

TN Valley

Thursday, September 3, 2026

GAMEDAY



LET'S GET IT STARTED

Golesh era begins at Auburn with neutral-site showdown against Baylor

TAILGATE of the week RECIPE

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Big Green Egg
from
Story & Lee!*



Strawberry Pretzel Salad

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups of pretzels, crushed
- 2 Tablespoon sugar
- ¾ cup margarine, melted
- 8 oz. package Cream cheese
- 1 c. confectioners' sugar
- 9 oz. whipped topping
- 1 pkg. strawberry Jell-O
- 1 pkg. lemon Jell-O
- 2 c. boiling water
- 1 large can crushed pineapple
- 10 oz. frozen strawberries, thawed

DIRECTIONS:

Combine pretzels, 2 tablespoons sugar and margarine. Press into 13" x 9" x 2" pan. Bake for 7 minutes at 400 degrees. Let it cool. Mix crease cheese, confectioner's sugar and whipped topping. Spread on pretzel mixture in the pan. Dissolve strawberry and lemon Jell-O in boiling water. Add pineapple and strawberries. Allow mixture to cool. Spread Jell-O and fruit on top of cream cheese mixture. Refrigerate to congeal (overnight is better).



This week's
recipe submitted
by Chiquita Goodloe Suggs



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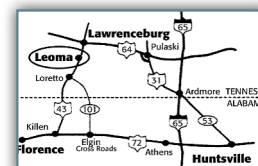
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THE LINE

(as of Monday)			
Thursday			
FAVORITE	TODAY	O/U	UNDERDOG
at RUTGERS	29½	51½	UMass
at KENNESAW STATE	23½	51½	West Georgia
at BUFFALO	23½	48½	Albany
at DELAWARE	28½	55½	Merrimack
at WAKE FOREST	24½	48½	Akron
at UCF	42½	58½	Bethune-Cookman
at GEORGIA TECH	6½	50½	Colorado
at MISSOURI	53½	61½	UAPB
at MINNESOTA	42½	51½	Eastern Illinois
at UTAH	34½	57½	Idaho
at ILLINOIS	27½	54½	UAB

Friday			
at EASTERN MICHIGAN	3	55½	San Jose State
at PURDUE	35½	56½	Indiana State
at GEORGIA STATE	28½	63½	NC A&T
at KANSAS	40½	53½	LIU Post
at OKLAHOMA	41½	50½	UTEP
at MICHIGAN STATE	9½	46½	Toledo
at USC	21½	51½	Fresno State
Miami (Fla.)	24½	47½	at STANFORD

Saturday			
at UCONN	19½	57½	Lafayette
at BOWLING GREEN	2½	47½	Tarleton State
at NEBRASKA	23½	46½	Ohio
at HOUSTON	20½	49½	Oregon State
at ALABAMA	27½	52½	East Carolina
at INDIANA	40½	55½	North Texas
at ARMY	36½	50½	Bryant
at WEST VIRGINIA	20½	56½	Coastal Carolina
at PITTSBURGH	16½	48½	Miami (OH)
at OHIO STATE	50½	56½	Ball State
at SOUTH CAROLINA	35½	53½	Kent State
at IOWA STATE	29½	53½	SE Missouri State
at KENTUCKY	23½	62½	Youngstown State
at AIR FORCE	28½	58½	Duquesne
at GEORGIA	46½	56½	Tennessee State
Auburn	7½	58½	Baylor
at NAVY	30½	52½	Towson
at CINCINNATI	7½	49½	Boston College
at DUKE	7½	51½	Tulane
at OREGON	24½	51½	Boise State
at TEXAS	29½	59½	Texas State
at TENNESSEE	46½	66½	Furman
at PENN STATE	24½	52½	Marshall
Oklahoma State	13½	57½	at TULSA
at IOWA	31½	44½	Northern Illinois
at ARKANSAS	40½	63½	North Alabama
at SOUTHERN MISS	21½	50½	Alcorn State
at SOUTH ALABAMA	12½	52½	SE Louisiana
at SOUTH FLORIDA	14½	52½	Florida International
at MIDDLE TENN.	20½	59½	Murray State
at JACKSONVILLE ST.	20½	54½	Eastern Kentucky
at VANDERBILT	30½	60½	Austin Peay
at TEXAS A&M	40½	53½	Missouri State
at TROY	16½	53½	Sam Houston
at MEMPHIS	11½	52½	Arkansas State
at MICHIGAN	27½	48½	Western Michigan
at MISSISSIPPI STATE	28½	54½	UL Monroe
at LSU	10	50½	Clemson
at VIRGINIA TECH	55½	61½	VMI
at FLORIDA	26½	59½	Florida Atlantic
at MARYLAND	45½	56½	Hampton
at ARIZONA	31½	58½	Northern Arizona
UNLV	3	57½	at HAWAII
at ARIZONA STATE	43½	52½	Morgan State
Western Kentucky	2½	52½	at NEVADA
UCLA	1½	53½	at CAL

Sunday			
at WASHINGTON	23½	50½	Washington State
at NOTRE DAME	20½	47½	Wisconsin
at OLE MISS	7	55½	Louisville

Monday			
SMU	3	53½	at FLORIDA STATE

GAMES ON TV

Thursday
UMass at Rutgers, 5 p.m., BTN
Akron at Wake Forest, 6 p.m., ACCN
Colorado at Georgia Tech, 7 p.m., ESPN
Ark.-Pine Bluff at Missouri, 7 p.m., SECN
Idaho at Utah, 8 p.m., ESPN
UAB at Illinois, 8 p.m., BTN

Friday
Indiana State at Purdue, 6 p.m., BTN
LIU at Kansas, 7 p.m., ESPN
Toledo at Michigan State, 7 p.m., FS1
UTEP at Oklahoma, 7 p.m., SECN
Fresno State at Southern Cal, 8 p.m., FOX
Miami at Stanford, 8 p.m., ESPN

Saturday
Bryant at Army, 11 a.m., CBSSN
Coastal Carolina at West Virginia, 11 a.m., TNT

