

Pollspeak Report to The Bowl Championship Series Oversight Committee

College Football 2007



Provided by

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Pollspeak, the College Sports Poll Watchdog, provides this report to The Bowl Championship Series Oversight Committee (BCS) at no charge and with no obligations. Pollspeak is not affiliated with The BCS, and we can therefore only make recommendations. The BCS will choose to use this information or not at its own discretion.

Inside this volume of the Pollspeak Report is all of the research and reports involving the USA Today Coaches' Poll and the Harris Interactive College Football Poll during the course of the 2007 college football season. Section A contains an executive summary along with Pollspeak's general recommendations. Section B contains all of the supporting information.

Section A

Executive Summary

This report is basically the culmination of two separate reports – one sent to the USA Today and one sent to Harris Interactive. They each have issues with their polling methodologies that should be resolved in order to strengthen their public perception and therefore strengthen the public perception of the BCS.

The most important change asked of the USA Today and Harris Interactive is to make all ballots public every week of the year. We will go one step further with the BCS and request that you require public ballots in order to be included in the BCS formula. Currently the BCS only requires that the last regular-season ballots be made public.

Certainly, having one public ballot is better than none; however, having any private ballots leads to a perception of hiding something. There is no way for the public (or BCS) to know if the voters are changing the way they vote for the public ballot. Every week's ballot is important to the teams and their fans, which is why all ballots should be public.

A team's poll ranking (particularly its BCS ranking) is not just important at the end of the season. Aside from the obvious implications that polls have on deciding the national championship, there are other benefits of a poll ranking that affect far more teams than the few playing for the big trophy. When a team is ranked in the top 25, it gets more press. The team is listed in every newspaper that covers college sports. The team is listed more often on the ESPN Bottom Line score ticker. Their games get better TV and radio coverage. This all turns into more exposure for the school, which positively affects the team's perception and financials. Equally important (if not more so), the extra exposure has a big affect on recruiting and the attitude of the high school players and coaches. Recruiting is the lifeblood of college sports. So it may not be so important if a team is ranked 17 vs. 18. However, it is VERY important if a team is ranked in the polls at all. Again, public ballots every week are necessary to ensure this process is handled fairly.

As a side note, Pollspeak is sponsoring a petition to make all ballots public. When we receive the allotted signatures, we will be forwarding it to the BCS, Harris Interactive and USA Today.

The full reports to the USA Today and Harris Interactive are included in Section B for your reference. However, here is a brief summary of the issues we pointed out in each:

USA Today Coaches' Poll Summary:

- 1) All ballots should be made public
- 2) The Coaches' Poll contains an inherent bias since coaches control the fate of their own teams, teams in their conference and their rivals
- 3) USA Today should supply basic rules for voters and criteria for judging voters' performance

Harris Interactive College Football Poll Summary:

- 1) All ballots should be made public
- 2) Contains bias to a lesser extent than the Coaches' Poll, but it must still be addressed and reported publicly
- 3) Harris Interactive should supply basic rules for voters and criteria for judging voters' performance
- 4) Identified a potential issue with the average age of voters
- 5) The only poll that allowed missing votes during the course of the season

Computer Polls Summary:

There is one more issue the BCS should address that is not covered in any previous Pollspeak Report. Computer Polls should be required to publicly state their formulas and show how their results were derived each week. Without public checks and balances there is a stronger possibility for corruption or errors in the computer polls.

If public display is not possible due to patents or other legal privacy concerns, then the BCS must appoint an independent individual or agency to verify the work of every computer poll each week. This person must be a credible expert who is unaffiliated with any poll or university potentially listed in the polls. Even if there has been no corruption or errors in the computer polling thus far, the fact that all formulas and "work" are not public (or certified by an unbiased expert) casts suspicion on their validity. By making this change, the BCS will be improving the perception and validity of the BCS formula.

Section B

Report to the USA Today

Pollspeak, the College Sports Poll Watchdog, provides this report to the USA Today at no charge and with no obligations. Pollspeak is not affiliated with the USA Today or their Coaches' Poll, and we can therefore only make recommendations. The USA Today will choose to use this information or not at its own discretion.

