

TN Valley

Thursday, August 28, 2025

GAMEDAY



TIME TO KICK IT OFF

It's Auburn at Baylor, Alabama at Florida State for season-opening tilts

Win a Mini Max Big Green Egg from Story & Lee!*

TAILGATE of the week RECIPE



Coconut Shrimp

INGREDIENTS

12 jumbo shrimp
2 egg whites (slightly beaten)
Dash of red pepper

1/2 tsp salt
1/2 cup cornstarch
1 cup sweetened flaked coconut

DIRECTIONS:

Peel shrimp, leave tail, de-vein if desired. Pour oil at a depth of 3 1/2 inches (350 degrees). Combine egg white, ground red pepper and salt in shallow bowl. Cornstarch in another bowl. Coconut in another bowl. Coat shrimp with cornstarch, shake off excess. Dip in egg white mix, dredge in coconut. Fry in two batches, 2 to 3 minutes until golden brown. Serves up to 4 people. Marmalade Dip Sauce: 1 cup orange marmalade, 4 tsp stoneground mustard, 1 tsp horseradish (can use prepared, I prefer fresh). This is so easy to prepare!



This week's recipe submitted
by **Eleanor Todd,**
Muscle Shoals, AL

Submit your recipes now and you could win \$50 if your recipe is selected.

To enter, submit your recipe to:

Tailgate Recipe Contest, 219 West Tennessee St., Florence, AL 35630 - Attn: Mara Beth Cravens

*Weekly winners are entered for grand prize drawing for a Mini Max Green Egg.

**Big
Green
Egg**
World's Best Smoker and Grill!



The Original American Designed Ceramic Cooker!

The World's Best Smoker & Grill!

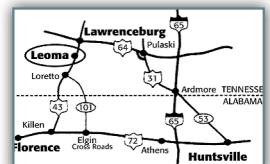
Story & Lee has the largest selection of Eggs and the lowest prices in the TN Valley.

FREE Delivery • FREE Assembly



Story & Lee
Since 1970 Furniture & Bedding

Hwy. 43 • Leoma, TN
Store Hours: Mon. thru Sat.
9 A.M. 'til 6 P.M.
(931) 852-2111
Toll Free 1-800-345-2511



www.storyandlee.com

THE LINE

(as of Monday)			
Thursday			
FAVORITE	TODAY	O/U	UNDERDOG
Boise State	6½	62½	at SOUTH FLORIDA
at RUTGERS	15½	49½	Ohio
at BOWLING GREEN	14½	52½	Lafayette
at NC STATE	13½	61½	East Carolina
Wyoming	7½	49½	at AKRON
at DELAWARE	29½	54½	Delaware State
at UCF	18½	52½	Jacksonville State
at MISSOURI	36½	51½	Central Arkansas
at DUKE	33½	47½	Elon
at OKLAHOMA STATE	19½	55½	UT Martin
at HOUSTON	22½	55½	Stephen F. Austin
at MINNESOTA	17½	44½	Buffalo
Nebraska	6½	54½	at CINCINNATI
at WISCONSIN	17½	39½	Miami (Ohio)
at SAN DIEGO STATE	18½	53½	Stony Brook
Friday			
at ARMY	16½	51½	Tarleton State
at MICHIGAN STATE	20½	49½	Western Michigan
at WAKE FOREST	16½	51½	Kennesaw State
Appalachian State	6½	50½	at CHARLOTTE
at ILLINOIS	45½	63½	Western Illinois
Georgia Tech	4½	52½	at COLORADO
Auburn	2½	57½	at BAYLOR
UNLV	10½	60½	at SAM HOUSTON
at SAN JOSE STATE	11½	51½	Central Michigan
Saturday			
at MARYLAND	14½	59½	Florida Atlantic
at PURDUE	18½	50½	Ball State
at OHIO STATE	2½	47½	Texas
Tennessee	13½	51	Syracuse
at TULANE	5½	46½	Northwestern
Mississippi State	12½	60½	at SOUTHERN MISS
at KENTUCKY	7½	48½	Toledo
at INDIANA	23½	54½	Old Dominion
at LOUISVILLE	38½	56½	Eastern Kentucky
at GEORGIA	39½	55½	Marshall
Alabama	13½	50½	at FLORIDA STATE
at PENN STATE	44½	57½	Nevada
Temple	2½	47½	at UMASS
at IOWA STATE	14½	47½	South Dakota
at OREGON	27½	56½	Montana State
at IOWA	38½	50½	Albany
at VIRGINIA	11½	58½	Coastal Carolina
at JAMES MADISON	26½	54½	Weber State
at OKLAHOMA	36½	60½	Illinois State
at TROY	20½	48½	Nicholls State
at VANDERBILT	36½	48½	Charleston Southern
at ARKANSAS STATE	10½	59½	SE Missouri State
at TEXAS A&M	24½	57½	UTSA
at KANSAS STATE	25½	55½	North Dakota
at MICHIGAN	34½	49½	New Mexico
at UTAH STATE	5½	60½	UTEP
at USC	35½	59½	Missouri State
at CLEMSON	3½	57½	LSU
at LOUISIANA TECH	13½	49½	SE Louisiana
at OLE MISS	35½	60½	Georgia State
at BYU	42½	60½	Portland State
at TULSA	5½	63½	Abilene Christian
at LA.-LAFAYETTE	11½	47½	Rice
at TEXAS STATE	13½	58½	Eastern Michigan
at SMU	48½	62½	East Texas A&M
Georgia Southern	1½	51½	at FRESNO STATE
at WASHINGTON ST.	13½	50½	Idaho
at ARIZONA STATE	28½	52½	Northern Arizona
at OREGON STATE	2½	50½	Cal
at ARIZONA	17½	52½	Hawaii
Utah	6½	51½	at UCLA
at WASHINGTON	22½	53½	Colorado State
Sunday			
South Carolina	7½	52½	Virginia Tech
Notre Dame	2½	49½	at MIAMI (Fla.)
Monday			
TCU	3½	56½	at NORTH CAROLINA