East Carolina at Alabama, 11 a.m., ABC
Liberty at James Madison, 11 a.m., ESPN
New Hampshire at Syracuse, 11 a.m., ACCN
North Texas at Indiana, 11 a.m., FOX
Ohio at Nebraska, 11 a.m., FS1
Oregon State at Houston, 11 a.m., ESPN
Ball State at Ohio State, 11:30 a.m., BTN
Miami (Ohio) at Pittsburgh, 11:30 a.m., CW
Kent State at S. Carolina, 11:45 a.m., SECN
Youngstown St. at Kentucky, noon, SECN
Tenn. State at Georgia, 2 p.m., SECN
Baylor vs. Auburn, 2:30 p.m., ABC
Boise State at Oregon, 2:30 p.m., CBS
Boston College at Cincinnati, 2:30 p.m., FOX
Furman at Tennessee, 2:30 p.m., SECN
Marshall at Penn State, 2:30 p.m., FS1
Texas State at Texas, 2:30 p.m., ESPN
Towson at Navy, 2:30 p.m., CBSSN
Tulane at Duke, 2:30 p.m., ACCN
Oklahoma State at Tulsa, 2:45 p.m., ESPN

TOP 25 SCHEDULE

Thursday
No. 2 No. 21 Utah (0-0) vs. Idaho (0-1), 8 p.m.
No. 25 Missouri (0-0) vs. Ark.-Pine Bluff (0-0), 7 p.m.
Friday
No. 7 Miami (0-0) at Stanford (0-0), 8 p.m.
No. 10 Oklahoma (0-0) vs. UTEP (0-0), 7 p.m.
No. 14 Southern Cal (0-0) vs. Fresno St. (0-0), 8 p.m.
Saturday
No. 1 Ohio St. (0-0) vs. Ball St. (0-0), 11:30 a.m.
No. 2 Oregon (0-0) vs. Boise St. (0-0), 2:30 p.m.
No. 3 Georgia (0-0) vs. Tenn. St. (0-0), 2 p.m.



Uga should have plenty of time to take a stroll Saturday when Georgia hosts Tennessee State. [JOHN BAZEMORE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

North Alabama at Arkansas, 3:15 p.m., SECN
Northern Illinois at Iowa, 3:15 p.m., BTN
Wyoming at Colorado State, 5 p.m., USA
Abilene Christian at Texas Tech, 6 p.m., FS1
Austin Peay at Vanderbilt, 6 p.m., SECN
Idaho State at Utah State, 6 p.m., CBSSN
Missouri State at Texas A&M, 6 p.m., ESPN
Clemson at LSU, 6:30 p.m., ABC
La. Monroe at Mississippi State, 6:30 p.m., ESPN
VMI at Virginia Tech, 6:30 p.m., ACCN
Western Michigan at Michigan, 6:30 p.m., NBC
Florida Atlantic at Florida, 6:45 p.m., SECN
South Dakota State at Northwestern, 7 p.m., BTN

Hampton at Maryland, 7 p.m., BTN
Portland State at San Diego State, 8:30 p.m., USA
C. Michigan at New Mexico, 9 p.m., FS1
UNLV at Hawaii, 9 p.m., CW
UCLA at Cal, 9:30 p.m., ESPN

Sunday
Texas Southern at Prairie View A&M, 11 a.m., ESPN2
Florida A&M vs. South Carolina State, 2 p.m., ESPN
Washington State at Washington, 3 p.m., NBC
Notre Dame vs. Wisconsin, 6:30 p.m., NBC
Ole Miss vs. Louisville, 6:30 p.m., ABC

Monday
SMU at Florida State, 6:30 p.m., ESPN

No. 5 Texas (0-0) vs. Texas State (0-0), 2:30 p.m.
No. 6 Indiana (0-0) vs. North Texas (0-0), 11 a.m.
No. 8 Texas A&M (0-0) vs. Missouri St. (0-0), 6 p.m.
No. 11 LSU (0-0) vs. Clemson (0-0), 6:30 p.m.
No. 12 Texas Tech (0-0) vs. Abilene Christian (0-0), 6 p.m.
No. 13 Alabama (0-0) vs. E. Carolina (0-0), 11 a.m.
No. 14 BYU (0-0) vs. Utah Tech (0-0), 7 p.m.
No. 16 Michigan (0-0) vs. Western Michigan (0-0), 6:30 p.m.
No. 18 Penn St. (0-0) vs. Marshall (0-0), 2:30 p.m.
No. 20 Tennessee (0-0) vs. Furman (1-0), 2:30 p.m.

No. 22 Iowa (0-0) vs. Northern Illinois (0-0), 3:15 p.m.
No. 23 Houston (0-0) vs. Oregon St. (0-0), 11 a.m.
Sunday
No. 4 Notre Dame (0-0) vs. Wisconsin (0-0) at Green Bay, Wis., 6:30 p.m.
No. 9 Mississippi (0-0) vs. No. 24 Louisville (0-0) at Nashville, 6:30 p.m.
No. 17 Washington (0-0) vs. Washington St. (0-0), 3 p.m.
Monday
No. 19 SMU (0-0) at Florida St. (0-0), 6:30 p.m.



Alabama quarterback Keelon Russell, who played in two games as a backup last year, is set to make his first career start when the Crimson Tide faces East Carolina. [VASHA HUNT/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

East Carolina at Alabama

When: 11 a.m. Saturday

Records: East Carolina (0-0), No. 13 Alabama (0-0)

TV/radio: ABC/FM-93.9, FM 97.7, AM-920

The series: Alabama leads 1-0.

Four-down territory

1. Solid investment: Sophomore Keelon Russell is Alabama's starter for the season opener. He played in two games as a backup last season and completed 11 of 15 passes for 143 yards and two touchdowns. He won the competition against Austin Mack, a senior who followed

head coach Kalen DeBoer to Alabama from Washington. Russell got his tenure off to a fine start last weekend by buying dinner for the Crimson Tide offensive line. He's hoping his wallet is the only hit he takes this season. "I think those are the things you do as a quarterback to continue to show that you appreciate them," DeBoer said. "That's what you want your leaders to do. To me, the higher the leadership role, the more you are as a servant those around you and those you need."

2. Will he, won't he: Alabama's run game was atrocious last season, finishing

near the bottom in the SEC and the nation in yards per game. Five-star recruit EJ Crowell was the clear answer to the Tide's problems, but the freshman missed most of preseason practice with injuries. But does the coaching staff expect him to be available Saturday? "We do," offensive coordinator Ryan Grubb said. "He's pushing every day. He was out there yesterday practicing and moving. He's like Wolverine. Him and (receiver) Noah Rogers are on a different planet. It's been really, impressive. I didn't see any setbacks (earlier this week) with EJ. He was cutting off with both

of his feet. We'll just see how he keeps progressing."

