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Sports

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IN MY OPINION
Football rankings add up to a science

TOM SORENSEN

Long ago and far away, I majored in journalism and psychology. I was fine with psychology until we moved past Pavlov and B.F. Skinner into a lab with a giant chart that featured veins.

I wasn't intimidated. Hey, there's blood in those things, right? Believe it or not, the observation was not enough to appease the professor and by the end of the week I was so lost that I was down to one major.

On Tuesday afternoon, I'm reading the Journal of Quantitative Analysis in Sports, and when I get to the section about hybrid paired comparisons, assumed and true covariance structure, sandwich estimators and misspecifications, I feel as if I am back in that lab.

Yet, the reading is compelling. It is part of the Sports-Quant rating algorithm. The SportsQuant folks use it every week when they rank college football teams.

David Annis -- vice president of forecasting and pricing structured transactions and analytical research at Wachovia -- founded Sports-Quant. He's a former professor at Purdue and Navy, loves sports and, like you and me, is frustrated by The Associated Press and other polls because they do not reward strength of schedule.

"Look at the polls, and the teams with one loss are grouped together and the teams with two losses are grouped together," Annis says over a glass of water.

It's after work, I'm buying and Annis, 29, is drinking water.

He explains.

"I graduated with degrees in engineering (mechanical) at Florida and (industrial) at Purdue," he says. "Engineering is nerdy. Then I majored in statistics (M.S. and Ph.D at Purdue), and that's the only subject even nerdier."

Yet there is not a pencil in his pocket. He developed his rating algorithm (which has nothing to do with former vice president Al Gore) at Purdue. The subject of his dissertation, he worked on it more than three years. Anybody who can pull that off is too cool to be a nerd.

Annis encountered one problem.

"How do you make it look like a serious subject?" he asks.

The subject is serious to every college football fan. This is a sport that values perception as much as performance when it determines its champion.

The perception that teams with pretty records are superior to teams with difficult schedules works against schools whose Saturdays are filled with adult competition.

This is why SportsQuant ranks Louisiana State, which has two losses, in front of six of the Division I-A undefeated teams. Two is 12 spots higher than AP ranks the Tigers. AP has no SEC team in its top five. SportsQuant has three.

AP ranks four ACC teams in its Top 25. SportsQuant ranks only Clemson and Miami. If 23 seems high for the Hurricanes, it's 22 spots lower than the World Boxing Association ranks them.

Annis predicts bowl winners and hits about 60 percent, including the Texas-Southern California upset last season for the national championship.

Annis also is an NFL fan, and he expects objective analysis -- understanding how to collect and apply data -- "to revolutionize the NFL like 'Moneyball' did major league baseball. I just hope I'm part of it," he says.

If you want to know more about Annis and his work, visit SportsQuant.com.

If you want to know more about the Prentice binary index, the kth iteration and the Poisson generalized linear model, you can ask me or somebody smarter -- I suggest SportsQuant.com. IN MY OPINION

SportsQuant Ratings

The rankings combine wins, losses and point-scoring data. They "explicitly account for

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home-field advantage and implicitly consider strength of schedule." For complete rankings, go to SportsQuant.com

SportsQuant	AP Top 25
1. Ohio State	Ohio St.
2. LSU	Michigan
3. Texas	Southern Cal
4. Florida	W. Virginia
5. Auburn	Texas
6. Southern Cal	Louisville
7. Rutgers	Tennessee
8. Michigan	Auburn
9. Louisville	Florida
10. California	Notre Dame
11. Oklahoma	California
12. Tennessee	Clemson
13. West Virginia	Georgia Tech
14. Nebraska	LSU
15. Boise St	Arkansas
16. Clemson	Oregon
17. Wisconsin	Nebraska
18. Pittsburgh	Boise St.
19. Missouri	Rutgers
20. Oregon	Oklahoma
21. Arkansas	Wisconsin
22. BYU	Boston College
23. Miami	Texas A&M
24. Washington St.	Missouri
25. Florida St.	Wake Forest

Tom Sorensen



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