GAMES ON TV

Thursday
Boise State at South Florida, 4:30 p.m., ESPN
Ohio at Rutgers, 5 p.m., BTN
East Carolina at NC State, 6 p.m., ACC Network
Towson at Norfolk State, 6 p.m., ESPNU
Central Arkansas at Missouri, 6:30 p.m., SEC Network
Buffalo at Minnesota, 7 p.m., FS1
Miami (Ohio) at Wisconsin, 8 p.m., BTN
Nebraska at Cincinnati, 8 p.m., ESPN
Friday
Tarleton State at Army, 5 p.m., CBSSN
App State vs. Charlotte, 6 p.m., ESPNU
Kennesaw State at Wake Forest, 6 p.m., ACC Network
Western Michigan at Michigan State, 6 p.m., FS1
Auburn at Baylor, 7 p.m., FOX
Georgia Tech at Colorado, 7 p.m., ESPN
UNLV at Sam Houston, 8:30 p.m., CBSSN
Central Michigan at San Jose State, 9:30 p.m., FS1
Saturday
Ball State at Purdue, 11 a.m., BTN
Duquesne at Pittsburgh, 11 a.m., ACC Network
Florida Atlantic at Maryland, 11 a.m., BTN
Mississippi State at Southern Miss, 11 a.m., ESPN
Northwestern at Tulane, 11 a.m., ESPNU
Syracuse vs. Tennessee, Atlanta, 11 a.m., ABC
Texas at Ohio State, 11 a.m., FOX
VMI at Navy, 11 a.m., CBSSN
Toledo at Kentucky, 11:45 a.m., SEC Network
Old Dominion at Indiana, 1:30 p.m., FS1
Eastern Kentucky at Louisville, 2 p.m., ACC Network
Alabama at Florida State, 2:30 p.m., ABC
Bucknell at Air Force, 2:30 p.m., CBSSN
Marshall at Georgia, 2:30 p.m., ESPN
TOP 25 SCHEDULE
Thursday
No. 25 Boise St. (0-0) at S. Florida (0-0), 4:30 p.m.
Friday
No. 12 Illinois (0-0) vs. W. Illinois (0-0), 6:30 p.m.
Saturday
No. 1 Texas (0-0) at No. 3 Ohio St. (0-0), 11 a.m.
No. 2 Penn St. (0-0) vs. Nevada (0-0), 2:30 p.m.
No. 4 Clemson (0-0) vs. No. 9 LSU (0-0), 6:30 p.m.
No. 5 Georgia (0-0) vs. Marshall (0-0), 2:30 p.m.
No. 7 Oregon (0-0) vs. Montana St. (0-0), 3 p.m.
No. 8 Alabama (0-0) at Florida St. (0-0), 2:30 p.m.
No. 11 Arizona St. (0-0) vs. N. Arizona (0-0), 9 p.m.
No. 14 Michigan (0-0) vs. New Mexico (0-0), 6:30 p.m.
No. 15 Florida (0-0) vs. LIU Brooklyn (0-0), 6 p.m.
No. 16 SMU (0-0) vs. East Texas A&M (0-0), 8 p.m.
No. 17 Kansas St. (0-0) vs. North Dakota (0-0), 6 p.m.
No. 18 Oklahoma (0-0) vs. Illinois St. (0-0), 5 p.m.
No. 19 Texas A&M (0-0) vs. UTSA (0-0), 6 p.m.
No. 20 Indiana (0-0) vs. Old Dominion (0-0), 1:30 p.m.
No. 21 Ole Miss (0-0) vs. Georgia St. (0-0), 6:45 p.m.
No. 22 Iowa St. (0-0) vs. S. Dakota (0-0), 2:30 p.m.
No. 23 Texas Tech (0-0) vs. Ark.-Pine Bluff (0-0), 6:30 p.m.
No. 24 Tennessee (0-0) vs. Syracuse (0-0) at Atlanta, 11 a.m.
Sunday
No. 6 Notre Dame (0-0) at No. 10 Miami (0-0), 6:30 p.m.
No. 13 South Carolina (0-0) vs. Virginia Tech (0-0) at Atlanta, 2 p.m.



Ralphie will take his usual pregame jog when the Colorado Buffaloes host Georgia Tech on Friday night. [DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Nevada at Penn State, 2:30 p.m., CBS	Georgia Southern at Fresno State, 8:30 p.m., FS1
South Dakota at Iowa State, 2:30 p.m., FOX	Idaho at Washington State, 9 p.m., CWTV
Howard at Florida A&M, 3 p.m., ESPNU	California at Oregon State, 9:30 p.m., ESPN
Montana State at Oregon, 3 p.m., BTN	Hawaii at Arizona, 9:30 p.m., TNT
Alabama A&M at Arkansas, 3:15 p.m., SEC Network	Colorado State at Washington, 10 p.m., BTN
Albany at Iowa, 5 p.m., FS1	Utah at UCLA, 10 p.m., FOX
Coastal Carolina at Virginia, 5 p.m., ACC Network	
UTSA at Texas A&M, 6 p.m., ESPN	Sunday
LSU at Clemson, 6:30 p.m., ABC	Virginia Tech vs. South Carolina, Atlanta, 2 p.m., ESPN
Missouri State at USC, 6:30 p.m., BTN	Winston Salem vs. Tuskegee, Montgommery, 6 p.m., ESPNU
New Mexico at Michigan, 6:30 p.m., NBC	Notre Dame at Miami, 6:30 p.m., ABC
UTEP at Utah State, 6:30 p.m., CBSSN	
Georgia State at Ole Miss, 6:45 p.m., SEC Network	Monday
East Texas A&M at SMU, 8 p.m., ACC Network	TCU at North Carolina, 7 p.m., ESPN

Auburn at Baylor

When: 7 p.m. Friday

TV/radio: FOX/FM-94.9

2024 records: Auburn (5-7), Baylor (8-5)

The series: Baylor leads 2-1-1.

Four-down territory

1. Keep it simple: Quarterback Jackson Arnold makes his Auburn debut, and while the Oklahoma transfer is experienced, Auburn coach Hugh Freeze wants to ease Arnold into shallow water before throwing him in the deep end. That means keeping it simple and getting everyone else to help their new QB. “We’ve got to make sure we’re not doing too much,” Freeze said. “We want our receivers in the right spots at the right time. We’re athletic enough there to win. Just do what the play is designed to do, and we’re good enough there to win and get open. That will help our quarterbacks.”

2. Long list: The entire Auburn defense was listed as potential starters on the Tigers’ depth chart early this week. Instead of a clearly defined starter, each player had the word “OR” next to their name. There are 34 potential starters listed on the defensive depth chart while the offense lists eight clear starters. “My first thought was that it was going to be a long introduction at Jordan-Hare when we introduce our starters on defense,” Freeze said. “We will play all of those guys, I suspect, on Friday night.”

3. Dye honor: Auburn will honor former Tigers coach, the late Pat Dye, with a sponsorship logo on Pat Dye Field in Jordan-Hare Stadium. The Pat Dye Field logo will be on the 25-yard line. Auburn named the field in honor of Dye in 2005, the same year he was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame. Dye’s Auburn teams were 99-39-4 from 1981-92, including SEC championships in 1983, 1987, 1988 and 1989, and the recently added 1983 national title. “For my people my age, Coach Dye put this program on the map of what it could become,” Freeze said.