3. The man in black: Among the talk of the 2025 season included a poor run game, sustaining success and sideline apparel. Alert fans noticed last season that DeBoer wore a white shirt in the season-opening loss to Florida State, and when DeBoer donned a black hoodie, the Tide won. Eight in a row to be exact. Alabama then lost to Oklahoma to end the streak, but the hoodie was still considered a fashion-must for

SEE ALABAMA, G5



Ryan Coleman-Williams will be a third-year starter at receiver for Alabama this season. [COLIN HUBBARD/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

ALABAMA

From Page G4

DeBoer. The temperatures in Tuscaloosa on Saturday are expected to be in the mid-90s, so will DeBoer ditch the hoodie for more comfortable digs or stick with the wishes of superstitious fans? "Man, I saw that forecast. You gotta do what you gotta do. Whatever it takes," he said.

4. You shall not pass: The Tide returns five players, including three starters, to one of the most highly experienced secondaries in the country. Last season, Alabama allowed an average of just 169.9 passing yards per game to finish atop the SEC and ninth in the nation. Returning three-year starter Bray Hubbard, two-year starter Keon Sabb, the cornerback duo of three-year starter Zabien Brown and Freshman All-American Dijon Lee Jr., along with Red Morgan. The Crimson Tide's 2025 unit was the first to lead the SEC for fewest passing yards allowed since the 2012 team. The UA defense in 2012 gave up an average of 173.6 yards per game to finish seventh nationally.

Key matchup

Alabama WR Ryan Coleman-Williams vs. ECU WR Brock Spalding

Williams enters his third year as a starter. He was the Tide's second-leading receiver last season with 689 yards on 49 receptions with four touchdowns. Spalding is a preseason All-American Conference selection who caught 42 passes for 554 yards and three touchdowns last season.

Player of the week

QB Keelon Russell

It makes sense for the Tide coaches to put Russell in situations where he will succeed early and build confidence in his first career start. He should have a great day through the air and a decent day running the ball if he has to.

By the numbers

5: The Crimson Tide had five games of 400-plus yards offense in 2025, including Louisiana-Monroe (583), Wisconsin (454), Vanderbilt (486), Oklahoma (406) and Eastern Illinois (539).

20: Alabama created 20 turnovers last season. UA's plus-seven turnover margin was fourth best in the SEC.

51: Alabama has a 51-15-3 record vs. the American Conference. Its last American Conference loss was Central Florida (40-38) in 2000.

1934: The Pirate, a symbol of East Carolina University athletics, was adopted from the legend and lore of coastal North Carolina during the colonial period and chosen for the school's nickname in 1934.

Prediction

Alabama 38, East Carolina 17

Expect plenty of good offensive and defensive plays, but it won't be a perfect game by any stretch. There will be plenty of bad plays and missed opportunities to go around. That's what happens in season openers. If Alabama doesn't have a good day running the ball, however, none of the positives will mean anything for fans still upset by last season's inability to move the ball on the ground.

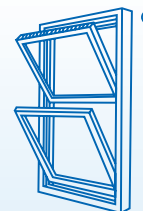
— Edwin Stanton

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Auburn vs. Baylor

When: 2:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Atlanta

Records: Auburn (0-0), Baylor (0-0)

TV/radio: ABC/FM-94.9, FM 100.3

The series: Series tied 2-2-1.

Four-down territory

1. Comfort zone: The Tigers have a new coach and a new quarterback, but the good news is they are quite familiar with one another. Transfer Byrum Brown spent three seasons under first-year Auburn coach Alex Golesh at South Florida. They have built a rapport with one another. "From a leadership standpoint, I've talked about Byrum a lot," Golesh said. "He's come out of his shell and I've been proud of the way he's led, on and off the field." Brown is only active FBS quarterback entering 2026 with 7,600 pass yards, 2,200 rushing yards, 60 passing TDs and 32 rushing TDs. Only 14 quarterbacks have accomplished those totals since 1956.

2. Crowded backfield: Auburn features four different rushers who led their respective teams in rushing in 2025. Senior Jeremiah Cobb led the Tigers with 969 yards, narrowly missing his first 1,000-yard season. Newcomers Bryson Washington (Baylor, 788 yards), Nykahi Davenport (South Florida, 612 yds) and Tae Meadows (Troy, 695 yards) have transferred to Auburn. Then there is sophomore Omar Mabson II, who is listed as one of three backups to Cobb on the depth chart. He saw action in 10 games last season. In other words, depth should not be an issue at running back. "I think the biggest challenge for us is that we have new players who have not been on the field together for Auburn," offensive coordinator Joel Gordon said. "We need to go out and not put pressure on ourselves, settle in and do the things we know we can do."

3. Stick to the plan: Golesh admits time is the enemy when it comes to formulating a game plan. The shorter the prep time the better. A longer stretch allows for second-guessing, trying to fit in more plays and asking, "what if this situation happens?" It can all lead to chaos. That's why Golesh is looking for consistency on the field as well as with game prep. "We have used the last week to teach what a normal game week process looks like in terms of installation," Golesh said. "Our



Auburn running back Jeremiah Cobb and the Tigers want to keep foes at arm's length this season, starting Saturday against Baylor. [BUTCH DILL/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

kids being really confident in the plan and them rolling through it two weeks in a row should give them the confidence to execute at a high clip."

4. In good hands: Top receiver Cam Coleman's exit to Texas left Auburn fans reeling. There was no need to reach for the Pepto-Bismol, though. The Tigers added receivers Chas Nimrod, Christian Neptune, Keshawn Singleton and Jeremiah Koger from South Florida, along with QB Brown. They know the system, and it's been an easy transition to the Plains. The four players combined for 2,275 yards and 20 touchdowns last season. "They take steps every day and realize they need to make plays," said Gordon, who was also at South Florida for three years under Golesh. "They make plays and that builds confidence for everybody."

Key matchup

Auburn QB Byrum Brown vs. Baylor QB DJ Lagway

Both take the field for the first time

with new teams. Brown was a beast for USF last season, throwing for 3,158 yards and 28 touchdowns with 1,008 rushing yards and 14 touchdowns. Lagway led Florida with 2,264 passing yards and 16 touchdowns.

Player of the week

WR Keshawn Singleton

Getting the offense going early is key and what better way for QB Byrum Brown to get comfortable than throwing to Singleton, his teammate from USF, who had 877 receiving yards and eight touchdowns last season.

By the numbers

2: Number of Heisman Trophy winners to serve as honorary captains. Auburn's Cam Newton (2010 winner) will join Baylor's Robert Griffin III (2011 winner) for the pregame coin toss.

104: Auburn is 104-27-2 all-time in season openers, tied with Arkansas for

the second most season-opening wins among current SEC schools (Alabama 105).

