

VSiN PRO

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

BETTING GUIDE

PRO EDITION

THE ROAD TO GLORY

BEST BETS FOR THE 2024 CFB SEASON

THIS PRO GUIDE INCLUDES:

134 TEAM PREVIEWS

PRESEASON TOP 25

POWER RATINGS, BETTING SYSTEMS AND MORE

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ODDS WITHIN GUIDE
ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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COMMON ABBREVIATIONS USED THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE

ATS - Against the Spread • Avg - Average • CL - Closing Line
DC - Defensive Coordinator • Def - Defense • Dog - Underdog
Eff Strg - Steve Makinen Effective Strength Rating • Fav - Favorite
FT - Final Total • HC - Head Coach • H2h - Head-to-Head • L - Losses
L# - Last number of games • LY - Last Year • MOV - Margin of Victory
O - Over • OC - Offensive Coordinator • Off - Offense • OL - Opening Line
OT - Opening Total • Opp - Opponent • O/U - Over/Under
PA - Points Against • Pct - Percentage • PF - Points For • PPG - Points Per Game
PYPG - Passing Yards per Game • RS - Returning Starters
RYPG - Rushing Yards per Game • SM BR - Steve Makinen Bettors' Rating
SM PR - Steve Makinen Power Rating • SU - Straight Up • TO - Turnovers
TYPG - Total Yards per Game • U - Under • W - Wins • YPP - Yards per Play
YPPT - Yards per Point • YPR - Yards per Rush

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Hello, friends.

It seems only fitting that our first guide back as an independent entity owned by Musburger Media is the College Football Betting Guide. Why? Because this is the one that best illustrates what our VSiN team is capable of when we all come together.

The 2024 version is over 200 pages long and features team previews for all 134 teams, more than 50 best bets from VSiN hosts and contributors, and several different feature articles that I will list momentarily. The size and scope of this project requires an “all hands on deck” approach and I am very fortunate to have an excellent team, including Senior Editor Zachary Cohen and Guide Designer Matt Devine.

In the 2024 College Football Betting Guide, you will read:

- Steve Makinen’s Top Trends, Stability Scores, and Recruiting Rankings
- Matt Youmans’ Preseason Top 25 and Big Ten breakdowns
- Zachary Cohen’s Heisman Trophy analysis and SEC previews
- Jonathan Von Tobel on the Big 12, Mountain West, and Pac-2
- Wes Reynolds on the MAC
- Tyler Shoemaker on Conference USA
- Tim Murray’s breakdowns of the Independents - Notre Dame, UMass, and UConn
- Adam Burke on the AAC, ACC, Sun Belt, How to Make Your Own Power Ratings Model, and the 2024 Home-Field Advantage Values
- Best bets on the College Football Playoff, Heisman, Season Win Totals, Conference Winners, and More from VSiN hosts and writers

If that looks like a lot, that’s because it is. Unlike other college football guides, we don’t have to sugarcoat anything to maintain access to coaches and athletic departments. We can give honest, betting-focused assessments of the players, teams, and staff to help you become a better, more informed bettor for the upcoming college football season.

We hope you enjoy the 2024 College Football Betting Guide. We are so excited about this publication, and also about our future, which co-owner Bill Adee referred to as “VSiN 3.0”.

We’re so thrilled to have you as a VSiN pro subscriber and encourage you to get your friends, family, and colleagues to join you as we have huge things planned for the football season and beyond!

Adam Burke
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2024 SEASON PREDICTIONS

	MATT BROWN	STORMY BUONANTONY	ADAM BURKE	KELLEY BYDLON	ZACHARY COHEN	PAUL HOWARD	STEVE MAKINEN	MITCH MOSS	TIM MURRAY	BRENT MUSBURGER	WES REYNOLDS	TYLER SHOEMAKER	DUSTIN SWEDELSON	JONATHAN VON TOBEL	BEN WILSON	MATT YOUMANS
ACC CHAMPION	Florida State	Miami	Miami	Florida State	Florida State	Florida State	Clemson	Miami	Clemson	Clemson	Miami	Florida State	Miami	Florida State	Florida State	Florida State
BIG TEN CHAMPION	Ohio State	Oregon	Oregon	Ohio State	Oregon	Ohio State	Oregon	Ohio State	Oregon	Ohio State	Ohio State	Ohio State	Ohio State	Oregon	Oregon	Oregon
BIG 12 CHAMPION	Utah	Utah	Utah	Utah	Utah	Utah	Oklahoma State	Utah	Utah	Houston	Utah	Utah	Kansas State	Iowa State	Iowa State	Kansas State
SEC CHAMPION	Georgia	Georgia	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia	Ole Miss	Alabama	Georgia	Georgia
AAC CHAMPION	Memphis	Memphis	Tulane	Tulane	Tulane	Memphis	UTSA	Memphis	UTSA	Memphis	UTSA	Memphis	Memphis	Memphis	UTSA	Memphis
CUSA CHAMPION	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty	Liberty
MAC CHAMPION	Toledo	Toledo	Toledo	Toledo	Toledo	Miami (OH)	Miami (OH)	Miami (OH)	Miami (OH)	Toledo	Toledo	Toledo	Miami (OH)	Toledo	Toledo	Miami (OH)
MWC CHAMPION	Boise State	Boise State	Boise State	Boise State	Boise State	Boise State	Boise State	Boise State	Boise State	Fresno State	Boise State	Boise State	Boise State	UNLV	Boise State	Boise State
SUN BELT CHAMPION	Texas State	App State	App State	App State	Texas State	App State	Texas State	James Madison	Texas State	App State	James Madison	App State	Texas State	James Madison	Texas State	Texas State
CFP FINAL FOUR #1	Georgia	Georgia	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	Georgia	Oregon	Ohio State	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia	Ohio State	Ohio State	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia
CFP FINAL FOUR #2	Ohio State	Oregon	Oregon	Ohio State	Oregon	Ohio State	Georgia	Georgia	Oregon	Texas	Ohio State	Georgia	Georgia	Oregon	Oregon	Ohio State
CFP FINAL FOUR #3	Florida State	Ohio State	Texas	Georgia	Georgia	Oregon	Ohio State	Utah	Notre Dame	Ohio State	Notre Dame	Oregon	Oregon	Texas	Florida State	Mississippi
CFP FINAL FOUR #4	LSU	Utah	Ohio State	Florida State	Ohio State	Utah	Texas	Texas	Ohio State	Oregon	Texas	Texas	Alabama	Alabama	Ohio State	Notre Dame
CFP TITLE GAME #1	Georgia	Georgia	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	Georgia	Georgia	Ohio State	Georgia	Georgia	Ohio State	Ohio State	Ohio State	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia
CFP TITLE GAME #2	Ohio State	Oregon	Oregon	Ohio State	Georgia	Oregon	Texas	Georgia	Oregon	Ohio State	Texas	Georgia	Georgia	Oregon	Oregon	Ohio State
CFP CHAMPION	Georgia	Georgia	Alabama	Ohio State	Alabama	Georgia	Texas	Ohio State	Georgia	Ohio State	Ohio State	Ohio State	Ohio State	Oregon	Georgia	Georgia

PRESEASON TOP 25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. GEORGIA

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

2. OHIO STATE

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

3. OREGON

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

4. TEXAS

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

5. ALABAMA

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

6. MISSISSIPPI

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

7. NOTRE DAME

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

8. PENN STATE

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

9. FLORIDA STATE

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

10. MICHIGAN

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

11. LSU

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

12. OKLAHOMA

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

13. UTAH

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

14. MIAMI

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

15. TEXAS A&M

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

16. CLEMSON

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

17. TENNESSEE

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

18. MISSOURI

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

19. OKLAHOMA STATE

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

20. KANSAS STATE

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

21. LOUISVILLE

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

22. IOWA

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

23. IOWA STATE

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

24. USC

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

25. WISCONSIN

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

VSIN EXPERT PLAYOFF

BEST BETS

MATT YOUMANS

MISSISSIPPI TO MAKE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF (YES -130) & OVER 9.5 WINS (-115)

Like him or not, Lane Kiffin has developed into an elite coach. He's also a hard-working recruiter who's using the transfer portal to his advantage. The Rebels are expected to have 10 veterans starting on each side of the ball, led by experienced quarterback Jaxson Dart. An accurate passer and strong runner, Dart accounted for 3,755 total yards and 31 touchdowns last season. Ole Miss finished 11-2 with double-digit losses at Alabama and Georgia. The schedule is more manageable this time with home games against Georgia and Oklahoma while the toughest road trips are to LSU and Florida. Expect the Rebels to make a run toward the top of the SEC standings, win 10 regular-season games and reach the playoffs. I'm betting Ole Miss Over for the third year in a row, although there is inflation from last year's win total of 7.5.

MITCH MOSS

UTAH TO MAKE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF (+260)

The Utes have a lot going for them entering the season:

- Step down in conference
- No Texas or Oklahoma
- Decimated by injuries in 2023
- Those players return tons of experience overall (7th year QB)
- Playmakers at every unit on both sides of the ball
- One of the best coaches in the entire country
- One of the best home-field advantages in the country
- Program has won 9+ games 13 times since 2003

Kansas State is the biggest challenger in the Big 12, and the two teams don't play in the regular season. The +260 odds are too juicy to pass up, especially if the Utes survive a trip to Stillwater on September 21st. At that point I would project them to be around even money or even odds on to make the playoffs.

ZACHARY COHEN

ALABAMA TO WIN COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF (14-1)

The Crimson Tide have a better chance to win the SEC, or at least finish as runner-up, than people think. Doing either of those would put Alabama in the College Football Playoff. Well, if the Tide make it to the 12-team postseason, you'd be happy to be holding a 14-1 ticket.

I know that Kalen DeBoer has his work cut out for him in replacing Nick Saban, but do you really want to doubt this guy? Everything he has touched at the college level has turned to gold, and this year's Alabama roster is better than what he had in Washington last year.

The Tide lost some real talent on both sides of the ball, but they have more than enough to compete. Jalen Milroe is back and should be one of the best quarterbacks in college football, and the Tide have a lot of players with game-breaking ability at running back and receiver. They also happen to be in better shape along the offensive line than they were a year ago — even with JC Latham now in the NFL. Defensively, six players with starting experience are back from a group that gave up 19.0 points per game last year. And coordinator Kane Wommack can be trusted to build an elite unit out of what's left.

I just don't think this program is going anywhere. DeBoer is going to have to prove a lot in Year 1, but this is still a talent factory and he should be up for it.

A photograph of Alan Bowman, a quarterback for Oklahoma State University, wearing an orange jersey with the number 7 and a black helmet. He is looking towards the camera with a serious expression. The background is a blurred football field.

Alan Bowman

STEVE MAKINEN

OKLAHOMA STATE TO MAKE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF (+800)

With its foremost rivals in the Big 12, Texas and Oklahoma, now off to the SEC, a very experienced Oklahoma State team could be a nice underdog wager as an option to emerge as a frontrunner this season. Most prognosticators have pegged Utah as the formal favorite, but HC Mike Gundy's Cowboys host the Utes in a late September game and have 19 starters back from their 10-win team on '23. Quarterback Alan Bowman is back at QB but will have to be better than last year, when he had a 15-14 TD-INT ratio. In fact, the overall experience is going to have to make a bigger difference this fall, as OSU only outscored opponents by 1.0 PPG last year in going 10-4. In what figures to be a very changed Big 12 conference, I like one of the mainstays to wind up getting it done.

MATT BROWN

LSU TO MAKE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF (+135)

& OVER 5.5 SEC WINS (+120)

Before you scream that this is a homer pick, hear me out. It's year three for Brian Kelly and it's time to make a move. The talent in Baton Rouge is there. The defense that allowed about two thousand yards per game last season, now headed by former Missouri DC Blake Baker, will be better, if not much better. Despite losing two elite wideouts, the offense has plenty of talent and even a little bit of depth. The offensive line is solid and Garrett Nussmeier won't have to be Jayden Daniels for this squad to win games.

But the biggest piece of the puzzle here is how pure LSU ran with its 2024 schedule. The Tigers dodged Georgia, Texas, Missouri, and Tennessee, while getting Bama and Ole Miss at home. The only road game the Tigers play all season versus a team with a win total set higher than 7.5 is Texas A&M (8.5).

The Tigers win all the games they are supposed to, and get a big win against either Bama or Ole Miss along the way to get into the playoff with two other SEC teams.

STORMY BUONANTONY

UTAH TO MAKE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF (+220)

& TO MAKE BIG 12 TITLE GAME (+120)

I'm drinking the Utah Utes' Kool-Aid something fierce, especially with the team taking a step down in competition from the Pac-12 to Big 12. They went 8-4 last year despite being decimated with injuries across the board, which included having 3-4 QBs play (none of which were their actual starter who led them to back-to-back Rose Bowls, Cam Rising). Rising is back. Stud TE Brant Kuithe is back. Their defense should be elite. They have one of the best head coaches in the entire sport. AND they have a ridiculous home field advantage, going 18-1 the last three seasons, 27-2 over the last five at Rice-Eccles Stadium. I think they win the Big 12 their first year or at very least make the title game, go Over their win total and make the CFP.

BOISE STATE TO MAKE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF (+6--)

& OVER 9 WINS (-110)

The Broncos were MUCH better than their 7-5 regular season record a year ago, having gone 1-4 in one score games. It's my understanding that internally things had gotten pretty contentious under former head coach Andy Avalos, so much so that once Spencer Danielson took over the entire team's "on edge" feeling completely lifted. Things snapped into gear the backend of the season and the Broncos ended up beating UNLV for the MW title. Danielson is now the full-time head coach, and in addition to adding former head coach Dirk Koetter to the staff as OC, brings back 15 starters. It's a unit that includes four returning starting OL and the best RB in G5 football Ashton Jeanty (averaged 113 YPG, led the nation in yards from scrimmage and had 19 total TDs last season). When you look at the schedule, aside from a Week 2 game at Oregon, it's fair to say every other game is winnable. Plus, they avoid Fresno State and get both Washington State and Oregon State at home. In terms of the CFP, I think the committee will have learned its lesson with Liberty last year (who once again has the easiest schedule in college football). Let's say Boise State's only loss is at Oregon, I give the Broncos a major edge over an undefeated Liberty or a one-loss Memphis because of their respective strength of schedule.

MISSOURI TO MAKE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF (+175)

I had to do a double take the first time I really looked at Missouri's schedule. It's more about who they DON'T play than who they do. They avoid Georgia, Texas, Ole Miss, LSU and Tennessee. Their first real test is Week 5 at Texas A&M, giving them a realistic chance of being 7-0 when they roll into Tuscaloosa on October 26th with the backend of the schedule looking manageable. Defense will likely have some regression from a unit that helped the Tigers to 11 wins last season, but the offense is the star of the show with third year QB Brady Cook and one of the best WRs in the country, Luther Burden. It's hard to imagine a likely double-digit win SEC team NOT making the CFP.

WES REYNOLDS

PENN STATE TO MAKE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF (-150)

Once again, James Franklin is changing coordinators. Mike Yurcich was fired after the Michigan game last season and now Andy Kotelnicki enters from a successful stint at Kansas. Kotelnicki is the sixth offensive coordinator in 11 years at Penn State, but he is likely the most creative mind Franklin has ever hired. Throughout his time in Lawrence, Buffalo, and his other stops, the Kotelnicki offense has been built on pre-snap motion and shifts in hopes of creating mismatches whether it be in the run game or the passing game. It is a difficult offense for which to prepare and that should benefit QB Drew Allar, RBs Nicholas Singleton and Kaytron Allen, plus Ohio State transfer WR Julian Fleming.

On defense, Tom Allen, fired last season as Indiana head coach, replaces Manny Diaz, who takes over the head coaching gig at Duke. While the Nittany Lions lost four players to this past year's NFL Draft, seven starters are back including four of the top five returning tacklers.

Penn State will be favored in 10 of its 12 games (Ohio State and at USC the likely exceptions). They avoid Michigan and Oregon and do get Ohio State at home. Ten victories could get into an expanded playoff with only the Big Ten and SEC likely to get three or more teams each.

