

GAMEDAY



WELCOME BACK?

Arnold leads his new team (Auburn) against his old team (Oklahoma)

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

TAILGATE of the week RECIPE



Chocolate Chip Cookie Pie

INGREDIENTS

9 inch pie crust, unbaked
2 large eggs
1 1/2 stick of butter
1/2 cup white sugar

1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup self-rising flour
2 cups chocolate chips
1 cup toasted pecans

DIRECTIONS:

Combine all ingredients. Pour into pie crust, bake 30 minutes at 350 degrees. Serve warm



This week's recipe submitted
by **Rebecca Brown,**
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.

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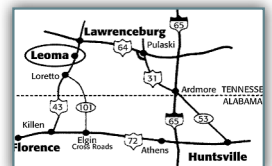
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Colorado fans will don their horns at home this week against Wyoming. [DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

THE LINE

Thursday	(as of Tuesday)		
FAVORITE	TODAY	O/U	UNDERDOG
Rice	2½	44½	at CHARLOTTE
Friday			
at OKLAHOMA ST.	12½	54½	Tulsa
Iowa	2½	45½	at RUTGERS
Saturday			
at TCU	6½	64½	SMU
at CLEMSON	17½	55½	Syracuse
at WISCONSIN	10½	44½	Maryland
at LOUISVILLE	26½	52½	Bowling Green
North Texas	2½	50½	at ARMY
UNLV	2½	49½	at MIAMI (Ohio)
at UTAH	3½	57½	Texas Tech
Arkansas	7½	62½	at MEMPHIS
at TENNESSEE	39½	69½	UAB
at OREGON	35½	55½	Oregon State
at FLORIDA STATE	45½	55½	Kent State
at UCF	6½	47½	North Carolina
at NOTRE DAME	24½	54½	Purdue
at UCONN	21½	52½	Ball State
at OKLAHOMA	6½	48½	Auburn
at OLE MISS	11½	61½	Tulane
James Madison	9½	46½	at LIBERTY
at BUFFALO	6½	42½	Troy
Michigan	2½	45½	at NEBRASKA
at DUKE	3½	59½	NC State
at MISSISSIPPI ST.	21½	49½	Northern Ill.
at GEORGIA TECH	23½	51½	Temple
Arkansas State	6½	56½	at KENN. ST.
at FLORIDA INT'L	6½	55½	Delaware
at KANSAS	13½	55½	West Virginia
at S. ALABAMA	14½	50½	Coastal Carolina
at MISSOURI	11½	47½	South Carolina
Marshall	2½	47½	at M. TENN.
Boise State	10½	51½	at AIR FORCE
at WESTERN KY.	11½	54½	Nevada
at BAYLOR	2½	59½	Arizona State
Washington	20½	52½	at WASH. ST.
at MIAMI (Fla.)	7½	51½	Florida
at INDIANA	5½	52½	Illinois
BYU	6½	49½	at E. CAROLINA
at LA. TECH	3½	51½	Southern Miss
at VIRGINIA	16½	48½	Stanford
at VANDERBILT	27½	53½	Georgia State
at TEXAS	39½	51½	Sam Houston
at UTEP	5½	46½	UL Monroe
UTSA	4½	59½	at COLO. ST.
at COLORADO	13½	44½	Wyoming
Cal	12½	48½	at SAN DIEGO ST.
at USC	18½	56½	Michigan State
Fresno State	2½	47½	at HAWAII

GAMES ON TV

Thursday

Rice at Charlotte, 6:30 p.m., ESPN

Friday

Tulsa at Oklahoma State, 6:30 p.m., ESPN
Iowa at Rutgers, 7 p.m., FOX

Saturday

Arkansas at Memphis, 11 a.m., ABC
Bowling Green at Louisville, 11 a.m., ACC Network
Maryland at Wisconsin, 11 a.m., NBC
North Texas at Army, 11 a.m., CBSSN
SMU at TCU, 11 a.m., ESPN2
Syracuse at Clemson, 11 a.m., ESPN
Texas Tech at Utah, 11 a.m., FOX
UNLV at Miami Ohio, 11 a.m., ESPNU
UAB at Tennessee, 11:45 a.m., SEC Network
New Hampshire at Dartmouth, 12 p.m., NESN
Oregon State at Oregon, 2 p.m., BTN
Auburn at Oklahoma, 2:30 p.m., ABC
James Madison at Liberty, 2:30 p.m., ESPNU
Kent State at Florida State, 2:30 p.m., ACC Network
Michigan at Nebraska, 2:30 p.m., CBS
North Carolina at Cal, 2:30 p.m., FOX
Purdue at Notre Dame, 2:30 p.m., NBC
Ball State at UConn, 2:30 p.m., CBSSN
Tulane at Ole Miss, 2:30 p.m., ESPN
N.C. State at Duke, 3 p.m., ESPN2
Northern Illinois at Mississippi State, 3:15 p.m., SEC Network
Temple at Georgia Tech, 3:30 p.m., CW
West Virginia at Kansas, 5 p.m., FS1
Boise State at Air Force, 6 p.m., CBSSN
South Carolina at Missouri, 6 p.m., ESPN
Arizona State at Baylor, 6:30 p.m., FOX
BYU at East Carolina, 6:30 p.m., ESPN2
Florida at Miami, 6:30 p.m., ABC
Georgia State at Vanderbilt, 6:30 p.m., ESPNU
Illinois at Indiana, 6:30 p.m., NBC
Stanford at Virginia, 6:30 p.m., ACC Network



North Carolina's Mikai Gbayor and the Tar Heels may seek a good seat Saturday when the Tar Heels play at Cal. [TYLER TATE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Washington at Washington State, 6:30 p.m., CBS
SE Louisiana at LSU, 6:45 p.m., SEC Network
UTSA at Colorado State, 8:30 p.m., FS1

Wyoming at Colorado, 9:15 p.m., ESPN
California at San Diego State, 9:30 p.m., CBSSN
Michigan State at Southern California, 10 p.m., FOX

TOP 25 SCHEDULE

Saturday

No. 3 LSU (3-0) vs. SE Louisiana (2-1), 6:45 p.m.
No. 4 Miami (3-0) vs. Florida (1-2), 6:30 p.m.
No. 6 Oregon (3-0) vs. Oregon St. (0-3), 2 p.m.
No. 7 Florida St. (2-0) vs. Kent St. (1-2), 2:30 p.m.
No. 8 Texas (2-1) vs. Sam Houston St. (0-3), 7 p.m.
No. 9 Illinois (3-0) at No. 19 Indiana (3-0), 6:30 p.m.

No. 11 Oklahoma (3-0) vs. No. 22 Auburn (3-0), 2:30 p.m.
No. 13 Ole Miss (3-0) vs. Tulane (3-0), 2:30 p.m.
No. 15 Tennessee (2-1) vs. UAB (2-1), 11:45 a.m.
No. 16 Utah (3-0) vs. No. 17 Texas Tech (3-0), 11 a.m.
No. 18 Georgia Tech (3-0) vs. Temple (2-1), 3:30 p.m.