49: Auburn is 49-48-8 all-time in Atlanta, including 1-2 in Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

1987-88: Xavier Atkins is first returning All-American on defense at Auburn since Tracy Rocker, who was a two-time All-American in 1987-88.

Prediction

Auburn 28, Baylor 13

Optimism is higher in Auburn at the start of a season than it has been in several years. There is good reason for it. This time, the Tigers might actually break through and be an SEC contender. It starts with Baylor and having a solid outing with a new coach and new players being on the same page. A win will go a long way to setting the Tigers on the right path.

— Edwin Stanton

Furman at Tennessee

When: 2:30 p.m. Saturday

Records: Furman (1-0), No. 20 Tennessee (0-0)

TV/radio: SEC/FM-97.9/AM-1340

The series: Tennessee leads 2-0.

Four-down territory

1. Honoring a legend: Last week's passing of American icon Dolly Parton hit folks in the state of Tennessee hard. She was most known in the state for her connection to Sevierville, her hometown, and Nashville, the country music capital of the U.S. She was known to belt out a rendition of "Rocky Top," on occasion, however, and the Vols will honor Parton with a special helmet decal. "It would be remiss if I didn't talk about the passing of Dolly Parton. All that she has meant across the world, this country, and certainly the queen of East Tennessee," Vols coach Josh Heupel said. "She meant a lot to people across the country, but certainly here in the state of Tennessee, too."

2. First steps: Faizon Brandon is the SEC's only true freshman starting quarterback and the only one in the Power Four conferences in the first week of the season. Brandon is the third true freshman QB Heupel has started in a game, and he is the first true freshman QB to start for Tennessee in a season opener since Brent Schaeffer in 2004. "I think he's done a really good job. Mature. Always in the building and always in that quarterback room, in terms of watching tape and learning," said Tennessee running backs coach De'Rail Sims.

3. Step up: The Vols are going with a true freshman as the starting quarterback, which means veteran Desean Bishop will have to step up and get the run game going to take the pressure of Brandon. It should not be too difficult for Bishop, who led the Vols with just over 1,000 yards last year. "He's got a year under his belt with the ball in his hands, does a great job without the ball in his hands, too, and I think he's really grown that way. So, experienced player that's played at a really high level that we expect to have a great year," Heupel said.

4. Ups and downs: The defense is going through a rebuild with new defensive coordinator Jim Knowles taking control. The Vols are trying to overcome some issues from last season, specifically in



Tennessee running back Desean Bishop and the Vols hope to rise above the competition this year, starting Saturday against Furman. [JOHN RAOUX/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

the passing game and in the red zone. Tennessee ranked 112th in pass defense and 118th in red-zone defense. There shouldn't be too much to worry about with Furman, but there will be an issue or two. "Like anything, game time will tell," Knowles said.

Key matchup

Tennessee DL Jordan Norman vs. Furman DL Joshua Stoneking

Norman, a transfer from Tulane who had 28 tackles, eight tackles for loss and six sacks last season, aims to take control of the defensive line. Stoneking is a consensus first-team FCS All-American who totaled 14 sacks and 23 tackles for loss last season.

Player of the week

RB Desean Bishop

The Vols have produced three consecutive 1,000-yard rushers, including Bishop from last year. He should run the

ball effectively against the Paladins and be on his way to another 1,000-yard season.

By the numbers

4: Four of the fine Tennessee offensive linemen return from last season (David Sanders Jr., Wendell Moe Jr., Sam Pendleton and Jesse Perry).

5: Tennessee will start a new quarterback for the fifth straight season.

18: The Vols have won 18 straight non-conference regular-season games. The streak dates to 2021.

34: Tight ends have accounted for 34

touchdowns (28 receiving, six rushing) in the Josh Heupel era.

Prediction

Tennessee 42, Furman 6

This is a good opportunity for the Vols to get the offense in tune and figure out any issues on defense. It's also a chance for Brandon to make some big plays and get some confidence under his belt early. That will go a long way once the Vols kick off SEC play later in the month against Texas.

— Edwin Stanton

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UNA at Arkansas

When: 3:15 p.m. Saturday

Records: UNA (1-0), Arkansas (2-10 last year)

TV: SEC Network

The series: First meeting.

Four-down territory

1. A new era: During a 2-10 2025, Arkansas fired coach Sam Pittman. Pittman led the Razorbacks for six seasons in his only head coaching gig, which came in his early 60s, and had a record of 32-34 while winning three bowl games — for whatever that's worth these days. In Pittman's place, after Bobby Petrino lost the last seven games as interim coach, they hired Memphis' Ryan Silverfield, who went 50-24 and won four bowl games in the same six-year period that Pittman was at Arkansas. Last year, it was clear what ailed Arkansas. It ranked 23rd in FBS in total offense at 454.8 yards per game, and 129th in total defense, giving up 425.2 yards per game. Memphis, while ranking two spots behind the Razorbacks in total offense with 411.6 yards per game, was 52nd in total defense, allowing 358.2 yards per game. Arkansas averaged 32.9 points per game while Memphis averaged 32.5, but Silverfield's Tigers allowed 10 less points per game. It's a big change for an Arkansas program going from Pittman to a 46-year-old Silverfield, but a change was likely needed, and there will be plenty of excitement around his debut.

2. Something of a homecoming: With the trip to Fayetteville comes a sort of familiar venture for UNA coach Brent Dearmon, whose biggest mentor in life and football is Gus Malzahn. Malzahn is a legend in the state of Arkansas, coaching at Hughes, Shiloh Christian and Springdale at the high school level before becoming the offensive coordinator for the Razorbacks for one year in 2006. Malzahn was also the head coach at Arkansas State in 2012. Dearmon served as the offensive coordinator at Arkansas Tech from 2015 to 2017 before taking his first head coaching job at Bethel. Malzahn, who will be in attendance Saturday, called Dearmon last week and asked if he was ready for the Hogs. Dearmon replied that he was still working on Samford. By now, his focus has shifted.

3. Reunited: Eight players from



KJ Jackson will be the starting quarterback for Arkansas in Ryan Silverfield's debut, which is Saturday against North Alabama. [ARKANSAS ATHLETICS]

the Lions roster came to UNA from Memphis, where they played under Silverfield. Five — Joshua White, Mond Cole, Kamore Harris, Donovan Nevils and Kavion Benton — are on the defensive line and came over when Josh Long took a job on Dearmon's staff. Two wide receivers in Xavier Johnson — who didn't see the field last season, but scored UNA's first touchdown of this season in his debut on a 95-yard connection with Destin Wade — and TJ Holmes also played for Silverfield last year. Center Will French III spent the last two seasons at Memphis, redshirting in 2024 and not appearing in 2025, before coming to UNA and winning the starting job for Dearmon and offensive line coach Justice Clegg. For those eight players, as well as Long, Saturday will be a chance to see most of the staff that followed Silverfield to Arkansas.