JARED SMITH

ALABAMA TO MAKE COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF (+105)

The "Make The Playoff" market is fascinating to me this year because of the expanded field, and I can see there being major volatility as we start to get a better feel of where the winds of the committee will blow. I also can't see Bama being left out if you consider the talent and coaching. I know it's a new regime, but it's Kalen DeBoer, who might be the most trustworthy CEO in the game right now. DeBoer gets Jalen Milroe back and most of the OL remains intact. The skill position group is raw — especially at receiver — but the schedule is manageable early. They get a bye before the Georgia game, and another before their big road test at LSU in early November. I think 10 wins gets them into the playoff but also wouldn't be shocked if 9-3 got it done when you factor in the committee's SEC bias. This bet should not be priced at plus money.



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VSIN HEISMAN TROPHY

BEST BETS

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

DYLAN RAIOLA (500-1)

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

ROCCO BECHT (1000-1)

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

MITCH MOSS

JALEN MILROE (15-1)

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

MILLER MOSS (60-1)

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

2017: Baker Mayfield (1st)

2018: Kyle Murray (1st)

2019: Jalen Hurts (2nd)

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

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

2022: Caleb Williams (1st)

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

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



Brady Cook

TIM MURRAY

KJ JEFFERSON (100-1)

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

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

DUSTIN SWEDLSON

JAXSON DART (15-1)

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

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

What does that tell us? Two things:

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

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

AVERY JOHNSON (25-1)

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

BRADY COOK (40-1)

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

JOE CERAULO

JAXSON DART (15-1)

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

KYRON DRONES (100-1)

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

KJ JEFFERSON (100-1)

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

VSIN SEASON WIN TOTAL

BEST BETS

MATT YOUMANS

MICHIGAN UNDER 9 WINS (-135)

Not only did Jim Harbaugh bolt for the Chargers, the Wolverines lost 13 players to the NFL Draft, the most of any program. Only seven players who started return for new coach Sherrone Moore, who needs to work miracles to win 10 games. The key to Michigan being a surprise team is redshirt sophomore quarterback Alex Orji, who's unproven along with the offensive line and wide receivers. The Wolverines host Texas, USC and Oregon and face Washington and Ohio State on the road. If they fall to all three top-five preseason opponents (the Longhorns, Ducks and Buckeyes), that makes a 9-3 finish the best-case scenario. There are too many new faces to think a 10-win season is realistic.

IOWA OVER 8 WINS (-115)

The Hawkeyes win ugly with defense and special teams, but old-school coach Kirk Ferentz offers no apologies. Believe it or not, Ferentz finished 10-4 last year despite dealing with one of the nation's worst offenses. New coordinator Tim Lester is promising to unleash an aggressive attack triggered by senior quarterback Cade McNamara. A big, strong line starts four seniors and one junior, and there is a deep stable of runners. A rock-solid defense is led by senior linebackers Jay Higgins and Nick Jackson. Michigan, Oregon and Penn State are missing on the schedule. Iowa could be favored in 10 games and catches another break by getting Washington, Wisconsin and Nebraska in Iowa City. While the win total is 7.5 at some books, it's now 8 at most spots. Expect at least eight wins.

PAULY HOWARD

OLD DOMINION UNDER 5 WINS (-180)

The Monarchs are only favored in two games this year and have a rough stretch of three straight road games, with the last two teams off of a bye. The schedule is difficult and they only return 10 starters from a six-win team.

They play at South Carolina and host East Carolina and Virginia Tech before the stretch of three straight road games. Not to mention, they play Texas State, App State, and James Madison after. Just brutal.

ZACHARY COHEN

TEXAS A&M OVER 8.5 WINS (-120) & TEXAS A&M OVER 9.5 ALT TOTAL (+220)

Mike Elko was able to turn a dead Duke program into a winner, so he should be able to revive Texas A&M. After all, Elko churned out elite defenses when he was the unit's coordinator from 2018 to 2021. Elko also happens to be inheriting a roster that is filled with returning talent. Not only do the Aggies have some of last year's best players back, including quarterback Conner Weigman, but some of Jimbo Fisher's prized recruits are starting to develop into players.

As long as Weigman is healthy after a broken foot ended his 2023 season, I like Texas A&M's offense. Weigman has NFL starter written all over him and there's plenty of talent surrounding him at the skill positions. As for the defense, there's playmakers at every level. And Elko is as well equipped as anyone to get the most out of them.

Of course, the Aggies do have some really rough spots on their schedule. They'll face Notre Dame, Missouri, LSU and Texas this year. But all four of those games will be played in College Station. So, it isn't crazy to think that Texas A&M can win three or four of those. But even winning two would put the Aggies in good position to win nine games. I also like the idea of throwing a little something on the alternate total, as I think 10 wins is within reason.

FLORIDA UNDER 4.5 WINS (+130)

Florida gave up 27.6 points per game in 2023 and was outside the top 100 in both opponent yards per carry (4.8) and opponent QB Rating (146). They also gave up 38.2 points per game over the course of their five-game losing streak to end the season. The impenetrable defense that we have come to expect from this Gators program is gone.

Billy Napier now enters this new season on the hot seat, and he does so with a roster that is mediocre in comparison to the rest of the SEC. The Gators also have a daunting schedule. It's very likely that they'll only be favored in home games against Samford and UCF. Maybe they'll also be small favorites on the road against Mississippi State. But that's not enough when looking at a win total of 4.5. I like the Under quite a bit and you can get it at plus-money odds. The good news for Florida fans is that it's almost DJ Lagway time.

VIRGINIA TECH OVER 8 WINS (-130)

This feels like it could be a breakout year for the Hokies. This will be Kyron Drones' first full season under center, but he completely transformed this offense once Brent Pry gave him the nod last year. Last season, Drones threw for 2,084 yards with 17 touchdowns and only three picks, and he also rushed for 818 yards with five touchdowns. He's as dangerous of a dual-threat quarterback as there is in college football. Drones also happens to be playing behind an offensive line that returns all five starters. On top of that, the Hokies have almost every key running back and pass catcher back in the mix. This offense should be explosive.

Defensively, Pry brings back 10 players with starting experience for a defense that gave up just 23.9 points per game. This group is absolutely loaded and should only improve with another year together.

As far as the schedule goes, things aren't all that rough for the Hokies. The two toughest games are a road meeting with Miami on September 27 and a home game against Clemson on November 9. Perhaps a home game against Rutgers on September 21 and a road game against Syracuse on November 2 will test Virginia Tech. But I tend to think this will be a nine-win football team, and I wouldn't bat an eye if you told me they won 10 or 11.

UCLA UNDER 5 WINS (+105)

Chip Kelly's decision to give up a Big Ten head coaching job to be an offensive coordinator in the same conference was definitely a bit odd. It also left UCLA in a weird spot. However, the Bruins quickly pivoted to DeShaun Foster, an alum that is excited about this opportunity. Perhaps his energy and love for the program will lead to success, and bringing in Eric Bienemy as offensive coordinator is interesting. The problem is that UCLA's schedule is a nightmare.

The following eight games could all be losses for the Bruins: at LSU, vs. Oregon, at Penn State, at Rutgers, at Nebraska, vs. Iowa, at Washington, vs. USC. Home games against Minnesota and Fresno State aren't sure-things either.

Not only does UCLA's schedule look horrible, but this defense lost a lot of talent from last year. And if that's not enough, the Bruins also lost one of the most well-respected defensive minds in college football with D'Anton Lynn taking the defensive coordinator gig at USC.

This roster isn't completely devoid of talent, but this has the potential to be an ugly year.

STEVE MAKINEN

COLORADO OVER 5.5 WINS (-140)

The pressure surrounding Colorado's football program last year was immense following the hiring of head coach Deion Sanders. While much of that hype has settled now to a manageable point, there are some extreme positives that have come out of the change. First off, the last two years on the recruiting/transfer trail have been unlike anything the program has experienced in recent years. There were some big wins to start the season last year as well. Now for '24, Coach Prime brings back most of his key pieces and will be back in the Big 12 where his program belongs. The Buffaloes will also benefit from a system showing that close losses can be a galvanizing factor for teams that stay the course. In fact, of the 32 teams over the last 11 seasons that suffered 5+ close losses of seven points or less and brought back their head coach and at least half of their starters (11+), only two finished worse the next season. The average win improvement was 2.6 per season. That would put Colorado at 6.6 wins, a modest number if you ask me for a team this explosive offensively.

NEW MEXICO STATE UNDER 4.5 WINS (-135)

You have to wonder what goes on behind the scenes when a coach just decides to hang it up out of the blue following two very successful seasons. On the surface, to me, it appears that former New Mexico State head coach Jerry Kill saw what was coming down the pike in Las Cruces and bailed just in time. The Aggies face a season in which their stability score going in is just 1. That means they have just enough starters returning to avoid the dreaded ZERO score. Not much more than that however. Besides Kill and his staff leaving, the biggest loss is QB Diego Pavia, who was good enough to land a Power Four gig in the transfer portal. Don't be surprised if this team hits a wall this year. They fall into a dangerous transitional system of when teams are off of seasons in which they won 66.7% or more of their games against the spread and have six or fewer offensive starters returning, plus are breaking in a new quarterback. The 33 teams that have fit that bill over the last 11 seasons have dropped by an average of 18.4% outright, 19.6% ATS, and 5.8 PPG offensively. The five teams that added a new head coach plummeted by 5.8 wins per season! The new head coach is Tony Sanchez, who struggled to a 20-40 record in five years at UNLV. Quite realistically, this team would be a great bet to undergo the worst decline from '23 to '24.





Kurtis Rourke

WES REYNOLDS

INDIANA OVER 5.5 WINS (-110)

New Hoosiers head coach Curt Cignetti has certainly not lacked confidence in his short time in Bloomington. At an introductory press conference he said “I win. Google me.” A quick Google search would show that James Madison went 19-4 (11-1 in 2023) over the last two seasons after transitioning from FCS where Cignetti took the Dukes to an FCS National Championship Game and to the National Semifinals twice in his first three seasons.

Cignetti hopes to bring that winning culture from James Madison to Indiana as 12 players (9 likely starters) and seven assistant coaches follow him to Bloomington. Granted, the Big Ten is a large step up from the Sun Belt, but unlike other programs that have to assimilate transfers from a wide variety of schools, Indiana having so many former Dukes become Hoosiers builds roster continuity immediately even with 31 new transfers in total.

New quarterback Kurtis Rourke transfers from Ohio, where he ran a zone read offense and accumulated 50 touchdown passes to just 16 interceptions in three seasons as the Bobcats starter.

Indiana could potentially go into October at 5-0 with three likely non-conference victories over FIU, Western Illinois, and Charlotte. The September 14 game at UCLA could also be a victory as the Bruins are in a rebuild with a first-time head coach and Maryland starts life without Taulia Tagovailoa, who leaves College Park as the Big Ten’s all-time leader in passing yards.

The only two likely non-winnable games on this schedule are against Michigan and Ohio State. Now a 10-win season is overly ambitious, but an eight-win season is realistic and the Hoosiers should return to a bowl game this year.

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

NEBRASKA OVER 7.5 WINS (-125)

Nebraska could be one of the most improved teams in the country this season, and its schedule is littered with opportunity. The Cornhuskers will likely be favored in the first six games of the regular season. It is not out of the realm of possibility Nebraska enters its road contest with Ohio State undefeated or with one loss. Much of this hinges on the play of freshman quarterback Dylan Raiola, but the Cornhuskers have other strengths as well. This should be one of the more physical front sevens in the country. With an improved defense, better quarterback play and an easy schedule in hand, Nebraska is a threat to blow by this win total.

CINCINNATI OVER 5 WINS (-160)

Scott Satterfield might not know who his quarterback is until the first week of the season, but the rest of the roster is primed for a step forward. Fifteen starters return for the Bearcats this year. The offensive line is completely intact and includes one of the best linemen in the country in Luke Kandra. Corey Kiner is a 1,000-yard rusher who returns as well. The defense needs to make a massive improvement, but continuity should help. Cincinnati also has a manageable schedule which includes Towson, Arizona State and Houston. Look for the Bearcats to go bowling this season.

TEXAS A&M OVER 8.5 WINS (-120)

The Mike Elko era begins this season, and the former Duke head coach has a loaded roster to work with. Eighteen starters return in total for Texas A&M, nine on both sides of the ball. The Aggies finished 19th in opponent EPA per play, allowed 5.2 yards per play and 3.4 yards per carry. Elko is a defensive genius who will be able to work wonders with this group. On the other side, quarterback Conner Weigman needs to stay healthy, but his talent is undeniable. If he can give new offensive coordinator Collin Klein a full season the Aggies should be able to greatly improve their offensive production. Texas A&M also drew a favorable schedule in the SEC, and will not play Georgia, Alabama or Ole Miss this season.



BOISE STATE UNDER 9 WINS (+120)

Boise State is the apple of nearly everyone's eye in college football, but there are some flaws with this team that should not be ignored. The Broncos do return their entire defense from 2023, but this was a flawed unit. Boise State allowed 6.1 yards per play. They finished 71st in opponent EPA per play (0.057) and 82nd in opponent EPA per play on early downs. The 25.8 points per game allowed by this unit was the second-most allowed in the last seven years. The Broncos also have some difficult road trips to Oregon, UNLV and Wyoming on the schedule. This is a play on the price. The market seems to have a blind faith in Boise State that I do not believe is worth paying for on the win total.

ADAM BURKE

NORTH CAROLINA TAR HEELS ALT WIN TOTAL OVER 8.5 WINS (+180)

The Tar Heels are favored in 10 games for me this season and one of their underdog roles is as a half-point pup to rival NC State in the regular season finale. The only clear underdog role comes at Florida State, but the Tar Heels have a bye two weeks before that game and a bye week after.

New DC Geoff Collins was a mediocre head coach, but he's been a spectacular DC at Mississippi State and Florida in his time. Former DC Gene Chizik was trending in the right direction, as the defense went from 114th in yards per play in 2022 to 65th in 2023. I think Collins can further that type of improvement. It is rarely a question of talent in Chapel Hill.

Offensively, the Tar Heels do have to replace Drake Maye, but Max Johnson has a 47/12 TD/INT ratio over his collegiate career and plenty of experience. He also returns an elite back in Omarion Hampton. Mack Brown's seat is hot heading into the season, but Chip Lindsey has been a good OC just about everywhere he's been and now he's in Year 2. The offensive line was a point of emphasis in the portal and I feel like the talent level and the schedule give the Tar Heels the opportunity for an excellent season. Obviously, Over 7.5 at -115 is also good, but I think this is a team capable of blowing by expectations.

SOUTH CAROLINA UNDER 5.5 WINS (-130)

LaNorris Sellers may be a name to know as the season goes along, but the three-star recruit from nearby Florence, SC is a dual-threat QB looking ahead to his first season as a starter. He wasn't the most accurate passer in high school and is a bruising runner at 230 pounds, but the Gamecocks don't have a ton of help around him. That is going to put a lot on Sellers' shoulders and, most importantly, on his body. He's likely to have a lot of rush attempts in Dowell Loggains' offense and that means he'll wear down.

The Cocks are favored over Vanderbilt on the road, but that's it for me in conference play. Not only that, their smallest underdog role for me is 5.5 points at Kentucky in Week 2, where Sellers is likely to be making just his

second career start. Coming into the season, he has four pass attempts to his name, all against Furman.

They'll be a big favorite over Wofford and Old Dominion, but even if they hold up in all three favorite roles, that's three wins. I don't know how they get to 6-6, let alone the minute chance of doing better than that.

TYLER SHOEMAKER

MISSOURI OVER 9.5 WINS (+135)

Per TSI, Missouri has the weakest schedule in the SEC and avoids Texas and Georgia. It would take them losing all three games at Alabama, at Texas A&M and vs. Oklahoma for them to go Under this total. They're in the TSI preseason top five from a power rating standpoint and are projected 10.2 wins. Especially at plus-money odds, I really like Missouri to go Over 9.5 wins.

JOSH APPELBAUM

ILLINOIS UNDER 5.5 WINS (-135)

Illinois went 5-7 last season, finishing at the bottom of the Big Ten West standings. A big reason the Fighting Illini struggled was their porous defense. Illinois allowed 353 points overall, the third most in the Big Ten. Illinois is only returning 10 total starters (5 on offense, 5 on defense) from last season's squad, which ranks 53rd in college football and near the bottom of the barrel among Power Four teams. Bret Bielema is entering his fourth season as the Illini head coach, with an overall record of 18-19. Illinois is picked to finish 15th in the newly minted 18-team Big Ten, according to USA Today.

