

PASSPORT TO KICKOFF



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Popeyes Bahamas Bowl

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2014 REVIEW - 2015 PREVIEW

After a successful inaugural bowl week in 2014 that was capped off with one of the most incredible comebacks and final plays in bowl game history, the second Popeyes Bahamas Bowl will kick off Thursday, Dec. 24, 2015 at Nassau's Thomas A. Robinson National Stadium.

The Bahamas slogan is "It's Better in the Bahamas," and bowl week in Nassau is just that with a mix of sun, sand and football in one of the most beautiful tourist destinations in the world.

The bowl has been strengthened going forward as ESPN Events announced the acquisition of the game May 12, 2015. The addition of the Popeyes Bahamas Bowl makes the game a part of an impressive stable of events in football and basketball for ESPN Events.

"We are excited to be adding the Popeyes Bahamas Bowl to our portfolio of events," said **Pete Derzis**, senior vice president, ESPN Events. "The inaugural game was a tremendous success, and we hope to build on that by bringing a one-of-a-kind bowl experience for our student-athletes, coaches and fans. The level of support from the entire country of the Bahamas makes this event truly unique – making this game a true destination event that fans across the country will want to attend and support."

A leader in the New Orleans segment of the foodservice industry and the world's second largest quick-service chicken concept based on the number of units, Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen became the bowl's title sponsor in August 2014. A multiyear extension of the title sponsorship occurred in June 2015.

The 2014 game featured Western Kentucky of Conference USA against Central Michigan of the Mid-American Conference in the first FBS-level bowl game outside of the United States or Canada since 1937.

A crowd of 13,667 in Robinson National Stadium and those watching on ESPN witnessed the Hilltoppers hold on for a 49-48 victory over the Chippewas in one of the most memorable bowl games of the 2014 season.

WKU built a 49-14 lead after three quarters, but CMU rallied with a 34-point fourth quarter, including a last-gasp, 75-yard, three-lateral pass play that resulted in a touchdown as time expired – a sequence that was named the top play of the 2014 bowl season by ESPN's SportsCenter. A 2-point conversion pass by the Chippewas that would have won the game was broken up in the back of the end zone. The final series of plays captured the imagination of college football fans who saw countless replays on national and local TV and shared the crazy ending through social media outlets.

WKU quarterback **Brandon Doughty** was the Offensive Player of the Game after completing 31 of 42 passes for 486 yards and five touchdowns. Hilltopper defensive end **Derik Overstreet** was the Defensive Player of the Game after he had five tackles, which included two sacks.

Central Michigan quarterback **Cooper Rush** threw for 493 yards and a FBS-bowl-record seven TDs in defeat, including the game's final thrilling TD.

The teams set FBS bowl records for most combined passing touchdowns (12) and combined passing yards (971).

Fans at the game were treated to free tastings of Popeyes' Ghost Pepper Wings, a pregame performance by the famed Bahamas All-Stars band and a spirited halftime show by the renowned Valley Boys.

The exciting finish capped off a first-class bowl week experience for student-athletes, coaches/staff, alumni, sponsors and fans, who all enjoyed the famous hospitality that the Bahamas offers to visitors.

A welcome party at the Atlantis after the teams' arrivals gave the student-athletes, team travel parties and VIPs a taste of both Popeyes and the Bahamas. The student-athletes attended a beach bash the next night at Atlantis and had a chance to enjoy food, fun and fellowship on the beach with spectacular views of the Caribbean and the striking Atlantis resort.

One of the highlights of bowl week was when the student-athletes from WKU and Central Michigan helped fulfill the mission statement of the bowl as they gave back to the Bahamas by way of a visit to the Ranfurly Homes for Children in Nassau and a youth football clinic conducted by the bowl, USA Football and the Bahamas American Football Federation. The large contingent of student-athletes from both schools brought smiles to the youth at both events.

In addition to that community-relations effort, the bowl also presented a \$56,000 donation to the Ranfurly Homes to fund 10 scholarships.

"It's been an outstanding experience this entire week for not only our players, our coaches, our administration, our fans, but it's truly been something I think they'll cherish the rest of their life," WKU head coach **Jeff Brohm** said. "It is a premier bowl destination, and I think we're fortunate and lucky to be here. We've had a fantastic time. Our players have experienced the culture here. They got to get out in the community. They got to go to the children's home. They got to put on a football clinic. They came back, and they raved about it. They had a great time. They had a great time working with the kids. They've had a lot of fun at the Atlantis the entire week they've been here."

"We've had, really, a marvelous time," Central Michigan head coach **Dan Enos** said. "This has been a first-class experience first and foremost for our student-athletes but also our coaches, administration and extended families that were able to come with us and participate in this week's festivities."

The economic impact of the game was significant as the bowl and the two participating institutions spent over \$1.26 million dollars in the Bahamas.

The 2015 game will once again feature teams from C-USA and the MAC in the Nassau stadium named for the late Bahamian Olympic track star. The facility has seen its share of high-flying track action, but the 14 combined TDs and the closing four-person relay by Central Michigan at the end of the inaugural game was as exciting as any seen on the stadium surface.

What can the Popeyes Bahamas Bowl do for an encore? Stay tuned.