4. Health update: Alex McPherson was sidelined for a majority of the 2024 season with ulcerative colitis and had just two field-goal attempts, a year after going 13-for-13. Freeze announced this week McPherson



Auburn running back Damari Alston looks to break free as the starter this season. [BUTCH DILL/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

may not be available against Baylor. Between Towns McGough and Ian Vachon, Auburn was 11-of-20 on field goals last season. Along with McGough, Connor Gibbs is available Friday. “Obviously, Alex is super talented and accurate,” Freeze said. “It’s just a matter of what he feels like he’s able to do and then we’ll go from there with Towns and Gibbs.”

Key matchup

Auburn RB Damari Alston vs. Baylor RB Bryson Washington

Alston gets the nod as the new Tigers’ starter with the departure of Jarquez Hunter. He has played in 34 games and has 681 yards with five touchdowns. Washington ran for 1,028 yards last season with 12 touchdowns.

Player of the week

Dillon Wade, LG

With 37 starts under his belt, Wade is perhaps the biggest leader on the AU offensive line and will be a key cog this season in keeping defensive line-men away from new Tigers QB Jackson Arnold.

By the numbers

24: Auburn is 24-8-1 all-time against the Big 12. The Tigers last matchup with a current Big 12 team was a loss to Houston in the 2021 Birmingham Bowl.

236: Auburn’s offensive line has combined for 236 career games played, the most in the SEC and seventh most in the country.

1995: Baylor hasn’t hosted a team from the SEC since Mississippi State played in

Waco in 1995.

2010: Auburn has not played a game on a Friday since the Iron Bowl in 2010.

Prediction

Auburn 28, Baylor 14

There is reason to be optimistic on the Plains. The defense will be better while the offense will have a new look and feel. The question is can Freeze and company bring it all together and lead the Tigers to new heights? Going on the road against a Power 5 opponent isn’t an ideal season-opener warmup, but an enthusiastic and athletic Auburn team will carry the day. Whether the Tigers can sustain those traits is the next question.

— Edwin Stanton

Alabama at Florida State

When: 2:30 p.m. Saturday

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

2024 records: No. 8 Alabama (9-4), Florida State (2-10)

The series: Alabama leads 3-1-1.

Four-down territory

1. High standard: Alabama had its share of struggles last season, but defense was not an issue. The Crimson Tide defense allowed just 17.4 points per game (fourth in the SEC and 10th nationally). Over the final six games, the defense surrendered just 12.8 points. The 17.4 points per game total is the lowest scoring average allowed by a Tide defense since 2017 when that national championship squad finished first in the nation in scoring defense (11.9).

2. Familiar face: Alabama is quite familiar with FSU offensive coordinator Gus Malzahn. The former Auburn head coach had some success against the Crimson Tide, winning three out of eight Iron Bowls. He was also the Auburn offensive coordinator when the Tigers beat Alabama in 2010. "I have tremendous respect for Gus Malzahn, who I've known for a very long time," Alabama defensive coordinator Kane Wommack said. "Gus always presents a number of challenges to you formationally, with motions, quarterback run, one-plus element and their ability to go tempo with their run game."

3. Bird's eye view: New Alabama offensive coordinator Ryan Grubb is back with Kalen DeBoer, but he won't be on the sidelines with him. He will be the only Tide assistant coach in the coach's booth. Last season, OC Nick Sheridan and former safeties coach Colin Hitschler were the two assistants in the booth. "I've got other guys up there with me," Grubb said. "It's pretty much the same setup I've done. I've got guys, Mitch Dahlen's up there, he's been with me for five years up in the box, so he's got a good set of eyes. Tyler Hughes was with us in Washington, veteran coach as well. Feel like it's pretty much the same setup."

4. Cautious of Castellanos: One area Alabama's defense struggled in last year was holding dual-threat QBs at bay. (See Oklahoma's Jackson Arnold, South Florida's Byrum Brown and Vanderbilt's Diego Pavia.) Seminoles QB Tommy Castellanos rushed for 1,000 yards in 2023 at Boston College. However, after Castellanos said



Alabama defensive lineman Tim Keenan III and the Crimson Tide hope to soon ascend in the Associated Press rankings after opening the year at No. 8.

[VASHA HUNT/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

in June that "(Alabama doesn't) have Nick Saban to save them ... I just don't see them stopping me," Alabama does have some incentive to stop him.

Key matchup

Alabama QB Ty Simpson vs. FSU QB Tommy Castellanos

Two QBs are making their debuts, Simpson as a starter and Castellanos as a Seminole. The experience and skill factors go to Castellanos (3,689 career passing yards, 1,427 rushing) but Simpson has a veteran offensive line in front of him.

Player of the week

Tim Keenan III, DL

The senior will be a leader on

Alabama's line this season. He was a leader last year, but it's his time to shine. He had seven tackles for loss last season with three sacks and at 6-foot-2, 320 pounds, Keenan is a run killer in the middle.

By the numbers

1: Crimson Tide opponents averaged just 1 yard per return in 2024, which led the nation.

22: Alabama has won 22 straight season openers, the second longest streak in the nation behind Ohio State (22).

28: UA forced 28 total turnovers (11 fumbles, 17 interceptions) in 2024, the second-most in the SEC and tied for fifth most in Division I.

278: Alabama began the 2008 season

at No. 24 in the AP preseason poll. Since then, UA has not been ranked lower than No. 17 in the 278 polls that followed.

Prediction

Alabama 24, Florida State 17

We don't know much about this Alabama team. It wouldn't be a surprise to see the Crimson Tide struggle, but it wouldn't be a shocker to see them win in a blowout. What we do know is Alabama has lots of talent and potential. The question is the coaching. Year two is a critical time for DeBoer, and there isn't much room for error with a fanbase accustomed to more hoisting hardware at the end of the season.

— Edwin Stanton

Tennessee vs. Syracuse

When: 11 a.m. Saturday

Where: Atlanta

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

2024 records: No. 24 Tennessee (10-3),
Syracuse (10-3)

The series: Tennessee leads 3-0.

Four-down territory

1. Missing yards: Tennessee teams have gone over 2,500 rushing yards for four straight seasons, which is a first in program history. Jaylen Wright and Dylan Sampson had much to do with that. This season the Vols turn to DeSean Bishop and Star Thomas, a Duke transfer. "This opportunity I have in front of me is not just something that I am proud about, but a lot of people around here are proud about," Bishop said. "A lot of people out here are rooting for me and praying for my success. I can't let them down and I won't."

2. No sneak peek: Tennessee, along with most college teams, normally release a depth chart on the first day of game week. Coach Josh Heupel opted not to do that. Several positions are set, including the quarterback spot with Joey Aguilar. There are questions about other positions and backups, but Heupel isn't giving any hints as to who those will be. "You'll find out on Saturday when the depth chart is released," he said.