The betting market isn't too optimistic when it comes to the Illini's chances this season. Their win total opened at 5.5 with the Under juiced to -115 at BetMGM. Over the course of the offseason, we've seen the Under get juiced up from -115 to -135. Why are the oddsmakers forcing bettors to pay a higher price to take the Under 5.5? Because that's where the smart money is leaning. Only 9% of bets have taken the Under 5.5 wins, yet it accounts for 57% (!) of the money. This is one of the largest "low bets, higher dollars" sharp bet discrepancies of any team in college football (a whopping 48% sharp bet split).

KENTUCKY OVER 6.5 WINS (-135)

Kentucky went 7-6 last season, finishing in the middle of the pack in the SEC East. The Wildcats will have to lean on a new quarterback as Brock Vandagriff, a former five-star recruit and transfer from Georgia, will take over under center. However, aside from a new signal caller, Kentucky will have the luxury of returning a plethora of starters from last season's team. The Wildcats return 15 starters, including six on offense and nine on defense. This ranks Kentucky seventh overall among Power Four schools in terms of returning starters. The Wildcats return four of their five starting offensive linemen as well.

Sharps seem to like Kentucky's chances of posting another seven win season. The Wildcats opened the offseason with a win total of 6.5 with the Under heavily juiced to -150. However, we've seen a huge juice adjustment since that time, as the Over 6.5 is now juiced to -135. In other words, we are seeing sharp "Under to Over" juice movement as the Over 6.5 wins went from +125 to -135. The Over is also receiving 86% of bets and 94% of dollars, a "low bets, higher dollars" bet discrepancy signaling heavy one-way support from both Pros and Joes.

IOWA STATE OVER 7.5 WINS (-120)

Iowa State went 7-6 last season but finished tied for fourth in the Big 12 thanks to a 6-3 record in conference play. The Cyclones were led by their stout defense, allowing only 296 points, third fewest in the conference. Iowa State returns sophomore Rocco Becht at quarterback, who posted impressive numbers last season as a redshirt freshman (62.9% completion percentage, 3,120 yards, 23 touchdowns, 8 interceptions). The Cyclones return 18 starters from last season's team, including nine on both sides of the ball. This ranks Iowa State tied for third overall in terms of the most returning starters among Power Four schools.

Wiseguys are leaning on Iowa State to win at least one more game than last season. Their win total opened at 7.5 this offseason, with the Under juiced to -150. However, we've since seen the juice completely flip from Under -150 to Over -120. Once again, this signals sharp "Under to Over" juice movement, as the Over has moved from +125 to -120. The Over is receiving 89% of bets and 96% of dollars, a heavy dose of both Pro and Joe action in addition to a big juice adjustment.

JOE CERAULO

OLE MISS OVER 9.5 WINS (-115)

The Rebels have a chance to really make some noise with a favorable schedule and an experienced QB this season. Only Tennessee and Missouri have easier schedules in the SEC, and Ole Miss will likely be underdogs in just two contests all season: at LSU and vs. Georgia. If they can steal one of those two, they'll be very live for a shot at the SEC title game. With their road contests, aside from LSU, consisting of Wake Forest, South Carolina, Florida and Arkansas, I struggle to see a world in which 10 wins isn't this team's FLOOR!

ARIZONA OVER 7.5 WINS (-115)

Could the Wildcats have asked for a better welcome gift to the Big 12 than the conference's easiest schedule? I don't think so. A year ago, this team started 3-3 en route to a 9-3 regular season finish. This year, they could very well start 2-2, after consecutive late-September trips to Kansas State and Utah, but I don't see them losing ANY of their seven home games. All that'd be left if they run the table in Tucson would be to steal one road contest at BYU, UCF or TCU – none of which are projected for higher than an eighth-place conference finish. With Noah Fifita and Tetairoa McMillan showing their loyalty this offseason by returning as the nation's top-performing, Power Five QB/WR duo from a year ago, the Wildcats wouldn't shock me if they turned in a top-four finish in the new-look Big 12 this year.

STORMY BUONANTONY

SMU OVER 8 WINS (-115)

Even if SMU loses its toughest non-conference game vs. TCU and loses to both FSU and Louisville, the rest of the schedule is very manageable for those nine wins. They went 11-3 last season, beat Tulane for the American title and should run through this year's schedule despite a slight step up in class joining the ACC. In my opinion, Preston Stone is underrated at QB coming back healthy after a broken leg prematurely ended his season. He had 28 TDs and six INTs on the year, but got better as the season went on with his TD:INT ratio at 17:1 over his last seven regular season games.



Rocco Becht

BEN WILSON

IOWA STATE OVER 7.5 WINS (-120)

Of the new-look "Power Four" conferences, there's no doubt the Big 12 is the most wide open with no team shorter than 3/1 to win the conference championship. With so much change and uncertainty in this league, the Cyclones bring the perfect mix of experience (most returning production in all of FBS) and physicality (2nd in overall defensive production behind only Texas last year). It took nearly half the season for QB Rocco Becht and the offense to find its footing, but a 446-yard showing in the team's bowl game against Memphis was a clear indication of improvement throughout the year. Becht is back, as are four of his offensive lineman plus leading RB Abu Sama from 2023. The Cyclones have more than enough talent to build on last year's 7-5 campaign by at least a win, and are worthy of a sprinkle at 10-1 to win the conference.

WILL HILL

COLORADO UNDER 5.5 WINS (+120)

The team that dominated headlines and social media last September is back. The concerning thing for this year's outlook, however, was everything that has happened since last September. Despite a 3-0 start a year ago, Deion's team limped to a 4-8 record, and struggled to keep QB Shadeur Sanders healthy behind a bad offensive line. The schedule gets tougher this year, and besides their opener against North Dakota St, there aren't many games where they're going to be heavily favored. Colorado was also one of the more fortunate teams last year in the turnover column, as they netted a +9 margin over 12 games. If Colorado gets off to a bad start, things could go sideways for a brash team that will get everyone's best shot.

MICHIGAN UNDER 9 WINS (-115)

So much of football is about the quarterback, and the coach. Coming off capturing an elusive national title, Michigan's head coach bolted back to the NFL, and their quarterback was drafted 10th overall. Without Jim Harbaugh and JJ McCarthy, what's left? Well, only seven returning starters to be exact, as a dozen other players from last year's team will now be playing on Sundays in the NFL. The Wolverines climbed the mountain last year, but with all the talent they lost, staying atop the mountain without the fiery Harbaugh is too much to ask.

SEAN GREEN

SYRACUSE OVER 7 WINS (-120) & WIN ACC (100-1)

There is a lot of excitement around the Orange this season and it starts with incoming QB Kyle McCord from Ohio State coming off an 11-1 season as a starter only losing to eventual national champion Michigan. New head coach Fran Brown takes over coaching duties and it's not crazy to project their defense will take a jump up.

The real reason I'm high on the Orange this year is their schedule. You'd have to imagine a Syracuse alumni was drawing up the schedule the

way things break for them this year. Four home games in a row to start off, which is ideal for breaking in a new HC and QB. October 12 at NC State is the first time they'll be a dog and they may not be an underdog for the rest of the year until at home against Miami in the last game of the season. They avoid Clemson, Florida State and Louisville, three of the top four favorites in the conference. Speaking of that final game against Miami in the Carrier Dome, that could very well be for a spot in the ACC Championship and we'll be thanking our lucky stars we got that 100-1 ticket sitting in our pocket.

UCLA UNDER 5 WINS (-115)

Even before DeShaun Foster went viral for his hilariously awkward press introduction I was looking to fade the Bruins this season. Let's start with the fact that former HC Chip Kelly willingly went from being a head coach to downgrading to an OC in conference. Why did Kelly leave this former storied franchise? One would have to believe he feels they can't keep up in the transfer portal and NIL days of college football. If Kelly doesn't believe in the Bruins, why should bettors?

Even if UCLA is able to cobble together some momentum under first year HC Foster, they face arguably the toughest travel schedule in college football history. They start off the season at Hawaii which I don't think will be as easy of a game as the line suggests and could be an upset win for the Rainbow Warriors. Then look at this run: October 5 at Penn State, then back to the West Coast October 12 for Minnesota, then back to the East Coast October 19 for Rutgers. They also have travel spots against teams with impressive historical home edges like LSU and Washington. The Bruins will top out at three wins, maybe four if they're lucky.

DUSTIN SWEDELSON

OLE MISS OVER 9.5 WINS (-115) & WIN SEC (+650)

After getting smoked by No. 2 Georgia 52-17 last year, Lane Kiffin said "We've got to recruit at a higher level." He added, "We've signed one five-star, they've signed 24. It kind of (does) show up at some point. We would have to recruit at a better level. Do a better job of recruiting."

The Ole Miss boosters have since put their money where Kiffin's mouth is and filled major needs in the transfer portal, especially on defense. Former Texas A&M DL and five-star recruit Walter Nolen will make an immediate impact alongside Florida DE transfer Princely Umanmielen, who was second team All-SEC last year with seven sacks. They brought in a bevy of options at RB to replace Quinshon Judkins who left for Ohio State in New Mexico's Jacorey Croskey-Merritt and Miami's Henry Parrish Jr. The offensive line was beefed with two Washington transfers after the Huskies won the Joe Moore Award for the nation's top offensive line.

QB Jaxson Dart is in his third season with the Rebels and returns three of his top four receivers from a year ago. The more balanced looking Ole Miss squad will benefit from a schedule that has them hosting Georgia and Oklahoma. Their toughest road test will be October 12 at LSU. A win that won't show up in the record, but plays into this bet, is that they don't have to play Alabama this year.

Jaxson Dart





Cade McNamara

JARED SMITH

OKLAHOMA UNDER 7.5 WINS (+100)

I'm not sure anyone will have a tougher transition year than the Sooners. OU loses seven starters on offense including the entire OL, all-conference WR Drake Stoops, and signal-caller Dillon Gabriel who transferred to Oregon. OC Jeff Lebby also left to become the head coach at Mississippi State. OU hired from within and promoted analyst Seth Littrell to OC. Littrell was HC at North Texas for seven seasons and went a dismal 0-5 in bowl games. He called plays in the Alamo Bowl at the end of last season but OU was shutout in the fourth quarter and lost 38-24 to Arizona. So I have major questions about the Sooners offense this season. The defense should be a top-15 unit again under Brent Venables and will keep them in the mix, but I have doubts about them holding up in the weekly SEC gauntlet, and I have even more doubts about Venables as a game manager. The schedule-makers did the Sooners no favors either, playing six of the top eight in the conference.

TIM MURRAY

UCLA UNDER 5 WINS (-115)

New head coach DeShaun Foster did not inspire much confidence during his press conference at Big Ten Media Days, but that is not the reason I am going under UCLA's win total. This win total has been on the move throughout the summer. The Bruins were dealt a rough hand when Chip Kelly left in February to take the Ohio State offensive coordinator job. In December, rival USC poached defensive coordinator D'Anton Lynn away for the same position. The Bruins visit LSU during the non-conference portion of their schedule and play Oregon, Penn State, Nebraska, Iowa, and USC during conference play. The Bruins face one of the most difficult schedules in the country this year. It would be an impressive feat if Foster led UCLA to bowl eligibility in his first season in Los Angeles and I do not expect that to happen.

IOWA OVER 8 WINS (-115)

The offense can't be any worse, right? Iowa finally made a change at offensive coordinator as Kirk Ferentz replaced his son, Brian, with former Western Michigan head coach Tim Lester. Lester was the head coach of the Broncos from 2017-22 and spent last year on the Green Bay Packers coaching staff. QB Cade McNamara is back after dealing with injuries last year and Iowa added Northwestern QB Brendan Sullivan in the transfer portal. Last year's quarterback play dropped off a cliff when McNamara got hurt.

Defensively, Iowa returns 86% of its production, second-best in the country according to SP+. Defensive coordinator Phil Parker enters his 13th season as Ferentz's defensive coordinator and is one of the top coordinators in the country. Lastly, Iowa's schedule is very manageable. The Hawkeyes will only be a clear underdog in one game (at Ohio State on Oct. 5) and they avoid Oregon, Michigan, Penn State, and USC in Big Ten play.

HOUSTON UNDER 2.5 CONFERENCE WINS (-140)

Houston's win total has been a market that has been pounded this summer. Instead of playing Under 3.5 wins, DraftKings Sportsbook offers a conference win total market. Year 1 for Willie Fritz is going to be a challenge for the Cougars. Houston has a top-10 most difficult schedule in the country. The Cougars will play five of the top seven teams in the Big 12 and do not play one of the worst teams in the Big 12, Arizona State. Houston will likely be an underdog in every conference game including a road trip to Provo on November 30 to face BYU. Houston only won two Big 12 games last year and I do not expect them to top that number in 2024.

DUKE UNDER 2.5 CONFERENCE WINS (-130)

Similar to Houston, Duke's win total has been bet down from 6.5 to 5.5 over the summer. The Blue Devils have a chance to go 4-0 in the non-conference portion of the schedule with only one game being a true "toss-up" at Northwestern. In the ACC portion, the Blue Devils could be an underdog in all eight ACC games.

Manny Diaz takes over for Mike Elko after Elko departed for Texas A&M. Additionally, QB Riley Leonard (Notre Dame), RB Jordan Waters (NC State), DE RJ Oben (Notre Dame), and DE Aeneas Peebles (Virginia Tech) all transferred. Duke did add QB Maalik Murphy from Texas in the portal and he is certainly an intriguing prospect. But, the Blue Devils return just 10 starters and face six of the top eight teams according to the futures board. Additionally, Duke does not have a rest advantage in any game this year. Both of Duke's opponents are also coming off of a bye when the Blue Devils have their two bye weeks. Duke could challenge for bowl eligibility but three conference wins should be more challenging to achieve.

VSIN CONFERENCE FUTURE

**BEST
BETS**

PAULY HOWARD

BOISE STATE TO WIN MOUNTAIN WEST (-110)

Boise State lost six games a year ago and still won the league. They have made the title game in six of the last seven years and are picked to win the league for the 14th straight year.

We hope for improved QB play and the main concern is Fresno State, who went 9-4 last year, but the loss of head coach Jeff Tedford is big. Many have Boise State as a playoff team, which pays 5-1.

ZACHARY COHEN

UTAH TO WIN BIG 12 (+320)

I was all over Utah in last year's guide, but Cam Rising and Brant Kuithe never suited up for the Utes. Well, both of them are 100% healthy heading into this season. Utah also added USC transfer Dorian Singer, who had 66 catches for 1,105 yards and six touchdowns when he played for Arizona two seasons ago. Utah now has an offense that will be on par with the defense, which gave up only 19.3 points per game in 2023 and returns nine players with starting experience.

Also, Utah no longer has to battle with some of the top Pac-12 programs anymore. The Utes should find life to be a lot easier in the Big 12. Sure, road games against Oklahoma State and Colorado will present challenges, but I trust Kyle Whittingham more than any head coach in college football. And I'm not sure he's ever had a team this talented.

I'd simply be stunned if this team doesn't win 10 or 11 games, and I don't see anybody in this conference giving the Utes a game in Arlington.

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

WYOMING TO WIN MOUNTAIN WEST (14-1)

Craig Bohl retired in the offseason and left the program in the hands of defensive coordinator Jay Sawvel. The Cowboys bring back 13 starters this season, a majority of which come on Sawvel's side of the ball. They finished 46th in opponent EPA per play (0.003), 30th in opponent EPA per rush and the unit allowed just 5.2 yards per play last season. The continuity should allow this team to match the production from last year. On the other side of the ball, the offensive line brings back four starters, and the program's top three rushers from last season are back as well. Wyoming makes just three road trips in conference play, the most challenging of which is at Colorado State. It gets Boise State and Fresno State at home. In my opinion, this price does not reflect the true odds of the Cowboys winning the Mountain West this season.