4. Flying blind (again): For the second consecutive week, North Alabama will take on a team with a new head coach and quarterback. Planning for Arkansas won't be as tedious, as Samford coach John Grass hadn't been a head coach for four years and didn't name a starting quarterback until the first drive of the game, but any time an FCS team is trying to prepare for an FBS team, it's likely

difficult. But still, Silverfield coached last season at Memphis and offensive coordinator Tim Cramsey was with him. Defensive coordinator Ron Roberts was calling plays last season at Florida, as well. Silverfield has also named K.J. Jackson the starting quarterback, meaning UNA can watch film in each critical area to get an idea of what to prepare for.

Key matchup

Arkansas pass rush vs. UNA offensive line

In each of its last two guarantee games, UNA has allowed three sacks, and against Florida State in 2023, it allowed five. The key to any FCS team staying in a game with one of the big boys is push from the offensive line that gives the running back space to create and the quarterback time to throw. Without that, the game has the potential to get out of hand.

Players of the week

RBs Chris McMillan and Jalen Fletcher

Establishing the run is always important in buy games, taking pressure of the quarterback instead of making him throw 30+ times. McMillan (44) and Fletcher (81) accounted for 125 rushing yards and Roderick Taylor Jr. added 38. The Lions will have to get somewhere near or better

than their rushing effort from last week against Samford in order to stay ahead of the chains against the Razorbacks.

By the numbers

1959: This will be North Alabama's first game against an SEC opponent since Nov. 21, 1959, when it lost 42-7 to Vanderbilt. Although a much bigger paycheck is attached to this game, the Lions will still want to come out with a better result.

68.4%: Destin Wade's significant improvement in completion percentage in the win over Samford compared to 51.1% last year. Wade will need to continue completing a high percentage of his passes to give UNA a chance against the Hogs on Saturday.

3.5: UNA's yards per rush against Samford. That's lower than last season's 3.9, though not by much. In order to keep the game from falling fully on the arm of Wade, the Lions will need to be effective in the running game.

Prediction

Arkansas 38, UNA 14

Buy game. Run the ball, get out healthy and collect the check.

— Matt St. Charles

New top Hog eager for quick turnaround

By Eric W. Bolin
The Associated Press

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — Much like the previous five coaches who came before him, Ryan Silverfield said all the right things when he was introduced as Arkansas football coach in November.

Unfortunately for him, none of those previous five made it even six full seasons without being shown the exit. The Razorbacks, who open the season at home Saturday against North Alabama, have won double-digit games just three times this century and have finished above .500 in Southeastern Conference play just once since 2011.

Silverfield has never finished with a losing record at the college level. Incidentally, he spent six full seasons coaching Memphis and led the Tigers to two 10-plus-win seasons and a bowl every try. Last year, his Memphis team even beat Arkansas in Week 4. Then-Arkansas coach Sam Pittman was fired just eight days later after the Razorbacks lost by 43 points at home to Notre Dame. Arkansas lost its final 10 games of the season, resulting in the third winless SEC slate in the last eight years.

For what it's worth, Silverfield ignores his new team's recent history.

"You're going to see a winning program. I think that can happen immediately," he declared last fall. "It's not one of those things we're sitting here saying, 'Hey, I need three years to rebuild this.' We can start rebuilding culture the moment we step down and how we're going to do this together."

The SEC is a bit different than the American Conference. Seven of Arkansas' 12 games come against teams ranked in the Top 25. Three more are against teams who picked up votes in the poll. A second consecutive 2-10 season wouldn't be a surprise.

A segment of the Arkansas fan base and donor class has grown frustrated with football's lack of success and calls for athletic director Hunter Yurachek's job are not uncommon. Yurachek told the Little Rock Touchdown Club last September that Arkansas wasn't financially in a position to win a national championship in football, countering the school's success in men's college basketball and baseball.

While the honesty may have been refreshing, the remarks didn't sit well.



Ryan Silverfield, who coached Memphis to two 10-win seasons and six bowl appearances over six seasons, hopes for more celebratory showers — though in Arkansas red — with the Razorbacks. [SAM HODDE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Arkansas limped through the rest of the season and Yurachek made a point to recognize the large injection of donations that immediately arrived upon Silverfield's hire, though his wording was careful.

"The university, through the direction of the board, is going to make a commitment to our football program," he said. "I don't want to tie a specific dollar amount to any of that because I don't want to limit what we can do and I also want to make sure we have a competitive advantage."

On the field, Arkansas doesn't appear

to have much of an advantage. The Razorbacks did rank 13th in the FBS in total offense last year, but lost starting quarterback Taylen Green, 1,000-yard rusher Mike Washington Jr., four starters on the offensive line and six of their top eight receivers. New defensive coordinator Ron Roberts arrived from Florida and takes over a bunch that ranked 122nd out of 136 FBS teams in total defense. He does have All-SEC defensive end Quincy Rhodes Jr.

"He's an impact player in the SEC. He's going to be somewhere in the first two days of the draft," Roberts

said. "Those types of players are good to inherit. Nice when you walk in the door and you've got one."

After Rhodes, few players appear to be all-conference caliber. Silverfield's 2026 so far has been spent attempting to develop them and rectify that as a starting point.

"I don't want anybody to like me. That's OK. I'm not here for people to like me," Silverfield said. "I hope the fans, when the season's all done, say, 'Yeah, we like that guy.' But other than that, man, we're out there to truly grind."

Frazier seeks his spot among UGA greats

By Charles Odum

The Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — Even though junior Nate Frazier has two years of eligibility remaining, he already feels time passing too quickly as he seeks to claim his place on No. 3 Georgia's rich legacy of running backs.

Frazier returns as the leader of Georgia's ground game as the Bulldogs prepare for Saturday's season opener against Tennessee State. He says he is determined to make sure he continues the momentum gained from a strong finish to his 2025 season to capitalize on every opportunity this season.

Frazier just missed 1,000 rushing yards last season, leading the team with 947 yards and six touchdowns. He showed his star potential when he rushed for 181 yards on only 12 carries in a 41-21 win at Mississippi State. It was the most yards for a Georgia running back since D'Andre Swift ran for 186 yards in a 2018 win at Auburn.

