



2016 POPEYES BAHAMAS BOWL ■ DECEMBER 23, 2016; 1 P.M. ET **ESPN** ■ POPEYESBAHAMASBOWL.COM

## 2015 REVIEW - 2016 PREVIEW

After a pair of successful bowl weeks and two exciting games, the third-annual Popeyes Bahamas Bowl will kick off at 1 pm on Friday, Dec. 23, 2016 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 Popeyes 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 2015 bowl week built on the success of the inaugural bowl by providing student-athletes, conference partners, alumni, fans and sponsors a first-class international bowl experience. The 2015 ESPN telecast had a significant increase in viewership over the inaugural game.

A large part of the bowl's success in the first two years has come from title sponsor Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, 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. A multiyear extension of the title sponsorship of the bowl occurred in June 2015. Last December, Popeyes opened its first restaurant in Nassau and a second is currently under construction.

Another key partner in the Popeyes Bahamas Bowl is the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism. Using the local slogan "Football, Family and Fun", Bahamians of all ages came 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.

The 2015 game featured Western Michigan of the Mid-American Conference and Middle Tennessee of Conference USA in the only current FBS-level bowl game outside of the United States.

A crowd of 13,123 in Robinson National Stadium and those watching on ESPN saw another high-scoring Popeyes Bahamas Bowl as Western Michigan beat Middle Tennessee 45-31 for the Broncos' first-ever bowl victory.

WMU's **Jamauri Bogan** ran for a career-high 215 yards and four touchdowns to power the Broncos to victory. Just like the previous year, the contest between Western Michigan and Middle Tennessee was one big play after another as the two teams combined for 1,055 yards of total offense and seven scoring plays of 29 or more yards.

Bogan, the 2015 MAC Freshman of the Year, did all of his damage on 19 carries for Offensive Player of the Game honors, while teammate **Grant DePalma** was named the bowl's Defensive Player of the Game after leading all tacklers with 12 tackles from his linebacker position.

The bowl was honored as Prime Minister of the Bahamas **Perry Christie** and Bahamas Minister of Tourism **Obie Wilchcombe** joined Popeyes Chief Marketing Officer-US **Hector Munoz** for the postgame presentations.

Fans at the game were treated to a Popeyes Bahamas Bowl Fan-Fest featuring several interactive elements around Robinson National Stadium, a t-shirt giveaway, a pregame performance by the famed Bahamas All-Stars band, the U.S. National Anthem sung by Popeyes commercial spokesperson **Deidrie Henry**, a halftime Junkanoo showdown by the Valley Boys and the Saxons and a Popeyes Football Toss Challenge.

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 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 Middle Tennessee and Western Michigan 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.

“The people in the Bahamas really opened their arms to all of us from Kalamazoo, Michigan the whole week, and they made us feel a part of their culture,” said Western Michigan head coach **P.J. Fleck**. “It was an incredible experience, one I won’t forget and our student-athletes won’t either. The hospitality was absolutely elite from everyone at the Atlantis, Popeyes, the bowl committee and ESPN.”

“The Popeyes Bahamas Bowl was a wonderful opportunity for our players, university, and fans,” said Middle Tennessee head coach **Rick Stockstill**. “For 90 to 95 percent of our team it was the only time they have had the chance to leave the country and go experience a place like the Bahamas. The hospitality was second to none, Atlantis was better than advertised, and the weather was just phenomenal. We loved it and felt honored to be a part of such a first-class event.”