Inside this volume of the Pollspeak Report is all of the research and reports involving the Coaches' Poll during the course of the 2007 college football season. Section 1 contains an executive summary along with Pollspeak's general recommendations. Section 2 contains all of the supporting information.

Section 1

Executive Summary

If the USA Today only takes away one point from this report, it should be this: implement public ballots. Currently the only Coaches' Poll ballot made public is the final regular season ballot...this is a BCS requirement. However, there is no BCS restriction that all other ballots can't be public as well. So this is strictly a decision between the USA Today and coaches.

Certainly having one public ballot is better than none; however, having any closed ballots leads to a perception of hiding something. There is no way for the public (or BCS) to know if the coaches are subtly changing the way they vote for the public ballot. This is especially true since the final poll of the year (after the bowl games) reverts to being private. If we had to rank the importance of each poll, the final regular season poll is certainly the most important and the final poll of the year is the second-most important. So just making the final ballot of the year public would be an improvement. However, every ballot is important to the teams and their fans, which is why all ballots should be public.

A team's poll ranking (particularly its BCS ranking) is not just important at the end of the season. Aside from the obvious implications that polls have on deciding the national championship, there are other benefits of a poll ranking that affect far more teams than the few playing for the big trophy. When a team is ranked in the top 25, it gets more press. The team is listed in every newspaper that covers college sports. The team is listed more often on the ESPN Bottom Line score ticker. Their games get better TV and radio coverage. This all turns into more exposure for the school, which positively affects the team's perception and financials. Equally important (if not more so), the extra exposure has a big affect on recruiting and the attitude of the high school players and coaches. Recruiting is the lifeblood of college sports. So it may not be so important if a team is ranked 17 vs. 18. However, it is VERY important if a team is ranked in the polls at all. It is also worth noting that some coaches may receive incentives in their contracts for being ranked in the polls. This gives some coaches even more reason to be biased in the polls.

Which leads us to our second topic – bias. Any coaches' poll is going to be inherently biased for many of the reason listed above. A coaches' poll gives the coaches power to affect their own destiny. They could improve the standings of their own team or conference allies. They could lower the standing of their nearest competition or rivals. They could affect the outcome of their own contract bonuses. There is likely no way around this inherent bias completely. However,

there may be ways to mitigate the bias. The USA Today should investigate these possibilities. For example, is there a way to preclude coaches from voting for their own team or teams in their conference? Or maybe coaches from other divisions (i.e. IAA) should be voting for IA teams instead? This is something the USA Today should publicly address because the inherent bias coupled with private ballots is an extremely worrisome combination for college sports. For examples of obvious bias in the current poll as well as the types of potential bias, see Section 2.

A standard suggestion for all of the polls is to weed out bad voters on an annual basis. Like any organization, you are only as strong as your weakest link. By enacting a policy of reviewing and replacing voters each year, the Coaches' Poll will strengthen its reputation. Pollspeak intends to help in this endeavor by providing some tools and information needed to do these reviews. However, to be truly effective, we would need to see public ballots each and every week.

What is a bad voter? There is no easy answer to that. Pollspeak has its definitions as do our readers. The USA Today likely has its definitions as well. Those definitions should be published publicly and explained to voters before they are chosen. Right now voting is completely open ended, but some basic rules could help align the voters towards a common goal. The USA Today must determine these rules on their own, but some suggestions include:

- Rank the teams based on their performances up to this week. Do not try to predict the future, which is of course unknown. You will have time to change team rankings each week based on their latest performances. So there is no need to guess in advance.
- Give ample weight to games played on the field. If two teams have similar records, and they have played each other already, generally rank the winner higher. This is a rule of thumb more than a definitive rule because other factors (such as injured players) can also be taken into consideration.
- Do not show unreasonable bias towards any team, including your own. Maybe this goes without saying. Or maybe the idea is that if all coaches are biased, they will cancel each other's biases out. Either way, the intent should be stated and used as criteria for rating performance. Otherwise, you will get most coaches demonstrating bias and some (like Texas' Mack Brown this year) who show less bias but derive no benefit from being unbiased. See Section 2 for details about Brown's and other coach's ballots.

