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# PRESEASON TOP 25

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It would be dumb to doubt Kirby Smart at this point. The Georgia coach has had a remarkable three-year run of success that includes two National Championships and a playoff snub that blocked his shot at three in a row last season.

The Bulldogs sat in the No. 1 spot in the VSiN preseason Top 25 a year ago and stayed there until a three-point loss to Alabama in the SEC Title Game. It was a costly setback that sent Georgia to the Orange Bowl while Michigan, Washington and Texas joined the Crimson Tide in the four-team playoff. The Wolverines claimed a breakthrough championship for the Big Ten.

Smart cried foul, feeling his team's exclusion was controversial. Georgia compiled a 42-2 record the past three seasons, falling twice to Alabama and Nick Saban, who was Smart's coaching mentor. Saban has retired to a TV job. Smart is coming back as strong as ever.

"I've got Georgia and Ohio State No. 1 and No. 1A," professional handicapper Paul Stone said, "but I gave the Bulldogs the top spot by an eyelash. One could make the argument that Smart had the top team in college football in each of the past three seasons."

Smart's team seems to be a near-unanimous pick as this season's No. 1.

"I have Georgia on top," Circa Sports college football oddsmaker Nick Bogdanovich said.

On the Circa futures board, Bogdanovich said, the Bulldogs and Buckeyes have attracted "a ton of money in the pool."

FoxSports analyst Chris "The Bear" Fallica recently bet the Georgia/Ohio State side at -110 in a National Championship prop against the rest of the field.

"I would rank Ohio State slightly ahead of Georgia. Those two teams are loaded," said Fallica, who ranks Oregon third, Texas fourth and Notre Dame fifth.

The conference landscape is changing dramatically this year with Oregon, Washington, UCLA and USC ditching the Pac-12 to join the Big Ten, which now totals 18 teams. Oklahoma and Texas moved from the Big 12 to the SEC.

"I don't think Texas is going to go to the SEC and become an 8-4 type team, nor are they going to be 12-0," Fallica said.

Bogdanovich said SEC contender Mississippi has received "sharp bets" at 25-1 in national title futures, and the same goes for Big 12 favorite Utah at 70-1.

"We are getting some sharp money on some longshots with people hoping to take advantage of the new playoff format," Bogdanovich said.

The four-team playoff was so restrictive that betting on longshots tended to be a fool's errand. The 12-team playoff implemented this season opens the door for more possibilities.

"Admittedly, I'm a hard-core traditionalist, so I'm typically averse to change," Stone said. "But I like the expansion to a 12-team playoff because it keeps more teams in the mix until the end of the regular season. I believe this gives us more pure betting opportunities since there will be more games where both teams are highly motivated."

Stone took his shot at predicting the playoff field: Georgia, Ohio State, Oregon, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Notre Dame, Penn State, Florida State, LSU, Miami and Liberty.

Stone provided his power rankings, which I combined with my own rankings to form the VSiN preseason Top 25.



# 1. GEORGIA

**Carson Beck was somewhat of a question mark at quarterback going into last season, when he matured quickly and completed 72.4% of his passes with 24 touchdowns and six interceptions. Beck will miss tight end Brock Bowers, a first-round draft pick by the Raiders, but he will love the addition of Florida transfer running back Trevor Etienne. Four starters return on the offensive line. The defense loses a few stars, yet always reloads due to elite recruiting. The Bulldogs will be tested by road games against Alabama, Texas and Mississippi, so don't expect perfection.**

## 2. OHIO STATE

After three consecutive losses to Michigan, it should be payback time for Buckeyes coach Ryan Day, who is 38-3 in Big Ten games. He catches a break by getting the Wolverines in Columbus, though Ohio State must face Oregon and Penn State on the road. Kansas State transfer Will Howard is the favorite to start at quarterback, and Ole Miss transfer Quinshon Judkins joins TreVeyon Henderson to form what could be the nation's top rushing attack for new offensive coordinator Chip Kelly. The defense welcomes Alabama transfer safety Caleb Downs.

## 3. OREGON

In 50 career games at Oklahoma and UCF, Dillion Gabriel has passed for 14,865 yards and 125 touchdowns, in addition to rushing for 1,060 yards and 26 TDs. He left the Sooners and transferred to Oregon, where the offense again will be explosive. Ducks coach Dan Lanning is 22-5 in two seasons, with three losses by exactly three points each to Washington. Oregon hosts the Huskies and Ohio State, so the schedule sets up for Lanning to make a run at Big Ten and national titles.

## 4. TEXAS

How far can junior quarterback Quinn Ewers lead the Longhorns? Texas reached the playoff semifinal last season, but came up short in a 37-31 loss to Washington. Ewers drove the offense to the 12-yard line with 15 seconds left before misfiring on three passes amid dubious play-calling by coach Steve Sarkisian. It remains to be seen if this team will be better. Sarkisian is a top-notch recruiter who lured Alabama transfer receiver Isaiah Bond and other impact players in an effort to reload after losing several stars to the NFL.