Chris Klieman

DUSTIN SWEDELSON

KANSAS STATE TO WIN BIG 12 (+400)

The Big 12 feels like a country whose overlords have backed out and left the land up for grabs to the natives. Without Texas and Oklahoma hanging over the league, this conference is wide open. If you were to power rank the coaches remaining in the Big 12, Kansas State's Chris Klieman would be in the top three, with a strong case for No. 1. Week in and week out, few coaches in the country are as reliable as Klieman. Since arriving in Manhattan in 2019, Kansas State has the best cover rate, 65% (39-21-3), in all of college football. Sophomore quarterback Avery Johnson and running back DJ Giddens (1,226 Yards, 10 TD) give Klieman his most dangerous backfield of his tenure in the Little Apple. With seven starters returning to a defense that allowed 21 points per game, the Wildcats are in a great spot to steal the new-look Big 12.

MIAMI TO WIN ACC (+400)

The U will never be back, but it can win this version of the ACC. Florida State and Clemson have dominated this league, combining to win 11 of the last 12 ACC titles. Florida State is still complaining about missing the playoff last year and has to replace its top QB, two WRs, TE and RB. Clemson has decided it wants to handcuff itself by not utilizing the transfer portal to improve. That leaves the ACC title susceptible to get taken.

Despite the entire country recruiting Miami's backyard for offensive weapons, it has been a long time since the Hurricanes had this much legitimate firepower on offense. The two headliners are QB Cam Ward and RB Damien Martinez coming in from Washington State and Oregon State, respectively. Ward brings as much experience as any QB in the country to Coral Gables. The two-time transfer has thrown for 13,874 career passing yards and 135 combined TDs in his four year career. Martinez is coming off back-to-back seasons of averaging 6.1 yards per carry and at least 900 rushing yards.

Add those two to an offense that returns reliable passing weapons in Xavier Restrepo and Jacolby George, a strong offensive line and a defense that will solve its secondary concerns in the transfer portal. Even Mario Cristobal will have a hard time screwing this up in 2024.

ADAM BURKE

APPALACHIAN STATE TO WIN SUN BELT (+275)

This is a team that has won at least nine games every season but two since joining FBS in 2014 and all of the pieces are back to be special once again. Returning QB Joey Aguilar is a top-five passer in program history after one season. Kanye Roberts is a great running back who averaged 5.7 yards per carry and likely learned a lot from Nate Noel, who is now in the SEC.

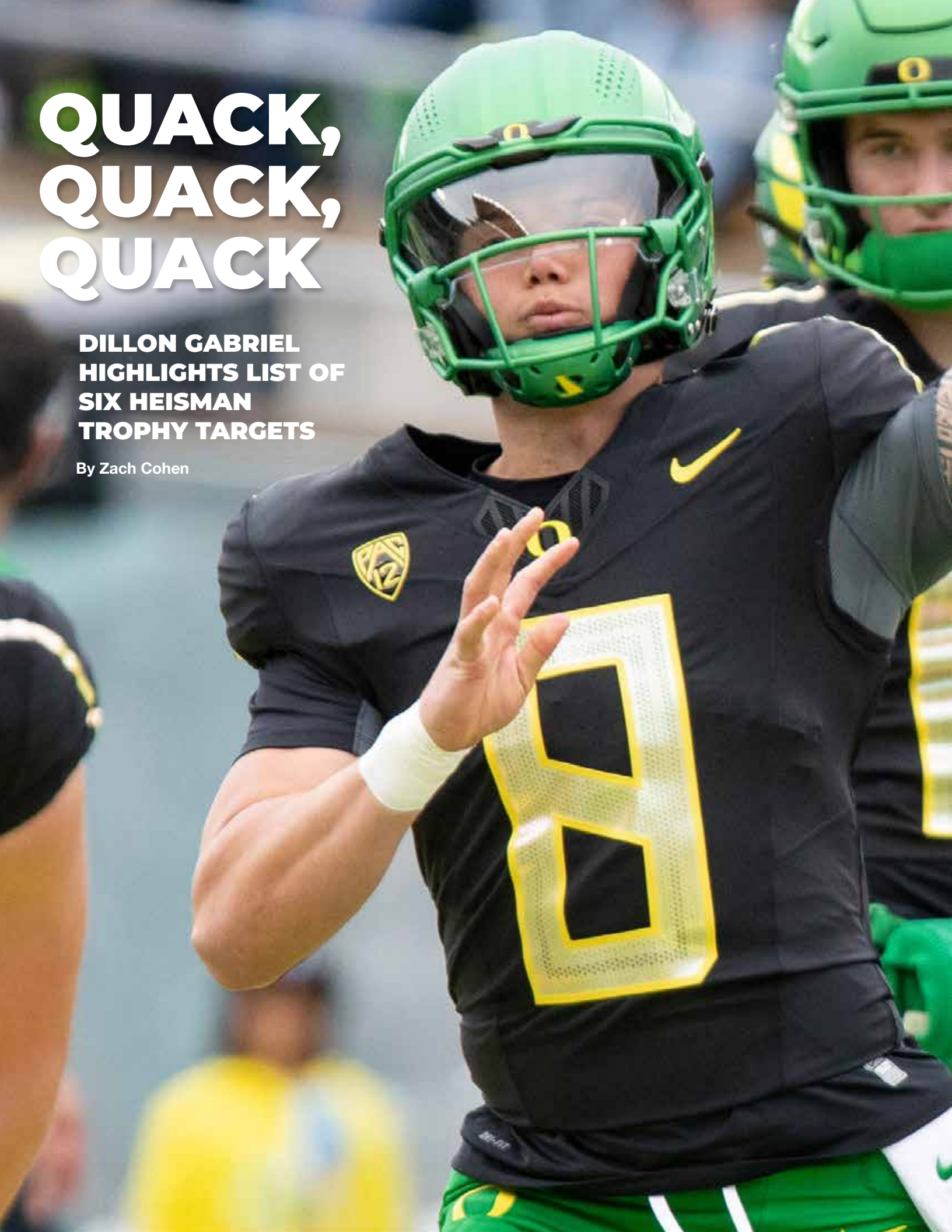
The App State defense finished outside the top 50 in yards per play for the first time in their FBS history. I can't see that happening again and have them power-rated at least 3.5 points better than any other team in the conference. They avoid Texas State and Troy in conference regular season action and I have them favored in every conference game by at least 3.5 points.

The bye weeks are well-timed (Weeks 8 and 12) and top contenders in the East Division like Coastal Carolina and James Madison are replacing far more than App State will be.

QUACK, QUACK, QUACK

**DILLON GABRIEL
HIGHLIGHTS LIST OF
SIX HEISMAN
TROPHY TARGETS**

By Zach Cohen



Jayden Daniels took home the Heisman Trophy award last season. Daniels threw for 3,812 yards with 40 touchdowns and only four interceptions for LSU, and he also added another 1,134 yards and 10 touchdowns on the ground. Daniels, who the Washington Commanders selected with the No. 2 pick in the 2024 NFL Draft, was the most electric dual-threat quarterback in all of college football. That was ultimately enough for him to edge out Oregon's Bo Nix, Washington's Michael Penix Jr. and Ohio State's Marvin Harrison Jr., despite the fact that the Tigers were just 9-3 in the regular season.

As we start looking at the upcoming season, Daniels' win in what was merely an above-average season for LSU can't be taken lightly. This award is usually reserved for players that perform at high levels on the very best teams in the nation. Now, there might be some wiggle room in the voting, making it hard to rule out some of the more exciting players that won't be playing for true College Football Playoff contenders. Players that play for teams that lose three or four games might be in play, especially with teams playing tougher schedules in the new college football landscape. But one thing that feels certain is that the player that wins this award will probably be throwing passes.

The Heisman Trophy has now gone to a quarterback in 20 of the last 24 seasons. That's something that you have to factor in when looking to get involved in this market. This has really become a quarterback-only award. The last non-quarterback to win the Heisman was Alabama wideout DeVonta Smith, who caught 117 passes for 1,857 yards and 23 touchdowns in 2020. Smith was also the best player on a Crimson Tide team that went on to win the College Football Playoff.

Realistically, it's hard to envision a receiver putting up another year quite like that — at least at the Power Four level. The same also goes for anybody at the running back position. Colorado wide receiver/cornerback Travis Hunter is the first non-quarterback on the odds board heading into this season, but 23 quarterbacks are listed above him. That said, we're going to primarily focus on the signal callers here, but I'll include one position player for those looking for the ultimate dart throw.

Now that we have that out of the way, let's get into the fun stuff. Here are some of my favorite Heisman Trophy betting options, including a chalkier pick, a value pick, some dark horses and the non-quarterback.

BEST CHALK OPTION

QB DILLON GABRIEL (+800), OREGON DUCKS

By the end of the college football season, Gabriel is going to turn 24 years old. So, if you've been thinking that he's been around forever, it's because he has. It feels like ages ago that Gabriel threw for 3,653 yards with 29 touchdowns and only seven picks in his first season with UCF. That was back in 2019.

And Gabriel was most recently throwing passes for Oklahoma. Last year, Gabriel threw

for 3,660 yards, 30 touchdowns and only six interceptions for the Sooners. He also rushed for 373 yards and 12 touchdowns.

Many people liked Gabriel as a value play to win the Heisman Trophy last year. He was playing for an Oklahoma team that seemed like it had an outside shot at making the College Football Playoff. The Sooners ultimately went 10-2 in the regular season, which wasn't quite good enough for them to achieve that. However, Gabriel undoubtedly did his part, as the lefty gunslinger was the leader of an Oklahoma squad that was 11th in the nation in EPA per play on offense. The Sooners were also seventh in the nation in Dropback EPA per play.

All in all, Gabriel's play under center has been tremendous for most of his college career. That's why it's easy to be excited about him playing with the best supporting cast he has ever had. Gabriel wisely decided to transfer to Oregon after last season. The Ducks trail only Ohio State in the odds to win the Big Ten, and Oregon is also fourth on the odds board when it comes to winning the College Football Playoff. Dan Lanning has built a powerhouse in Eugene, and Gabriel is about to reap all the benefits.

The Ducks should have a top-five offensive line this year and there might not be a team in the nation with a better group of receivers. Tez Johnson is the best of the returning pass catchers, but there's also help coming by way of internal development, the transfer portal and highly-regarded freshmen. Add all of that to the fact that Will Stein is one of the best offensive coordinators in the country and Gabriel should put up huge numbers for an elite football team. That's a recipe for a Heisman-winning season.

BEST VALUE PLAY

QB NICO IAMALEAVA (18-1), TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS

Iamaleava isn't being priced as one of the true favorites to win the Heisman Trophy, but that's only because we haven't seen much of him. However, in the Cheez-It Citrus Bowl, we saw Iamaleava go 12 for 19 for 151 yards and one passing touchdown against Iowa, and he also added another 27 yards and three scores on the ground. That was a Hawkeyes defense that was 17th in the nation in EPA per play allowed and gave up fewer points per game (13.2) than all but three teams in college football. That said, this 6'6" dual-threat quarterback is ready to do big things in 2024.

Iamaleava was a high-profile recruit who chose Tennessee over the likes of Alabama, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Ohio State, Oregon and USC. Absolutely everybody wanted to get their hands on him, but he ended up choosing to play in Josh Heupel's high-powered offense. Just two years ago, we saw what a highly-talented quarterback can do in this system, as Hendon Hooker threw for 3,135 yards with 27 touchdowns and only two interceptions in 2022. He also rushed for 430 yards and five scores. Well, Iamaleava has a lot more in common with Hooker than Joe Milton III.

It just isn't out of the realm of possibility that Iamaleava will use his big arm and lively legs to put up big numbers in his first year under center. Tennessee is just going to have to win some games in a very competitive SEC. But the Volunteers have a win total of 8.5 this season, and the Over is heavily juiced. If this is a nine-win team and Iamaleava lives up to the hype, it's likely he'll be in the conversation here.

Nico Iamaleava





Miller Moss

DARK HORSES

QBS MILLER MOSS (40-1) & JAYDEN MAIAVA (50-1), USC TROJANS

I did something similar with the Alabama quarterbacks last year. The Tide hadn't yet decided on a starting quarterback, but I felt good about them producing a Heisman Trophy contender. So, I put a little something on all of them. And that ended up getting me a good price on Jalen Milroe, who had his chances of winning. Well, I feel the same way about Lincoln Riley and the Trojans this year. I'm not sure if it'll be Moss or Maiava, but I don't really care. The reality is that three quarterbacks have won the Heisman in the explosive Riley offense, and I just don't see how you can rule out the possibility of it happening again.

Sure, the Trojans are playing in a competitive Big Ten conference this year, but there's a ton of talent in place and plenty of reason for optimism. For starters, in each of Riley's seven seasons as a head coach, his teams have had top-10 scoring offenses. And with the weapons he has in his offense — like the electric Zachariah Branch — this season, it's hard to see that changing. But the defense should be a lot better this season, with D'Anton Lynn taking over on that side of the ball. Lynn is considered a defensive mastermind and should quickly fix things for USC. If he does, the Trojans should flirt with nine or 10 wins and make a run at one of the final spots in the College Football Playoff.

If it's Moss that wins the job, the Trojans are starting a player that they have seen succeed in their system. Last year, he threw for 372 yards and six touchdowns in a DIRECTV Holiday Bowl win over Louisville. He can make every throw in the book and has comfortability after having spent the last two years with Riley. However, it'd probably be a little better if Maiava steals the job. His odds are a bit longer and he has a lot more upside as a dual-threat quarterback. Maiava was a star for UNLV last year and a lot of teams were interested in his services as a transfer portal option.

QB CADE KLUBNIK (50-1), CLEMSON TIGERS

It wasn't long ago that Dabo Swinney was comparing Klubnik to Deshaun Watson, who was a two-time Davey O'Brien Award and Manning Award winner and led the Tigers to a national championship. Klubnik was a highly regarded recruit coming out of high school, and many thought that his combination of passing accuracy and the ability to move the chains with his legs would make him a star at the college level. So far, the early returns have been a little disappointing. But Klubnik is still an impressive player and he should have a much better understanding of how to utilize his talent in his second full season under center.

If Clemson's offensive line play is a little better than it was a year ago, Klubnik could surprise some people by working his way back into the Heisman mix. Many people pegged Klubnik as a dark horse to win the award heading into last season, but perhaps they were a year early. This will be Year 2 of Klubnik playing in Garrett Riley's system, which promised a more modern-looking offense and under-

delivered. Maybe with a better group of pass catchers, Riley will be able to open up the playbook and let Klubnik cook.

The Tigers are likely going to be in the mix to win the ACC, which certainly doesn't hurt. Clemson gets Georgia in the opening week of the season, but every other game on the schedule is winnable — including a road game against Florida State on October 5th. Well, 10 or 11 wins and good individual numbers should make Klubnik a household name again. The Clemson brand doesn't hurt either.

NON-QUARTERBACK

RB DONOVAN EDWARDS (100-1), MICHIGAN

I have to reiterate that I think this award is going to a quarterback, so betting on a running back or receiver might be lighting your hard-earned money on fire. However, if forced to pick a skill position player, it's hard to find a better option than Edwards. Jim Harbaugh might be gone, but Michigan is going to remain a run-first team under Sherrone Moore. That should mean a ton of touches for Edwards, who no longer has Blake Corum in front of him on the depth chart.

Edwards had a pretty disappointing 2023 season, but he reminded everybody what he is capable of by rushing for 104 yards and two scores on only six carries against Washington in the championship.

Edwards likely won't be seeing less than double digits in carries very often this season, and he'll be running behind an offensive line that should be very good. The Wolverines lost most of last year's group up front, but they did a good job in hitting the portal. And I generally trust this program to be tough up front. That should mean some big games for Edwards, who is a home-run hitter out of the backfield.

With Michigan's defense once again expected to be outstanding, it's just hard to rule out the possibility of the defending champs making a run at the Big Ten and earning a spot in the College Football Playoff. If that happens, somebody on offense will get some mainstream love. Well, this isn't a team in which you'd expect that player to be the quarterback. So, Edwards could get credit for carrying the Michigan offense.

DOWN-AND-DIRTY

THE MAKING OF POSITIONAL POWER RATINGS By Adam Burke

The process of creating a rating system for college football teams is different for everybody. It can be as detailed or basic as the creator wants it to be and the form and function will also vary. The vast majority of people who bet on sports won't have any ratings system at all or will simply crowdsource opinions from the ones that already exist.

There is nothing wrong with that and your process for coming to a wager should be whatever makes you confident and comfortable. However, your process should also be flexible. If bets aren't going your way or you are consistently taking bad numbers because the line moved against you, it would be a good idea to consider some changes.