3. Orange in the red: The Vols were ranked No. 80 in red-zone scoring last season at just over 80%. It breaks down to 25 rushing TDs, 14 passing scores and 13 made field goals in 63 red-zone trips. "You have to play smart football down there," Heupel said. "The efficiency of the run game is a big part of that as well. If you are throwing the football, you have to be efficient with it as well. A lot of what takes place in the middle of the field is as important in the red zone."

4. Fast and furious: Tennessee has a knack of dominating the first quarter. Opponents managed only two first-quarter offensive touchdowns during the regular season last year. The UT offense, meanwhile, has outscored opponents 543-202 in the first quarter under Heupel. In fact, since 2021, the Vols are first in the nation in first-quarter scoring at 10.44 points per game. Heupel's teams have scored at least one touchdown in the first quarter in 73 of the 88 games he has coached.



Tennessee tight end Miles Kitselman could be a focal point for the Vols against Syracuse. [SCOTT KINSER/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Key matchup

Tennessee QB Joey Aguilar vs. Syracuse QB Rickie Collins

Both players are making debuts with new teams. Aguilar is in his fifth season, having played in junior college, Appalachian State and a short spring stint at UCLA. Collins saw limited time in two seasons at LSU.

Player of the week

Miles Kitselman, TE

Heupel said this week the tight ends need to play an important role in the opener. Kitselman is looking to take the

next step forward as a leader. He had 301 yards and four TDs last season.

By the numbers

30: Josh Heupel has guided Tennessee to its winningest three-year stretch (30 from 2022-24) since the Vols won 30 games from 1998-2000.

15: Tennessee has a 15-1 nonconference regular-season record in the Heupel era and has won 14 straight.

789: Syracuse is 789 miles away from Knoxville.

20: The Vols have held 11 of their last 14 opponents to under 20 points.

Prediction

Tennessee 35, Syracuse 13

Right now, no one expects Tennessee to repeat what it accomplished last season. There are too many questions about the offense that need to be answered before talk of a playoff berth can be tossed around. A strong showing in the opener can go a long way in giving new Vols starters confidence. They will need a boatload of that when Georgia comes calling in a couple of weeks.

— Edwin Stanton

UNA at Western Kentucky

When: 6 p.m. Saturday

TV/radio: ESPN+/FM-98.3, FM-103.5

Records: UNA (3-9 in 2024), Western Kentucky (1-0 in 2025)

The series: First meeting.

Four-down territory

1. It's all about the money, money, money: It's the annual money game for UNA. Western Kentucky is paying the Lions \$300,000. A chance to win? We'll leave that up to you right now or you can cheat and check the bottom of this char-
ticle. UNA is 2-8 all-time against FBS teams, including a 40-0 loss at Memphis last season. The wins came in 1973 against Appalachian State (21-7) and in 1997 at Southwestern Louisiana (48-42 in 4 OTs), now known as Louisiana-Lafayette. So, none during the Division I era.

2. Season-opening woes: The first game of the season hasn't been especially kind to UNA. The Lions are 2-5 in such games since moving to Division I in 2018. The five losses have come in the last five years such as the 37-15 loss to Southeast Missouri last year in the FCS Kickoff game. In those seven matchups, UNA has been outscored 195-131 with two matchups being decided by a single possession. The 34-30 win at Southern Utah in 2018 and the 17-14 overtime loss at Indiana State in 2022.

3. Top Gun? Is that how Western Kentucky quarterback Maverick McIvor got his name? Don't know. But the signal caller isn't an unfamiliar face to UNA. The Lions saw him in each of the previous two seasons while he was with Abilene Christian. McIvor finished a combined 42-of-72 passing for 462 yards, three touchdowns and one interception. He was 33-for-51 with 401 yards passing and three touchdowns in his Western Kentucky debut last week, a 41-24 win over Conference USA foe Sam Houston State.

4. Lion signaling: McIvor's counterpart will be Ari Patu. It would be a surprise if he wasn't considering he spent training camp and UNA's scrimmages running with the first-team offense. Patu played in just three games last season due a wrist injury that required surgery. He was 48-of-86 passing for 535 yards, a touchdown and five interceptions. He finished with 14 total turnovers. It will be interesting to see how he plays in Year 2 of coach Brent Dearmon's offense.



Ari Patu and UNA will be looking for a little more continuity this season. [IVY ROSE BALL/TIMESDAILY]

Key matchup

Western Kentucky WR Matthew Henry vs. UNA secondary

Like McIvor, Henry is a new Hilltopper. He transferred in from FCS Western Illinois after logging 1,211 yards and six touchdowns on 64 catches in 2024. He certainly appeared to be one of his quarterback's favorite targets in Western Kentucky's opener. He caught seven passes for 148 yards and a touchdown. Yeah, that'll play. The Lions, meanwhile, are starting new players in three-fifths of their secondary. Something to watch.

Player of the week

UNA passing game

Sure it says player, but we'll cheat and go with multiple. Namely, the receiving

corps. The Lions lost their top three pass catchers from 2024: Takaaree Kenebrew (46 catches, 772 yards, 4 TDs), Dakota Warfield (46, 568, 3) and Kobe Warden (42, 513, 3). Tanaka Scott (26, 407 3) and Justin Luke (5, 141, 2) are back, while UNA added Justin Pegues from Bowling Green and tight end Christian Burkhalter from Georgia Tech. Being in sync with Patu early in the season could go a long way. Some of that will depend on the offensive line, too.

By the numbers

7-30: UNA's record away from the palatial Braly Stadium since the start of 2018. The Lions have only won more than one road game in a season once in that stretch — 2018.

7: The number of road games UNA has this season.

11-4: Western Kentucky's record against FCS opponents as an FBS school, according to fearthefcs.com. The Hilltoppers last loss to the lower division was 2019. It was the season opener against Central Arkansas, which the Bears won 35-28.

61: The number of new players Western Kentucky has on its roster, 47 of which are transfers.

Prediction

Western Kentucky 49, UNA 10

The Hilltoppers get their victory. The Lions' athletic department gets their check. Everybody comes out a winner.