## 5. ALABAMA

Kalen DeBoer, who coached Washington to the national title game, takes over for retired legend Nick Saban. There are many other changes with the Crimson Tide, who lost more than 30 players to the NFL and transfer portal. DeBoer has assembled a strong coaching staff and he convinced quarterback Jalen Milroe to return. While Alabama does get to play Georgia and Missouri in Tuscaloosa, the schedule is not kind to DeBoer. The Tide face road games against Wisconsin, Tennessee, LSU and Oklahoma.

## 6. MISSISSIPPI

With 10 veterans slated to start on each side of the ball, the Rebels will make a run toward the top of the SEC standings and a playoff spot. Ole Miss, which finished 11-2 with a No. 9 ranking (its highest since 1969) last season, will close the gap after being outclassed in double-digit losses at Georgia and Alabama. Jaxson Dart is an experienced quarterback who will trigger coach Lane Kiffin's big-play offense, and the defense appears tougher. A manageable schedule should help Kiffin win 10 regular season games.

## 7. NOTRE DAME

Duke Leonard started against the Fighting Irish last season and is now their new quarterback. Leonard is one of several new faces on offense. The Notre Dame defense returns nine starters after allowing 15.9 PPG. Marcus Freeman, who went 10-3 in his second season as coach, is building momentum and recruiting at a high level. If the Irish can win their season opener at Texas A&M, a soft remaining schedule sets up for Freeman to reach at least 10 wins and get into the 12-team playoff.

## **8. PENN STATE**

James Franklin is a polarizing coach who recruits well yet can't get his talented teams over the hump, mostly because he can't beat Ohio State. The Nittany Lions, who have lost seven straight in the rivalry, host the Buckeyes on Nov. 2. Penn State avoids Michigan and Oregon on a favorable schedule. Junior quarterback Drew Allar had 25 touchdowns passes to two interceptions last season, and stud running backs Kaytron Allen and Nicholas Singleton also return. The defense shapes up as one of the nation's best.

## **9. FLORIDA STATE**

A leg injury to star quarterback Jordan Travis during a meaningless game against North Alabama wrecked playoff plans for the Seminoles, who were 13-0 before taking a humiliating 63-3 beating from Georgia in the Orange Bowl. Travis will be replaced by transfer DJ Uiagalelei, who played at Oregon State and Clemson. The offensive line is elite. The defense is rebuilt. Florida State should be fine until it gets real tests on the road against Miami and Notre Dame late in the season. Mike Norvell is an outstanding coach.

## **10. MICHIGAN**

With enthusiasm unknown to mankind, Jim Harbaugh coached the Wolverines to a 15-0 national-championship masterpiece. Now he's off to the NFL to energize the Chargers, and Michigan will look much different with a total of only seven starters returning. Running back Donovan Edwards and tight end Colston Loveland lead an offense that's searching for a quarterback to replace J.J. McCarthy — is Alex Orji the answer? New coach Sherrone Moore draws a tougher schedule that includes Texas, USC, Washington and Oregon.

## **11. LSU**

A trip to Las Vegas will tell a lot about the Tigers' fortunes and future, as LSU opens against USC on Sept. 1. The departure of quarterback Jayden Daniels is not doomsday. Garrett Nussmeier takes over after passing for 395 yards and three touchdowns in a bowl win against Wisconsin. Brian Kelly, who's 20-7 in two seasons in Baton Rouge, will put a good offense on the field. The run defense, even with star linebacker Harold Perkins leading the charge, could be a weakness. LSU will be happy to host Ole Miss, Alabama and Oklahoma.

## **12. OKLAHOMA**

It's time for sophomore quarterback Jackson Arnold to step up after a turnover-riddled Alamo Bowl loss. Arnold will lean on speed receiver Deion Burks, a Purdue transfer who starred in the spring game. Brent Venables is a defensive genius, but he remains a shaky head coach with much to prove. His back is to the wall while faced with a grueling schedule. The Sooners, who get only three SEC home games, will play Alabama, Texas, Ole Miss, LSU, Missouri, Tennessee and Auburn.

## **13. UTAH**

Cameron Rising is the definition of an upperclassman. The Utah quarterback missed all of last year with a knee injury and is headed into his seventh season of college football. Rising's ability to stay healthy and play without fear will be critical to the team's success. Kyle Whittingham is a rock-solid coach who creates a culture of toughness in his program. While the Utes are picked to win the Big 12, they draw tough road games against Oklahoma State, Colorado and UCF.

## **14. MIAMI**

The numerous game-management mistakes made by Mario Cristobal are impossible to overlook. Will the talented Hurricanes overcome their clumsy coach? Cam Ward is continuing a fascinating career that started at Incarnate Word in 2020 and continued at Washington State. Ward has made 44 career starts. The offense has big-time potential with wideout Xavier Restrepo returning and running back Damien Martinez transferring from Oregon State.