The economic impact of the Popeyes Bahamas Bowl was once again significant in 2015 as the bowl, ESPN Events, Popeyes, Western Michigan and Middle Tennessee spent nearly \$2 million in traveling to and during their stay in the Bahamas. 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

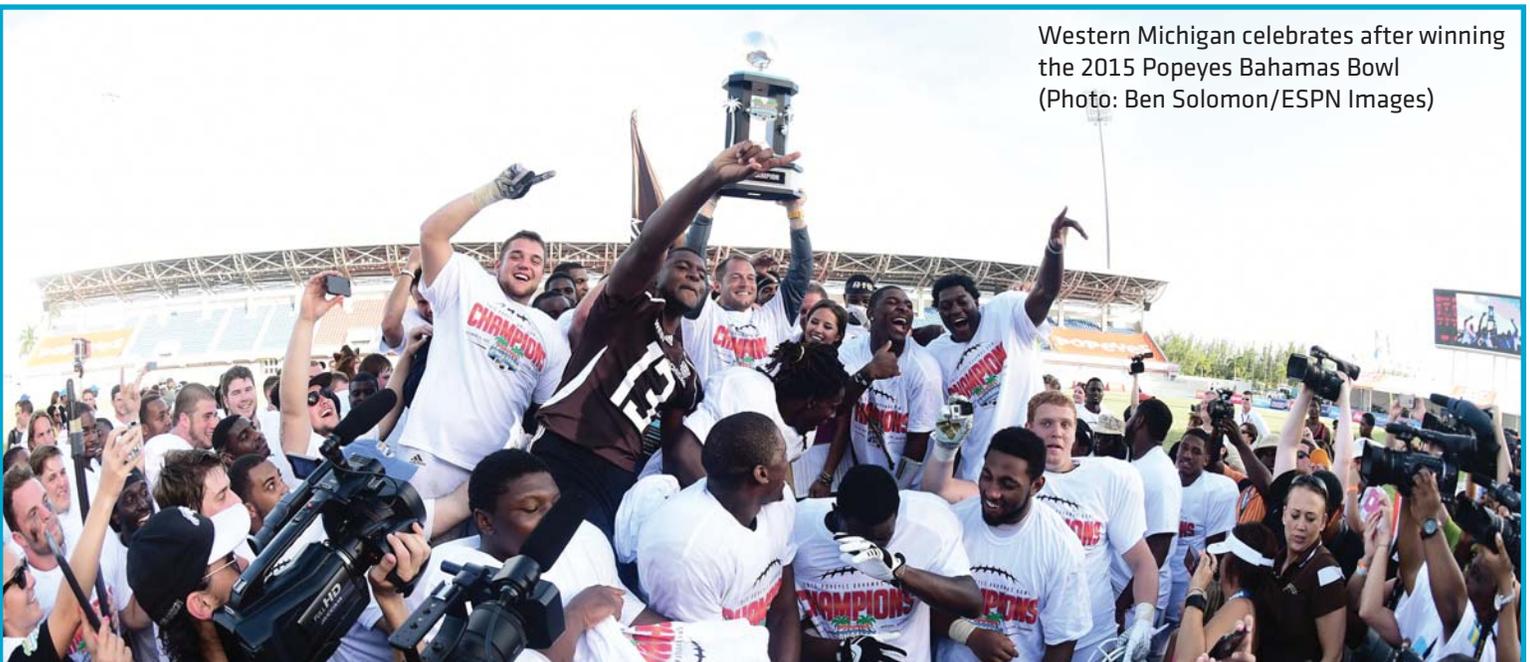
continue to visit the Ranfurly Homes, conduct the Youth Football Leadership Clinic and engage the Bahamas All-Stars band and Junkanoo groups.

Valued support for the Popeyes Bahamas Bowl comes from a diverse group of sponsors, especially Atlantis and Caribbean Bottling Company Bahamas (Coca-Cola). Local Bahamas sponsors Bristol Cellar (Bacardi), Burns House (Kalik), The Tribune and Unilever 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 Popeyes 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 2016 game, the Popeyes Bahamas Bowl will have an expanded group of universities who could make the trip to Nassau. The American Athletic Conference joins Conference USA and the MAC as participating conferences, and two of these conferences will meet in the Nassau stadium named for the late Bahamian Olympic track star on December 23.

If the first two games, which had a combined 173 points and 24 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.



Western Michigan celebrates after winning the 2015 Popeyes Bahamas Bowl  
(Photo: Ben Solomon/ESPN Images)