— David Glovach

This week's SEC, state games

Jacksonville State at Central Florida

When: 6 p.m. Thursday
TV: ESPN+
2024 records: Jacksonville State (9-5), UCF (4-8)
The series: First meeting.
The lowdown: Jacksonville State is one of six teams that will play four midweek games this season. That's the most in the FBS. ... Last year, the Gamecocks played seven games Monday-Thursday. ... New JSU coach Charles Kelly's first full-time college coaching job was at Jacksonville State in 1992. ... Kelly was Auburn's co-defensive coordinator last year. ... Gavin Wimsatt, expected to be JSU's starting quarterback, spent two seasons at Rutgers before going to Kentucky. ... Gamecocks receiver Brock Rechsteiner is the son of WWE Hall of Famer Scott Steiner. ... Jacksonville State ended its 2024 season in the Cure Bowl, which is played less than 20 miles from UCF's campus. ... Scott Frost makes his second debut as head coach of the Golden Knights. He was 19-7 in his first two seasons before a 16-22 tenure at Nebraska. ... The Golden Knights have won 10 straight Thursday games, behind only Oklahoma State and Utah, who have won 12 straight.

Alabama State at UAB

When: 6:30 p.m. Thursday
TV: ESPN+
2024 records: ASU (7-5), UAB (3-9)
The series: Tied 2-2.
The lowdown: New UAB cornerbacks coach Ryan Lewis Sr. was Alabama State's defensive coordinator the last three years. ... The Blazers and Hornets last met in August 2019, a 24-19 UAB victory. ... The Blazers have won the last two meetings. ASU took the first two: 27-24 in 1994 and 13-3 in 1995. ... UAB has 49 new players this season, 31 via the transfer portal. ... The Blazers have won nine straight season openers by a combined score of 373-80, including three via shutout. ... Their last eight season openers have been against FCS teams. ... Alabama State has an all-time record of 523-511-41. ... The Hornets blocked five punts last year and six overall.

Central Arkansas at Missouri

When: 6:30 p.m. Thursday
SEE SEC, G9



Gavin Wimsatt, who spent time trying to dodge defenders at two other schools, is expected to start Jacksonville State's season opener. [JACKSONVILLE STATE ATHLETICS]



UAB defensive back coach Ryan Lewis Jr. couldn't break away from Alabama State that quickly. [UAB ATHLETICS]



Beau Pribula is likely hoping he won't hear any news that will cause him to hang his head after Missouri's season opener. [MISSOURI ATHLETICS]



Lee Corso will sign off from College GameDay after choosing whether to don Texas or Ohio State headgear. [PAUL SANCYA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]



Jeff Lebby and Mississippi State are looking to smile more and grimace less this season. [ROGELIO V. SOLIS/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

SEC

From Page G8

TV: SECN

2024 records: Central Arkansas (6-6), Missouri (10-3)

The series: First meeting.

The lowdown: Missouri is coming off back-to-back double-digit wins seasons for the first time since 2014. ... The Tigers have never lost to an FCS team. They're 23-0 against the lower division. ... Central Arkansas last posted a 10-win season in 2017. ... The Bears did not play a Power Four opponent last season, but did so in 2023. They lost at Oklahoma State 27-13. The last time they played an SEC school was 2022. Ole Miss casually won 59-3. ... Missouri is using the season opener to determine its starting quarterback with Beau Pribula, a transfer from Penn State, and Sam Horn, a team backup last season, both scheduled to play.

No. 1 Texas at No. 3 Ohio State

When: 11 a.m. Saturday

TV: FOX

2024 records: Texas (13-3), Ohio State (14-2)

The series: Tied 2-2.

The lowdown: This will be the final College GameDay for ESPN's Lee Corso. ... The last time these programs played feels like so long ago. Oh, wait. It was in one of last season's College Football Playoff semifinals. Ohio State came out victorious 28-14 on its way to the national title. ... The last — and only — time



Kentucky is hoping its season ends up pointing in a better direction than 2024. A good season opener could help. [KENTUCKY ATHLETICS]

Texas played in Columbus was Sept. 10, 2005. The first of a home-and-home series. The Longhorns won 25-22. Vince Young threw for 270 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions for Texas. The Buckeyes were held to 255 yards offense. The teams combined to make eight field goals. ... Perhaps it is worth noting Arch Manning is the full-time starter for Texas.

Mississippi State at Southern Miss

When: 11 a.m. Saturday

TV: ESPN

2024 records: Mississippi State (2-10), Southern Miss (1-11)

The series: MSU leads 18-12-1.

The lowdown: This is the programs' sixth matchup in Hattiesburg and first since 2015. Although, the two have only played four times since 2000, the latest being 2015. ... Southern Miss' last win in the series was Oct. 15, 1988 in Jackson. The Golden Eagles made those Bulldogs look like the current version by winning 38-21. ... Mississippi State added 65 new players in the offseason: 37 via the transfer portal, nine from junior college and 19 high schoolers. ... Southern Miss has three of those castoffs: long snapper Luke Beard, three players on their roster that transferred from Mississippi State



Chances are Georgia's band won't feature many long faces when the Bulldogs take on Marshall. [GERALD HERBERT/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

including long snapper Luke Beard, running back Jeffery Pittman and linebacker Avery Sledge.

Toledo at Kentucky

When: 11:45 a.m. Saturday

TV: SECN

2024 records: Toledo (8-5), Kentucky (4-8)

The series: UK leads 1-0.

The lowdown: This will be the third time in four seasons Kentucky is opening its schedule with a MAC opponent. ... Toledo, which was picked to win the



Oklahoma is aiming for that “mandatory fun” to carry over into the season. [OKLAHOMA ATHLETICS]



Peyton Higgins and Troy are looking to make a significant leap from what the team did last season. [TROY ATHLETICS]

SEC

From Page G9

MAC championship, is 2-4 all-time against SEC schools. The wins came against Mississippi State (2024) and Arkansas (2015). ... Wildcats quarterback Zach Calzada is back in the SEC for his seventh season. He played three years at Texas A&M, transferred to Auburn in 2022 and spent the past two seasons at Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas. ... Toledo coach Jason Candle needs one more win to pass Gary Pinkel (73 wins from 1991-2000) to become the Rockets' all-time victory leader. Candle is 73-40 entering his 10th season.

Marshall at No. 5 Georgia

When: 2:30 p.m. Saturday
TV: ESPN
2024 records: Marshall (10-3), Georgia (11-3)
The series: UGA leads 1-0.
The lowdown: Georgia and Marshall last played 21 years ago. The Bulldogs won a 13-3 shootout in 2004. ... Georgia has won all nine of its season openers under coach Kirby Smart. The Bulldogs also haven't lost at home since 2019, a stretch of 31 consecutive games. ... This is Tony Gibson's debut as a head coach, not just with Marshall. Gibson spent the previous six seasons as the defensive coordinator at North Carolina State. He held the same role at West Virginia in the five seasons before that. ... Marshall, which won the Sun Belt in 2024, was predicted to finish sixth in the conference's East Division.