Frazier wants to earn his place beside such recent Georgia rushing leaders as Swift, Nick Chubb, Sony Michel and Todd Gurley. Frazier seems to feel his time is running out as he approaches his junior season.

Before the start of preseason practice, Georgia posted a video of an emotional Frazier standing on the steps of Sanford Stadium, wearing his uniform with his red No. 3 jersey. Frazier raised his hands and then clinched his fists as he loudly proclaimed "I don't want to leave this place, bro! I love this place, bro! I love it here! I don't want to go!"

Frazier said Monday his sentiments, which seemed to be delivered in an anguished tone, were real.

"Oh man, it's just a blessing, man," Frazier said. "We come and we put work in at this place, you know, Monday through Sunday, and then coming to the game on Saturday, it's all worth it."

Frazier said when he is playing for Georgia "I feel like it is no greater feeling than that that moment right there."

Frazier said he cherishes such Georgia traditions as the Dawg Walk with fans before the game.

"The tradition of this place is crazy and it's like something that's unlike any other," he said. "So it's like it's a special feeling, right? So when I said I don't want to leave this place, it's actually a



Georgia running back Nate Frazier showed star potential last season and finished with a team-high 947 yards rushing. [COLIN HUBBARD/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

true feeling, but I can only be here for so long."

Georgia also returns running backs Chauncey Bowens, who rushed for 526 yards and six touchdowns, Bo Walker and Dwight Phillips Jr. Other key returning players on offense include quarterback Gunner Stockton and tight end Lawson Luckie.

Georgia linebacker Justin Williams said Frazier has "always been that twitchy guy" as a running back.

This year, Williams said he has seen Frazier "taking the extra mile to do the

extra things, the little things after practice. I've seen that from him. He's been doing that consistently. So he knows that his time is very limited, just like the rest of us. So he's been taking that role very seriously."

Coach Kirby Smart said Frazier has taken a lead role of the running back room even though Bowens and Phillips also are juniors.

"Leadership in that room, I think he takes personal ownership and energy," Smart said of Frazier. "Those three guys are all came in together. He

takes a lot of pride in having positive energy, stamina carrying the ball further downfield."

After having 16 catches for 116 yards and a touchdown in 2025, Frazier has worked to become more of a factor as a target for Stockton.

"Pass (protection) and pass receiving becoming a weapon," Smart said when asked how Frazier has improved. "Weapon catching the ball out of the backfield has been a big focus for him. All in all, he's worked really hard in his game."

Badgers hope its past influences future

By Steve Megargee
The Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Wisconsin reacted to back-to-back losing seasons by tackling the dual challenge of restocking its talent base through the portal while making sure those transfers understood what it takes to win.

Embattled coach Luke Fickell responded by reaching out to players from past Wisconsin teams that contended for Big Ten titles. That helped the Badgers discover the threads linking the best teams in this program's recent history.

"There was a consistency that you heard from whoever the leaders were that you talked to from those teams, that really held out throughout all those teams," Fickell said.

How well the Badgers respond could determine whether Fickell's tenure lasts beyond this season.

Former Wisconsin athletic director Chris McIntosh brought Fickell back even after Wisconsin followed a 5-7 finish in 2024 by going 4-8 last year — a stunning fall for a program that posted 22 straight winning seasons from 2002-23. Rather than switching coaches, Wisconsin made a greater financial investment in the program as Fickell added 34 transfers, including 27 from other Bowl Subdivision programs.

As many as 11 of those transfers could start in the season opener Sunday night against No. 4 Notre Dame at Lambeau Field in Green Bay.

Wisconsin had to upgrade its roster to have any shot at contending in the Big Ten.

The NFL didn't draft any Wisconsin players this year for the first time since 1978. Only two Badgers were drafted last year, both in the seventh round. No Badgers have been selected in the first three rounds since 2023, when offensive lineman Joe Tippmann and defensive lineman Keanu Benton went in the second.

"If we don't develop and recruit and get NFL players, in this league, you're not winning," Fickell said.

Wisconsin's best teams had more NFL-caliber players. They also had an attitude that Wisconsin's recent teams lacked.

Fickell described a video the team received from Chris Orr, who played linebacker for Wisconsin from 2015-19.



Luke Fickell's Wisconsin teams haven't given Badger fans much to see the last two years with consecutive losing seasons. [ANDY MANIS/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Orr specified that the Badgers need to be a brotherhood rather than just acting like a family.

The gist of Orr's message was that while families often take care of each other no matter what, brothers fight and hold themselves accountable.

"It motivated me," said quarterback Colton Joseph, an Old Dominion transfer. "The one thing we're sticking to this season is, 'Burn the boats. Give it everything we've got.' We're not turning back."

That approach could revitalize Fickell's tenure and impress new athletic director Shawn Eichorst, who arrived after McIntosh left to become the Big Ten's deputy commissioner for strategy. After going 53-10 and earning a College

Football Playoff berth his last five years at Cincinnati, Fickell has posted a 17-21 record at Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's encountered bad luck. The Badgers' intended season-opening starting quarterback has been available for the entirety of only 11 of their 37 games the last three years because of injuries.

Yet the Badgers also haven't responded well to adversity. They believe that can change if they follow the example set by Wisconsin's best teams.

"What stood out about every team in the study that we did was the teams were so player-led," safety Matt Jung said. "The coach was great, but if the coaches stepped aside, they would still have a great practice because if someone

simply didn't touch the line, it wasn't just the leaders, it wasn't just the captains getting on them. It was every single player holding the standard. That's what Wisconsin football needs to be."

Wisconsin will get an immediate indication of how far it has come, and perhaps how far it still must go.

Rather than opening the season with a lightweight program, the Badgers face a potent Notre Dame team that has plenty of motivation after getting left out of the playoff last year. The Badgers will learn right away how much of a gap might separate them from the nation's top programs — and how to go about closing it.

"In the long run," Fickell said, "I think it's going to help us."

Ducks try Shoehei way to set title goal

By Anne M. Peterson

The Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — When a young Shohei Ohtani was envisioning his future in baseball, he turned to a goal-setting tool developed by a Japanese track coach.

The Harada Method for setting and achieving goals, once used by Ohtani to manifest a major league career, has now been adopted in football by No. 2 Oregon.

The idea is that there's one ultimate goal, with eight supporting pillars as a path and actionable items beneath each pillar. Coach Dan Lanning introduced the tool to players at a team retreat this summer.

"It just lays out our format of things that we want to do this year. Coach Lanning has always been a big write things out on his mirror, write things out on the board, and really speak into existence. And this year, I've done the same thing," said quarterback Dante Moore, who will start for the Ducks again this year after he opted out of declaring for the NFL draft.