## **15. TEXAS A&M**

**Mike Elko arrives from Duke and represents a coaching upgrade after the disappointments of the Jimbo Fisher era. Elko will field a solid defense led by Nic Scourton, a Purdue transfer who led the Big Ten with 10 sacks. The offense will need a big boost from quarterback Conner Weigman, who's back from a foot injury. The Aggies catch some scheduling breaks by avoiding Georgia, Alabama and Ole Miss.**



## 16. CLEMSON

The Tigers have faded from national title contention the past two years, mainly because of mediocre quarterback play and coach Dabo Swinney's refusal to use the transfer portal like other elite programs. If junior quarterback Cade Klubnik lives up to his recruiting hype, and he has fallen well short of it so far, Clemson can win the ACC. Nine offensive starters return. It would be a very good sign for the Tigers if the opener against Georgia does not get ugly.

## 17. TENNESSEE

If redshirt freshman quarterback Nico Iamaleava is the real deal, the Volunteers could be hell on wheels. A five-star recruit who can run and throw, Iamaleava led Tennessee to a 35-0 victory over Iowa in the Citrus Bowl to jumpstart his career. Chris Brazzell, Bru McCoy and Squirrel White form a big-play receiver crew. Josh Heupel is an innovative offensive coach. The Vols' depleted defensive secondary could be a problem, however.

## 18. MISSOURI

It's wrong to call the Tigers sleepers in the SEC, but they do deserve more respect as legit contenders after an 11-2 season that ended with a Cotton Bowl win. Brady Cook is a quality quarterback and Luther Burden, who made 86 receptions for 1,212 yards, is a star for an offense that returns nine veterans. Running back Cody Schrader will be missed, and the defense is a question mark. Georgia, Texas, Ole Miss and LSU are not on the schedule.

## 19. OKLAHOMA STATE

Few teams boast the experience of the Cowboys, who bring back 19 starters. Ollie Gordon will drive the offense after rushing for 1,732 yards and 21 touchdowns. Alan Bowman is not a quarterback who instills a lot of confidence, but he's behind a big, veteran line and has an elite receiver to throw to in Brennan Presley. Mike Gundy, entering his 20th year as coach, hosts Utah and hits the road to Kansas State on consecutive Saturdays in late September.

## 20. KANSAS STATE

Avery Johnson, a promising dual-threat sophomore, takes over at quarterback. The Wildcats will try to run wild with Johnson, DJ Giddens, who rushed for 1,226 yards last season, and Colorado transfer Dylan Edwards. Chris Klieman is a dependable coach who wins with a ground attack and a gritty defense. Kansas State hosts Arizona, Oklahoma State and Kansas and should be a factor at the top of the Big 12.

## 21. LOUISVILLE

After coaching Purdue to the Big Ten title game and Louisville to the ACC title game in back-to-back years, Jeff Brohm is his own tough act to follow. The Cardinals, who took advantage of scheduling breaks last year, play Notre Dame and Clemson on the road. Brohm must get the most out of well-traveled quarterback Tyler Shough, formerly at Texas Tech and Oregon, to win 10 games again.

## 22. IOWA

Senior quarterback Cade McNamara returns from a knee injury to lead an offense that was the butt of jokes last season. The Hawkeyes were outscored 61-0 in season-ending losses to Michigan and Tennessee. New coordinator Tim Lester is promising to unleash an aggressive offense. Eighteen starters return for coach Kirk Ferentz, who offers no apologies for winning ugly with defense and special teams.

## 23. IOWA STATE

It appears the Cyclones have found another Brock Purdy. As a freshman, Rocco Becht passed for 3,120 yards and 23 touchdowns. Becht will get better behind a line that returns five starters and with an explosive group of receivers. Nine starters come back on defense for coach Matt Campbell, who could have the Cyclones in Big 12 title contention going into season-ending games against Utah and Kansas State.

## 24. USC

Is it Miller time for the Trojans? USC could replace star quarterback Caleb Williams with Miller Moss, who passed for six touchdowns in a Holiday Bowl victory over Louisville. UNLV transfer Jayden Maiava will compete with Moss for the starting job. Lincoln Riley will coach up the offense. A beleaguered defense will be much improved due to the hiring of coordinator D'Anton Lynn, who worked wonders last year at UCLA.

## 25. WISCONSIN

Luke Fickell went 7-6 in his first year coaching the Badgers, and he might not top that record this year unless Miami transfer quarterback Tyler Van Dyke triggers an improved offense. The Badgers will be typically strong on the offensive line, and Fickell's defense will be solid with eight starters back. The schedule presents only a few cupcakes and features Alabama, USC, Penn State, Iowa, Oregon and Nebraska.

# VSIN HEISMAN TROPHY

# BEST BETS

## **JONATHAN VON TOBEL**

### **DYLAN RAIOLA (500-1)**

This ties into my win total wager on Nebraska. The Cornhuskers have a very manageable schedule in front of them this season. If they take advantage of it, that means Raiola hits the ground running. It is a simple handicap, but should Nebraska win 10 games this season – an actual possibility – I'll take a flier on the high-profile freshman who is starting at quarterback for a brand like Nebraska.