Monte Harrison retired from baseball after the 2023 season and spent his freshman year at Arkansas in 2024 as a walk-on. [LYNNE SLADKY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Alabama A&M at Arkansas

When: 3:15 p.m. Saturday
TV: SECN
2024 records: Alabama A&M (6-6), Arkansas (7-6)
The series: First meeting.
The lowdown: A&M is playing its third straight season opener against a Southeastern Conference opponent. The Bulldogs lost to Auburn 73-3 last year and Vanderbilt 47-13 in 2023. ... Quarterback Cornelious Brown IV is starting his third straight season opener for A&M. ... Arkansas receiver Raylen Sharpe has a 29-game reception streak. ... Arkansas sophomore receiver Monte Harrison is 30 years old. As a freshman, he was coming off a 10-year professional baseball career, including three seasons



Bishop Davenport, after appearing mainly as a backup last season, will get the run the offense this year. [SOUTH ALABAMA ATHLETICS]

between the Marlins and Angels.
Illinois State at No. 18 Oklahoma
When: 5 p.m. Saturday
TV: SEC+
2024 records: Illinois State (10-4), Oklahoma (6-7)
The series: First meeting.
The lowdown: OU is in its 131st football season and seeks its 51st conference title and 28th season with at least 11 wins. ... The Sooners are 101-23-6 in season openers. ... Oklahoma is 12-3 vs. current FCS programs, beating Maine 59-14 last season. Only seven of the games have been since 1952.
Nicholls at Troy
When: 6 p.m. Saturday

TV: ESPN+
2024 records: Nicholls (4-8), Troy (4-8)
The series: Troy leads 20-6-1.
The lowdown: Troy is 54-43-6 all-time in season openers, including 12-12 since moving to FBS in 2001. ... Troy and the Colonels are meeting for the first time since 2001 when the Trojans won 26-0. ... Nicholls has lost the last four meetings since a 22-20 victory in 1997. ... Since 2001, the Trojans are 24-1 vs. FCS teams. The loss was in 2014 to Abilene Christian and was a major factor in longtime coach Larry Blakeney resigning. Troy paid Abilene \$130,000 for the honor. ... Nicholls opened its season last week, beating Incarnate Word 20-6 in coach



Texas A&M offensive lineman Ar'maj Reed-Adams is in charge of making sure Marcel Reed is able to show he's more than a running quarterback. [RANDY J. WILLIAMS/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]



Florida coach Billy Napier and quarterback DJ Lagway, while playing a weak FCS opponent, aren't likely to challenge a school scoring record Saturday. [COLIN HACKLEY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

SEC

From Page G10

Tommy Rybacki's head-coaching debut. Rybecki has been with the Colonels for 11 years, the last 10 as defensive coordinator. He has a history degree from Jacksonville State, which used to be a major rival of Troy's.

Morgan State at South Alabama

When: 6 p.m. Saturday

TV: ESPN+

2024 records: Morgan State (6-6), South Alabama (7-6)

The series: First meeting.

The lowdown: USA begins its 17th season of football. ... The Jags have lost their last two season openers. They lost 52-38 to North Texas last year and 37-17 at Tulane in 2023. ... South is 11-1 vs. FCS opponents. The loss was 22-21 to Southern Utah in 2013. ... The Jags have won their last 10 games vs. FCS foes, including 41-40 in overtime over Nicholls in 2016. ... USA is playing an FCS team for the fifth straight year. Last year's was Northwestern State and ended 87-10. ... Bubba Thompson, after a seven-year pro baseball career that included three seasons in the major leagues, has joined the Jags as a quarterback. He is not in USA's depth chart.

UTSA at No. 19 Texas A&M

When: 6 p.m. Saturday

TV: ESPN

2024 records: UTSA (7-6), Texas A&M (8-5)



Vanderbilt managed to barely squeak by Charleston Southern in 2014. [VANDERBILT ATHLETICS]

The series: A&M leads 2-0.

The lowdown: The Roadrunners are beginning their 15th season and the Aggies their 130th. ... Texas A&M has a 779-503-48 all-time record, while UTSA is 91-81. ... A&M beat UTSA 23-10 in 2016 and 45-14 in 2019. ... The Aggies are

17-3 in home season openers since 2000. ... Since 2010, A&M is 42-3 at home non-Big 12 or SEC opponents.

Long Island at No. 15 Florida

When: 6 p.m. Saturday

TV: SEC+

2024 records: LIU (4-8), Florida (8-5)

The series: First meeting.

The lowdown: Florida is facing its second all-time Northeast Conference opponent. The Gators downed



Garrett Nussmeier is tying to avoid pulling down the LSU offense this season. [GERALD HERBERT/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

SEC

From Page G11

Duquesne 27-14 in September 1950. ... Florida’s most points in a season opener since 1982 was the 70 the Gators dropped on New Mexico in 1994. ... Florida’s school record for total offense is 774 against West Texas State in 1982. ... The Gators are unlikely to challenge the school record for points. They beat Florida Southern 144-0 in 1913.

Charleston Southern at Vanderbilt

When: 6 p.m. Saturday
TV: SEC+
2024 records: Charleston Southern (1-11), Vanderbilt (7-6)
The series: Vandy leads 1-0.
The lowdown: Vanderbilt is scheduled to unveil its renovated stadium, at least the south end zone. ... The Commodores played FCS Alcorn State last year and won 55-0, holding the Braves to 71 total yards. ... Vandy’s win in the Birmingham Bowl last year was its first bowl victory since 2013. ... The Commodores also sealed their first winning season since 2013. ... Vandy quarterback Diego Pavia accounted for 3,094 yards offense last year, ranking second in school history. ... The teams met in 2014. The Commodores won 21-20.

No. 9 LSU at No. 4 Clemson

When: 6:30 p.m. Saturday
TV: ABC



Rahsul Faison was able to stiff arm the NCAA eligibility rule to earn an extra year at South Carolina. [STEVE CONNER/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

2024 records: LSU (9-4), Clemson (10-4)
The series: LSU leads 3-1.
The lowdown: The programs rank 12th and 13th, respectively, for the most wins by an FBS team. LSU has 815 and Clemson 808. ... Clemson is playing its season opener at home for the first time since 2019. ... Death Valley has hosted six previous matchups of top-10 teams. Clemson is 4-2 in those games. ... Clemson has eight returning starters on both sides of the ball for the first time since



Ole Miss linebacker Tyler Banks learned from coach Lane Kiffin in early August that he had won the annual Chucky Mullins Courage Award and will wear No. 38. [OLE MISS ATHLETICS]

and will wear the No. 38 jersey this season in honor of the late Russellville native. ... Ole Miss is 96-29-5 in season openers with on-field wins 23 of the last 28 years. ... Rebels coach Lane Kiffin is tied with David Cutcliffe for third on the school’s all-time wins list with 44 wins. Billy Brewer is second (67 wins) and John Vaught first (190).