Pollspeak has one final, minor suggestion regarding making the ballots public. The current flash presentation of the end-of-regular-season ballots looks nice, but it would also be good to present the ballots in an HTML format (like the AP) or even spreadsheet format. At the very least, Pollspeak would appreciate receiving the data this way for easier analysis.

Section 2

Unfortunately, due to the Coaches' Poll's closed ballots, there is very little supporting information we can provide here, but we have included the lone article we have written based on the lone week of public ballots. Formatting in this document is an approximation of how it originally appeared on the web. To view the original information, see the Football section of Pollspeak: www.pollspeak.com. In contrast, you can see the 40 pages of information we provided to the Associate Press in our *Report to the Associated Press* here:

<http://pollspeak.com/reports/Pollspeak%20Report%20to%20the%20Associated%20Press%20-%20Football%202007.pdf>

A similar amount of data would be provided to the USA Today if their ballots were also made public each week. The USA Today could use this data to help identify errors and continuously improve the Coaches' Poll.



The Coaches' Perspective (posted 12/12/07)

Since this is the first time we get to see the Coaches' ballots all season, this column will be a bit different. The Coaches' Perspective is part analysis and a large part opinion and guess-work. It is generally accepted that coaches are going to be biased when they fill out their ballots. After all, they have a vested interest in how the polls turn out. Besides, the polls are secret for all but the last week, so who would ever know? In fact, if coaches aren't biased, fans could argue that they aren't doing their job as coach. A better argument is: why would you let the most inherently biased group of people vote in a poll with so much at stake...let alone secretly? It's like having the prisoners run the parole board.

This column will focus on the Coaches' Poll we have today, point out some of those alleged biases and give opinions why they exist. In many cases these will just be educated guesses supported by circumstantial evidence. We can't really know what goes on in the minds of the coaches...or in some cases, the assistants who may or may not actually fill out their ballots for them. There is also the very real possibility that there are no ulterior motives in the following votes, and our suspicions are purely coincidental.

Let's start by looking at the five most extreme coaches according to [Pollstalker](#):

1) [Howard Schnellenberger](#) -- FAU's only BCS top-25 opponent is USF, but The Bulls aren't one of his extreme votes. Unlike [Kansas](#), who he has highest in the nation at #2. Most of the other coaches voting Kansas nearly that high are in the Big 12. Schnellenberger briefly coached at [Oklahoma](#) and can't have fond memories of his infamous stint in the Big 12. Ah, there is a pattern -- Schnellenberger ranks every Big-12 team ([Kansas](#) - #2, [Missouri](#) - #4, [Texas](#) - #14) in the highest 10%...except for Oklahoma, which he ranks in the bottom 10% (#7). It seems he doesn't have an issue with the Big 12...just Oklahoma.

Schnellenberger also ranks [Florida](#) lowest in the nation at #21. This might be due to the Gators running up the score on FAU this year, 59-20. A ranking of #21 certainly isn't a sign of respect for the drubbing. Less likely, maybe Schnellenberger still holds a grudge against the Gators for handing his 1983 National Champion, [Miami Hurricanes](#) their only loss that season.

As for his five other extreme votes...theories welcome on the [forums](#).

2) **Bobby Bowden** – voted **West Virginia** highest. As anybody who has seen "We Are Marshall" knows, Bowden coached West Virginia (1970-1975) before **FSU**. Also, FSU recently hired offensive line-coach **Rick Trickett** from West Virginia, and Offensive Coordinator/Head-Coach-in-waiting **Jimbo Fisher** was born and raised in West Virginia...so there are plenty of ties to West Virginia on the staff.

Bowden voted **Oklahoma** lowest in the nation at #10. Oklahoma is one of the few traditional powerhouses Bowden has played but never beaten. He lost to the Sooners during the regular season in 1976 and lost all three Orange Bowls with them at the end of the 1979, 1980 and 2000 seasons. Additionally, the head Coach of Oklahoma, **Bob Stoops**, ran the **Florida** defense for the Gators' first national championship win over **FSU** in the 1996 Sugar Bowl. Bowden certainly has no love lost for the Sooners.

Bowden ranks **Clemson** highest in the nation at #11. Clemson is coached by his son, **Tommy Bowden**. Even Tommy couldn't rank his own team that high (#14)...although that is the Tiger's second highest ranking next to his dad's.