No. 20 Vanderbilt (3-0) vs. Georgia St. (1-2), 6:30 p.m.
No. 21 Michigan (2-1) at Nebraska (3-0), 2:30 p.m.
No. 23 Missouri (3-0) vs. South Carolina (2-1), 6 p.m.
No. 24 Notre Dame (0-2) vs. Purdue (2-1), 2:30 p.m.
No. 25 Southern Cal (3-0) vs. Michigan St. (3-0), 10 p.m.

Auburn at Oklahoma

When: 2:30 p.m. Saturday

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

Records: No. 22 Auburn (3-0), No. 11 Oklahoma (3-0)

The series: Oklahoma leads 3-0.

Four-down territory

1. Upper hand: Auburn QB Jackson Arnold will be in familiar territory Saturday as he faces his former team. At OU, Arnold passed for 1,421 yards and 12 TDs as a sophomore in 2024, playing in 10 games with nine starts. Whether that's a good thing in terms of game planning is up for debate. "As far as schematics, we're going with what our breakdowns say and what we see on tape from this year," Auburn coach Hugh Freeze said. "And get a game plan that we hope gives him a chance to have success. But really haven't talked about anything else other than that."

2. Lowering the Boom: The Sooners have allowed just 19 points so far, including just two touchdowns. Granted, two of the opponents were Illinois State and Temple. Still, the Sooners have the top scoring defense in the SEC, and their run defense (96 yards allowed per game) will be the first big test for Auburn. The Tigers are running the ball well so far and are third in the SEC in rushing offense (242 yards per game). "They're very stingy, very physical," Freeze said of the Sooners. "When I watch them on tape, I'm looking at a team that should be in playoff discussions. They're that talented and that good."

3. Nobody's perfect: Auburn is a perfect 3-0 so far, but the team isn't playing at its best in some areas. The Tigers slipped in the second half last week, failing to move the ball offensively and not getting third-down stops defensively. Freeze thinks he knows what the issue was. "I told them in the team meeting that we have to quit feeling like we have to be perfect," he said. "When you're not perfect and have a long face, that isn't going to get it. It's about playing the next play and the next possession."

4. All hands on deck: Auburn has played numerous freshmen this season, particularly on defense. Defensive end Jared Smith picked up his fourth sack last week and safety Eric Winters had a career-high five tackles. Seven freshmen started in the opener and many



Auburn defensive end Keyron Crawford will look to add to his team-leading tackle numbers at Oklahoma. [JULIO CORTEZ/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

more got some reps last week. That's on purpose. The Tigers need the younger players on the field to get experience and provide depth. They will need it in the SEC opener with Oklahoma. "We've been getting ready for this moment by playing those young kids," Freeze said. "You have to have that kind of depth in these games."

Key matchup

Auburn QB Jackson Arnold vs. Oklahoma QB John Mateer

A battle between two transfers, Arnold has 501 yards passing with four touchdowns. Mateer leads the SEC with 906 passing yards and has five TDs.

Player of the week

Keyron Crawford, LB

He leads the Tigers with 16 tackles and is tied for the SEC lead with three sacks and second in the league with five tackles for loss.

By the numbers

0: Auburn has not allowed a first-quarter touchdown through three games.

1: Auburn is making its first trip to Oklahoma. OU won at Jordan-Hare last year, and the Sooners beat the Tigers in the Sugar Bowl in January 1972 and January 2017.

10: The Tigers have 10 rushing touchdowns. Auburn had 13 rushing

TDs in 2024.

27: Eric Singleton Jr. has a catch in all 27 games of his college career. The streak is the third longest in the SEC.

Prediction

Oklahoma 28, Auburn 24

We get a great indicator of where Auburn stands. Will we see a contender or will we see a program that isn't ready for prime time? Right now, it's somewhere in between. If Auburn can fight the hostile environment and not slack off at any point, we might see not just an SEC contender but a playoff one as well.

— Edwin Stanton

UAB at Tennessee

When: 11:45 a.m. Saturday

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

Records: UAB (2-1), No. 15 Tennessee

(2-1)

The series: Tennessee leads 5-0.

Four-down territory

1. Hard lesson: The Georgia loss was brutal, but with a 12-team playoff in place, the Vols are still in the hunt. One loss won't break them, but there is little margin for error now. Tennessee tight end Miles Kitselman pointed out the Vols lost two games last year and still made the playoffs. Even Georgia lost early last season and won the SEC and made the playoffs. "We're in that exact same boat right now. We can either dwell on this and mope in it, be sad, or you can learn from it," Kitselman said.

2. Joey has entered the chat: Although UT didn't get the win against Georgia, QB Joey Aguilar was impressive enough to get some Heisman Trophy consideration. FanDuel has Aguilar at +1600 odds to win, seven spots behind Miami's Carson Beck (+750). Aguilar is 63-of-95 passing for 906 yards, which is second in the SEC, with two interceptions to go with nine touchdowns.

3. That's an issue: Before the Georgia game, Tennessee's defense allowed just 7 of 29 third-down conversions. Georgia converted 8 of 17. "At times we have applied great pressure to the quarterback," Tennessee coach Josh Heupel said. "Some of that depends on what kind of pressure packages we are in, adjusting to the formation we are seeing. In coverage, we've given up things we feel like we are in control of. That's an area where we can get better."

4. You again: Before UAB coach Trent Dilfer was in Birmingham, the former NFL quarterback was coaching at Lipscomb Academy in Nashville. Vols linebacker Edwin Spillman played for Dilfer and knows a little something about what kind of offense they will see. "I would describe it as almost kind of similar to our offense, but also to a little bit of Syracuse," Spillman said. "They really like the wide splits back from what I remember seeing. They are a fast-flowing offense. They're going to try to let their playmakers go out there and do their thing."



Tennessee defensive end Joshua Josephs has been an imposing force so far this season. [GEORGE WALKER IV/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Key matchup

Tennessee WR Chris Brazzell II vs. UAB WR Corri Milliner

Brazzell has turned into a star player in the SEC. He's second in the league in yards (364), catches (20) and TDs (5). Milliner is the Blazers' top receiver in yards (268), catches (17) and TDs (3).

Player of the week

Joshua Josephs, DE

Josephs has a sack in all three games and is tied for the SEC lead. His four tackles for loss rank fifth in the league. He's also

come up big with two forced fumbles.

By the numbers

1: Sacks allowed by the Tennessee offense, which leads the SEC and is tied for second in the FBS.

5: Chris Brazzell II is tied for the FBS lead with five receiving touchdowns.

12: Tennessee's defense has 12 sacks, which leads the SEC and is tied for second in the FBS.

16: Tennessee has won 16 straight regular-season, nonconference games. Its last loss was 34-31 to Pitt in 2021.