Like everything else with present-day college football, it is getting increasingly more difficult to pin down players and teams. Continuity is almost non-existent, as players and coaches rack up travel miles by moving all over the country. Also, transfers are moving from the FCS ranks to the Group of Five and Power Four ranks, while Group of Five players are also leveling up to Power Four. Players that had success at lower levels aren't a guarantee to have success at the highest level or in a new scheme.

So, creating your own set of college football power ratings might seem like a real challenge. Like I said, you can be as detailed or as basic as you want to be. My chief goal in using power ratings in my handicapping is to get some line value by betting early in the week. If my line is +4 and the line comes out at +7.5, I want to take that +7.5 and then see that line move closer to +4. But, if I don't know where I think the line should be, then it is much harder to justify betting earlier in the week.

The truth is a very high percentage of football bettors only bet on game day or the day before. There may only be a few instances per season where not getting the best of the line or better than where the line closes makes the difference, but the practice of getting closing line value, or CLV, is one of the best indicators of future betting success. That means you get a better line than what the line is at kickoff.

I have friends and colleagues in the industry, including our very own Tyler Shoemaker and his T Shoe Index, and Steve Makinen, whose power ratings and game lines are available on our website, who have extremely detailed power ratings or betting models. For the purposes of our College Football Betting Guide, though, I want to illustrate a down-and-dirty power ratings setup that can help you this season.

These are what I'd call "Positional Power Ratings" and are based on a scale of roughly 40-100. The worst teams in the nation will be closer to 40. The best teams will be closer to 100. Quarterback, offensive line, defensive line, coaching/special teams are worth a maximum of 15 points each (60 total). Running back, wide receiver, linebackers, and defensive backs are worth a maximum of 10 points each (40 total). The stronger the position group, the higher the value. I determine these values based on my perceptions of national strength and conference strength, but that's where the art part comes in against the science part.

Then, I take Team vs. Team and apply my home-field advantage numbers to put together a spread on that game. If my line is off from the market, I will consider that accordingly.

As the season goes along, I will adjust team values accordingly based on the closing line, the line movement, and the game result from studying the box score. In the lead-up to the season, I'm using these to look for season win total bets.

Georgia (95) is the top team in the nation for me, but since I did this exercise with them last season, let's look at the No. 2 Ohio State Buckeyes.

OHIO STATE

QUARTERBACK (13.5/15)

Will Howard might be the perfect QB for Chip Kelly's offense, but I don't know that yet. He accumulated just over 3,000 total yards with 34 total TD and 10 INT. The Buckeyes are deep with freshman Air Noland and transfer Julian Sayin. I wouldn't call this an elite group, but it's certainly a good one.

RUNNING BACK (10/10)

A backfield with TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins might be the best in the nation. Henderson will cross 3,000 rushing yards for his career this season even if he shares a lot of carries with Judkins, who has 31 TD and over 2,700 yards to his name in just two college seasons. The Buckeye backfield has 63 career TD between these two and Kelly's run scheme. That merits a top grade.

WIDE RECEIVER (10/10)

Carnell Tate and Brandon Inniss are actually the wild cards here. We know Emeka Egbuka is solid and freshman Jeremiah Smith absolutely looks like the real deal and next big star at WR. The Buckeyes do need a WR3 to emerge and also lost a very good TE in Cade Stover. Still, the upside and potential of this unit is tremendous and so is WR coach Brian Hartline.

OFFENSIVE LINE (12.5/15)

With all the options at QB, I think one will emerge there. This is the position group with the most questions to me. The Buckeyes were 79th in yards per carry last season and tied for 46th in sacks. Alabama C Steh McLaughlin and three returning starters should help.

DEFENSIVE LINE (14/15)

JT Tuimoloua is a beast and Jack Sawyer is one of many who stayed around in hopes of getting some gold pants for beating Michigan and possibly winning a title. Tyleik Williams is a great run-stopper. This was a top-25 run defense last season under Jim Knowles and should be again.

LINEBACKER (9/10)

Ohio State lost tackle leaders Steele Chambers and Tommy Eichenberg, but I think they're more athletic at linebacker for this season. Cody Simon had 12 tackles in the loss to Missouri in the Cotton Bowl and the Buckeyes have converted two safeties to LB.

DEFENSIVE BACKS (10/10)

Ohio State landed star transfer Caleb Downs, who many regarded as the top transfer in the nation. He is the only starter who wasn't one in this secondary last season. The Buckeyes allowed 145 passing yards per game last season, as the Knowles scheme took hold in Year 2. This is in the running for the best secondary in the country.

COACHING/SPECIAL TEAMS (14/15)

Ryan Day can't seem to beat Michigan, but he finally realized that he shouldn't be calling plays. Chip Kelly now has that honor and it was eminently clear what Jim Knowles' scheme can do on defense. The talent is better here, but Day surrendering the play calling might be the biggest upgrade of the offseason for the Buckeyes.

TOTAL: 93/100

To put this into context, here are my top 10 teams:

Georgia 95; Ohio State 93; Oregon 91.5; Texas 90; Alabama 89; Notre Dame 86; Ole Miss 86; LSU 85; Florida State 84.5; Penn State 84.5

And my bottom 10 teams:

Temple 44; New Mexico 45; Kent State 45; Kennesaw State 45; FIU 45.5; Akron 46; UTEP 46; Louisiana-Monroe 47; UMass 47; Eastern Michigan 48

MEASURING RECRUITING TALENT

By Steve Makinen

This study should prove more important than ever with the mass realignment we have undergone nationwide for the 2024 season. Measuring a team's talent level numerically should be a great indicator of how teams will assimilate into their new leagues. For instance, the teams moving from the Pac-12 to the Big Ten and Big 12 seem set up for strong success. Alternatively, looking back at last year, the teams that went from the American to the Big 12 were generally overmatched on a talent scale in their new surroundings, and it played out that way on the field.

I will address all of those subjects in this article, including projecting this year's standings for the newly reshaped conferences based SOLELY on the recruiting rankings from 247Sports and a predictive formula that I was able to uncover using regression analysis. This is always an interesting topic, and I have now made it a permanent fixture in my preparations for each coming college season.

2024 PROJECTED STANDINGS USING RECRUITING RANKINGS FOR THE LAST FOUR YEARS

After adding the 2024 rankings from 247Sports.com to my database of the year-by-year recruiting rankings for the FBS teams since 2007, and comparing different options to the actual records and my power ratings that teams closed at in a given season, I was able to determine that the most predictive time frame of a team's success on the field again came when considering its LAST FOUR RECRUITING CLASSES. It was greater than 1-year, 2-year, 3-year, and any special combined formulas I derived using the 1-4-year window.

Recruiting consistency leads to more consistent on-field success. As is the case with any statistical study, there are exceptions to the rule, but knowing what I know from 20+ years in this industry on both sides of the counter, I am still comfortable with using this 4-YEAR TIME WINDOW for analyzing teams' prospects for a season despite the recent recruiting trends. That said, I will continue to analyze the results again each year to stay on top of any new trends forming.

On the next page are the would-be projected standings for the 2024 season for each conference using their combined average rank for their last four recruiting classes (2024, 2023, 2022, 2021). Remember that these projections include NO OTHER factor than the perceived talent level of the players by 247Sports when they signed into each team's recruiting class.

TEAMS THAT DO THE MOST/LEAST WITH THEIR RECRUITING CLASSES

Signing a quality recruiting class is only the start of the story. Coaches need to develop the individual talent they acquire and mold them into a functioning unit in order to be successful. While some programs take a modestly rated recruiting class and make a winning program out of it, there are others that take a highly rated class and underachieve on the field. Let's look at some of the programs that have distinctly demonstrated the opposite ends of this spectrum.

The teams below are sorted by the difference between their average national recruiting rankings over the LAST FOUR years as compared to their end-of-year power rating on my scale. As you analyze the merits of why each of these teams appears on the list, be sure to consider which programs have undergone coaching changes in recent years and, as a result, how relevant this info might be for 2024.

TOP 20 TEAMS WHOSE ON-FIELD PERFORMANCE CONSISTENTLY EXCEEDS ITS RECRUITING RATING

As you look at the teams on the "overachieving" list, you'll see a common trend in that three of the top four programs are service academies, a credit to the quality character of kids those teams recruit.

Of the top 10 teams, four are repeat teams from last year. New entries are James Madison and Jacksonville State, recent FBS adds, Oregon State and Western Kentucky.

All but three of the teams on this list are from Group of Five conferences. Only Oregon State (#7), Iowa State (#8), & Wake Forest (#18) represent the Power Four leagues. Truthfully, it's hard to compete consistently for conference titles in the Power Four leagues if you aren't recruiting consistently well. It will be interesting to see how the recruiting efforts of the Pac-12 teams moving into Midwest leagues fare, as recruiting kids/families for games far out of market could prove to be a challenge.

1. JAMES MADISON: Recruit Rank - 131.8, SM PR - 47, Diff: +84.75
2. JACKSONVILLE STATE: Recruit Rank - 132.8, SM PR - 83, Diff: +49.75
3. AIR FORCE: Recruit Rank - 108, SM PR - 64.5, Diff: +43.5
4. TULSA: Recruit Rank - 114, SM PR - 75.5, Diff: +38.5
5. ARMY: Recruit Rank - 117, SM PR - 80, Diff: +37
6. LIBERTY: Recruit Rank - 101.8, SM PR - 65.8, Diff: +36
7. OREGON STATE: Recruit Rank - 71.3, SM PR - 36.8, Diff: +34.5
8. IOWA STATE: Recruit Rank - 53, SM PR - 22, Diff: +31
9. WESTERN KENTUCKY: Recruit Rank - 107.8, SM PR - 77.3, Diff: +30.5
10. LA LAFAYETTE: Recruit Rank - 89.5, SM PR - 59.3, Diff: +30.25
11. SAN JOSE STATE: Recruit Rank - 107.5, SM PR - 77.3, Diff: +30.25
12. MARSHALL: Recruit Rank - 102, SM PR - 72.3, Diff: +29.75
13. COASTAL CAROLINA: Recruit Rank - 94.8, SM PR - 66, Diff: +28.75
14. TROY: Recruit Rank - 102.8, SM PR - 75, Diff: +27.75
15. APPALACHIAN STATE: Recruit Rank - 83.5, SM PR - 57, Diff: +26.5
16. NAVY: Recruit Rank - 121.3, SM PR - 94.8, Diff: +26.5
17. UAB: Recruit Rank - 101.8, SM PR - 75.5, Diff: +26.25
18. WAKE FOREST: Recruit Rank - 67.5, SM PR - 43.5, Diff: +24
19. BOISE STATE: Recruit Rank - 68.5, SM PR - 44.8, Diff: +23.75
20. WYOMING: Recruit Rank - 110.5, SM PR - 86.8, Diff: +23.75

TOP 20 TEAMS WHOSE RECRUITING RATINGS HAVE EXCEEDED THEIR ON-FIELD PERFORMANCE

The programs on this "underachieving" list are those that, more often than not, are forced to fire their coaches due to lack of success. They recruit fairly well but are typically found at or near the bottom of their conference standings. For a second straight season, Rutgers holds the dubious honor of the top spot.

Essentially, the teams on this list don't do nearly as well as what 247sports thought its signees were capable of.

Overall, this list is dominated by Power Four conference schools, who use the lure of playing in big-time college football games to sign good athletes but haven't had the same luck transferred to the field. You might be surprised to see some programs like Michigan State, South Carolina, or Miami on this list, but that's the nature of the beast playing in the country's toughest conferences.

The only three Group of 5 schools you'll find among the top 10 in this collection of underachievers are Florida International (#3), South Florida (#7), and Louisiana Tech (#8).

ACC

CONF RK	TEAM	4-YEAR AVG	NATL RK
1	MIAMI FL	9.50	8
2	CLEMSON	12.25	13
3	FLORIDA ST	17.25	18
4	NORTH CAROLINA	21.25	20
5	LOUISVILLE	34.50	31
6	CALIFORNIA	42.25	38
7	VIRGINIA TECH	45.00	44
8	STANFORD	46.75	46
9	NC STATE	46.75	47
10	PITTSBURGH	49.75	50
11	SMU	50.00	51
12	GEORGIA TECH	51.00	53
13	BOSTON COLLEGE	54.50	58
14	VIRGINIA	56.25	59
15	SYRACUSE	57.75	60
16	DUKE	62.00	66
17	WAKE FOREST	69.50	70

BIG TEN

CONF RK	TEAM	4-YEAR AVG	NATL RK
1	OHIO ST	3.25	3
2	OREGON	8.75	7
3	USC	10.00	10
4	PENN ST	14.25	14
5	MICHIGAN	16.00	15
6	NEBRASKA	26.25	23
7	MICHIGAN ST	30.50	25
8	WISCONSIN	30.50	26
9	UCLA	32.25	27
10	MARYLAND	35.50	32
11	WASHINGTON	38.25	34
12	IOWA	38.25	35
13	INDIANA	43.00	39
14	MINNESOTA	43.75	41
15	RUTGERS	48.25	49
16	PURDUE	51.75	56
17	ILLINOIS	58.75	62
18	NORTHWESTERN	64.50	68

AMERICAN ATHLETIC

CONF RK	TEAM	4-YEAR AVG	NATL RK
1	MEMPHIS	62.25	67
2	SOUTH FLORIDA	71.25	72
3	TX-SAN ANTONIO	73.25	74
4	TULANE	74.00	75
5	EAST CAROLINA	81.25	78
6	FLA ATLANTIC	88.00	82
7	NORTH TEXAS	93.00	86
8	TEMPLE	100.50	95
9	UAB	100.50	96
10	RICE	103.25	102
11	TULSA	104.50	104
12	CHARLOTTE	105.50	108
13	ARMY	122.25	131
14	NAVY	123.25	132

CONFERENCE USA

CONF RK	TEAM	4-YEAR AVG	NATL RK
1	LOUISIANA TECH	96.25	89
2	FIU	99.00	93
3	LIBERTY	103.25	101
4	W KENTUCKY	110.25	116
5	NEW MEXICO ST	111.50	118
6	SAM HOUSTON ST	116.25	124
7	UTEP	118.00	126
8	MIDDLE TENN ST	119.50	127
9	JACKSONVILLE ST	129.25	133
10	KENNESAW ST	132.75	134

INDEPENDENTS

CONF RK	TEAM	4-YEAR AVG	NATL RK
1	NOTRE DAME	10.25	11
2	MASSACHUSETTS	109.00	113
3	CONNECTICUT	109.75	114

BIG 12

CONF RK	TEAM	4-YEAR AVG	NATL RK
1	UTAH	32.75	29
2	TCU	37.25	33
3	UCF	41.25	36
4	COLORADO	41.75	37
5	OKLAHOMA ST	43.25	40
6	BAYLOR	44.00	42
7	TEXAS TECH	44.75	43
8	ARIZONA ST	45.75	45
9	WEST VIRGINIA	47.00	48
10	ARIZONA	50.25	52
11	CINCINNATI	51.25	55
12	KANSAS ST	53.75	57
13	HOUSTON	58.50	61
14	KANSAS	59.00	63
15	IOWA ST	59.00	64
16	BYU	61.25	65

MAC

CONF RK	TEAM	4-YEAR AVG	NATL RK
1	TOLEDO	89.75	83
2	BUFFALO	92.50	85
3	MIAMI OHIO	98.25	90
4	C MICHIGAN	100.50	97
5	E MICHIGAN	101.50	98
6	W MICHIGAN	103.00	100
7	N ILLINOIS	103.50	103
8	BALL ST	106.00	109
9	OHIO U	109.75	115
10	AKRON	111.00	117
11	BOWLING GREEN	112.75	120
12	KENT ST	113.00	121

MOUNTAIN WEST

CONF RK	TEAM	4-YEAR AVG	NATL RK
1	BOISE ST	70.50	71
2	SAN DIEGO ST	72.25	73
3	FRESNO ST	76.75	77
4	COLORADO ST	83.25	79
5	UNLV	93.25	87
6	NEVADA	99.25	94
7	SAN JOSE ST	107.00	110
8	UTAH ST	107.75	112
9	WYOMING	112.75	119
10	NEW MEXICO	114.00	122
11	AIR FORCE	114.75	123
12	HAWAII	120.75	130
1	WASHINGTON ST	68.00	69
2	OREGON ST	74.25	76

SUN BELT

CONF RK	TEAM	4-YEAR AVG	NATL RK
1	COASTAL CAROLINA	86.75	80
2	APPALACHIAN ST	87.75	81
3	ARKANSAS ST	91.00	84
4	SOUTHERN MISS	93.50	88
5	LA LAFAYETTE	98.25	91
6	MARSHALL	98.50	92
7	S ALABAMA	102.00	99
8	GA SOUTHERN	104.50	105
9	TEXAS ST UNIV	105.25	106
10	GEORGIA ST	105.25	107
11	TROY	107.25	111
12	OLD DOMINION	116.50	125
13	JAMES MADISON	120.25	128
14	LA MONROE	120.50	129

SEC

CONF RK	TEAM	4-YEAR AVG	NATL RK
1	ALABAMA	1.50	1
2	GEORGIA	2.50	2
3	LSU	6.00	4
4	TEXAS	7.00	5
5	TEXAS A&M	8.75	6
6	OKLAHOMA	9.50	9
7	FLORIDA	12.00	12
8	AUBURN	16.50	16
9	OLE MISS	17.00	17
10	TENNESSEE	17.25	19
11	MISSOURI	24.75	21
12	ARKANSAS	25.25	22
13	KENTUCKY	27.00	24
14	MISSISSIPPI ST	32.50	28
15	SOUTH CAROLINA	34.50	30
16	VANDERBILT	51.25	54

Only two teams from this group have welcomed new head coaches for 2024, Boston College and Indiana. It will be interesting to follow the direction of those programs in the coming seasons. The other 18 are staying the course for at least one more season, which historically has proven a better way to escape underachievement.