Virginia Tech vs. No. 13 South Carolina

When: 2 p.m. Sunday
Where: Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Atlanta
TV: ESPN
2024 records: Virginia Tech (6-7), South Carolina (9-4)
The series: USC leads 11-7-2.
The lowdown: Get ready to hear the name Beamer. Often. ... Carolina coach Shane Beamer is the son of former Virginia Tech coach Frank. Frank was a tawdry 238-121-1 over 29 seasons leading the Hokies (1987-2015). ... Shane started his college playing career at Virginia Tech and was an assistant coach to his dad for Frank’s last four years. ... USC running back Rahsul Faison was granted an extra year of eligibility by the NCAA on Monday. He ran for 1,109 yards and eight touchdowns last year at Utah State and will be in his sixth season. ... The Hokies last beat the Gamecocks in 1974. Of course, they’ve only played six times since, most recently USC’s 28-21 win in 1991.

2000. ... Clemson has reached double-figure wins 13 times in the last 14 seasons. ... The series’ previous four meetings were all in the postseason.

Georgia State at No. 21 Ole Miss

When: 6:45 p.m. Saturday
TV: SECN
2024 records: Georgia State (3-9), Ole Miss (10-3)
The series: First meeting.
The lowdown: Linebacker Tyler Banks won the Chucky Mullins Courage Award

— A. Stacy Long and David Glovach

Swinney thrived after nearly being fired

By Steve Reed
The Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — Dabo Swinney appears destined for the College Football Hall of Fame.

He has won eight Atlantic Coast Conference championships in the last 10 years and two national championships, and now his fourth-ranked Clemson Tigers look poised for another run at glory as they kick off the 2025 season Saturday night at home against No. 9 LSU.

Swinney is first to admit it's been one heck of a ride — and he's been “blessed” beyond words.

But it wasn't all trophies and celebrations for the Pelham native when he took over the Tigers 17 years ago as an interim head coach.

There were tense moments for Swinney early on, none more so than in the moments following the Tigers' lopsided 29-7 defeat to in-state rival South Carolina in November 2010 in front of more than 81,000 mostly dejected fans at Clemson's Memorial Stadium. The loss dropped the Tigers to 6-6 in the regular season and Swinney to 19-14 since taking over as head coach.

As he emerged that day from his news conference, Swinney found his wife, Kathleen, in tears in the hallway.

“I walk out and she's crying and I just thought she was just sad, you know, that she feels bad for me,” Swinney recalled.

He gave her a hug and assured her everything was going to be all right.

That's when she looked at him in the eyes and told him that Terry Don Phillips, Clemson's athletic director at the time, was waiting to see him in his office.

“Oh,” is the only thing Swinney could muster, and the tension in his body mounted.

“I mean, I think I'm getting fired — and my wife thinks I'm getting fired,” Swinney recalled at the Atlantic Coast Conference championship media days.

Knocked back by the news, Swinney took a few minutes to gather his thoughts before reminding himself that “God's got me.”

He walked down the hallway to find the door cracked open. He peered inside and found Phillips sitting on the couch.

So this is how it ends, Swinney thought to himself.

He entered the room. But the pink slip never came. Swinney wasn't fired that day.



Dabo Swinney has coached the Clemson Tigers to nine ACC championships, including the last two, and two national titles. [JACOB KUPFERMAN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Instead, he was surprised when Phillips offered his wholehearted, unconditional support.

“I go from thinking I'm getting fired to Terry Don Phillips telling me how much he believes in me,” Swinney said. “He said to me, ‘Hey there's going to be a lot of criticism and there's going to be a lot of this and that, (but) I want you to keep doing what you're doing. I want you to know that I've got your back. I believe in you more now than even when I hired you.’”

With that, Phillips got up from the couch and prepared to walk out of his office before turning back to Swinney and saying “and if it doesn't work, you can come help me pack — and I'll come help you pack.”

Phillips then hugged Swinney on his way out.

“Terry Don Phillips is not a man of a lot of words, but he had a lot of conviction



Dabo Swinney, who was originally Clemson's interim coach, is now a three-time winner of the Paul “Bear” Bryant Award given to college football's best head coach. [ERIC GAY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

SEE CLEMSON, G14

CLEMSON

From Page G13

in his words and he meant what he said,” Swinney said.

Swinney sat in stunned silence for a few minutes before his wife walked into his office, worried about her husband’s job security.

“I told her, ‘Didn’t get fired,’ and she’s like, ‘What?’” Swinney said.

Tim Bourret, who was Clemson’s sports information director, witnessed the event unfolding. He said it was a tense time given the way the regular season had ended. But he felt that Swinney had earned some stock from Phillips by leading the Tigers to the ACC championship game in 2009 before losing to Georgia Tech.

“Terry Don just had a sixth sense about Dabo and his ability to lead the program,” Bourret said. “I didn’t think he was going to get fired, but then again I had been around long enough to know that people make decisions based off what happens against South Carolina.”

Bourret said Phillips had come to admire Swinney’s tireless work as an assistant coach at Clemson before hiring him as the interim head coach in 2008. He said Phillips took notice of how players, even those who played positions other than the one Swinney coached, could be found hanging out in Swinney’s office between practices.



Clemson coach Dabo Swinney has had quite a run with the Tigers, who are 161-30 since 2011.

[JACOB KUPFERMAN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

“He had a way with players — and he was a great recruiter,” Bourret said. “And Terry Don took notice of that.”

Swinney, of course, never did have to pack up his things at Clemson.

The Tigers bounced back to go 10-4 the following season, earning a trip to the Orange Bowl. It was the first of 13 double-digit win seasons over the next 14 years for Swinney, who has built the Tigers into one of the most successful and consistent programs in college

football.

Since 2011, the Tigers have won a remarkable 84.3% percent of their games (161-30) under Swinney, including nine ACC championships. He is the winningest coach in ACC history with 180 victories.

The lessons Swinney learned that day have shaped his coaching career.

Two years ago, after Clemson failed to win 10 games, Swinney had a decision to make when it came to struggling young

quarterback Cade Klubnik. Like Swinney, Klubnik had found himself under intense scrutiny and many Tigers fans were urging him to explore the transfer portal and for Swinney to find a replacement.

But Swinney showed the same faith in Klubnik that Phillips once showed in him.

Klubnik responded last season by leading the Tigers to a second straight ACC championship and a return to the College Football Playoff after a two-year absence. Klubnik enters this season as a first-team Associated Press preseason All-American and is viewed as one of the favorites to win the Heisman Trophy. He’s s projected first-round NFL draft pick.

All because Swinney believed in him.

