

Utah AG: BCS may violate antitrust laws

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SALT LAKE CITY (AP)—Utah's attorney general is investigating the Bowl Championship Series for a possible violation of federal antitrust laws after an undefeated Utes team was left out of the national title game for the second time in five years.

Attorney General Mark Shurtleff contends the BCS unfairly puts schools like Utah, which is a member of a conference without an automatic bid to the lucrative bowl games, at a competitive and financial disadvantage.

"We've established that from the very first day, from the very first kickoff in the college season, more than half of the schools are put on an unlevel playing field," Shurtleff said Tuesday. "They will never be allowed to play for a national championship."

BCS administrator Bill Hancock said he couldn't comment on the investigation until he had seen something in writing from the Utah attorney general's office.

"We just don't think it's appropriate to comment until we've seen something to comment on," Hancock said.

The BCS is designed to pit the top two teams against each other in a national championship game each year. It uses a complicated formula based on human polls and computer rankings to determine who plays in that game, which Shurtleff contends is biased.

No. 1 Florida and No. 2 Oklahoma have one loss each but will play for the BCS national championship Thursday night in Miami.

The Associated Press crowns its own national champion based on a poll of sports writers who are not bound to vote for the winner of the BCS title game. Many fans are clamoring for voters to put Utah—the nation's only undefeated team—in the No. 1 spot in the final poll.

On Friday, Utah became the first team from a non-BCS conference to win two BCS bowls after it upset No. 4 Alabama 31-17 in the Sugar Bowl. Utah also beat Pittsburgh in the 2004 Fiesta Bowl to complete an undefeated season.

Shurtleff said his office is still in the initial stages of reviewing the Sherman Antitrust Act to see if a lawsuit can be filed. To succeed in a lawsuit, he would have to prove a conspiracy exists that creates a monopoly.

Shurtleff said he prefers that BCS officials and university presidents solve the problem of excluding some schools from a national title game by creating a playoff system, but added he's committed to doing whatever it takes to produce change.

If a lawsuit is filed against the BCS, though, Shurtleff could end up suing the state he represents. Utah is a member of the Mountain West Conference and Utah State belongs to the Western Athletic Conference; both leagues are members of the BCS.

"We have to determine the answer to those questions," said Shurtleff, whose planned investigation was reported by the Deseret News on Tuesday. "You determine who it is you're bringing action against."

The BCS is comprised of the 11 Football Bowl Subdivision conferences, the University of Notre Dame and representatives of the bowl organizations.

Under the BCS, about \$9.5 million is distributed among Conference USA, the Mid-American, Mountain West, Sun Belt and Western Athletic conferences for making their teams available to play in BCS games.

If a school from any of those conferences receives an at-large invitation to play in a BCS bowl or championship game, those conferences get an additional 9 percent of BCS revenues among them, which come from television rights and the bowls themselves.

If more than one school from those conferences make the BCS bowls or championship game, those conferences get an extra \$4.5 million for each additional team.

By comparison, the share to each conference with an automatic berth in the BCS—the ACC, Big East, Big 12, Big Ten, Pac-10 and SEC—is about \$18 million each. When a second team from one of those conferences qualifies to play in a BCS game, as the SEC accomplished this year with Alabama and Florida, that conference gets an additional \$4.5 million.

"It's not about bragging rights. It's a multimillion dollar—hundreds of millions—business where the BCS schools get richer and non-BCS get poorer," Shurtleff said.