### **ROCCO BECHT (1000-1)**

Rocco Becht was the fifth-best graded passer by PFF standards in the Big 12 last season, and he was tied for third in turnover-worthy play rate (2.6%). His top two receivers are back. Jayden Higgins (53 receptions, 983 yards) was named to the preseason All-Big 12 team. Jaylin Noel led the team in touchdown receptions (7). All five starters return along the offensive line. It's a great setup for Becht, and the Cyclones have a schedule they could run through. Becht also has his shot at an early, high-profile win against Iowa at the start of the season. Iowa State could be a 10-win Power Four champion this season. I'll take their starting quarterback at those odds.

## **MITCH MOSS**

### **JALEN MILROE (15-1)**

Betting the winner of this award in the 2024 preseason might be a bigger crapshoot than any year in recent memory, but 15-1 was too good to pass up on him. After not playing well in a Week 2 home loss to Texas last year, Milroe was benched in the following game. He came back in the Crimson Tide's fourth game of the season and helped beat 15th ranked Ole Miss 24-10. Starting with that game and ending with his SEC title winning performance over undefeated Georgia, the Alabama signal caller threw for 18 touchdowns, and ran for 10 more. I think Nick Saban is the best coach in the history of college football, and Bama will certainly miss him. But maybe not on offense. New coach Kalen DeBoer worked wonders with Michael Penix the previous two years at Washington, and I expect similar results with his new QB in the SEC. Milroe has two spots to shine before the end of September: Week 3 in Madison against the Wisconsin Badgers, and two weeks later at home in a rematch vs. Georgia. Watch out if he plays well in both of them and Alabama is 4-0 entering October.

### **MILLER MOSS (60-1)**

Number grab. Had to do it. At the time of print his number is the same at some shops as his teammate, UNLV transfer, Jayden Maiava. Moss replaced Caleb Williams as USC's QB in their 42-28 bowl game victory over Louisville last year, and proceeded to throw for 372 yards with six touchdowns in the process. Moss should put up phenomenal numbers in Lincoln Riley's offense IF he starts for the entire season. After all, every QB under Riley has done just that since he became a head coach in 2017. Here is a list of where Riley's former quarterbacks finished in Heisman voting since:

2017: Baker Mayfield (1st)

2018: Kyle Murray (1st)

2019: Jalen Hurts (2nd)

2020: Spencer Rattler didn't finish in the top 10

2021: Caleb Williams took over for Spencer Rattler a month into the season

2022: Caleb Williams (1st)

2023: Caleb Williams didn't finish in the top 10

Three firsts, one second, and three outside the top 10. Defense could catch some of the blame for last year. We've all been waiting for that unit to improve. Watch out if it ever does because Riley's offenses will always put points on the board.





Brady Cook

## TIM MURRAY

### KJ JEFFERSON (100-1)

“Physically, he’s the closest to Cam (Newton) that I’ve had.” That is quite the praise from UCF Gus Malzahn on his new quarterback. Malzahn was Newton’s offensive coordinator at Auburn in 2010 and will be calling plays this year for UCF. Jefferson spent five years at Arkansas before transferring to UCF for his sixth year.

The Knights have a loaded backfield with RB RJ Harvey (1,416 yards and 16 touchdowns) and Toledo transfer Penny Boone. Boone was MAC Offensive Player of the Year in 2023. If Jefferson can play like he did in 2021 and 2022 with Arkansas, UCF could compete for a Big 12 championship. Jefferson rushed for over 600 yards, completed over 67% of his passes, and threw just a total of nine interceptions over those two seasons. With the expanded playoff, if the Knights win the Big 12, Jefferson, a true dual-threat quarterback, could earn an invitation to New York City in December.

## DUSTIN SWEDLSON

### JAXSON DART (15-1)

Five of the last six QBs who have won the Heisman Trophy were transfers. The one outlier was Bryce Young in 2021 at Alabama. Of that group, four took the trophy home after being at their new school for at least one full season prior.

Both Baker Mayfield and Kyler Murray did it in their third seasons at Oklahoma. Joe Burrow and Jayden Daniels won in their second seasons at LSU. Last year’s Heisman Trophy voting ended with three multi-year, starting, transfer-QBs finishing 1-2-3 (Daniels-Michael Penix-Bo Nix).

What does that tell us? Two things:

1. Developed quarterbacks are now hired guns and are able to go out and find the systems and situations that fit their play best
2. Continuity matters at the QB position in a college football world that has embraced the chaos of the transfer portal

Following all of this info leads me to Dart. The former four-star recruit returns for his third season at Ole Miss in 2024. He has combined for 61 combined touchdowns with 21 interceptions over two seasons. Three of his top four passing targets are back this season plus the Rebels added Antwane Wells Jr. from South Carolina. He should have a chance for his “Heisman moment” on November 9th when Georgia comes to The Grove.

### AVERY JOHNSON (25-1)

This year, the Wildcats return one of the sexiest Heisman picks in Johnson. In a limited 2023 role, the true sophomore was able to make highlight reel plays while combining for 12 total touchdowns. He showed what he was capable of in a full-time starter role by beating NC State in the Pop-Tarts Bowl, throwing for 178 yards, rushing for 71 yards, and finishing with three total touchdowns. With the offense built around his ability to attack teams in the air and on the ground, Johnson should be able to find the end zone at a high clip. That could give him a season statline that will force voters to send him to the other Manhattan at season’s end.