Prediction

Tennessee 38, UAB 13

After a heart-wrenching overtime loss to Georgia, the Vols catch a break with a nonconference foe next on the schedule. It's time for Tennessee to regroup and keep its postseason goals within arm's length. Tennessee must finish games, though. Georgia was right there for the taking and UT didn't close the deal. You have to win those games to be a championship team.

— Edwin Stanton

UNA at Illinois State

When: noon Saturday

TV: ESPN+

Records: UNA (1-2), No. 6 Illinois State (2-1)

The series: Illinois State leads 1-0.

Four-down territory

1. Rank and file: Illinois State is the first ranked opponent on UNA's schedule. The Redbirds check in at No. 6 in the STATS FCS Top 25. Illinois State is ranked fourth in the coaches poll, but nobody really cares about or counts that one — at the high school or college levels. When's the last time you heard of an FBS team, for example, ranked in a coaches poll? Exactly. Anyway, Illinois State is one of four ranked teams (at the moment) the Lions are scheduled to face. Abilene Christian (No. 14 on Oct. 4), Austin Peay (No. 18 on Oct. 25) and Tarleton State (No. 3 on Nov. 15) await. UNA is 1-20 all time against ranked FCS opponents. That includes a 1-3 mark last season, which included a 24-17 loss to Illinois State and a 47-34 win over Abilene Christian.

2. Better get used to the road: UNA won last week's matchup against Northeastern State (Oklahoma) — a bad Division II team — 49-21 in its final home opener at Braly Stadium. The Lions' next home game won't be until Oct. 11, almost a month later. And UNA hasn't been all that successful in road games since 2018, its first Division I season. The program is just 7-33 during that stretch, which includes losses at Western Kentucky and Southeast Missouri State this season.

3. Up against that MVFC: This will be UNA's fourth matchup against a team from the Missouri Valley Football Conference — a league that has won 12 of the last 14 FCS national titles and appeared in all 14 — since 2018. It had four teams make the playoffs last season. The Lions are 0-3 against such teams, although two have been decided by a single score. After the 38-7 loss at North Dakota State in 2018, UNA lost 17-14 in overtime at Indiana State in 2021 and 24-17 to Illinois State last season.

4. An upcoming chance to recharge: The matchup at Illinois State is UNA's final nonconference game. The Lions have an off week after that, which is considerably earlier than it was a season ago. UNA didn't have a bye until the middle of October that year. Whether that's a good thing



Juice Allen has helped UNA scamper out to be among the FCS leaders in rushing offense. [DAN BUSEY/TIMESDAILY]

or not, obviously, is still to be determined. The Lions went into last season's bye on a three-game win streak and came out of it losing their final four. This upcoming one could be helpful. UNA has a trip to Abilene Christian after this one.

Key matchup

Illinois State QB Tommy Rittenhouse vs. UNA pass rush

Rittenhouse opened the season with a 6-for-13 passing performance for a mere 22 yards. That came at Oklahoma, a team currently ranked No. 11 in the AP Top 25. Since then — against FCS opponents — the quarterback is 38-for-42 for 380 yards, five touchdowns and one interception. He's also been sacked just twice. Against, you guessed it, Oklahoma. UNA has recorded seven sacks over its last two games. The Lions had four at Southeast Missouri State and three against

Northeastern State. Some pressure would likely go a long way.

Player of the week

Destin Wade, QB

He was the pick last week going into his first UNA start. He completed 11 of 15 passes for 161 yards and a touchdown in two-plus quarters against Northeastern State. The Lions scored points on the seven drives he played. But that was against an overmatched opponent. It'll be worth seeing how he does against legitimate competition.

By the numbers

5: Where UNA's rushing offense ranks in the FCS out of 118 teams. The Lions are averaging almost 245 yards per game. Only Delaware State (280), Tennessee Tech (272), Texas Rio Grande Valley (264) and Jackson State (249) are higher.

86: Where UNA's pass offense ranks. The Lions are averaging close to 155 yards per game. Their three passing touchdowns are tied for the 14th fewest. Three teams have thrown zero, five have tossed one and five thrown two.

2021: The last time UNA had a noon kickoff. The Lions played three such games that year: at North Carolina A&T (a 38-34 loss), at Monmouth (a 45-33 loss) and at Hampton (a 35-27 win).

4: The number of road games left after Saturday's trip.

Prediction

Illinois State 42, UNA 24

The combination of a ranked opponent and one the Lions have to play against on the road, doesn't tend to lend UNA any favors.

— David Glovach



Memphis is hoping it can continue its winning ways at home and give fans something to brag about. [MEMPHIS ATHLETICS]

This week's SEC, state games

Arkansas at Memphis

When: 11 a.m. Saturday

TV: ABC

Records: Arkansas (2-1), Memphis (3-0)

The series: Memphis leads 3-2.

The lowdown: This is the first meeting between the programs since 1998. Arkansas left Memphis with a 23-9 victory. ... Memphis' last win over the Razorbacks was in 1994. The Tigers stayed in Memphis with a 16-15 victory.

... Memphis is tied with Ohio State and Illinois for the nation's longest FBS win streak at seven. ... The Tigers are 31-1 in their last 32 nonconference home games. Memphis has beaten Kansas (2016), UCLA (2017), Ole Miss (2015 and 2019) and Mississippi State (2021) during that stretch. The loss was to UTSA (31-28) in 2021. ... Arkansas coach Sam Pittman can fall below .500 or get above .500 depending on how this game goes. He's got a 32-32 career record

— all with the Razorbacks.

Troy at Buffalo

When: 2:30 p.m. Saturday

TV: ESPN+

Records: Troy (1-2), Buffalo (2-1)

The series: Troy leads 1-0.

The lowdown: Troy is facing a Mid-American Conference opponent for the 10th time, though just the fifth in a regular-season game. ... Troy punter Evan Crenshaw was called on 11 times in last

week's 28-7 home loss to Memphis. He averaged 48.2 yards per punt with five of at least 50 yards and five downed inside the 20. ... The Trojans' 112 yards offense was the weakest in their Division I history. ... Crenshaw was one punt shy of the school record set in 1984 by Doug Crane against Mississippi College. ... Crenshaw's 530 total punting yards easily bested the school record of 441



Evan Crenshaw's punting made him Troy's lone standout in last week's loss to Memphis. [TROY ATHLETICS]

SEC

From Page G7

set in 2003 against Minnesota by Thomas Olmsted, who had 10 punts. ... Buffalo's Ta'Quan Roberson was 28-of-40 passing for 318 yards and three touchdowns in last week's 31-28 win over Kent State. The Bulls rallied from a 14-0 deficit. ... The Trojans and Buffalo previously played in the December 2018 Dollar General Bowl in Mobile. Troy, which held the ball for 21:44 of the second half, including the entire third quarter, won 42-32.

Tulane at No. 13 Ole Miss

When: 2:30 p.m. Saturday

TV: ESPN

Records: Tulane (3-0), Ole Miss (3-0)

The series: Ole Miss leads 45-28.