“I experienced that too, right?” said Swinney, a three-time winner of the Paul “Bear” Bryant Award given to college football’s best head coach. “I know what it means to have someone believe in you.”

Bourret, who worked at Clemson until 2017, said it’s hard to imagine where the program might be had Phillips not kept Swinney.

“There could not be a better fit for this program,” Bourret said. “Dabo would probably be successful at any program, but it is amazing what he has done at Clemson. He’ll be in the Hall of Fame someday, no doubt. Terry Don’s sixth sense certainly proved right.”

PICKS PANEL



SIRVELL
CARTER



MARA BETH
CRAVENS



GREGG
DEWALT



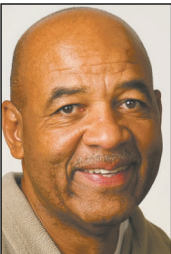
DAVID
GLOVACH



RENITA
JIMMAR



STACY
LONG



DEANGELO
MCDANIEL



CALEB
SUGGS

Auburn at Baylor	Baylor
Alabama at Florida State	Alabama
North Alabama at Western Kentucky	Western Kentucky
Syracuse vs. Tennessee	Tennessee
Texas at Ohio State	Ohio State
LSU at Clemson	Clemson
Virginia Tech vs. South Carolina	South Carolina
Georgia Tech at Colorado	Georgia Tech
Cal at Oregon State	Cal
Notre Dame at Miami	Notre Dame

Baylor
Alabama
Western Kentucky
Tennessee
Ohio State
Clemson
South Carolina
Georgia Tech
Cal
Notre Dame

Baylor
Florida State
Western Kentucky
Syracuse
Ohio State
LSU
Virginia Tech
Colorado
Cal
Notre Dame

Auburn
Alabama
Western Kentucky
Tennessee
Ohio State
LSU
South Carolina
Colorado
Oregon State
Miami

Auburn
Alabama
Western Kentucky
Tennessee
Ohio State
Clemson
South Carolina
Georgia Tech
Oregon State
Notre Dame

Auburn
Alabama
Western Kentucky
Tennessee
Ohio State
Clemson
South Carolina
Georgia Tech
Oregon State
Notre Dame

Auburn
Alabama
Western Kentucky
Tennessee
Ohio State
Clemson
South Carolina
Georgia Tech
Oregon State
Notre Dame

Auburn
Alabama
UNA
Tennessee
Ohio State
Clemson
South Carolina
Georgia Tech
Oregon State
Miami

Auburn
Alabama
Western Kentucky
Tennessee
Texas
Clemson
South Carolina
Georgia Tech
Oregon State
Miami

Last week	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0
Season record	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0

COLUMN

Behold high expectations, for everyone

By Doug Segrest
For GameDay

The days are long, but the years grow short. Yet there's still one certain way to slow time down to a crawl.

It's the interminable wait for a new college football season.

Finally, it's over. And not a second too soon.

Week Zero was the appetizer. Now comes the seven-course meal. After a stifling summer and an uncharacteristic fade by our favorite baseball team, we're overdue something good.

And if you talk to a fan of any school, everything is good.

At Vanderbilt, Diego Pavia and Clark Lea are talking about national titles — at a program that's never recorded double-digit wins. But in the new world of NIL, this isn't your grandfather's program.

South Carolina fans already have Oct. 25 circled. That's when Alabama visits, and this is the popular pick for an upset that could impact the CFP.

Missouri, which never felt like a full-fledged Southeastern Conference member, is a darkhorse playoff contender. The schedule is perhaps the league's most favorable, yet the Tigers have quietly won 21 games over the past two seasons. This isn't smoke and mirrors.

Florida's hopes — and Billy Napier's future — hinge on the health of quarterback DJ Lagway and a deeper roster.

Tennessee bid adieu to Nico Iamaleava in a financial stalemate that would have made George Steinbrenner proud. Can the Vols repeat their playoff adventure without him?

LSU has the league's most-seasoned quarterback and a defense that has to be improved, right? Yet the first five weeks of the season include road trips to Clemson and Ole Miss, as well as a visit from the Gators.

Texas A&M has oil money and a coach that worked wonders at Duke.



Diego Pavia is one reason the Vanderbilt Commodores are talking about reaching new heights this season. [GEORGE WALKER IV/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Kentucky's faith rests in journeyman quarterback Zach Calzada.

Oklahoma is also resting its hopes on a transfer quarterback, a much more heralded one. If he's legit, the Sooners have the defense to make national waves.

Ole Miss should contend again. Arkansas has the potential for improvement. Only Mississippi State seems out of contention before the first whistle.

At Auburn, Hugh Freeze fields the Tigers' deepest roster in seven years. And with three coaches calling plays, new QB Jackson Arnold has options in

strategy and playmakers.

Georgia remains a favorite. Likewise, Texas with Arch Manning now under center. But the Bulldogs schedule is a gauntlet by comparison.

And at Alabama, Kalen DeBoer's second team seems to have fully bought in after a roller-coaster first year that caromed between unforgettable victories and losses that will be remembered for decades to come.

The offseason dreams carry us through the dog days. No more barking. We're here.

Our guess is as good as any: Alabama avenges a September loss to Georgia for the SEC title, and Texas and Texas A&M join them in the playoff. Auburn continues the upward trajectory while Ole Miss and Missouri just miss making the field of 12.

Just prepare for the unexpected. That's the only thing that hasn't changed about the game we love.

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



Impressive Relaxers

that give comfort to your bottom line

IMG® is the progressive choice in motion furniture with exceptional seating comfort, unrivaled quality and functional designs.

IMG
N O R W A Y



Free Delivery



COLD-CURE MOLDED FOAM

This spaceage material encases the interior steel frame and sinuous springs, allowing for body-friendly curvatures to be covered with glove-fitted upholstery. This guarantees absolute comfort and durability.



360 swivel on MANUAL
- 180 on MOTORIZED



Integrated footstool



Adjustable head and
neck support



Effortless reclining



3 sizes



WARRANTY

Ten years on molded foam cushions
and steel frames.
Five years on mechanisms.
Two years on motor battery-parts
plus leather and fabric covers.

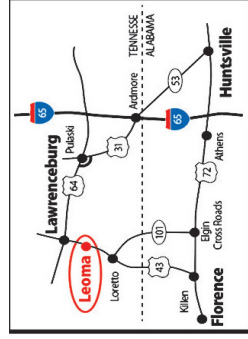
Gliding / rocking function

This ad turned sideways per advertiser's request



Story & Lee
Since 1970
Furniture & Bedding

Store Hours:
Monday thru
Saturday
9 A.M. 'til 6 P.M.



Free Delivery - Hwy. 43 • Leoma, TN • (931) 852-2111 • Toll Free: 1-800-345-2511