### BRADY COOK (40-1)

Oftentimes we see the Heisman Trophy go to the QB on the best team. Or it goes to a QB that puts up monster numbers. At 40-1, it feels like Cook is worth a shot to see if he can make a run and get into both of those conversations. For starters, Missouri’s schedule is very manageable. No Georgia, no Texas, with visits to Texas A&M and Alabama the two tough spots. However, both programs are transitioning to new coaches, while Missouri has a lot of continuity on offense. Cook returns his top receivers from a year ago, including potential top-five draft pick Luther Burden III. and a great red zone threat in Theo Wease. And while the Tigers lost Cody Schrader at RB, Georgia State transfer Marcus Carroll and Appalachian State transfer Nate Noel will keep defenses honest versus Cook’s arm. Missouri’s defense lost a lot, so there could be more shootouts in their future. That will give Cook a chance to put up big numbers in his third year starting.

## JOE CERAULO

### JAXSON DART (15-1)

This year’s Heisman race is WIDE open, and I haven’t seen nearly enough from frontrunners like Dillon Gabriel or Carson Beck to think that there isn’t tremendous value by just looking down the board ever so slightly. Among Power Five quarterbacks with at least 275 attempts a year ago, Dart was top 10 in passer rating and top 12 in passing yards. He also boasted a sensational 23/5 TD/INT ratio, while adding eight scores on the ground. If the Rebels are serious contenders this season, an upset win in Baton Rouge or at home against Georgia could provide Dart the signature “Heisman moment” he’d need to win this award. Ryan Kramer

### KYRON DRONES (100-1)

A couple of truths about the current college football landscape. One, we are seeing more player movement at the top level of College Football today than we ever have. Two, Drones COMPLETELY transformed the Virginia Tech offense starting in Week 3 when coach Brent Pry inserted him into the lineup. Now we look forward to 2024 where the Hokies return the most production (opposite of player movement) on the offensive side of the ball in the country. For a dual-threat QB who has shown he can lead an offense to 50 burgers on a team that many feel will contend for a ACC championship and spot in the playoff, 100-1 is flat out insulting. Pick up a pizza bet and enjoy the ride down to +1500 by Week 3.

### KJ JEFFERSON (100-1)

Very simple handicap here. Jefferson was everything for the Razorback team over the last couple years. Now he heads to Central Florida, coached by Gus Malzahn. The same Malzahn who happened to be the offensive coordinator for Heisman Trophy winning QB Cam Newton at Auburn. The Big 12 is as open of a conference as there is and as we saw last year preseason 50-1 shot Oklahoma State made their way into the championship game. I love UCF as a dark horse led by Jefferson, and if that happens I am certain he will be in the Heisman mix.

# STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING
GEORGIA	73.5	ARKANSAS	46.5	SAM HOUSTON ST	36.0
OHIO ST	69.0	RUTGERS	46.5	WESTERN KENTUCKY	36.0
OREGON	69.0	APPALACHIAN ST	46.0	AIR FORCE	35.5
TEXAS	69.0	GEORGIA TECH	46.0	ARKANSAS ST	35.5
ALABAMA	65.0	LIBERTY	46.0	COLORADO ST	35.0
PENN ST	64.0	MEMPHIS	46.0	MARSHALL	35.0
MICHIGAN	63.0	UCLA	46.0	EAST CAROLINA	34.5
NOTRE DAME	61.5	BAYLOR	44.5	FLA ATLANTIC	34.5
LSU	61.0	MINNESOTA	44.5	UTAH ST	34.5
FLORIDA ST	60.5	MISSISSIPPI ST	44.5	SAN JOSE ST	34.0
OLE MISS	60.5	SYRACUSE	44.5	UAB	34.0
OKLAHOMA	60.0	OREGON ST	44.0	COASTAL CAROLINA	33.5
MISSOURI	59.5	TULANE	44.0	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	33.5
CLEMSON	58.5	FRESNO ST	43.5	GEORGIA SOUTHERN	33.0
TEXAS A&M	58.5	NORTHWESTERN	43.5	SAN DIEGO ST	33.0
TENNESSEE	57.5	CINCINNATI	43.0	ARMY	32.0
MIAMI FL	57.0	HOUSTON	43.0	NORTH TEXAS	32.0
KANSAS ST	56.5	TX-SAN ANTONIO	43.0	OLD DOMINION	32.0
UTAH	56.5	BOSTON COLLEGE	42.5	WESTERN MICHIGAN	32.0
USC	55.5	DUKE	42.5	GEORGIA ST	31.5
LOUISVILLE	54.5	INDIANA	42.5	HAWAII	31.5
OKLAHOMA ST	54.5	JAMES MADISON	42.5	NAVY	31.5
IOWA ST	54.0	PITTSBURGH	42.0	OHIO U	31.5
KANSAS	54.0	BYU	41.5	CHARLOTTE	30.5
ARIZONA	53.5	TEXAS ST UNIV	41.5	SOUTHERN MISS	29.5
FLORIDA	53.5	WASHINGTON ST	41.5	TULSA	29.5
SMU	53.5	MIAMI OHIO	41.0	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	29.0
WASHINGTON	53.5	PURDUE	41.0	MIDDLE TENN ST	28.0
AUBURN	53.0	ILLINOIS	40.5	BALL ST	27.0
IOWA	53.0	MICHIGAN ST	40.5	CONNECTICUT	27.0
WEST VIRGINIA	52.0	ARIZONA ST	40.0	NEW MEXICO ST	26.5
WISCONSIN	52.0	SOUTH FLORIDA	40.0	EASTERN MICHIGAN	25.5
NC STATE	51.5	VIRGINIA	40.0	NEVADA	25.5
KENTUCKY	50.5	WAKE FOREST	40.0	NEW MEXICO	25.5
VIRGINIA TECH	50.0	STANFORD	39.5	BUFFALO	24.0
SOUTH CAROLINA	49.5	UNLV	39.5	AKRON	23.5
BOISE ST	49.0	LA LAFAYETTE	39.0	FLA INTERNATIONAL	23.5
UCF	49.0	RICE	38.5	LOUISIANA TECH	23.5
COLORADO	48.5	TROY	38.5	MASSACHUSETTS	23.0
NORTH CAROLINA	48.5	WYOMING	38.0	UTEP	22.5
TCU	48.5	JACKSONVILLE ST	37.5	LA MONROE	21.0
CALIFORNIA	48.0	TOLEDO	37.0	TEMPLE	20.0
TEXAS TECH	48.0	VANDERBILT	37.0	KENT ST	18.5
NEBRASKA	47.5	BOWLING GREEN	36.5	KENNESAW ST	17.5
MARYLAND	47.0	SOUTH ALABAMA	36.5		