The lowdown: Ole Miss is 13-2 against Tulane when the series is played in Oxford, like Saturday's matchup will be. The Rebels are 28-25 when the game takes place in New Orleans. They're 4-1 when it's played in Jackson, Mississippi. ... The Green Wave last beat Ole Miss in Oxford in 1988. The score was an eye-popping 14-9. Before that, it was 1980. It was a little more robust at 26-24. ... Tulane has already beaten a pair of Power Four opponents. The Green Wave erased Northwestern in the season opener 23-3 and topped Duke last week 34-27. ... Ole Miss is 3-0 for the fifth straight year. The last time it had such a streak was from 1956-62.



Gavin Wimsatt and Jacksonville State didn't get the last high step in last week at Georgia Southern. [JACKSONVILLE STATE ATHLETICS]

Northern Illinois at Mississippi State

When: 3:15 p.m. Saturday

TV: SECN

Records: Northern Illinois (1-1), Mississippi State (3-0)

The series: First meeting.

The lowdown: Someone will be howling or growling after the Huskies and Bulldogs meet. ... Mississippi State is trying to start 4-0 for the first time since winning its first nine games of 2014. That year, the Bulldogs reached No. 1 in the



The last time Mississippi State started 4-0, Dak Prescott was leading the Bulldogs to the No. 1 ranking in the country. [GERALD HERBERT/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

in last week's 63-0 win over Alcorn State. The Bulldogs led 42-0 at halftime.

Murray State at Jacksonville State

When: 6 p.m. Saturday

TV: ESPN+

Records: Murray State (0-3), Jacksonville State (1-2)

The series: JSU leads 17-2.

The lowdown: Jacksonville State, out-scored 10-0 in the fourth quarter, lost 41-34 at Georgia Southern last week. ... JSU's Cam Cook, with 120 yards rushing last week, has 390 this season to rank fourth in the nation. ... Murray State, which lost 37-21 at Georgia State last week, is trying to avoid its second 0-4 start in four seasons and the seventh in school history. ... The Gamecocks and Racers first met in 2003 and faced off every year through 2020 as Ohio Valley Conference rivals. ... Both of Murray's series wins were in overtime: 23-17 in 2003 and 35-34 in 2013. ... The teams met in a nonconference game in 2022, a 34-3 JSU victory. ... Jacksonville State is 63-14-2 on homecoming.

Coastal Carolina at South Alabama

When: 6 p.m. Saturday

TV: ESPN+

Records: Coastal Carolina (1-2, 0-0 Sun Belt), South Alabama (1-2, 0-0)

The series: Coastal leads 2-1.

The lowdown: USA is trying to avoid its first three-game losing streak since

national rankings and had a quarterback named Dak Prescott. ... NIU is 1-12 all-time vs. Southeastern Conference teams. The win was in 2003, 19-16 at Alabama. ... The Huskies are coming off a 20-9 loss at Maryland two weeks ago. ... Northern Illinois has held six straight opponents to 20 points or less, which is the second longest such streak in FBS. Florida has a seven-gamer. ... MSU sophomore Fluff Bothwell, a transfer from South Alabama, had the seventh multi-touchdown game of his career and second this season



South Alabama receiver Jeremy Scott found the end zone for the first time last week against Auburn. The Jaguars would like him to keep doing so to help them avoid another loss. [BUTCH DILL/ THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]



Alabama A&M is looking to raise its helmets for a third straight win Saturday. [ALABAMA A&M ATHLETICS]

SEC

From Page G8

2021. ... Jags receiver Devin Voisin, who had one touchdown over the last two seasons, has four this year to rank third in the nation. ... USA redshirt freshman receiver Jeremy Scott scored his first career touchdown in last week's 31-15 loss at Auburn on his fourth career catch. ... Coastal, which has lost to Virginia and East Carolina by a combined 76-7, notched its win against FCS Charleston Southern 13-0 two weeks ago. ... Last week's 38-0 home loss to East Carolina was Coastal's first shutout loss since 42-0 at Stony Brook in October 2011 and first home shutout loss since 24-0 to Charleston Southern in November 2008. ... The Chants churned out 239 total yards, including 67 rushing. ... The Chanticleers and Jaguars last met in 2021 with Coastal winning 27-21 in Mobile.

Lane at Alabama A&M

When: 6 p.m. Saturday
TV: SWAC TV
Records: Lane (0-2), Alabama A&M (2-1)
The series: A&M leads 5-0-1.

The lowdown: Cornelious Brown IV was 21-of-33 passing for 329 yards and two touchdowns in Alabama A&M's 23-21 win at Tennessee State last week. ... Bulldogs kicker Victor Barbosa, with field goals of 26, 26 and a career-high 45 yards last week, has made 14 straight kicks since his last miss at the end of the 2023 season. ... The Dragons opened with



South Carolina got to smell the taste of a Mayor's Cup victory last season and would like to indulge in that sweetness this year. [ARTIE WALKER JR./THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

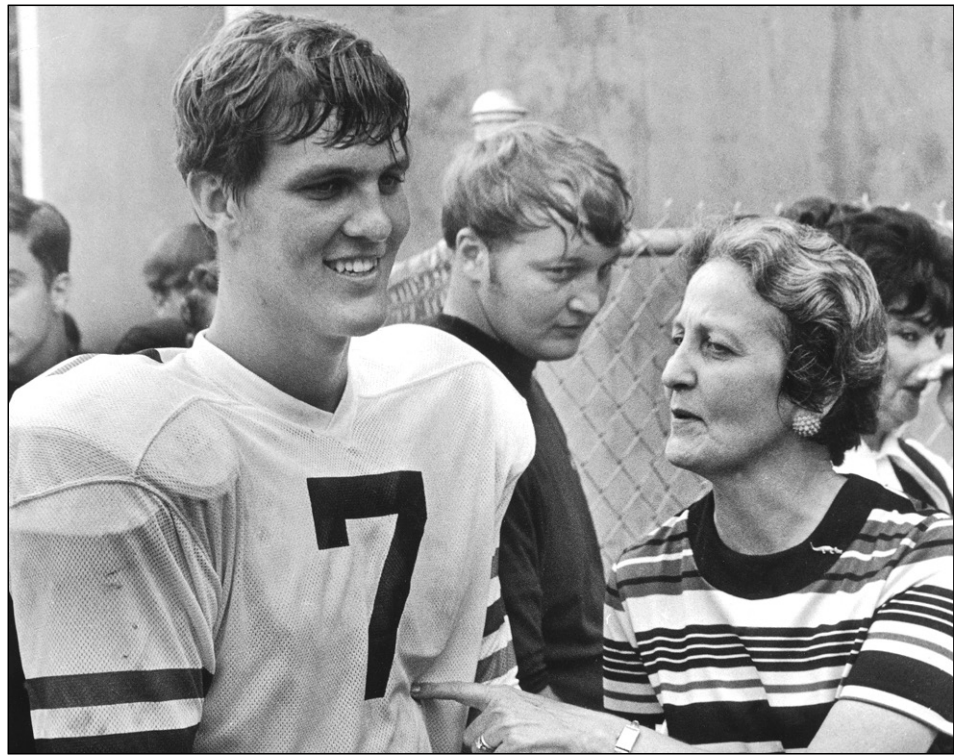
a 27-15 home loss to Lincoln (Missouri) and lost 29-21 last week at Allen. ... Lane QB Nick Billoups has 227 yards passing for two touchdowns and has 114 of the Dragons' 269 yards rushing. ... A&M coach Sam Shade and Lane's Stanley

Conner coached together at Miles. ... The teams tied 13-13 in their inaugural meeting in 1948.