1. VANDERBILT: Recruit Rank - 54, SM PR - 103, Diff: -49
2. STANFORD: Recruit Rank - 39.8, SM PR - 82, Diff: -42.25
3. FLA INTERNATIONAL: Recruit Rank - 87.8, SM PR - 128.5, Diff: -40.75
4. COLORADO: Recruit Rank - 45.3, SM PR - 82.8, Diff: -37.5
5. RUTGERS: Recruit Rank - 50.5, SM PR - 82.3, Diff: -31.75
6. GEORGIA TECH: Recruit Rank - 44.8, SM PR - 73.8, Diff: -29
7. SOUTH FLORIDA: Recruit Rank - 79.8, SM PR - 107.3, Diff: -27.5
8. LOUISIANA TECH: Recruit Rank - 90.3, SM PR - 117.3, Diff: -27
9. MICHIGAN STATE: Recruit Rank - 33.5, SM PR - 60.5, Diff: -27
10. SOUTH CAROLINA: Recruit Rank - 34.5, SM PR - 60.5, Diff: -26
11. MIAMI (FL): Recruit Rank - 11.3, SM PR - 34.8, Diff: -23.5
12. ARKANSAS STATE: Recruit Rank - 90, SM PR - 112.5, Diff: -22.5
13. MARYLAND: Recruit Rank - 29.8, SM PR - 52.3, Diff: -22.5
14. NEBRASKA: Recruit Rank - 25.5, SM PR - 47.8, Diff: -22.25
15. BOSTON COLLEGE: Recruit Rank - 52.5, SM PR - 74.5, Diff: -22
16. INDIANA: Recruit Rank - 46, SM PR - 67.8, Diff: -21.75
17. MASSACHUSETTS: Recruit Rank - 108, SM PR - 129.8, Diff: -21.75
18. SOUTHERN MISS: Recruit Rank - 92.3, SM PR - 112.3, Diff: -20
19. TEMPLE: Recruit Rank - 98.3, SM PR - 117.8, Diff: -19.5
20. COLORADO STATE: Recruit Rank - 86.5, SM PR - 105, Diff: -18.5

TEAMS WHOSE RECRUITING APPEARS TO BE TRENDING IN EACH DIRECTION

The recent success or lack thereof on the recruiting trail for teams figures to have a direct relationship with how they fare on the field in the coming years. Teams whose classes are improving consistently are likely to become more prominent on the national/conference stage, while those whose class strengths are declining could be experiencing downturns in the near future. There are also unique situations where a staff added an unusually highly rated or lowly rated class in a given year instead of typical results. Let's look at teams on both ends on the recruiting momentum spectrum.

20 TEAMS WHOSE RECRUITING RANKINGS ARE TRENDING IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION

BYU (Last three recruiting ranks: 62, 51, 57, prior 11 years avg: 69.3)

The step up to the Big 12 conference has had a good impact on BYU's recruiting rankings recently, and the 57th-ranked class of 2024 is keeping with that tendency. It's not quite Big 12 caliber yet, however, and it needs to keep trending upward for this team to compete for conference titles.

California (Last three ranks: 55, 46, 39)

Moving to the ACC didn't hurt California's first-year recruiting efforts, as the Golden Bears scored their best class in four years. The four-year

average of 42.25 wasn't top half for Pac-12 standards, but it is for ACC figures. Don't be surprised if this team fares better in its new conference.

Charlotte (2024 recruiting rank: 77, prior FBS high: 88)

Including the addition of a transfer QB from Florida, Charlotte's first recruiting class after completing a year of American Athletic Conference action was stellar by program standards. Having never scored higher than an 88 rank before, head coach Biff Poggi landed a 77th ranked class nationally. Doing this consistently would make the 49ers an upper-half AAC team.

Colorado (Last two ranks: 21, 22, prior 2-years avg: 62)

The impact of hiring head coach Deion Sanders was huge on the recruiting trail as he built upon a huge first class in 2023 with an almost equal one this past winter/spring. Colorado's four-year average ranks fourth among its new mates in the Big 12.

Florida (2024 rank: 7, best since 2013)

Billy Napier landed Florida its most highly-rated recruiting class in over a decade since the 2023 season ended. The #7 national ranking used to be commonplace around Gainesville. Not lately, however. This is exactly the momentum the Gators need to become relevant again in the SEC.

Florida State (2024 rank: 11 – highest since 2018)

Like its neighbors to the East in Gainesville, Florida State scored a highly regarded recruiting class this past winter/spring, highlighted by the signing of transfer QB DJ Uiagalelei. Head coach Mike Norvell is building off a huge undefeated regular season and has this program on the cusp of elite again.

Houston (Last three ranks: 51, 48, 52 – prior 5-year average 75.8)

The move to the Big 12 has helped Houston put together its best three-year recruiting classes on record. The four-year average still places the Cougars 13th on the conference list, so there's plenty of work still to be done for new head coach Willie Fritz.

Illinois (Last five ranks: 87, 71, 65, 54, 45)

Fourth-year coach Bret Bielema brought in Illinois' best recruiting class since 2019 this spring and continued a five-year trend of continuous improvement. This program seems to be clearly moving in the right direction.

Kansas (2024 rank: 42, prior 12-year best: 49)

Lance Leipold's Kansas team is winning and building upon that success, as he and his staff put together the best recruiting class the program has scored since 2011. It seems the best could be yet to come for the Jayhawks.

Miami (Last two ranks: 8, 6 – prior 13-year average: 16.6)

I've seen a lot of experts that are high on Miami this year, and despite all of the criticism head coach Mario Cristobal has received for their underachieving ways, on paper, this might now be the most talented team in the ACC for 2024.

Missouri (Last four rank avg: 24.8 – prior five-year average: 43.2)

Moving to the SEC and hiring head coach Eliah Drinkwitz has had a major impact on recruiting at Missouri. The results on the field have improved as well, with the Tigers coming off an 11-win season and Cotton Bowl victory.

NC State (Last three ranks: 76, 49, 27))

Although he is going into his 12th season at NC State, head coach Dave Doeren seems to have flipped a switch the last two offseasons to turn up the Wolfpack's recruiting efforts. This year's rank of 27th is SEC-level, and the addition of transfer QB Grayson McCall should keep this team in contention for 2024 in the ACC.

Oregon (Last seven recruiting rank avg: 9.6, prior 5 years 20.4)

Despite four coaching changes since 2017 and now a move to the Big Ten, recruiting has taken off for Oregon once again after a downturn in the years prior. The Ducks scored a 15-year high ranking of fourth this offseason. With QB Dillon Gabriel under center, are they poised to get back into the national title consideration in the immediate future?

SMU (Last four ranks: 51, 50, 42, 57– prior 11-year avg. rank: 75.2)

With four strong recruiting classes in tow and now a move to the ACC, it sure looks like SMU will be more than competitive in its enhanced surroundings. In fact, on the conference projections chart, the Mustangs check in at #11 of the 17 ACC teams. Not bad for a program that has been at the Group of 5 level for decades.

Texas State (Last two ranks: 87, 79 – prior 11-year average 108.2)

Head coach GJ Kinne has proven to be a terrific hire for Texas State. Not only has he been highly effective in landing key transfers as well as recruits in his first two offseasons for the Bobcats, but the results also showed on the field as his first team went 8-5. At this rate, it would be surprising to see TSU be able to keep him beyond another season or two.

Texas Tech (Last 42 ranks: 72, 46, 35, 26)

Head coach Joey McGuire has the Texas Tech recruiting efforts headed in the right direction, with each of the last three seasons under his watch bettering the prior year. At this rate, the Red Raiders will be the projected winner in the Big 12 next season or the one after that.

Tulane (Last four ranks: 80, 77, 75, 64)

Sometimes, it's only baby steps that are needed in recruiting to make a program better. As you can see, the rankings are climbing slowly but surely for the Green Wave, leaving them in a position to fight for an expanded CFP berth once again.

Tulsa (2024 rank: 75 – prior six-year avg: 110)

Tulsa's recruiting efforts made a quantum leap this offseason under second-year head coach Kevin Wilson. Sometimes, that's all it takes to move up a tier or two in a Group of 5 conference.

UCF (L3 average: 37 – prior 10-years average 68.1)

Head coach Gus Malzahn has taken UCF recruiting to another level in his four years, so much so that the Golden Knights are projected to be third of 16 teams in the Big 12 for 2024.

UTEP (2024 rank: 91, best since 2010)

New head coach Scotty Walden immediately got busy for UTEP and scored the program's best-rated recruiting class in 14 years. The average ranking since 2010 was 122.5, so this group is a huge step up in talent. We'll see if it pays off right away or in the near future.

24 TEAMS WHOSE RECRUITING RANKINGS ARE TRENDING IN A NEGATIVE DIRECTION

Boise State (Last two years ranks 74, 73, prior 12 years no 70+)

This might not seem like a big transformation, but second-year head coach Spencer Danielson has landed Boise State its two lowest-rated recruiting classes since 2010 & prior. This program had become a normal 50s and 60s-rated school. Will back-to-back underachieving classes lead to a drop-off on the field in the coming years? The Broncos are still projected first in the MWC on the conference standings chart, but the margin is slimming.

Boston College (Last four years ranks – 37, 53, 57, 71)

This offseason's recruiting results weren't a great start for new head coach Bill O'Brien's reign at Boston College. I would have expected more, considering his career success in the New England area. For 2024, there might be enough talent and experience back to maintain some level of success, but the recruiting efforts are going to have to pick up if this team is to stay viable in the ACC.

Bowling Green (Last four years rank avg 112.8, prior four-year avg 96.0)

The 2024 season will be Scott Loeffler's sixth at Bowling Green, and he will be bringing back a relatively experienced lineup. However, recent recruiting classes suggest the seven wins achieved last year could be a ceiling type of number for this program in this era.

Buffalo (2024 recruiting rank 117, prior three-year avg 84.3)

Former head coach Maurice Linguist recruited well in his three years at

Buffalo. His teams didn't win on the field, however. The Bulls are looking for the opposite after new head coach Pete Lembo's first class cratered.

Central Michigan (2024 recruiting rank 126, prior three-year avg: 92)
Head Coach Jim McElwain seemingly took the winter and spring off since finishing 5-7 last season, as his program recorded its worst-graded recruiting class on record. That won't help improve a team that has missed out on bowl games the last two seasons.

Cincinnati (Last five years ranks: 40, 42, 48, 55, 60)
Cincinnati is trending in the opposite direction needed to compete in the Big 12.

FIU (Last three years rank avg: 104, prior five-year avg: 79.6)
The weakening of Conference USA around FIU has had a detrimental effect on recruiting efforts. You can see the dramatic fall off the last three years when compared to the prior five, although the current four-year ranking is still second best in the league. I'm not sure lowering the standards because those around you are also being lessened is what a program wants.

Hawaii (Last six years rank avg: 120.7, prior nine-year avg: 94.1)
Not sure why specifically, but it seems that very few highly regarded players are drawn to Hawaii football any longer. One would have thought that prolific passer Timmy Chang coming back as head coach would have made an impact. It hasn't, and the program continues to suffer on the field.

Iowa (Last four years ranks: 24, 38, 41, 50)
There may be an emerging stigma attached to Iowa football due to its lack of offensive effectiveness in recent years. The Hawkeyes and head coach Kirk Ferentz are on a four-year slide for recruiting class scores. With the Big Ten getting better, this team's talent level is not.

LA Lafayette (Last three years ranks: 120, 91, 114 – prior three-year avg: 74.3)
Transitioning out of a huge four-year run under Billy Napier was expected to be tough. While Napier is setting new recruiting standards at Florida, head coach Michael Desormeaux has unfortunately lowered the recruiting standards of ULL in his first three classes. The results showed on the field the last two years. It will probably continue.

Maryland (2024 rank: 54, prior 14-year low: 50)
Yes, you're reading that accurately, Maryland scored its worst recruiting class in at least 15 years following back-to-back 8-5 seasons under Mike Locksley. With this Big Ten getting significantly better and deeper this season, this was no time to slip up and lose momentum.

Michigan (Last five years rank best 12th, prior eight-years, five top 8's)
Despite three straight CFP appearances, Michigan has been unable to capitalize on the recruiting trail. The loss of head coach Jim Harbaugh hurt since the national title win, but the Wolverines' 2024 class ranked 19th, very low by program standards, and with the addition of USC and Oregon, the current Big Ten conference projection by recruiting rankings is fifth.

MDST (Last four years rank avg: 119.5, prior eight-year avg: 90.5)
Falling recruiting rankings were just one reason it was time for Middle Tennessee State to move on from veteran coach Rick Stockstill. His last three classes reflected a new era of the recruiting game he couldn't keep up with. Unfortunately, new head coach Derek Mason seems to have continued that trend.

Northern Illinois (2024 rank: 116, prior 14-year low: 114)
Even coming off a first bowl win in many years, Northern Illinois head coach Thomas Hammock couldn't close the deal with recruits. The result was a 15-year low ranking this year for the Huskies. The last three years have also been plus-100, so it doesn't seem that the bowl-winning success will last.

Navy (Last five years rank avg: 123.5)
For anyone wondering why Navy's football program has fallen on hard times, look no further. Prior to 2019, the eight-year recruiting average was around 103, and the Navy staff always did well in developing those players. This new task is a little tougher. This ranking is EASILY the worst in the American Athletic Conference and makes the job of new head coach Brian Newberry a challenge.

New Mexico (Last two years ranks: 125, 128)
New Mexico has never been a hotbed for top college football talent, but I would have thought new head coach Bronco Mendenhall would have had a bigger impact on this year's recruiting efforts than he did. No wonder this team's win total is a measly 2 at DraftKings.

New Mexico State (Last three years ranks: 86, 118, 130)
Pardon the pun, but head coach Jerry Kill's decision to retire "killed" recruiting efforts at NMSU. An enthusiastic Kill brought in a great class two years ago, and that group led the Aggies to two bowl games. Don't be surprised if this team hits a wall this year.

North Carolina (2024 rank: 32, prior 11-year low: 32)
North Carolina has revived its football program under head coach Mack Brown, so why the poorly-rated recruiting class this year by program standards? This coming off a 2023 class rated just 28th. Perhaps UNC is bound to decline in 2024.

Northwestern (Last five years: 47, 49, 56, 60, 93)
With Northwestern's high education standards, it's never as easy to recruit there as at some other Big Ten schools. That said, former head coach Pat Fitzgerald typically fared well at getting the most out of player development. Now, with David Braun in charge of a recruiting trend moving steadily downward, the 2024 season becomes a major challenge.