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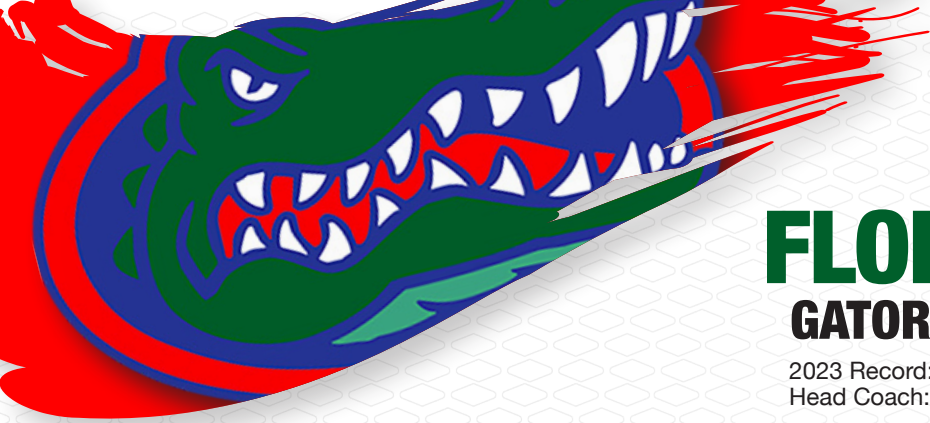
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# FLORIDA GATORS

2023 Record: 5-7 SU & 4-8 ATS  
Head Coach: Billy Napier (3rd)

It's going to be interesting to see what happens with Florida this year. This team looks like it will be better on both sides of the ball, but the Gators face a nightmare of a schedule. If Florida doesn't find a way to reach the .500 mark, would that mean the end of the Billy Napier era? Napier was hired because his coaching style reminded people of Nick Saban, and he had a lot of success at Louisiana. However, Florida is just 11-14 in his two seasons in Gainesville and the Gators aren't holding their own in the recruiting wars.

The good news for Florida fans is that it's almost DJ Lagway time in The Swamp. Lagway is a five-star dual-threat quarterback who was ranked eighth in the 2024 ESPN 300. Lagway likely won't unseat Graham Mertz this year, but Florida's fortunes should change once the electric signal caller gets his shot.

### OFFENSE

Last season, Mertz threw for 2,903 yards with 20 touchdowns and only three picks. The former five-star recruit flamed out at Wisconsin, so there wasn't much expected of him when he arrived in Gainesville. But Mertz looked re-energized in his new surroundings, showing great command of the offense and showing that he can make all the throws. Now, there's high hopes for the Florida passing game in 2024, as he'll be tossing passes to talented wideout Eugene Wilson again. Florida also brought in former Wisconsin receiver Chimere Dike, who had a good connection with Mertz in Madison. And the Gators also added Arizona State transfer Elijah Badger, who was one of the best wideouts in the Pac 12.

If Florida's offensive line holds up, the Gators will move the ball. Mertz has a good group of weapons and running back Montrell Johnson Jr. is coming off a season in which he rushed for 817 yards and averaged 5.4 yards per carry.