South Carolina at No. 23 Missouri

When: 6 p.m. Saturday

TV: ESPN
Records: South Carolina (2-1, 0-1 SEC), Missouri (3-0, 0-0)
The series: Mizzou leads 9-6.



Florida fans might be thankful they didn't have to watch a performance last week like John Reaves' nine-interception disaster in the 1969 season. [JIM KERLIN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]



LSU coach Brian Kelly was quite grumpy after being asked about his offense's lack of success against Florida. [MATTHEW HINTON/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

SEC

From Page G9

The lowdown: The teams call their rivalry the Mayor's Cup since both's hometown is Columbia. ... The Gamecocks' 34-30 win last season ended a five-year losing streak to the Tigers. ... USC star quarterback LaNorris Sellers was injured in last week's 31-7 home loss to Vanderbilt. ... Carolina's Vicari Swain has taken three of his six punt returns to the end zone this year. ... Miz-zou's Ahmad Hardy ran for 250 yards on 22 carries with three touchdowns in last week's 52-10 win over Louisiana-Lafayette. ... Hardy's 250 yards were the most by an FBS player this year and rank seventh in school history. ... The Tigers ran for 427 yards, their most since a 2017 win over Tennessee, and have reached 500 total yards in every game this season. ... Missouri owns a 13-game home winning streak.

Florida at No. 4 Miami

When: 6 p.m. Saturday

TV: ABC

Records: Florida (1-2), Miami (3-0)

The series: Miami leads 30-27.

The lowdown: The end could be nigh for Florida coach Billy Napier, who is 20-21 in his fourth season with the Gators. ... According to multiple reports, he'll be due an almost \$20 million buyout at the



The last time Vanderbilt was ranked at least 20th, Alex Washington and the Commodores were showing off their dance moves after stunning Auburn in 2008. [MARK HUMPHREY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

end of the season. ... Florida's 20-10 loss at LSU last week featured five thrown interceptions by Gators QB DJ Lagway. ... Rex Grossman was the last of the Gators to throw four when he did it also

in a loss to LSU in 2002. ... The last with five was Shane Matthews at Mississippi State in 1992. ... Lagway was four shy of the school record (and SEC mark) set by John Reaves against Auburn in 1969. ...

The Hurricanes disposed of South Florida 49-12 last week, and South Florida beat the Gators 18-16 two weeks ago. ...

SEC
From Page G10

An unranked Florida has beaten a ranked Miami just once. In 1959. ... The Gators haven't won at Miami since 1985.

Georgia State at No. 20 Vanderbilt

When: 6:30 p.m. Saturday
TV: ESPN
Records: Georgia State (1-2), Vanderbilt (3-0)
The series: Georgia State leads 1-0.
The lowdown: Vandy is ranked its highest in the Associated Press poll since it was 13th after beating Auburn 14-13 in October 2008. The Commodores followed with a four-game losing streak. ... Vandy was similarly unbeaten — though 2-0 — last year and feeling its oats before a two-game losing streak that began with a 36-32 loss at Georgia State (and ended with a victory over Alabama). ... The Commodores are 3-0 for the first time since 2017. ... Diego Pavia was 18-of-25 passing for 177 yards and two touchdowns in Vandy's 31-7 skinning of then-No. 11 South Carolina last week. It ended a 16-game losing streak to the Gamecocks. ... Brock Taylor, with last week's 51-yard field goal at Carolina, has six kicks of at least 50 yards, the most by a Commodore since at least 1996. ... Taylor has made 14 straight field goals. ... GSU quarterbacks TJ Finley and Cameran Brown combined for 288 yards passing



Sam Houston is named after the first president of Republic of Texas, who is depicted with a bandaged leg in the painting, after he served as a general during the Texas Revolution. [HARRY CABLUCK/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

and four touchdowns in last week's 37-21 win over Murray State. ... Finley is on his fifth school in six years: LSU, Auburn, Texas State, Western Kentucky and now Georgia State. He has never faced Vandy.

Southeastern Louisiana at No. 3 LSU

When: 6:45 p.m. Saturday
TV: SECN
Records: SE Louisiana (2-1), LSU (3-0)

The series: LSU leads 2-0.
The lowdown: The two campuses are separated by about 48 miles. ... LSU struggled mightily on offense in last week's 20-10 win over Florida. As coach Brian Kelly will strenuously attest, the Tigers won, but they were outgained by 50 yards. LSU's defense collected five interceptions, returning one for a touchdown. ... Meanwhile, Southeastern Louisiana was racking up 457 yards in a

56-3 disposal of Mississippi Valley State. ... SLU's Dkhai Joseph returned a punt 70 yards for a touchdown, the Lions' first punt-return TD since 2019. ... LSU is 153-25-8 all-time vs. teams from Louisiana and has won 37 straight. The last in-state loss was in 1982 to Tulane. ... LSU's previous wins over the Lions were in 2018 (31-0) and 1949 (48-7).

Sam Houston at No. 8 Texas

When: 7 p.m. Saturday
TV: SEC+
Records: Sam Houston (0-3), Texas (2-1)
The series: Texas leads 1-0.
The lowdown: Texas is playing a second straight Conference USA opponent. The Longhorns, after last week's 27-10 victory over UTEP, are 24-0 against CUSA teams. ... UT has won nine straight games vs. in-state competition. Its last such loss was in September 2022 at Texas Tech, 37-34 in overtime. ... The Bearkats, who lost 37-20 at Hawaii last week, are in their third FBS season and last started 0-4 in 2023. Before that, they hadn't started 0-4 since 1981. ... Texas and Sam Houston previously met in 2006 with the Longhorns goring the Bearkats 56-3. ... The original Sam Houston settled in Texas in 1832, played a major role in the 1835-36 Texas Revolution and served as the first president of the Republic of Texas.