San Jose St (Last six years: Five worse than 110th, prior five-year avg: 84.2)
Recruiting efforts have dropped off severely at San Jose State and now the Spartans start anew under head coach Ken Niumatalolo with just seven starters back. It wouldn't be outlandish to see things go south for the Spartans in 2024.

UCLA (2024 rank: 44, worst since 2011)
UCLA's first recruiting class for Deshaun Foster bottomed out, which is not great timing considering the move to the Big Ten figures to bring enhanced competition. To put the #44 ranking into perspective, the average ranking for the Bruins since 2011 was 22.

Virginia (Last four years ranks: 32, 59, 65, 69)
The recruiting classes at Virginia have fallen off in each of the last three years from the season prior, and that doesn't bode well for improving or competing at any respectable level in the ACC.

Washington State (Last five years ranks: 56, 59, 62, 71, 80)
There has to be some real concern with Washington State football right now, as not only have the Cougars been left without a bonafide conference, but the impacts on recruiting have been felt as well, with four straight classes rated worse than the prior.

West Virginia (2024 rank: 61 – worst on record)
Head coach Neal Brown's West Virginia team had a strong 9-4 season last year, a program best since 2016. That makes it all the more surprising that the Mountaineers struck out on the recruiting/transfer trail in the offseason. They are still in relatively good shape as far as the Big 12 is concerned, but this isn't a ranking that they want to see start to trend.

HOME-FIELD ADVANTAGE: SOMETHING IS BETTER THAN NOTHING

By Adam Burke

How much does home-field advantage matter in college football? I don't know. You don't know either. Accounting for all of the variables and producing a statistically significant sample size in the current landscape of college football is impossible. But, that doesn't mean that we want to simply guess what it means or what it's worth.

My belief is that the value of home-field advantage is both quantitative and qualitative. With the help of VSiN's Jason Latus and Steve Makinen, I've nailed down the quantitative part of the equation, at least as it pertains to my process.

I made a change to my process this season. The default home-field advantage remained two points, but I changed from a five-year sample size to a three-year sample size for determining a team's HFA. I'm using Straight Up (SU) + Against The Spread (ATS) win percentage at home as my criteria.

Why the change? For starters, we're further removed from COVID, so things have been more "normal." Also, with the portal, coaching carousel, and all the other things that lead to personnel changes, five years simply felt too long.

In some ways, this does make my HFA numbers more "dynamic" in that they're going to change more frequently year-over-year with teams dropping down or moving up based on their trendlines and I'm okay with that.

Teams are placed into "buckets" and ones that meet certain thresholds either go above or below the standard-issue two points. For this season, there are 20 teams with my max HFA of 3.5 points, nine teams with 3 points, 23 teams with 2.5 points, four teams with 1.5 points, and 11 teams with 1 point. That means exactly half (67) of the FBS teams (134) qualify one way or another. I did use two points for newcomer Kennesaw State without any data to rely on.

It is important with all elements of handicapping to think about potential pitfalls. For example, James Madison has 3.5 points of HFA for me, but the roster has changed and so has the

2024 HFA BUCKETS

3.5 POINTS
(SU + ATS HOME WIN% OF 70% OR HIGHER)

ALABAMA
JAMES MADISON
KANSAS STATE
LOUISVILLE
LSU
MICHIGAN
NC STATE
OHIO STATE
OKLAHOMA
OKLAHOMA STATE
OLE MISS
OREGON
OREGON STATE
PENN STATE
SMU
TENNESSEE
TEXAS
UTAH
UTSA

3 POINTS
(65-69.99%)

CLEMSON
DUKE
GEORGIA
LIBERTY
LOUISIANA
MIAMI (OH)
TEXAS A&M
UCF
WEST VIRGINIA

2.5 POINTS
(60-64.99%)

AIR FORCE
APPALACHIAN STATE
BOISE STATE
COASTAL CAROLINA
FRESNO STATE
IOWA
JACKSONVILLE STATE
KENTUCKY
MICHIGAN STATE
NEW MEXICO STATE
NORTH CAROLINA
SOUTH ALABAMA
SOUTH CAROLINA
SYRACUSE
TCU
TEXAS TECH
TOLEDO
TROY
UAB
WAKE FOREST
WASHINGTON STATE
WESTERN KENTUCKY
WYOMING

2 POINTS
(ANY TEAM BETWEEN 40-59.99% HAS A STANDARD HFA OF 2 POINTS.)

1.5 POINTS
(35.01-39.99%)

BOSTON COLLEGE
INDIANA
NEVADA
NORTHERN ILLINOIS

1 POINT
35% OR LOWER

AKRON
BUFFALO
CHARLOTTE
COLORADO STATE
FIU
GEORGIA TECH
NEW MEXICO
STANFORD
TULSA
UMASS
VANDERBILT

head coach. Oregon State has also seen tremendous turnover and may not warrant 3.5 points without Jonathan Smith and with a depleted roster.

Those are part of the qualitative handicapping process. I use HFA in concert with my Power Ratings to put together game spreads in hopes of getting ahead of the market by betting lines early in the week. But, I still have to keep in the back of my mind that my line could be off because of how I'm valuing home-field for those teams. That being said, the decreases for those teams in my Power Ratings account for the coaching and roster turnover changes, and if those are efficient, it shouldn't be that big of a deal.

What is impossible to nail down is how HFA differs between a nationally-televised ABC game under the lights with a liquored-up crowd and major stakes versus a Noon kickoff against a MAC team in Week 2. Dynamic home-field advantage values would be useful, but that is where sample size comes into play. We don't have enough data points to make a definitive statement, especially in an era where players and coaches come and go depending on which way the wind is blowing.

So, what do we do? We do the best that we can. We come up with something. Some people use a blanket home-field advantage for every team, which I argue doesn't take it far enough.

As a sabermetrician and a deep-diver when it comes to baseball stats, I'll point to the difference between on-base percentage (OBP) and wOBA (weighted on-base average). OBP treats everything the same. A walk is just as valuable as a single and a double is just as valuable as a home run because the formula doesn't differentiate between the ways of reaching base. wOBA, meanwhile, uses weighted run values to showcase that a home run is indeed more valuable than a double or a triple is weighted heavier than a walk. Predictably, I prefer wOBA over OBP.

In that same breath, playing in front of 1,000 people is not the same as playing in front of 10,000 people or 100,000 people. However, I could also argue that the teams playing road games in front of 100,000 people are way more accustomed to it than others, which, in theory, could cut down on the home-field advantage. They're traveling in style, staying in nicer hotels, working with better dieticians, sleep therapists, and whoever else is on staff to accommodate the needs of the players.

Back in the VSIN 2022 College Football Betting Guide, I called home-field advantage an "inexact science". I referred to that expression last season and refer to it again this season. But, like I said, I don't want something random or completely arbitrary.

Therefore, while it is frustrating to not be able to truly pin down what HFA is worth, something is better than nothing.



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40 TRENDS

FOR 2024 By Steve Makinen

As we approach the opening of the 2024 season, I thought I'd dig through the VSIN database and share 40 of the top team situational trends that will be in play at numerous points throughout the season. Along with the trends, I've offered up my own explanation as to why the trend might be thriving, as well as the potential game(s) in which they could be in play.

KANSAS STATE IS 40-21-2 ATS SINCE 2019

Steve's Thoughts: Head coach Chris Kleiman has a good pulse on his team, as it has performed consistently in his six-year tenure. This year could prove to be a challenge with QB Will Howard now at Ohio State, but until there is a reason otherwise, don't feel bad about backing the Wildcats.

Potential 2024 Spots: All games, starting 8/31 vs. UT-Martin

PITTSBURGH IS 33-16 OVER THE TOTAL SINCE 2020

Steve's Thoughts: Pittsburgh has been an underrated offensive program in recent years under head coach Pat Narduzzi, as well as a consistently below-average defensive team. Oddsmakers seemingly have not picked up on the lengthy trend either. With nine offensive starters and four defensive starters back for 2024, the trend of higher-scoring games figures to continue.

Potential 2024 Spots: All games, starting 8/31 vs. Kent State

ALABAMA IS ON A 20-7 ATS SURGE AT HOME

Steve's Thoughts: If you need any more evidence to convince yourself that Alabama boasts one of, if not the best home-field advantages in all of college football, this point spread record should prove it. The Tide are 26-1 outright in these games.

Potential 2024 Spots: Seven home games, starting 8/31 vs. Western Kentucky

OREGON STATE IS 25-5 ATS IN HOME GAMES OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS

Steve's Thoughts: The Pac-12 folded around Oregon State over the last year, leaving what looks to be a much less formidable home schedule in 2024. The Beavers are a team rebuilding under first-time head coach Trent Bray, but more success at home should keep the program in good shape.

Potential 2024 Spots: Seven home games, starting 8/31 vs. Idaho State

UNLV IS ON A 17-4 ATS RUN IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES AND 12-4 ATS RUN FOLLOWING A STRAIGHT-UP WIN

Steve's Thoughts: The Runnin' Rebels have become a trendy team in recent years, some very good, some very bad. Head coach Barry Odom's team went 10-4 ATS for bettors last year and continued building on some angles that began even before he arrived.

Potential 2024 Spots: Five non-conference games, starting 8/31 at Houston

LIBERTY IS ON A 12-3 ATS RUN AS AN UNDERDOG

Steve's Thoughts: Although this trend didn't play out well for Liberty in last year's Fiesta Bowl, the Flames have played well recently when underrated by oddsmakers. Unfortunately, as head coach Jamey Chadwell's team has become the class of Conference USA and always plays one of the country's easiest schedules, the angle doesn't come up all that often.

Potential 2024 Spots: Only one realistic underdog scenario on the schedule, 9/28 at Appalachian State

BOISE STATE HAS REBOUNDED FROM ITS LAST 13 OUTRIGHT LOSSES BY GOING 11-2 ATS IN THE FOLLOW-UP CONTEST

Steve's Thoughts: One of the signs of a strong and well-coached college football program is the ability to bounce back immediately after losses. Boise State is always among the front runners in the Mountain West because it responds well after setbacks.

Potential 2024 Spots: First realistic post-loss opportunity, 9/21 vs. Portland State

NEW MEXICO STATE HAS GONE 26-14 ATS OVERALL OVER THE LAST THREE SEASONS, INCLUDING 11-3 ATS AS A FAVORITE

Steve's Thoughts: If any trend to this point faces a challenge in continuing, it is this one. This will be a true rebuilding season in Las Cruces, as NMSU has just seven starters back and a brand-new coaching staff. My numbers call for the Aggies to be favored in five games.

Potential 2024 Spots: First favorite opportunity, the 8/31 opener versus SE Missouri State

KANSAS HAS BEEN ON A HUGE TOTALS RUN, GOING 32-15 OVER THE TOTAL SINCE 2019

Steve's Thoughts: Kansas has thrilled college football fans and bettors recently with its explosive play and high-scoring, thrilling games. Last year, the Jayhawks averaged over 10 yards per pass attempt, second only to LSU. And that was even with QB Jalon Daniels missing much of the season. He's back, and the explosiveness should be as well.

Potential 2024 Spots: All games, starting 8/29 vs. Lindenwood

WEST VIRGINIA HAS ENJOYED A STRONG HOME-FIELD ADVANTAGE OVER THE LAST FOUR SEASONS, GOING 16-6 ATS

Steve's Thoughts: Being the furthest program east in the Big 12 in recent years has not hurt West Virginia's ability to perform well at home in games. WVU has a passionate fan base, and Mountaineer Field has a long history of being a tough place to play. Under head coach Neal Brown, that trend has continued.

Potential 2024 Spots: Seven home games in all, and the first is a big one, 8/31 vs. Penn State

GEORGIA STATE HAS DONE ITS BEST WORK AWAY FROM HOME IN RECENT SEASONS, 19-6 ATS IN THE LAST 25 ROAD/NEUTRAL CONTESTS

Steve's Thoughts: Georgia State is one of the top five performing point spread teams in the country over the last four years. The Panthers' best success has come away from home, and this includes three straight convincing bowl victories.

Potential 2024 Spots: GSU plays six road games, including four straight in October/November. The first one is the opener at Georgia Tech on 8/31

RUTGERS HAS GONE 11-3 ATS IN ITS LAST 14 NON-CONFERENCE GAMES

Steve's Thoughts: I'm not sure anyone could ever convince me that Rutgers' move to the Big Ten ever made geographical or competitive sense for the program. That said, I'm not surprised to see a trend indicating that the Scarlet Knights' best success in recent years has come in non-Big Ten games.

Potential 2024 Spots: Rutgers plays three non-conference games, starting 8/29 vs. Howard

SAM HOUSTON STATE BOASTS A 14-3 ATS MARK IN ITS LAST 17 LINED GAMES AS AN UNDERDOG

Steve's Thoughts: It's not surprising to see recently promoted FBS teams faring well as underdogs, as these programs have a natural built-in chip on their shoulder to prove they can compete at the highest level. However, this trend started prior to last year, so it's pretty clear that head coach KC Keeler uses the underdog role to motivate his team to play well.

Potential 2024 Spots: My numbers show SHSU as an underdog in seven games this season, starting first at Rice on 8/31

MICHIGAN IS 29-13-1 ATS OVERALL IN THE LAST THREE SEASONS, INCLUDING 16-5 ATS IN ROAD/NEUTRAL GAMES

Steve's Thoughts: With all of the change that has occurred at Michigan since the national title game win in January, there are a lot of analysts, including myself, who have written off the Wolverines' chances for 2024. However, this is a team on a massive run of point-spread success, particularly on the road, and won't go down without a fight.

Potential 2024 Spots: Michigan doesn't play a road game till an October 5th title game rematch at Washington

LOUISIANA TECH TOTALS HAVE GONE 31-15-1 OVER SINCE 2019

Steve's Thoughts: Louisiana Tech has allowed over 33 PPG in four straight seasons. If you're looking for any primary reasons why the Bulldogs tend to go Over on most totals, that would be the place to start. Only five starters are back on the defensive side of the ball for 2024, don't expect a ton of improvement.

Potential 2024 Spots: LTU's opener is at home versus Nicholls State on 8/31, first FBS game is 9/14 at NC State

SOUTH CAROLINA OWNS AN IMPRESSIVE 11-4 ATS MARK AS A FAVORITE OVER THE LAST FOUR SEASONS

Steve's Thoughts: You have to give some credit to head coach Shane Beamer at South Carolina. His team generally wins the games it is supposed to win. The problem is that in the SEC, there aren't many times per season that the Gamecocks are "supposed" to win.

Potential 2024 Spots: I have South Carolina expected to be favored four times, starting 8/31 at home versus Old Dominion

TULSA IS 22-8-1 ATS IN ROAD/NEUTRAL GAMES OVER THE LAST FOUR SEASONS

Steve's Thoughts: Head coach Kevin Wilson's first Tulsa team didn't do a whole lot well last year. However, it did continue a long running trend of bringing back profits for backers in road games. The Golden Hurricane were 4-1-1 ATS on the road and are now a 73%+ cover in road games over the last five seasons.

Potential 2024 Spots: Tulsa plays six road games, including 9/7 at Arkansas State

LSU IS 20-7 OVER THE TOTAL IN THE TWO-YEAR HEAD COACH BRIAN KELLY ERA

Steve's Thoughts: Points have been plenty in the two-year tenure of head coach Brian Kelly at LSU, so much so that oddsmakers seemingly can't keep up. Last year, the Tigers led the country with 45.5 PPG. However, they also allowed 28 PPG. Even with Heisman Trophy-winning QB Jayden Daniels off to the NFL, I wouldn't expect an overhaul in how they play.

Potential 2024 Spots: LSU's opener versus USC has fireworks written all over it

MARYLAND HAS GONE 15-6 ATS IN ITS LAST 21 NON-BIG TEN GAMES

Steve's Thoughts: Like fellow East Coaster Rutgers, Maryland has also found the going much tougher in the Big Ten than out of conference. Head coach Mike Locksley's team is rebuilding somewhat in 2024 but has three very winnable non-conference tilts to beef up the record.

