



2017

**BOWL GAMES ARE BETTER  
IN THE BAHAMAS™**

## 2016 REVIEW - 2017 PREVIEW

After three bowls that have served as a springboard to success for those teams and student-athletes participating, the fourth-annual Bahamas Bowl will kick off at 12:30 pm on Friday, Dec. 22, 2017 at Nassau's Thomas A. Robinson National Stadium.

Proving the slogan that "Bowl Games are Better in the Bahamas," bowl week in Nassau always lives up to that with a mix of sun, sand and football in one of the most beautiful tourist destinations in the world.

The Bahamas Bowl was enhanced after ESPN Events added the game to an impressive stable of events in May 2015. And, with ESPN on board, the bowl week always provides student-athletes, conference partners, alumni, fans and sponsors a first-class international bowl experience.

A large part of the Bahamas Bowl's success is the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism. Using the local slogan "Football, Family and Fun", Bahamians of all ages come out to Robinson National Stadium to experience gameday the way it is done in at college stadiums in the U.S.

The Atlantis Bahamas is another important element to the bowl experience, as it houses both teams for four nights at its world-class resort and water park on Paradise Island.

Robinson National Stadium received a major upgrade as the National Stadium Authority-Bahamas installed a Celebration Bermudagrass field in November 2016, along with other improvements to the facility.

There has been plenty of success on the field for all of the participating teams. Both of the first two winners of the bowl – WKU in 2014 and Western Michigan in 2015 – went on to win their respective conference titles the following season. The Hilltoppers captured Conference USA in 2015 and 2016, while the Broncos won the MAC title in 2016 and played in a New Year's Six bowl after an undefeated 13-0 regular season.

Fourteen student-athletes who have participated in the bowl have heard their names called by teams during the 2015-17 NFL Drafts, led by Western Michigan WR **Corey Davis**, who was selected No. 5 overall by the Tennessee Titans in the 2017 NFL

Draft. Davis set a bowl record with 188 receiving yards in the 2015 game. A bowl-record total of seven student-athletes who played in the Bahamas were taken in the 2016 NFL Draft.

The 2016 game featured Old Dominion of Conference USA and Eastern Michigan of the Mid-American Conference in the only current international bowl game. The combined 16 victories between ODU and EMU coming into the game was the most in the history of the bowl.

A crowd of 13,422 in Robinson National Stadium and those watching on ESPN saw another exciting Popeyes Bahamas Bowl as Old Dominion beat Eastern Michigan 24-20 for the Monarchs' first-ever bowl victory.

Led by Offensive Player of the Game running back **Ray Lawry** and his 133 rushing yards, the Monarchs (10-3) left the Bahamas with a six-game win streak and their first bowl trophy. Quarterback **David Washington** added 188 passing yards and three touchdowns for ODU.

Eastern Michigan quarterback **Brogan Roback** did all he could to keep the Eagles (7-6) in the game, throwing for 300 yards and two second-half touchdowns.

ODU senior linebacker **TJ Ricks** was named Defensive Player of the Game after finishing with nine tackles, including one for a loss.

The bowl was honored as Prime Minister of the Bahamas **Perry Christie** gave out the newly-renamed Prime Minister's Trophy to ODU.

Fans at the game were treated to a pregame FanFest featuring several interactive elements around Robinson National Stadium, a pregame performance by the famed Bahamas All-Stars band and a halftime Junkanoo joint performance from the Valley Boys and the Saxons.

The game capped off a tremendous bowl week for everyone involved, 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 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 Eastern Michigan and Old Dominion helped fulfill the mission statement of the bowl as they gave back to the youth of the Bahamas by way of a visit to the Ranfurly Homes for Children in Nassau and a Youth Football Leadership Clinic conducted by USA Football and the bowl. The large contingent of student-athletes from both schools brought smiles to the Bahamian youth at both events.

"We could not be more excited and I absolutely agree: Bowl games are better in the Bahamas, said ODU head coach **Bobby Wilder** the day before the game. "We have had a life-changing experience from the moment we arrived on Monday, when the plane was getting ready to touch down and everyone had their window (shade) open, taking pictures of the beautiful water; how friendly and welcoming everybody was at the airport to the time we arrived at Atlantis. It's all just been a dream come true and we've made lifetime memories that we will never forget."

"The hospitality, and the first-class nature with which we've been treated – I said it the other day, 'We've been treated like kings,'" said Eastern Michigan head coach **Chris Creighton**. "At Eastern Michigan, we haven't experienced that before. It's truly been a blessing; it's been an honor."

The economic impact of the Bahamas Bowl was once again significant in 2016 as the bowl, ESPN Events, Eastern Michigan and Old Dominion and sponsors spent \$3.5 million in traveling to and during their stay in the Bahamas as 1,900 people made their way to The Bahamas to be a part of bowl week, using over 2,300 room nights locally.

Significant money was spent in travel, shipping, hotel, food, supplies, advertising, entertainment and local transportation. Several local Nassau businesses worked with the bowl and supplied product, supplies, equipment and services. In the future, the bowl will continue to visit the Ranfurly Homes, conduct the Youth Football Clinic and engage the Bahamas All-Stars band and Junkanoo groups.

Valued support for the Bahamas Bowl comes from a diverse group of sponsors, especially Atlantis and Caribbean Bottling Company Bahamas (Coca-Cola). Local Bahamas sponsors Bristol Cellar, Burns House and the The Tribune join numerous Nassau businesses in making the bowl a success each year. The Bahamas Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, the National Sports Authority and their staffs help prepare Robinson National Stadium for the game, and transportation partners Bahamas Experience, Leisure Travel and Tours and Majestic Travel make sure the teams, staffs, VIPs and fans get around New Providence Island to the many bowl events with ease.

The Bahamas Bowl Advisory Committee, made up of Bahamian business leaders, works with the bowl staff year-round to help promote the game and lend assistance where needed.

For the 2017 game, the Bahamas Bowl has Conference USA and the Mid-American Conference as participating conferences in the Nassau stadium named for the late Bahamian Olympic track star on December 22.

If the first three games, which had a combined 217 points and 29 touchdowns scored, are any indication, fans in the Bahamas will be treated once again to exciting high-flying football, and everyone watching on ESPN will experience the wonder and beauty of the Bahamas. be treated once again to exciting high-flying football, and everyone watching on ESPN will experience the wonder and beauty of the Bahamas.

ODU head coach Bobby Wilder celebrates with his players after the Monarchs won the 2016 Bahamas Bowl  
(Photo: Ben Solomon/ESPN Images)