— A. Stacy Long and David Glovach

PICKS
PANEL



GREGG DEWALT



STACY LONG



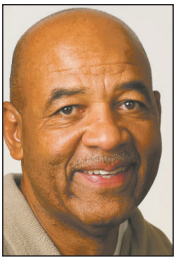
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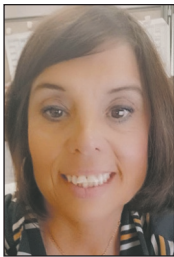
RENITA JIMMAR



DAVID GLOVACH



DEANGELO MCDANIEL



MARA BETH CRAVENS



CALEB SUGGS

Auburn at Oklahoma
UNA at Illinois State
Tulane at Ole Miss
South Carolina at Missouri
Arkansas at Memphis
Texas Tech at Utah
Illinois at Indiana
Michigan at Nebraska
N.C. State at Duke
Arizona State at Baylor

Last week
Season record

Oklahoma
Illinois State
Ole Miss
Missouri
Arkansas
Utah
Illinois
Nebraska
Duke
Baylor

5-5
21-9

Oklahoma
Illinois State
Ole Miss
Missouri
Arkansas
Utah
Indiana
Michigan
Duke
Baylor

7-3
21-9

Oklahoma
Illinois State
Ole Miss
Missouri
Arkansas
Utah
Illinois
Nebraska
N.C. State
Baylor

6-4
19-11

Oklahoma
Illinois State
Ole Miss
South Carolina
Arkansas
Utah
Indiana
Nebraska
N.C. State
Baylor

6-4
19-11

Oklahoma
Illinois State
Ole Miss
Missouri
Arkansas
Texas Tech
Indiana
Michigan
Duke
Arizona State

6-4
18-12

Oklahoma
Illinois State
Ole Miss
Missouri
Arkansas
Texas Tech
Illinois
Michigan
N.C. State
Baylor

5-5
17-13

Auburn
Illinois State
Tulane
Missouri
Memphis
Texas Tech
Illinois
Michigan
N.C. State
Arizona State

4-6
16-14

Auburn
UNA
Ole Miss
Missouri
Arkansas
Texas Tech
Indiana
Nebraska
Duke
Baylor

4-6
15-15

Manning: ‘We’re going to be better’

By Jim Vertuno

The Associated Press

Texas quarterback Arch Manning had a simple message and a promise: There will be better days ahead from him.

“I know the type of player that I am,” Manning said Monday as he answered another round of questions about a poor outing in last week’s win over UTEP. “I know I’m going to play better and we’re going to be better as an offense.”

This week’s matchup with Sam Houston State, a program in only its third season of FBS-level competition, would typically be an afterthought for the No. 8 team in the country.

But Manning’s poor play has turned the Longhorns’ final game before the Southeastern Conference schedule into a must-watch to see if he can deliver anything close to those preseason Heisman Trophy predictions.

If he struggles again, a suddenly doubtful fanbase turns its worries into a five-alarm fire. And even if he plays well, the result and Manning’s stat line will likely be dismissed as coming against inferior competition.

Stats are one thing. Just passing the eye test this week would be a start.

Manning’s play so far has stoked the embers of doubt. He struggled badly in a season-opening loss to Ohio State. He started slow the next week but rallied with four touchdown passes against San Jose State.

His day against UTEP last weekend was downright rough. Manning was 11-of-25 passing for 114 yards with one touchdown and interception. He had a streak of 10 consecutive incompletions. He sidearmed some throws and missed open receivers. There were boos late in the first half.

Through three games, Manning is completing just 55% of his passes.

“It’s frustrating because I know I’m better than that,” Manning said. “But you know, we’re going to be better this week and get clicking on offense. I’m excited to get going.”

Texas coach Steve Sarkisian promised patience with a player hitting the first adversity of his career.

“Here’s a guy who’s had an awesome life, they way he’s grown up, the people he’s been surrounded by,” Sarkisian said. “I think you learn a lot about yourself through adversity and overcoming



Texas quarterback Arch Manning, after facing high expectations this season, is facing the first adversity of his career. [ERIC GAY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

adversity. ... When he gets on the other side of it, I think all of this is going to serve well not only for him, but for us as a team.”

Texas wide receiver Parker Livingstone caught three touchdown passes in the first two games. Manning badly overthrew him on a wide-open route in the end zone against UTEP.

Livingstone said the wide receivers can help Manning by delivering more big plays when given the chance.

“When he throws us the ball, it’s our job to make a guy miss and create an explosive,” Livingstone said.

Off the field, Manning has raked in millions in endorsements. Some of his product television ads have aired during Texas games this season.

Certainly more was expected of a quarterback in his third season in coach Sarkisian’s offense. And yet Manning often looks rushed or confused or just simply misses open receivers.

“All my life I’ve been an accurate passer,” Manning said. “I’ve just got to get back to it.”

Sarkisian believes he can bring Manning to the level of play that was expected. Sarkisian at various times has pleaded for

patience from fans and pundits.

“I feel like we’ve done enough with him to have a pretty good understanding of who he is as a player and what he’s capable of. I know there’s a lot of football in him that’s high-level football,” Sarkisian said.

“Our job as coaches is to work him towards that,” Sarkisian said. “We’ve righted the ship before, we’ll get there.”

Manning’s teammates say they’re still confident in him as their leader.

“He’s still a great quarterback,” offensive lineman Trevor Goosby said. “I tell him that every day.”

Gators steadfast in support of Lagway

By Mark Long
The Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Florida quarterback DJ Lagway has gone from appearing rusty to looking lost. It's not what anyone envisioned even though he missed nearly nine months dealing with various injuries.

He is dancing in the pocket, leading to off-balance throws that end up sailing over receivers or spinning into the ground. He is failing to get through his progressions, allowing defenders to lock onto his first read. He is lacking situational awareness — when to audible, when to run and when to slide — and showing little feel for the game.

He is still coach Billy Napier's guy, and that is unlikely to change.

Napier is sticking with his turnover-prone starter despite a five-interception performance in a 20-10 loss at No. 3 LSU on Saturday night.

"DJ's our quarterback," said Napier, now 20-21 in four seasons at Florida. "He's one of the best quarterbacks in the country. He made some good decisions, but he also made some bad decisions."

Lots of them. The sophomore threw an interception in every quarter in Death Valley, including back-to-back picks on Florida's final two drives while trailing by 10. The fourth one came with the Gators in field-goal range and prompted a lengthy sideline discussion with Napier.

"I'm just excited to get back to work," said Lagway, who was making his first road start in Southeastern Conference play. "I got to get this taste out of my mouth. I played horrible football, and I got to do better."

Lagway couldn't recall ever turning over the ball five times in a game before Saturday. Not in high school. Not in peewee football. Not in his backyard.

"I've never had a performance like that in my life, so it's kind of hard to process it," he said. "But at the end of the day, it's all about how you bounce back and how you respond. And I'm planning on doing so."

The Gators, who have now lost consecutive games in each of Napier's four seasons, play at rival and fourth-ranked Miami (3-0) on Saturday night. Florida is winless in eight road games against ranked teams during Napier's tenure.

Florida (1-2) faces seven more ranked



Florida quarterback DJ Lagway, in last weekend's loss at LSU, set career highs for completions (33), attempts (49) and, most notably, interceptions (five). [GERALD HERBERT/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

opponents this season, including three in a row against the Hurricanes, Texas and Texas A&M over the next month. No one should be surprised to see Lagway start all of them, even though promising freshman Tramell Jones Jr. waits on the bench.