### DEFENSE

The defensive side of the ball is where things got really ugly for Florida last year. The Gators gave up 27.6 points per game in 2023, and they also were 122nd in college football in yards per play allowed (6.4). Florida didn't discriminate in how it struggled defensively, either. The Gators gave up 4.8 yards per carry on the ground, which was good for 111th in the nation. They also had an opposing QB Rating of 146.0, which was also 111th.

Florida did bring in a good amount of talent to compete for starting positions, and the team also happened to play a lot of young guys last year. So, the Gators should look a little more organized, especially with Ron Roberts coming in to help. But this is likely going to remain one of the worst defenses in the SEC.

### OUTLOOK

This is an extremely low number for a team with a brand this big. However, I'm not sure I see four wins on the schedule, and Florida would need five to go Over. Realistically, the only team I'm certain Florida will beat is Samford. This Under is one of my favorite plays you can make this season.

## 2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	MIAMI FL	1	57
9/7	SAMFORD	-35	21
9/14	TEXAS A&M	2	58.5
9/21	at MISSISSIPPI STATE	-6	44.5
10/5	UCF	-8	49
10/12	at TENNESSEE	7.5	57.5
10/19	KENTUCKY	-6	50.5
11/2	vs GEORGIA	21	73.5
11/9	at TEXAS	19	69
11/16	LSU	4.5	61
11/23	OLE MISS	4	60.5
11/30	at FLORIDA STATE	10.5	60.5

**SCHEDULE STRENGTH 54.58**  
#1 TOUGHEST OF 134

**FIELD RATINGS 3/0.4**  
(HOME/ROAD)

## RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8 (RETURNING QB)  
DEFENSIVE: 6

## 2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	26.5	62	29.5	85
YARDS PER POINT	15	80	13.8	79
PLAYS PER GAME	69.9	51		
TIME OF POSSESSION	32:11	16		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	34.7%	100	37.0%	45
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	398	47	406.7	91
YARDS PER PLAY	5.7	51	6.5	124
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.1	93		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	136.4	83	165.5	88
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	72	5.1	117
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.4	50		
COMPLETION %	71.9%	4	60.5%	59
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	261.6	38	241.3	84
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.8	43	8.5	124
TURNOVERS	1	17	0.6	128

## 2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE  
**120-1**

MAKE PLAYOFF  
**20-1**

CFP CHAMPION  
**250-1**

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION  
UNDER 4.5**



# MIAMI FL HURRICANES

2023 Record: 7-6 SU & 6-7 ATS  
Head Coach: Mario Cristobal (3rd)

In theory, the expanded playoff should really help a team like Miami. You could argue that the Hurricanes have top-15 talent on a pretty regular basis, but they're not going to be one of the nation's top four teams when all is said and done. Consistency has been a major issue in Coral Gables, but the increased margin for error with 12 teams in the CFP instead of four could open some doors.

Certainly that's what Mario Cristobal is hoping for in his third year. To this point, Miami is an underwhelming 12-13 on his watch, but key offensive positions have been upgraded and the defensive pipeline is still rich.

### OFFENSE

Cam Ward was one of the most sought-after QBs in the portal and he went about as far away from Pullman, Washington, as he could. Ward and fellow Pac-12 transfer Damien Martinez from Oregon State give OC Shannon Dawson the best QB/RB combo he's had at Miami and maybe ever in his career. Dawson was on the Houston staff from 2020-22 and may have the chance to right a wrong after not recruiting the Lake Jackson, Texas native.

The interesting thing about Ward is that he played a Wing-T offense in high school and so he didn't get a lot of looks. He's now in his fifth season of college football and has put up nearly 14,000 passing yards in some pass-happy schemes. Martinez was an 1,100-yard rusher for the Beavers and Miami brought back WR Xavier Restrepo, who nearly had 1,100 receiving yards. This could be a dynamic offense.

### DEFENSE

Lance Guidry is a really solid defensive coordinator. His Hurricanes ranked 30th in yards per play allowed last season after finishing 103rd the previous season. They were much better against the run and also ranked tied for 22nd with 35 sacks. There are some holdovers from last season, but Guidry and Cristobal hit the transfer portal hard, as the Hurricanes spent some NIL money this offseason.

The portal can be used to add impact talent, but also depth. For a Miami team that lost four games that they led in the second half, this looks like an all-around deeper roster and every returnee is a year older in the scheme.

### OUTLOOK

We hear Miami hype every year. It hasn't panned out for a while, with bad injury luck and bad coaching among the chief factors. If Ward can stay healthy and spearhead a resurgence with this offense, we know the defense will be solid and the schedule is extremely manageable with Florida State at home and no Clemson on the docket. My numbers have Miami favored in 11 games.

