

## COVID-19 Caveats (during the 2020 NCAA season)

Due to the concerns about the possibility of spreading the coronavirus, during the global pandemic that began in 2019 – as it related to travelling to, and playing, football games (mostly in other states) for those athletes, students, and/or fans attending such games, several conferences began their seasons late (Big-10 and Pac-12) after originally having cancelled their official NCAA seasons (for all the colleges in those respective conferences). Two conferences (the Big-10 and SEC) only scheduled games against other teams in their respective conferences. Almost every team in the ACC and Big-12 conferences played at least one game against an opponent that was not in their conference, and several teams had two or three such opponents in 2020. Most teams in the American Athletic and Sun Belt conferences typically played two (or more) games outside their conferences as well.

Teams which exclusively only played games against just other teams from within their own conference would have a group strength of schedule (SOS) value (for those teams – in that particular conference) which would sum to zero in the Power ratings (that contribute to where the Improved Linear Model has ranked those teams during the latter weeks of 2020). The Pac-12 had one contest outside its conference: Colorado defeated San Diego State at home, 20-10. This one game significantly increased the Pac-12 teams' SOS values as depicted in the PDF files on the previous web page (and illustrated in the table below).

Teams in the Big-12 also had higher than normal SOS values because of several blow-out wins over teams in traditionally weaker conferences, but thankfully, those values did not skew the ILM rankings as much as the one aforementioned contest seems to have done for those teams in the Pac-12; this is possibly due to the more complete schedule of conference games for the Big-12 as well as the fact that each of the teams in the Big-12 had incurred several losses late in the season.

For example, let's compare the range of SOS for teams in the "Power 5 conferences" for several weeks when the CFP rankings had been released.

CFP Week	Big-10 Low	Big-10 High	SEC Low	SEC High	Pac-12 Low	Pac-12 High	Big-12 Low	Big-12 High	ACC Low	ACC High
16	-3.40	5.40	-3.97	4.55	10.28	23.46	6.26	11.63	0.41	7.82
17	-2.73	5.70	-1.64	4.36	10.37	20.49	6.24	11.61	1.24	7.96
Post	4.25	12.20	4.64	11.47	-3.38	6.81	7.40	12.73	-2.42	4.70

Week 17 is after the regular season ended, and "Post" is after all the bowl games had been completed. The SOS values above were generated by the Power rating system, including the full margin of victory, and only those games where both teams are in division 1 are included for that computation. As one can easily see, once the inter-conference collection of bowl games was completed, conferences like the Big-10 and SEC experienced significant SOS increases and likewise with the Pac-12's SOS decreases. If you were to exclude the San Diego State 20-10 loss at Colorado, the Pac-12 SOS ranged from -5.01 to 5.11 in week #17 (and similarly in week #16).