Napier has shown unwavering loyalty to his players and coaches. He kept defensive coordinator Austin Armstrong, special teams coordinator Chris Couch and strength and conditioning coach Marc Hocke despite essentially demoting them. And he continues to rotate backups into games even though there's an obvious drop-off.

It is hard to argue with his Lagway decision. After all, Lagway went 6-1 as a starter as a freshman and showed glimpses of greatness. But he has

experienced setback after setback since.

He missed the majority of two games last season because of a left hamstring injury. He was slowed to start 2025 following surgery to repair a core-muscle injury. He missed all of spring practice because of a sore throwing shoulder that team doctors believe stems from a lingering high school injury. And then he strained his left calf while running with teammates days before training camp began in late July.

He has fully practiced just four weeks since January, although his popularity continued to soar. The 20-year-old Lagway has name, image and likeness deals with Gatorade, Jordan Brand, Mercedes-Benz, Lamborghini Orlando, T-Mobile, Beats by Dre,

Chipotle and others.

His value as a brand ambassador seemingly took a hit in Baton Rouge. Lagway completed 33 of 49 passes — both career highs — for 287 yards and a touchdown against the Tigers. He was sacked three times and finished with 19 yards rushing on nine carries.

Those modest numbers probably would have been enough to win, but his turnovers were the difference. His second pick set up a field goal and his third was returned 58 yards for a score.

"It's not just on one person," linebacker Myles Graham said. "It's on all of us, and we've got to all-around play better. The game slipped out of our hands two weeks in a row, so that's a problem that we're going to fix."

COLLEGE STANDINGS

(Through Sept. 13 games)

American Athletic Conference									
	Conference			All Games					
	WL	PF	PA	W	L	PF			
Navy	2	0	80	47	3	0	132	54	
Memphis	0	0	0	0	3	0	111	33	
North Texas	0	0	0	0	3	0	143	40	
Tulane	0	0	0	0	3	0	90	61	
East Carolina	0	0	0	0	2	1	111	27	
Rice	0	0	0	0	2	1	61	64	
South Florida	0	0	0	0	2	1	64	72	
Temple	0	0	0	0	2	1	100	59	
Army	0	0	0	0	1	1	51	51	
Charlotte	0	0	0	0	1	2	56	89	
FAU	0	0	0	0	1	2	91	91	
UTSA	0	0	0	0	1	2	108	105	
UAB	0	1	24	38	2	1	107	108	
Tulsa	0	1	23	42	1	2	72	70	

Atlantic Coast Conference									
	Conference			All Games					
	WL	PF	PA	W	L	PF			
Georgia Tech	1	0	24	21	3	0	110	53	
N.C. State	1	0	34	24	3	0	93	72	
Stanford	1	0	30	20	1	2	53	70	
California	0	0	0	0	3	0	96	32	
Florida St.	0	0	0	0	2	0	108	20	
Louisville	0	0	0	0	2	0	79	31	
Miami	0	0	0	0	3	0	121	39	
North Carolina	0	0	0	0	2	1	75	57	
Pittsburgh	0	0	0	0	2	1	130	57	
SMU	0	0	0	0	2	1	115	71	
Syracuse	0	0	0	0	2	1	119	89	
Virginia	0	0	0	0	2	1	134	58	
Duke	0	0	0	0	1	2	91	96	
Virginia Tech	0	0	0	0	0	3	57	113	
Wake Forest	0	1	24	34	2	1	76	53	
Boston College	0	1	20	30	1	2	126	82	
Clemson	0	1	21	24	1	2	58	57	

Big 12 Conference									
	Conference			All Games					
	WL	PF	PA	W	L	PF			
Houston	1	0	36	20	3	0	98	29	
Iowa St.	1	0	24	21	4	0	119	57	
Arizona	0	0	0	0	3	0	111	26	
BYU	0	0	0	0	2	0	96	3	
TCU	0	0	0	0	2	0	90	35	
Texas Tech	0	0	0	0	3	0	174	35	
UCF	0	0	0	0	2	0	85	17	
Utah	0	0	0	0	3	0	137	25	
Arizona St.	0	0	0	0	2	1	92	58	
Baylor	0	0	0	0	2	1	114	90	
Cincinnati	0	0	0	0	2	1	121	40	
Kansas	0	0	0	0	2	1	108	56	
West Virginia	0	0	0	0	2	1	86	44	
Oklahoma St.	0	0	0	0	1	1	30	76	
Colorado	0	1	20	36	1	2	71	70	
Kansas St.	0	1	21	24	1	3	97	106	

Big Sky Conference									
	Conference			All Games					
	WL	PF	PA	W	L	PF			
Montana	0	0	0	0	2	0	66	40	
Cal Poly	0	0	0	0	2	1	106	87	
Idaho	0	0	0	0	2	1	67	49	
N. Arizona	0	0	0	0	2	1	107	118	
UC Davis	0	0	0	0	1	1	41	94	
Montana St.	0	0	0	0	1	2	78	96	
N. Colorado	0	0	0	0	1	2	51	48	
Sacramento St.	0	0	0	0	1	2	69	68	
Weber St.	0	0	0	0	1	2	55	134	
E. Washington	0	0	0	0	0	3	49	99	
Idaho St.	0	0	0	0	0	3	77	116	
Portland St.	0	0	0	0	0	4	23	184	

Big South-OVC Association									
	Conference			All Games					
	WL	PF	PA	W	L	PF			
L'wood (Mo.)	1	0	35	28	1	2	61	83	31
Tennessee Tech	0	0	0	0	3	0	82	31	
Gardner-Webb	0	0	0	0	2	1	87	117	
E. Illinois	0	0	0	0	1	2	68	94	
SE Missouri	0	0	0	0	1	2	68	104	
Tennessee St.	0	0	0	0	1	2	48	103	
W. Illinois	0	0	0	0	1	2	61	124	
UT Martin	0	0	0	0	0	3	34	106	
Chas. Southern	0	1	28	35	0	3	31	93	

Big Ten Conference									
	Conference			All Games					
	WL	PF	PA	W	L	PF			
Oregon	1	0	34	14	3	0	162	30	
Southern Cal	1	0	33	17	3	0	165	50	
Illinois	0	0	0	0	3	0	135	22	
Indiana	0	0	0	0	3	0	156	23	
Maryland	0	0	0	0	3	0	103	33	
Michigan St.	0	0	0	0	3	0	106	70	
Nebraska	0	0	0	0	3	0	147	24	



Northwestern, so far, hasn't been the Big Ten's standard bearer. The Wildcats are one of only two league teams with a losing record. [MATT MARTON/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Ohio St.	0	0	0	0	3	0	121	16	
Penn St.	0	0	0	0	3	0	132	17	
Rutgers	0	0	0	0	3	0	139	58	
Washington	0	0	0	0	2	0	108	31	
Iowa	0	0	0	0	2	1	94	30	
Michigan	0	0	0	0	2	1	110	44	
Minnesota	0	0	0	0	2	1	103	37	
Wisconsin	0	0	0	0	2	1	73	48	
UCLA	0	0	0	0	0	3	43	108	
Purdue	0	1	17	33	2	1	82	50	
Northwestern	0	1	14	34	1	2	59	64	