## 2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	at FLORIDA	-1	53.5
9/7	FLORIDA AM	-38.5	20.5
9/14	BALL STATE	-32	27
9/21	at SOUTH FLORIDA	-15.5	40
9/27	VIRGINIA TECH	-9.5	50
10/5	at CALIFORNIA	-7	48
10/19	at LOUISVILLE	0.5	54.5
10/26	FLORIDA STATE	1.5	60.5
11/2	DUKE	-17	42.5
11/9	at GEORGIA TECH	-9.5	46
11/23	WAKE FOREST	-19	40
11/30	at SYRACUSE	-10	44.5

**SCHEDULE STRENGTH** **43.93**  
#57 TOUGHEST OF 134

**FIELD RATINGS** **2/0.3**  
(HOME/ROAD)

**RETURNING 16 STARTERS**

OFFENSIVE: 9  
DEFENSIVE: 7

## 2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	30.1	38	24.1	48
YARDS PER POINT	13.9	50	13.9	77
PLAYS PER GAME	68.4	70		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:37	24		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	38.7%	63	34.8%	30
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	418	32	334.7	26
YARDS PER PLAY	6.1	25	5.1	36
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.7	85		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	167.6	47	111.7	15
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5	20	3.5	20
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.5	46		
COMPLETION %	63.4%	36	56.5%	18
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	250.4	47	223	55
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.5	57	7.1	52
TURNOVERS	1.8	109	1.4	58

## 2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

**+400**

MAKE PLAYOFF

**+210**

CFP CHAMPION

**55-1**

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION  
OVER 9**





# FLORIDA ATLANTIC OWLS

2023 Record: 4-8 SU & 3-7-2 ATS  
Head Coach: Tom Herman (3rd)

Things are not going well in Boca Raton, but maybe our expectations for the Owls have been too high. Two outlier seasons under Lane Kiffin with 11-3 records in 2017 and 2019 account for nearly 22% of FAU's wins as a FBS member. COVID limited the Owls to nine games in 2020, but they've only won 19 games in four seasons since Kiffin went to Ole Miss and things didn't get any better under Tom Herman last year.

The former Texas head coach led a 4-8 season with a team that lost four straight to end the season with bowl eligibility very much a possibility based on the schedule. The transfer portal was not at all kind to FAU this offseason, so it looks like another disappointing year on the horizon.

### OFFENSE

LaJohntay Webster is now at Colorado and FAU's top two running backs both moved on as well, as Larry McCammon, who had a 1,000-yard season in 2022, and Kobe Lewis moved on. Webster had 108 catches for 1,168 yards and eight touchdowns last season. That was 41% of the catches and 45% of the yardage from the passing game. So, this is basically a brand new offense.

Cam Fancher transferred in from Marshall and brought top target Caleb Coombs with him, but there is only one returning starter for Akron legend and former Cleveland Brown Charlie Frye on offense. That may not be a bad thing after finishing 104th in yards per play, but this is still a low-ceiling roster. Fancher had as many TD passes (11) as interceptions last year.

### DEFENSE

The story on the defensive side is a lot different, as FAU has plenty of returning production from a unit that finished 51st in yards per play and 58th in scoring defense. Top corner Jarron Morris ran out of eligibility after six years in college and big man Evan Anderson is hoping to make the San Francisco 49ers roster, but a lot of the top guys from last season do return in Year 2 for this coaching staff.

FAU was 126th in average time of possession, so this defense was asked to do a lot last year. In that respect, improvement, or at least status quo, is certainly possible if the offense can make some strides under Herman, who was the OC at Ohio State once upon a time.

### OUTLOOK

For a team that doesn't look very good on paper, a win total of 6.5 suggests bowl eligibility is a real possibility and that would be considered a successful season for Herman and Company. My numbers put FAU at 6.03 wins, even though they are 110th in my Power Ratings. That gives you an idea of the schedule that the Owls have. And, yet, I still don't trust this roster.

## 2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/30	at MICHIGAN STATE	8.5	40.5
9/7	ARMY	-5.5	32
9/14	FIU	-14.5	23.5
9/21	at CONNECTICUT	-4.5	27
9/28	WAGNER	-43	-5
10/12	NORTH TEXAS	-5	32
10/19	at UTSA	12	43
11/1	SOUTH FLORIDA	2	40
11/7	at EAST CAROLINA	3	34.5
11/16	at TEMPLE	-11.5	20
11/23	CHARLOTTE	-7	30.5
11/30	at TULSA	-2.5	29.5

**SCHEDULE STRENGTH** **28.77**  
#134 TOUGHEST OF 134

**FIELD RATINGS** **3/0.3**  
(HOME/ROAD)

## RETURNING 11 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 3  
DEFENSIVE: 8

## 2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.1	96	26	56
YARDS PER POINT	14.3	66	15.4	39
PLAYS PER GAME	68.4	71		
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:20	124		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	34.0%	106	36.7%	40
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	316	107	400.6	80
YARDS PER PLAY	4.6	116	5.3	52
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.6	111		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	106.4	114	152.6	60
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.5	109	3.8	36
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	35	30		
COMPLETION %	63.1%	40	64.9%	115
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	209.6	84	248	95
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6	120	7.5	77
TURNOVERS	1.4	65	1.5	46

## 2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE  
**25-1**

MAKE PLAYOFF  
**200-1**

CFP CHAMPION  
**2000-1**

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION**  
**UNDER 6.5**