The Ducks have lofty goals after they reached the College Football Playoff in each of the past two seasons but fell short of a national title.

Last season, Oregon went 13-2, with both losses coming to Fernando Mendoza and national champion Indiana. The Ducks enter this season with the highest preseason ranking in program history.

"It started a little bit with our leadership group when we did our leadership retreat; went through it, kind of built out some of our vision boards," Lanning said. "Some of our players have done the same thing individually. But yeah, kind of grew from there."

The message resonated for many of the Ducks.

"The Harada method definitely helps you hone in on little goals before getting to that big goal, and if you can't do those little goals, like you just can't expect that big goal, and that's been the main thing we've been preaching," receiver Evan Stewart said.

Oregon brings a loaded offense into the season, led by Moore, who threw for 3,565 yards and 30 touchdowns last year. Stewart is back after missing last season with a torn patellar tendon, and he'll be joined by standout receiver Dakorian



Oregon coach Dan Lanning and the Ducks, after reaching the playoffs each of the last two year, hope this season ends with a national championship.

[LINDSEY WASSON/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Moore. The defensive line is also a strength, with Matayo Uiagalelei, Bear Alexander and A'Mauri Washington all returning after eschewing the NFL draft.

Alexander posted his square Harada board on Instagram. In the center box was his central goal: becoming a first-round draft pick. Among his eight pillars in boxes surrounding that goal were faith, discipline, character and health. The actionable items beneath character included "being kind" and "giving back."

Lanning said he and Cory Shaffer, a mental performance consultant for the

Ducks, were interested in the Harada Method before it became a tool for the players.

The method was developed by Takashi Harada, a junior high track coach who aimed to inspire underperforming athletes through discipline and self-reliance. While originally used in sports, it has been adapted to business, too.

"It's something that I was kind of studying before, and then Cory and I both actually sent it to each other. So, it kind of worked out and was like, OK, this might be something we want to surround

some of our thought processes," Lanning said. "It started a little bit with our leadership group. We did our leadership retreat, went through it, kind of built out some of our vision boards, and some of our players have done the same thing individually."

Moore was among them.

"Ohtani is probably going to be the greatest baseball player of all time, I mean, at the end of the day, what he's done," Moore said. "But yeah, we're just trying to learn from the greats and make sure we be that team this year."

Whittingham hopes to end Michigan drama

By Larry Lage
The Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Kyle Whittingham turned left out of his office on the second floor of Schembechler Hall and walked down a hallway for his midday workout, following a routine he has stuck with six days a week since July 1, 2008.

“Today’s a light one,” Whittingham said to a reporter on Tuesday.

Not quite.

Michigan’s first-year coach will turn 67 in November while preparing to play rival Ohio State, but the 6-foot, 220-pound former BYU, NFL and USFL linebacker looks fit enough to play some snaps for the Wolverines.

Whittingham seems to be a man of discipline and, without a doubt, he is leading a football team in desperate need of it.

The former Utah coach was hired after the firing and arrest of Sherrone Moore and the departure of Jim Harbaugh after he won the 2023 national title, ending an era marred by rules violations that put college football’s winningest program on NCAA probation.

“There has been a lot of drama,” Whittingham said. “We hope that we’ve come to the end of that.”

The 16th-ranked Wolverines will start the Whittingham era on Saturday night against Western Michigan, an expected tuneup for next week’s home game against No. 10 Oklahoma.

His youth included football

Whittingham was in San Luis Obispo, while his parents were attending Cal Poly. His father, Fred, was an NFL linebacker for 12 years and died at 66 in 2003 due to complications from a third back surgery.

“Football is all I ever knew because of him,” Whittingham said in an interview in his office this summer. “I was with him in the Dallas Cowboys’ locker room, in New Orleans and Philadelphia. I got to coach with him at Utah. I played for him at BYU.

“When I got to Utah, he was the coordinator and I was his D-line coach. Then later at Utah, I was the coordinator and he was linebacker coach.

Kyle Whittingham was an all-conference linebacker for the Cougars and went on to play in the USFL and appeared in three games with his hometown Rams during the 1987 NFL strike. He was hired as an assistant coach in 1994 at



Michigan coach Kyle Whittingham has been greeted warmly by the Wolverines since he was hired. [RYAN SUN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Utah, where he was the head coach from the 2005 season until last December. He was 177-88 with the Utes, winning at least 10 games eight times, including 11 last season, and three conference championships.

Whittingham and his wife, Jamie, have been married for more than 40 years

and they have four children with a 13th grandchild due soon. His brother, Freddie, is coaching Michigan’s tight ends and his son, Alex, is leading the team’s linebackers.

Kyle and Jamie Whittingham are living in an Ann Arbor apartment, buying time to look for a home, and he drove his

motorcycle to work on Tuesday for a four-minute commute.

Discipline at Michigan

Rod Moore, who is in his sixth season at Michigan, said Whittingham’s approach

SEE WHITTINGHAM, G14

WHITTINGHAM

From Page G13

is more aligned with Harbaugh’s structure and is a drastic departure from how Moore ran the program in 2024 and 2025. Meetings that started on time or a little late the last two years now begin early sometimes. Quarterback Bryce Underwood chose to stay instead of transferring after hearing Whittingham’s pitch and said he is thankful he did.

“He’s a great guy to look up to,” Underwood said.

And, Whittingham has been pleasantly surprised by the players he inherited.

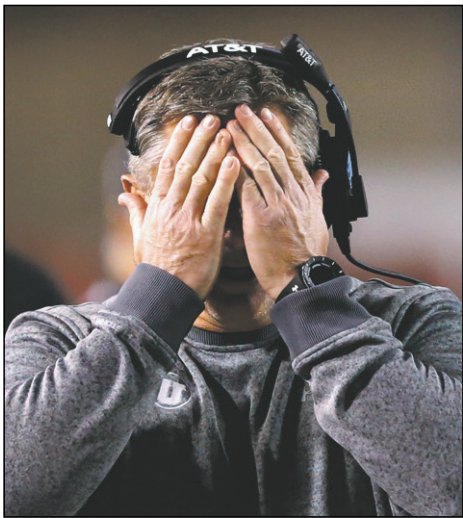
“I was a little leery that perhaps all these four- and five-star athletes would be entitled and me-guys and I found out they were the exact opposite,” he said. “I didn’t know what I was getting into as far as the culture.”

Crosswords and AC/DC

Just like his hometown Los Angeles Times crossword puzzle that he does daily to keep his mind agile, a game that gets harder each day of the week, his workouts go from moderate to intense.