Bobby Bowden generally ranks his ACC brethren higher than most voters nationally. He's not as conference-biased as some others, but he is the only coach to give **Wake Forest** a vote (#22). The Demon Deacons have beaten FSU two years running.

Only one person ranked **Penn State** higher than Bowden, and it is well known that **Joe Paterno** and Bowden are long time friends and mutual admirers.

Bowden ranks **South Florida** highest at #17. The obvious reason might be that Bowden is just trying to help another Florida school make its mark. While USF could be seen as competition, Bowden is known for helping the underdog. However, there is another connection. FSU receivers coach and alumnus **Lawrence Dawsey** just returned to FSU from...USF. On that note, prior to that, Dawsey worked at **LSU**, Bowden's #1 team. Although LSU has an even stronger tie with **Jimbo Fisher**, whose last job was Offensive Coordinator for LSU. Is there a chance that Bowden's staff is somehow having an influence on his ballot?

Why would Bowden vote **Illinois** lowest (#18)? Fighting Illini head coach, **Ron Zook** was the coach at **Florida** for three years, but there was no public animosity between the two. Then again Zook did beat Bowden in his last game as a Gator.

Bowden was also one of four coaches not to rank **Tennessee**. Tennessee beat FSU in the 1998 National Championship game played at the Fiesta Bowl. That's enough...we should move on.

3) **Dennis Franchione** – **Texas A&M's** ex-coach was 5-0 against **Hawaii** as the head coach of **New Mexico** and **TCU**. It seems a lack of respect may have carried over to this year's ballot, ranking the Warriors lowest at #22.

Otherwise there aren't many obvious biases on his ballot. Franchione shows no particular bias towards the Big 12...in fact, maybe a slight bias AGAINST the Big 12 South. **Texas** at #20 and **Oklahoma** at #6 are both in the lower range nationally, but much lower than you would expect from a Big 12 coach. We can only guess that since Franchione was ousted by the Aggies (technically he retired), he doesn't have to play politics any more. In fact, based on his ballot, he might be planning a move to the ACC, Big East or Pac-10. USA Today should note that a more unbiased poll than the current Coaches' Poll might be "The Recently Ousted Coaches' Poll."

4) **Mark Dantonio** of **Michigan State** shows the typical conference bias you would expect -- **Ohio State** #1, **Illinois** #9, **Wisconsin** #14, **Penn State** #23. With the exception of Wisconsin the rest are either on or near the extreme high, and only 3 people voted higher for Wisconsin. No surprises there.

His ranking of **Missouri** (#12) and **Kansas** (#13) lowest in the nation is surprising, though. Dantonio was Kansas' secondary coach under **Glen Mason** from 1991-1994. Maybe there are still some hard feelings towards the Jayhawks and possibly Missouri who he beat 3 out of 4 of those years, too.

Dantonio's last team, **Cincinnati** might be feeling burnt by their ex-coach's #25 ranking. 49 of the 60 coaches ranked the Bearcats higher.

As for **Air Force's** highest ranking at #22...feel free to discuss theories on the [forums](#). Could he have family in the service?

5) **Bill Doba**, the recently fired coach of **Washington State** also shows the typical conference bias -- **USC** highest (#2), **Arizona State** highest (#7), **Oregon State** highest (#20). He could have joined **Oregon** coach, **Mike Bellotti** and six others in ranking Oregon, but maybe he didn't appreciate this year's 53-7 pounding by the Ducks, which was the Cougars worst loss of the season. Otherwise, this is Pac-10 bias to the extreme. He was fired on November 26th, before these ballots were turned in. So is it possible the ballot was completed by somebody else? Or maybe it just didn't affect his attitude towards his competition.

He also ranks **Clemson** lowest in the nation at #21. This is a stretch, but Doba was defensive coordinator at **The Citadel** (The Military College of South Carolina) in 1987-88. In 1988, The Citadel made it to the I-AA national playoffs, but were shut out earlier that year by Clemson 24 – 0. We seriously doubt he has had an axe to grind with Clemson all these years, but since there is no historical record of ballots for us to check, who knows? Also, who knows what other biases head coaches or assistant coaches harbor that no reasonable amount of research would uncover.

