do:

•Likely Heisman Trophy finalists: Missouri quarterback Chase Daniel, eighth in passing efficiency; WVU quarterback Pat White, 10th.

•Potent attacks: Missouri is fifth in total offense and West Virginia is 11th; Missouri is sixth in scoring offense and West Virginia is eighth.

•Dynamic freshmen: Missouri receiver Jeremy Maclin, second in I-A all-purpose yards at 209 a game; West Virginia back Noel Devine, team-best 9.6 yards a carry.

Still the name-recognition question persists. Last Saturday's showdown between then-unbeaten Kansas and one-loss Missouri drew a decent 7 overnight rating on ABC, but that was down 27% from that time slot last year for teams with one loss each.

Of course, they were USC and Notre Dame.

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