

31st & Pearl

A \$20 Million Mistake?

Last week's inexplicable loss by USM to lowly Alabama-Birmingham sent the Eagles' record to 9-2 on the season. It also cost USM its spot in all of the national top 25 polls. More than all this, however, is the likelihood that USM's choke-job in Birmingham may end up costing C-USA at least \$20 million. Truth be told, USM should be 11-0 on the season to this point. The schedule has been pretty much filled with cupcake opponents. Losing to Marshall and UAB, two teams that can barely scratch together enough combined wins for bowl eligibility for just one team, is essentially inexcusable. Still, a win over UAB and Memphis would've had USM at 11-1 going into the C-USA title game. With Houston potentially at 12-0, the winner would've have taken a spot in the BCS, and brought home to C-USA the \$20 million money bag that comes with that level of bowl participation.



Now, USM has put C-USA officials in the unenviable position of rooting for Houston to win out, including victories over Tulsa to close out the regular season and USM in the C-USA title game. Yes, it is in every C-USA member's best financial interests – including USM's – that Houston go 13-0 and represent C-USA in a BCS Bowl. Should USM beat Memphis, it would still make the Liberty Bowl in Memphis, so there's little loss there, save some prestige. But, the prestige card was thrown out the window by Larry Fedora and the other USM coaches who led the Eagles to the embarrassing loss in Legion Field last week. With all of the scandals going on at USM at the moment, a \$20 million payday for C-USA, especially one brought to it by USM, would've been a welcomed distraction.

31st & Pearl is a series housed at usmnews.net that features commentary on aspects of life in the CoB, and at USM, from a variety of columnists.