Doba is also one of two coaches to leave either **Wisconsin** or **Texas** unranked (he leaves both off). No serious guesses here. Of course, if the ballot was filled out by a replacement after Doba was fired, then we don't even know whose biases we're dealing with. Pollspeak has contacted both the **Washington State** and **Texas A&M** athletic departments to see how ballots were handled after their coaches departed. As of this writing, there was no comment from Washington State. Texas A&M responded: "*Coach Franchione has done his own voting the entire time and will finish this year after the bowls are finished.*"

(UPDATE 12/13/07: Washington State responded: "*Coach Doba did fill out the final ballot.*")

Those are just the first five coaches we looked at. We have neither the time nor space to make those connections for every coach. However, here are some more quick highlights:

- Half of **Oklahoma's** #1 votes came from their head coach, **Bob Stoops**. Stoops also gave **LSU** their lowest ranking (#6) behind Big 12 members **Missouri** (#3) and **Kansas** (#4). You can't blame him for trying to reach the national championship game (but you can blame the BCS).
- By contrast, only two of **LSU's** 11 first-place votes came from SEC schools. One of those was **Les Miles** himself. Miles also gave **Arkansas** and **Auburn** their highest rankings, **Tennessee** and **Florida** their second-highest rankings, and **Georgia** a respectable #3 ranking (but not so close to affect LSU's trip to the title game...just in case.)
- While **Tyrone Willingham** (**Washington**) was at **Notre Dame**, he lost to **Boston College** all three years. Coincidentally he is the only coach to leave the Eagles off of his ballot.
- **Michigan** was only ranked by six coaches. Five of them were Big Ten coaches and the other was Michigan alum, **Les Miles**.
- **Tommy Bowden**, **Howard Schnellenberger**, **Mike Bellotti** and **Bobby Bowden** were the only coaches to vote **Missouri** ahead of **Oklahoma**. Talk about breaking [rule #1](#)! These teams have the same record, and the Sooners beat the Tigers TWICE this year.
- **Art Briles**, **Houston's** ex-coach – cast the only vote for **Houston** (#23).
- **George O'Leary** of **UCF** gives his own team its highest ranking of #17.
- **Virginia Tech's** **Frank Beamer** gave the Hokies their highest ranking of #2.
- **Hawaii's** only #1 vote came from fellow WAC coach, **Hal Mumme** of **New Mexico State**.
- **Illinois'** highest ranking of #9 came from three Big Ten coaches: **Bret Bielema** (**Wisconsin**), **Mark Dantonio** (**Michigan State**) and **Ron Zook** (**Illinois**).
- **Wisconsin's** highest ranking of #13 came from Wisconsin coach **Bret Bielema**, and seemingly unbiased picks from **Texas Tech's** **Mike Leach** and **Southern Mississippi's** **Jeff Bower**.

One of the most unbiased coaches is Texas' Mack Brown. Texas finished #17 in the Coaches' Poll, which is exactly how Brown voted them. Every other coach with a vote and a team in the top 25 voted their team higher than the final poll. Well, one exception is Jim Tressel who voted Ohio State #1, but you can't call that an act of modesty. Mack Brown also had no votes on the extreme, and shows negligible Big 12 bias. So he is actually Good Voter of the Week-worthy. However, this is the Coaches' Poll. So our question to Coach Brown is...Why bother? Nobody is trying to hold you to a higher standard, and you can only hurt your own team or conference by voting without bias. Even Pollspeak wouldn't ask this of you.

We would ask the BCS to remove such an inherently biased poll from the formula. Alternatively, the Coaches' Poll could be modified to disallow voting for any team from your conference (including your own team). Although this could cause issues with the number of votes cast. Also, while exploitation is still possible by downgrading your nearest competition, it wouldn't be as damaging as the current system. Aside from making all ballots public, which should be a requirement of all BCS polls, our favorite option, is to convince the NCAA to include a Biased Vote Infraction into the football rulebook, resulting in a 15-yard penalty on the coach's next kick off...even if he changes schools. Maybe that will help hold coaches' personally accountable.