Whittingham broke a sweat seven minutes into his workout after riding a bike, hovering around 17 mph with the level of resistance at 15. Roughly halfway through his 45-minute cardio block, he ramped the level and speed up to 20.

He spent about 12 minutes completing



Kyle Whittingham hopes off-field issues are behind the Michigan program. “There has been a lot of drama. We hope that we’ve come to the end of that.” [RICK BOWMER/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

the crossword puzzle with a blue marker on a sheet of paper, resting on a towel draped over the handlebars. When he was done, he matched his answers with another sheet of paper with the answers.

“100%,” he said proudly while crumpling up the papers. “I usually get 100% through Thursday, then it gets tough Friday. On Sunday, they’re diabolical.”

He shifted gears to pump music from AC/DC through his wireless earbuds, no surprise for a classic rock fan.

The second part of Whittingham’s



Kyle Whittingham’s 2008 Utah team finished 13-0 after topping Nick Saban and Alabama in the January 2009 Sugar Bowl. [ALEX BRANDON/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

workout was on the ground floor of Michigan’s massive weight room. There were three sets of the incline bench press with 55-pound dumbbells, Whittingham lamenting the shoulder pain that prevents him from using 100-pounders anymore; inverted rows with his feet on a bench; 50 crunches and stretches for his troublesome hamstrings, hip and shoulder.

A little more than an hour after he started, he grabbed a protein drink from of a wall of refrigerators.

Whittingham then walked up the steps

to his office, where he has welcomed a lot of people to learn more about the Wolverines, a team he followed as a kid in Southern California because he liked their winged helmets and coach Bo Schembechler.

“I’ve always had an affinity for the Michigan program,” he recalled. “Since I got the job, I have connected with Tom Brady, Desmond Howard, Charles Woodson, Derek Jeter, and Lloyd Carr sat here for an hour. Jack Harbaugh, Jon Falk and John Bacon have come in here, too. This place is special.”

PICKS PANEL



**AMY
BEARD**



**SIRVELL
CARTER**



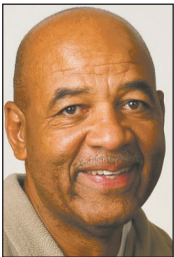
**GREGG
DEWALT**



**RENITA
JIMMAR**



**STACY
LONG**



**DEANGELO
MCDANIEL**



**MATT
ST. CHARLES**



**CALEB
SUGGS**

Auburn vs. Baylor
East Carolina at Alabama
North Alabama at Arkansas
Ole Miss vs. Louisville
Clemson at LSU
Colorado at Georgia Tech
SMU at Florida State
Miami at Stanford
UNLV at Hawaii
UCLA at Cal
Last week
Season record

Auburn
Alabama
Arkansas
Ole Miss
LSU
Georgia Tech
Florida State
Miami
UNLV
UCLA
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0-0

Auburn
Alabama
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Ole Miss
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COLUMN

All decisive, and all nonconference

By Doug Segrest
For GameDay

It feels like time is accelerated. Yet for college football fans, the stretch from April to opening weekend feels like an eternity. Then the 14 weeks that follow vanish in a blur.

We enter another season with a sport that barely resembles what we knew. NIL has evolved into \$40 million rosters and nine game conference slates. Yet 10 nonconference matchups still offer hope that the game's core remains intact.

These aren't just marquee showdowns. They may help determine who plays for the national championship in January.

1. Miami at Notre Dame (Nov. 7): What should have been a CFP showdown last year gets a mulligan — and it's worth the wait. This is the biggest game on both schedules. Miami's only ranked opponent is Notre Dame. The Irish, free from a conference grind, face three ranked foes. At minimum, this feels like a play-in game. More likely, it's a battle for the top seed.

2. Ohio State at Texas (Sept. 12): Two of the nation's best rosters meet in prime time. Texas narrowly missed the CFP last season, in no small part because of a 14-7 loss at Ohio State in the opener. The Longhorns didn't score until late despite outgaining the Buckeyes by 130 yards — and that was before their offense found rhythm.

3. Louisville vs. Ole Miss (Sunday): A neutral site game with major stakes. Louisville is a dark horse ACC contender. Ole Miss went 2-1 in the play-offs after Pete Golding replaced Baton Rouge-bound Lane Kiffin. This is an early statement opportunity.

4. Notre Dame at BYU (Oct. 17): The Irish face their first

major test midway through the season, in a venue that could be snowy and treacherous if El Niño cooperates. It's also BYU's first big challenge, though the Cougars can recover thanks to a rugged Big 12 finish.

5. Oklahoma at Michigan (Sept. 12): A 24-13 win at the Big House two weeks into 2025 launched Oklahoma into CFP contention and pushed Michigan toward a full reset. Under Kyle Whittingham, the Wolverines will be hard-nosed. Will the offense be good enough?

6. Clemson at LSU (Saturday): This is how you schedule an intersectional opener. Dabo Swinney aims to prove he hasn't lost his mojo, while expectations for Kiffin are sky high. A loss puts either team in a precarious spot before Labor Day.

7. Georgia Tech at Georgia (Nov. 28): It's a rivalry again. Georgia Tech has pushed Georgia to the limit the past two seasons. A win could propel the victor into the postseason — and give the loser a damaging final data point.

8. Boise State at Oregon (Saturday): The Pac-12 is back, and Boise State is the early front-runner. An opening Saturday upset could reshape the CFP field more than any other game on the schedule.

9. Florida State at Alabama (Sept. 19): Alabama has revenge on its mind. But Florida State dominated the 2025 opener and Mike Norvell needs to keep the wolves at bay.

10. Auburn vs. Baylor (Saturday): The Alex Golesh era begins two hours up the road from The Plains. A strong debut could vault Auburn into dark-horse CFP contention.

Doug Segrest, who covered college football for 28 years for numerous newspapers in Alabama and Tennessee, is a freelance columnist.



Ohio State, after flexing on Texas last year in an early-season matchup that weighed heavily on the playoff field, will try to do it again this year at Texas. [JAY LAPRETE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]



LSU, if the Tigers wear the victory belt like last year at Clemson, will solidify a spot as a playoff contender. [JACOB KUPFERMAN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]



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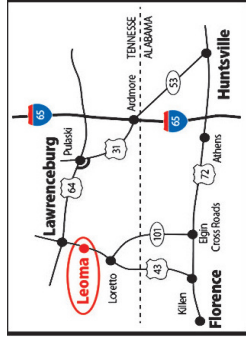
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