

## Statement From SBC Commissioner Karl Benson

Written by John McElwain  
Monday, 09 December 2013 08:36

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The 2013 regular season was the most competitive in the 13-year history of the Sun Belt – we had seven teams with records strong enough to qualify for bowls, the best ever non-conference win record, and a 6-1 record against our peer conferences – Conference USA, the Mid-American Conference and the Mountain West Conference.

When it was all over, UL-Lafayette and Arkansas State emerged as the league's co-champions with the Cajuns accepting a bid to the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl and Arkansas State being selected by the Sun Belt's second primary bowl, the GoDaddy Bowl.

The seven Sun Belt bowl eligible teams breaks the league's previous record of five teams set last year and of all the other nine FBS conferences, the Sun Belt had the highest percentage of teams reach the bowl eligible mark – a tremendous achievement for the conference.

With seven bowl eligible teams from the Sun Belt along with a number of teams from other conferences in the at-large pool, we have known for several weeks that it was going to be very difficult, if not impossible, to place all of the bowl eligible teams from the Sun Belt into bowls that had open spots.

And during the past several weeks, I have been in discussions and negotiations with all the bowls that might be open. Specifically, the Sun Belt targeted the AdvoCare V100

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Independence Bowl and Little Caesar's Pizza Bowl and was in negotiations with both up until final decisions were made.

The Sun Belt Conference Presidents and Chancellors authorized me two weeks ago to use Sun Belt funds at my discretion to entice both bowls to take a Sun Belt team. As a result, the Sun Belt made very significant financial offers to both bowls that clearly exceeded anything the Sun Belt has done in previous years.

I am extremely disappointed, that while our efforts were very aggressive, we ended up not being able to place more than two of our bowl eligible teams – especially Western Kentucky University with an 8-4 record. While the current bowl system is beneficial, the system is flawed when in the last two years three teams with eight or more wins – WKU, Middle Tennessee and Louisiana Tech – are denied post season opportunities when 12 teams last season with 6-6 records and seven teams this season are allowed to play in bowl games. This comes in addition to 6-7 teams being allowed to play in bowl games in 2012 and 2011.

With all of this being said, it is important to reiterate several important facts.

First, the champion of the Sun Belt Conference does not automatically go to the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl.

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Second, while the Sun Belt has suggested guidelines on how we would like teams to be selected for bowls, both the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl and GoDaddy Bowl ultimately have the freedom to choose the team that they feel is best for their game.

Lastly, once our two current bowl slots are filled there becomes a great deal of competition for open bowl slots. The discussions that we had with these open bowls involved significant financial contributions that put our teams in a position where they could be at or near the top of each bowl's list of potential invitees.

We salute and congratulate the two bowl representatives from the Sun Belt. This is a time to celebrate the accomplishments of Sun Belt teams this season – and not focus on the negative. The Sun Belt continues to evolve, grow, and mature as one of ten FBS conferences. Beginning next season the Sun Belt will have a third primary bowl partner with the Camellia Bowl in Montgomery, Alabama and other guaranteed spots in the Bahamas Bowl and the Miami Beach Bowl, along with other potential new bowls that we are trying to develop. And of course, a major goal of ours will be to have a team in the newly formed College Football Playoff.

“Together we Rise” is the theme of the Sun Belt Conference because we stand firmly committed to our membership and our communities and we embrace the growth and evolution of the Sun Belt.