We can't point out every instance of alleged bias in the Coaches' Poll, but with just some basic research, we think we've pointed out many of the TYPES of bias:

- Conference
- Own Team
- Poll Competition
- Alumni
- Past Jobs
- Family
- Staff
- Friends
- Rivals
- Bad Sportsmanship/Revenge

Biases exist in all polls, but the Coaches' Poll seems particularly susceptible to bias due to the voters' vested interest in the results and the close relationships within the coaching fraternity. The goal of this article is not to put coaches in the spotlight. It is to put the Coaches' Poll in the spotlight and hope steps are taken to fix the inherent problems with using such a poll in the BCS.

Report to Harris Interactive

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Section 1

Executive Summary

If Harris Interactive only takes away one point from this report, it should be this: implement public ballots. Currently the only Harris Interactive College Football Poll ballot made public is the final regular season ballot...this is a BCS requirement. However, there is no BCS restriction that all other ballots can't be public as well. So this is strictly a decision by Harris Interactive.

Certainly, having one public ballot is better than none; however, having any private ballots leads to a perception of hiding something. There is no way for the public (or BCS) to know if the voters are subtly changing the way they vote for the public ballot. Every week's ballot is important to the teams and their fans, which is why all ballots should be public.

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What is a bad voter? There is no easy answer to that. Pollspeak has its definitions as do our readers. Harris Interactive likely has its definitions as well. Those definitions should be published publicly and explained to voters before they are chosen. Right now voting is completely open ended, but some basic rules could help align the voters towards a common goal. Harris Interactive must determine these rules on their own, but some suggestions include:

- Rank the teams based on their performances up to the current week. Do not try to predict the future, which is of course unknown. You will have time to change team rankings each week based on their latest performances. So there is no need to guess in advance.
- Give ample weight to games played on the field. If two teams have similar records, and they have played each other already, generally rank the winner higher. This is a rule of thumb more than a definitive rule because other factors (such as injured players) can also be taken into consideration.
- Do not show unreasonable bias towards any team, including those on your resume. Most of the voters in the Harris Interactive Poll are former players, coaches, administrators or employees of the schools being ranked. Voters should not show favoritism to teams they have been affiliated with.

On that note, the topic of bias must be discussed. The Harris Interactive poll is not as inherently biased as the USA Today Coaches' Poll since all of the voters in the Harris Interactive poll are not currently employed by the universities. However, as past players, coaches, administrators or employees of football playing schools, there is likely some level of allegiance (or rivalry) involved. If Harris Interactive is going to allow voters with obvious school affiliations, they need to ensure that each school and conference has equal representation. Are they currently doing background checks and bias screens on their voters? How are they handling conference affiliations where the number of teams vary? In other words, do conferences with more teams have an advantage by having more representative voters? These are questions that should be addressed publicly and published on their site in the name of full disclosure. Ideally, they should present charts or graphs demonstrating how each team and conference is represented.

A minor demographic issue also worth mentioning is age. This topic is addressed in more detail in Section 2, but many of the voters in the Harris Interactive Poll are retired, and the average age of their voters is the highest of all polls (based on our sample). While age is not necessarily a problem, Harris Interactive might want to look into a greater mix of current and retired voters...as long as the bias balance issues are also addressed.

Another issue discussed in Section 2 is missing ballots. Seven ballots went missing during the course of the 2007 season. Since ballots are private, Pollspeak has no idea whose ballots are missing or why. Neither the USA Today nor AP football polls have a single missing ballot. If Harris Interactive is going to allow ballots to go unfilled, they should publicly explain their system in more detail. How many ballots are allowed to go missing before results are invalidated and what statistical measure are they using to determine this number?

Pollspeak has one final, minor suggestion regarding making the ballots public. The current PDF presentation of the end-of-regular-season ballots is functional, but it would also be good to present the ballots in an HTML format (like the AP) or even spreadsheet format. At the very least, Pollspeak would appreciate receiving the data this way for easier analysis.

Section 2

Unfortunately, due to the Harris Interactive College Football Poll's closed ballots, there is very little supporting information we can provide here, but we have included the lone article we have written based on the lone week of public ballots. Formatting in this document is an approximation of how it originally appeared on the web. To view the original information, see the Football section of Pollspeak: www.pollspeak.com. In contrast, you can see the 40 pages of information we provided to the Associate Press in our *Report to the Associated Press* here:

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A similar amount of data would be provided to Harris Interactive if their ballots were also made public each week. Harris Interactive could use this data to help identify errors and continuously improve their College Football Poll.