Coastal Athletic Association									
	Conference			All Games					
	WL	PF	PA	W	L	PF			
Rhode Island	2	0	62	37	3	0	71	44	
N.C. A&T	1	0	33	30	1	2	61	122	
William & Mary	1	0	28	27	1	2	65	105	
Bryant	0	0	0	0	2	1	72	51	
Delaware	0	0	0	0	2	1	86	89	
Elon	0	0	0	0	2	1	109	83	
Monmouth (N.J.)	0	0	0	0	2	1	126	109	
New Hampshire	0	0	0	0	2	1	75	60	
Towson	0	0	0	0	2	1	71	73	
Villanova	0	0	0	0	1	1	30	69	
Albany (N.Y.)	0	0	0	0	0	3	56	95	
Hampton	0	1	30	33	1	2	71	81	
Stony Brook	0	1	17	31	1	2	58	91	
Campbell	0	1	20	31	0	3	47	115	
Maine	0	1	27	28	0	3	44	69	

Conference USA									
	Conference			All Games					
	WL	PF	PA	W	L	PF			
Louisiana Tech	1	0	49	14	2	1	80	37	
W. Kentucky	1	0	41	24	2	1	117	75	

Jacksonville St.	1	0	34	24	1	2	78	82	
FIU	0	0	0	0	2	1	80	71	
Kennesaw St.	0	0	0	0	1	2	45	79	
Middle Tenn.	0	0	0	0	1	2	38	89	
UTEP	0	0	0	0	1	2	68	72	
New Mexico St.	0	1	14	49	2	1	54	66	
Liberty	0	1	24	34	1	2	65	64	
Sam Houston St.	0	1	24	41	0	3	65	116	

Ivy League									
	Conference			All Games					
	WL	PF	PA	W	L	PF			
Brown	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Columbia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Cornell	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Dartmouth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Harvard	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Penn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Princeton	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Yale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Mid-American Conference									
	Conference			All Games					
	WL	PF	PA	W	L	PF			
Buffalo	1	0	31	28	2	1	86	57	
Bowling Green	0	0	0	0	2	1	69	54	
Toledo	0	0	0	0	2	1	121	45	
N. Illinois	0	0	0	0	1	1	28	37	
Ball St.	0	0	0	0	1	2	37	102	
Cent. Michigan	0	0	0	0	1	2	36	122	
Ohio	0	0	0	0	1	2	57	81	
Akron	0	0	0	0	0	3	28	109	
E. Michigan	0	0	0	0	0	3	73	128	
Miami (Ohio)	0	0	0	0	0	2	17	62	
W. Michigan	0	0	0	0	0	3	36	94	
Kent St.	0	1	28	31	1	2	63	110	

Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference							
	Conference			All Games			
	WL	PF	PA	WL	PF	PA	
Delaware St.	0 0	0	0	2 1	90	81	
Howard	0 0	0	0	2 1	55	74	
S.C. State	0 0	0	0	2 1	81	96	
N.C. Central	0 0	0	0	2 2	96	114	
Norfolk St.	0 0	0	0	1 2	51	118	
Morgan St.	0 0	0	0	0 3	43	125	

COLUMN

Is the SEC too deep for its own good?

By Doug Segrest
For GameDay

There's a notion that the SEC is competitive, but there's no alpha dog this season. At first glance, that notion is nonsense. Upon further review, it may be spot on.

Look across the college football landscape. Teams that were expected to contend for conference titles are taking on water. That includes Clemson in the ACC and Kansas State in the Big 12. Throw in Notre Dame, which is 0-2 after a pair of narrow Top 25 losses.

Clemson and Kansas State can at least recover by winning their conferences., though that's not likely. But Notre Dame has just one team currently ranked in the Top 25 left on the schedule. The Fighting Irish are kaput already.

Texas A&M added to the Irish misery Saturday night with a thrilling, 41-40 come-from-behind win engineered by Marcel Reed. Yet no one is proclaiming the Aggies the SEC's best powerhouse just yet.

But what sets the league apart is the traditional bottom. Vanderbilt is already 3-0 and just beat South Carolina decisively after the Gamecocks lost QB LaNorris Sellers to injury.

Going into the year, Mississippi State was the obvious choice for bringing up the rear of the league. But the Bulldogs already have an upset of 2024 CFP participant Arizona State on the ledger. Jeff Leiby's second edition is already halfway to bowl eligibility.

Only Kentucky looks like fodder for the rest of the league this year.

My point is this: The SEC may not have a team that laps the pack. Instead, it may have very good teams with three or four headed to the postseason capable of winning it all.

If that many get there.

I'm going out on a limb and predicting this: The SEC champ will have at least two conference losses. I wouldn't be shocked if the winner had three.

That is going to cause a stress test for the CFP selection committee. The emphasis is supposed to be on strength of schedule and quality wins. But you're going to have some less than imposing records to choose from.

My guess is that Georgia, Alabama and



Brett Norfleet and the undefeated Missouri Tigers are making noise as a potential playoff team this season. [COLIN E. BRALEY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS]

Texas (underwhelming, but with the most favorable schedule) make the field. You could easily substitute LSU, Oklahoma and Tennessee or Missouri.

For years everyone predicted that the expanded playoff would make the regular season meaningless. Instead, you're going to have more November games that resonate with national ramifications than ever before.

Looking ahead

• **Auburn at Oklahoma (2:30 p.m. Saturday on ABC):** Is it too early to call this a CFP play-in game? Two surprisingly good teams face off with each already

claiming an impressive nonconference win. Add the subplot of Auburn's Jackson Arnold returning to his former school, and this one is as big as it gets in September. Consider the winner a legitimate contender.

• **South Carolina at Missouri (6 p.m. Saturday on ESPN):** Missouri has quietly risen into the Top 25 with a new QB and one old-school scalp after taking down arch-rival Kansas. South Carolina limps in likely without Sellers (note that we're writing this early in the week, so things can change). Both have other opportunities to correct their course, but an impressive Mizzou win puts the Tigers

in the thick of contention.

• **Florida at Miami (6:30 p.m. Saturday on ABC):** The Gators arrive on a two-game skid, and Billy Napier's seat has gone from hot to radioactive. At 1-2, the Gators look and play like a disappointment. But if they can clean up penalties and turnovers, they're capable of pulling off the upset. But this may be more old-school Miami, capable of running away with the ACC. We'll know more late Saturday night.

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



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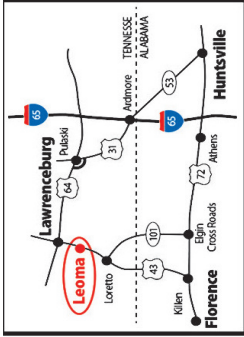
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