The Harris Interactive Poll - What You Don't Know (posted 12/19/07)

We're going to shy away from the typical Bad/Good Voter premise with the Harris Interactive Poll. Most of our readers have gotten comfortable with [Pollstalker](#) by now and can tell for themselves who the most extreme voter is, etc. (Okay, it's [Bobby Aillet](#)). Instead, we'll point out some of the differences between this poll and the others. We can't guarantee that you don't know these things already, but if you do know, please tell us what happened to the missing ballots.

The first, and most obvious, difference is that Harris Interactive is the largest of the polls. With 114 voters, it nearly doubles the Coaches' Poll and dwarfs everything Pollspeak has covered to date:

- AP - 65 voters
- Coaches - 60 voters
- Men's Basketball - 72 voters
- Women's Basketball - 50 voters

However, not so obvious, is that all 114 voters don't have to vote each week. 114 ballots were counted in weeks 15 and 14, but week 13 only had 113 voters. Week 11 only had 112 voters. In all, seven ballots have gone missing during the 11 weeks Harris has been polling this season. The missing votes could be from seven individual voters, or some voters may have neglected to vote multiple times. Since the ballots are secret, we have no idea. We contacted Harris Interactive about this discrepancy. We asked them how many ballots per week are allowed to go missing, and what happens when voters don't turn in ballots? Unfortunately their only response so far has been: "*I would refer you to the December 2 documents that are on the Harris Interactive website (<http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/bcspoll.asp>); these document indicate that all 114 Harris Poll voters submitted their rankings on Sunday, Dec 2nd.*" The Harris Interactive Poll is the only poll that has allowed missing ballots so far. Neither the AP nor Coaches' Poll had a different number of voters on any given week.

Another difference with the Harris Interactive poll is that it is made up of a lot of retired people. There are some current media members, but for the most part the poll is made up of former players, former coaches, former media and former college administrators. With all of these retirees, it makes sense that

the Harris Interactive Poll might have the oldest voters of any poll. Previously we had assumed that the Coaches' Poll might have the oldest voters. So we did some research.

We were able to easily look up the ages of 40 of the 114 voters in the Harris Poll. We would like more data, but this is still a good representative sample. The average age of those 40 voters is 63 years old. The Coaches average age (with 58 of 60 voters checked) was 53 years old. As for the AP, we couldn't find enough for a representative sample, but suffice to say, they are likely the youngest group. Some seem to have just graduated from college, and since the AP Poll is only made up of current media, it makes sense that they would be younger than the retirees. So the average age of Harris voters is a full 10 years older than that of the coaches, and likely much older on average than the AP voters.

Does age really matter? It shouldn't. We are not saying that there should be any type of age limitations placed on voters. Nor are we saying that any one age group votes BETTER than any other age group. However, it is worth noting demographic differences between the polls. If different polls seem to display certain trends, age could be one factor. Perhaps an older generation voter might give more respect to traditional powerhouses than someone from a younger generation. Not that these are definitive examples, but USC was ranked highest (#5) in Harris and #6 in the other two polls. Also, Navy's only two votes came from the Harris Poll. Again, by no means is this proof of any bias by age, but this is a trend well worth noting and tracking over the years.

While on the topic of age, here is a quick call back to the Coaches' Poll. It might just be coincidence, but the two oldest voters in the Coaches Poll (Howard Schnellenberger -- 73 and Bobby Bowden -- 78) also happen to be the two most extreme voters according to [Pollstalker](#).

For what it's worth, the oldest voter we uncovered in the Harris Interactive Poll was [Bill Arnsperger](#), who is 81 and served various coaching stints with Ohio State, Kentucky, Tulane, LSU and the NFL. However, there is a good chance that the Harris Interactive Poll's most extreme voter, [Bobby Aillet](#), is actually older. Unfortunately, our research could not confirm his birth date, but he was captain of the Louisiana Tech football team in 1945, which would likely make him 80 years or older.