Potential 2024 Spots: Maryland hosts Connecticut in the season opener on 8/31

TENNESSEE HAS THROTTLED NON-CONFERENCE OPPONENTS IN THE LAST THREE SEASONS, 11-1 ATS IN THE LAST 12

Steve's Thoughts: Like many SEC teams, Tennessee fattens its stats and builds confidence in non-league games against overmatched opponents. The Vols are in a current 11-1 ATS surge in non-SEC games and play four such opponents in 2024

Potential 2024 Spots: Tennessee's non-conference slate starts 8/31 vs. FCS Chattanooga

WASHINGTON IS JUST 2-7 ATS IN ITS LAST SEVEN GAMES COMING OFF OUTRIGHT LOSSES

Steve's Thoughts: Washington went undefeated through its first 14 games of 2023, so this trend never got tested. However, in 2024, with new head coach Jedd Fisch taking over a team with just five starters returning and playing in a new and tougher conference, there should be multiple chances to take advantage.

Potential 2024 Spots: Washington could and should go undefeated in September, but October/November will be a different animal

VANDERBILT IS ON A 2-10 ATS SKID FOLLOWING A STRAIGHT-UP WIN

Steve's Thoughts: Vanderbilt has not been known for its ability to build lengthy winning streaks in college football in recent years. Much of that is due to this brutal trend showing the Commodores cover in just 16% of games following an outright victory.

Potential 2024 Spots: I have Vandy as a double-digit favorite in two games this year. The follow-up games would be 9/14 at Georgia State and 10/26 versus Texas

TENNESSEE HAS STRUGGLED IN THE UNDERDOG ROLE, GOING 4-12 ATS AS SUCH SINCE 2020

Steve's Thoughts: I wrote earlier about Tennessee's tremendous success in non-conference games in recent seasons. The Vols are almost always favored in such scenarios. The equal and opposite reaction occurs when Tennessee plays as an underdog. In that case, this program has struggled.

Potential 2024 Spots: I have Tennessee as an underdog three times this season, starting 9/21 at Oklahoma

FLORIDA HAS GONE JUST 5-15 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE ACTION OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS

Steve's Thoughts: Florida has been an interesting Power Four team in that it tends to underachieve when it plays non-SEC competition lately. If the Gators are to make a bowl game again in 2024, this can't continue since they play what is the toughest schedule in the country, and the SEC portion is the majority of the reason for it.

Potential 2024 Spots: Florida's opener on 8/31 at home versus Miami will be a defining game for both programs

FLA INTERNATIONAL IS 9-26 OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS IN CONFERENCE ACTION

Steve's Thoughts: It's never a good sign when you play in the worst conference in the country and still aren't covering point spreads on a regular basis. FIU has been the worst team in the nation in terms of conference ATS record in recent years, contributing a ton to why it hasn't played in a bowl game since 2019.

Potential 2024 Spots: FIU's first of eight conference tilts is 9/28 vs. Louisiana Tech

STANFORD IS ON A BRUTAL 4-15 ATS SKID IN HOME GAMES

Steve's Thoughts: To be quite honest, in my opinion, this is the first trend on this list that I feel strongly that has a chance to turn positively in 2024. Second-year head coach Troy Taylor has a very experienced team coming back, and for the first time in a while, Stanford will enjoy a regional edge over the teams it hosts, with four ACC teams and two non-conference foes making the trip out to Palo Alto. However, the Cardinal still have to prove they can play well at home before I would invest in them.

Potential 2024 Spots: Stanford plays a Friday night home opener versus TCU on 8/30

NORTHERN ILLINOIS IS JUST 4-16-1 ATS IN ITS LAST 21 HOME GAMES

Steve's Thoughts: Northern Illinois has been on an up-and-down roller coaster ride over its last six seasons of college football. The Huskies have gotten into a pattern of following their winning seasons with losing campaigns and vice versa. One thing that could help their consistency a lot is better performance in front of the home folks. Having covered the spread in just 20% of their last 20 games leaves a lot to be desired.

Potential 2024 Spots: NIU hosts six games in 2024, starting 8/31 versus Western Illinois

IOWA IS ON A HUGE TOTALS RUN OF 42-20 UNDER

Steve's Thoughts: The trend of Iowa's offense being woeful is no hidden secret amongst those following college football. However, despite miniscule totals posted by oddsmakers, this defensive-oriented team continues to go Under over 2/3 of the time. In my opinion, something has to radically change for me to start going against this angle.

Potential 2024 Spots: Iowa's first three games are at home, starting 8/31 vs. Illinois State

KENT STATE HAS GONE JUST 6-16 ATS IN ITS LAST 22 GAMES AS AN UNDERDOG

Steve's Thoughts: Even in the high-scoring days under former head coach Sean Lewis, Kent State struggled to perform well in the underdog role for bettors. I guess it's hard to beat point spreads when you're consistently allowing high 30s in points per game each season. KSU's offense again looks to be the better unit in 2024, meaning I wouldn't expect a change to their underdog performance.

Potential '24 spots: Kent State opens as a heavy underdog at Pitt on 8/31

ARIZONA STATE IS 2-8 ATS OVER THE LAST THREE SEASONS IN NON-CONFERENCE PLAY

Steve's Thoughts: Arizona State has struggled in non-conference games over the last three seasons. How will that impact the 2024 season now that the Sun Devils are playing what would be 10 former non-conference foes? The Big 12 is unfamiliar territory for ASU. We'll see what happens.

Potential 2024 Spots: ASU's slate starts with a non-league tilt versus Wyoming on 8/31

LOUISIANA TECH IS 6-17 ATS IN CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE LAST THREE SEASONS

Steve's Thoughts: Louisiana Tech has gone exactly 1-7 ATS in two of the last three seasons of Conference USA play. Mind you, CUSA is not exactly known for its superiority. This is a huge sign of underachieving and a big reason the Bulldogs are off back-to-back-to-back 3-9 campaigns.

Potential 2024 Spots: Louisiana Tech's league slate starts 9/28 at FIU

BALL STATE'S TOTALS HAVE GONE 31-14 UNDER OVER THE LAST FOUR SEASONS

Steve's Thoughts: The games on this Ball State under trend have averaged about 48 PPG production combined for the teams. The average college football total during this span has been about 54. You do the math, but perhaps caution is in order for 2024, as head coach Mike Neu's team has a lot more experience back on the offensive side of the ball than on defense.

Potential 2024 Spots: Louisiana Tech's league slate starts 9/28 at FIU

NEW MEXICO IS ON AN EXTENDED 25-52-1 ATS SKID OVERALL SINCE 2017

Steve's Thoughts: New head coach Bronco Mendenhall has a pretty strong resume in college football. His task here in Albuquerque is monumental, however, as his 2024 team has just nine starters back and is on a prolonged losing stretch. No wonder the Lobos' season win total is set at just 2.

Potential 2024 Spots: New Mexico's season opens with a difficult FCS game on 8/24 versus Montana State

FLA ATLANTIC IS ON A 4-15 ATS SKID IN THE LAST 19 GAMES COMING OFF A STRAIGHT-UP VICTORY

Steve's Thoughts: Since Lane Kiffin left FAU for Ole Miss, the Owls have not only dropped off significantly overall, but they've proven to be very inconsistent as well. One of the major problems over those last four seasons has been the inability to string multiple wins together. As such, they haven't seen a bowl game since 2020.

Potential 2024 Spots: I wouldn't expect this trend to arise for sure for FAU until at least Week 4 after hosting FIU

PITTSBURGH HAS GONE 0-6 ATS IN THE LAST SIX GAMES AS A ROAD UNDERDOG

Steve's Thoughts: Typically, I demand more than a six-game data sample when declaring a trend valuable, but the fact that so few of these six games were even competitive in terms of the line is eye-opening. For instance, in its game last year at Notre Dame, the Panthers were catching 20-1/2 and lost 58-7. None of the others were that bad, but were also not close.

Potential 2024 Spots: I have Pitt as an underdog in all five road games, starting 9/7 at Cincinnati

TEMPLE HAS STRUGGLED ON THE ROAD OVER THE LAST THREE SEASONS, 4-12 ATS

Steve's Thoughts: Temple's football program is going through a rough patch, 10-33 overall, dating back to 2020. Not a real surprise to see that the Owls have had a hard time covering point spreads on the road. College football bettors that back terrible teams on the road deserve to lose. Don't be one of those bettors.

Potential 2024 Spots: Temple's first road test is a tough one at Oklahoma on 8/30

MIAMI (OH) IS ON A 28-15 UNDER THE TOTAL RUN OVER THE LAST FOUR SEASONS

Steve's Thoughts: Miami (OH) vaulted to the top of the MAC last year with a record-setting defense that allowed just 15.9 PPG. That was a major reason why the Redhawks continued a recent trend under head coach Chuck Martin of totals going Under. It has been five straight years now that Miami has had more totals go Under than Over.

Potential 2024 Spots: Their first game at Northwestern on 8/31 figures to be a dogfight where the first team to 20 wins

VIRGINIA TECH HAS GONE JUST 4-19 ATS IN ITS LAST 19 GAMES FOLLOWING UP AN OUTRIGHT WIN

Steve's Thoughts: Prognosticators of college football, including myself, seem to be all-in on Virginia Tech for 2024, following up their 7-6 season and blowout of Tulane in the Military Bowl. However, if head coach Brett Pry's team is to reach its goals, it will have to get a lot better in managing success. The Hokies have been downright awful in coming back after wins lately.

Potential 2024 Spots: I could see this trend arising in any of the week 2-5 games, starting with a home tilt versus Marshall on 9/7

GEORGIA TECH IS JUST 5-18 ATS AS A FAVORITE SINCE 2018

Steve's Thoughts: This trend dates back to 2018, so for a Power Four football team to only be favored 23 times in six full seasons says a lot about the strength of that program. When teams aren't favored very often, they can struggle with that unfamiliarity.

Potential 2024 Spots: According to my numbers, Georgia Tech will be favored three times, starting with an 8/31 matchup versus Georgia State

CHARLOTTE HAS STRUGGLED THE LAST TWO SEASONS AT HOME, 2-10 ATS

Steve's Thoughts: Head coach Biff Poggi was expected to bring the excitement to Charlotte. However, a 3-9 season in his first year and just 17.5 PPG offensively has squelched any of the positive feelings. With his 49ers coming off back-to-back 1-5 ATS seasons at home, things are going to have to change quickly for Poggi to stick around long-term.

Potential 2024 Spots: Charlotte has a difficult home opener versus James Madison on 8/31

A LOOK AT 30 NEW COACHES FOR 2024

By Adam Burke

Coaching turnover is and has always been a huge part of the college football offseason. Long before college football free agency and the transfer portal, coaches were using their leverage at a rapid rate to get higher-profile jobs or larger paychecks from the colleges and universities that employed them.

This past offseason was no different. With players and recruits all looking for the highest bidder and the best fit, sideline bosses and their agents were doing the same thing. This year's coaching cycle was actually one of the most interesting in recent years because some coaches left to be coordinators, both at the NFL and college levels, while others took whatever job was being offered to them.

There are 30 new head coaches for the 2024 college football season. Two head coaches - Spencer Danielson at Boise State and David Braun at Northwestern - had the interim tags officially removed.

Let's look at all 30 new program leaders and the impacts that those hires may have on the team and the way that they play.

POWER FOUR NEW HEAD COACHES

ACC

BILL O'BRIEN (BOSTON COLLEGE)

O'Brien went from being Ohio State's new offensive coordinator to Boston College's new head coach in the blink of an eye. Former BC HC Jeff Hafley is now the DC of the Green Bay Packers, paving the way for O'Brien to get his first head coaching gig at the collegiate level since 2012-13. O'Brien is likely to look for more out of the Eagles' passing game led by 1.5-threat QB Thomas Castellanos. He rushed for over 1,100 yards, but had a 15/14 TD/INT ratio as a passer, so it'll take O'Brien's tutelage to make him a true dual threat. BC only averaged 182.5 passing yards per game last season. I'd expect that to change this year.

MANNY DIAZ (DUKE)

Duke goes from Mike Elko to Diaz, in what looks like a decent step down. Nothing against Diaz, who had mixed returns over three seasons as the head coach of Miami from 2019-21, but Elko got the most out of the Blue Devils during his two seasons in Durham. Diaz, like Elko, is a defensive wizard, but it remains to be seen if Diaz and OC Jonathan Brewer will be able to get the most out of one-time five-star recruit Maalik Murphy at QB.

FRAN BROWN (SYRACUSE)

Brown was viewed as a surprising replacement to Dino Babers, but his recruiting reputation followed him to upstate New York, where he was very successful in the transfer portal, including the commitment of former Ohio State QB Kyle McCord. Brown is something of an unknown as an X's and O's guy. He's primarily been a defensive backs coach and was only the co-DC for one year at Temple in 2019, but the talent level has instantly improved for Syracuse with his strong recruiting prowess.

BIG TEN

CURT CIGNETTI (INDIANA)

Realignment isn't the only big change in the Big Ten this season. Five new head coaches are in the mix, including the architect of the James Madison team that transitioned from FCS to FBS and took the Group of Five ranks by storm. Conventional wisdom would suggest that Indiana is just a springboard for Cignetti into a bigger job, as he went 52-9 at JMU and faces an uphill climb in Bloomington. He raided the Dukes' roster to infuse more talent into the Hoosiers and also secured dual-threat QB Kurtis Rourke from Ohio to run the offense he wants with offensive coordinator Mike Shanahan (no, not that one).

SHERRONE MOORE (MICHIGAN)

Moore took over for suspended Jim Harbaugh on three Saturdays in November, including the Wolverines' third straight win over Ohio State. But, it was Harbaugh coaching up his team during the week. Moore was the OC in 2023, co-OC in 2021-22, and has been with the program since 2018. He has a lot to prove and a mass exodus of talent to overcome, but a program with Michigan's standards deserves the benefit of the doubt.

JONATHAN SMITH (MICHIGAN STATE)

One of the most heralded hires of this coaching cycle was done by Michigan State to bring Smith from Corvallis to East Lansing. The former Oregon State coach faced countless challenges in the Pac-12, but managed to get a ton out of the QB position and the roster as a whole to fight toe-to-toe with the big boys of the now-mostly-defunct conference. Smith brought QB Aidan Chiles with him in hopes of sparking an offense that has been among the Big Ten's worst and most inconsistent units. With the additions of former Pac-12 foes USC, UCLA, Washington, and Oregon, Smith's task is not an easy one, but Sparty has a great chance of returning to relevance under his watch.

DESHAUN FOSTER (UCLA)

When O'Brien took the BC job, Chip Kelly was hired by Ohio State as the offensive coordinator. With the program scrambling a little bit, Foster, the former running backs coach, emerged as a first-aid kit. Late switches like this force athletic departments to do whatever they can to plug holes in the boat, especially to keep recruits from leaving en masse, as the transfer portal opens up when a coach leaves. Perhaps I'm underselling Foster, who was a Bruin from 1998-01 and a seven-year NFLer, but he's never been more than a running backs coach and thus faces a lot of question marks.

JEDD FISCH (WASHINGTON)

When Kalen DeBoer bounced for 'Bama, Washington moved quickly on Fisch, who was in the midst of a thoroughly impressive turnaround at Arizona. Fisch has seen and done a lot of things over his 27-year career and has assisted some of the sport's biggest sideline legends, including Bill Belichick and Pete Carroll, not to mention the time he spent with Jim Harbaugh.

Amazingly, his three years in Arizona were his first as a full-fledged head coach and he immediately put his stamp on the program. While he wasn't able to bring budding star Noah Fifita to Seattle, he did get Mississippi State transfer Will Rogers to hang around.

BIG 12

BRENT BRENNAN (ARIZONA)

Fisch's replacement in Tucson is Brennan, whose career comes a little bit full-circle. Brennan was a GA at Arizona in 2000 and is now the head coach after seven seasons at San Jose State. He inherits a really special offense and has way more resources than he had at SJSU. That should breed a lot of confidence in the Wildcats, who move from the Pac-12 to the Big 12 at a pretty good time. Expectations are high out of the gate for Brennan and my belief is that this hire works out really well right away.

WILLIE FRITZ (HOUSTON)

Fritz goes from the AAC to the Big 12 to coach a former member of the AAC, as college football realignment has opened up a lot of these potential quirks. Fritz was wildly successful at Tulane and is headed to



Kalen DeBoer

a Houston program dying to get back on track. The Green Wave won 23 games over the last two seasons, as Fritz had to bottom out to get back on top. Houston has to level up in the Big 12, as evidenced by last season's 2-7 conference record, so we'll see how quickly Fritz can retool the program on the fly. Expect more running from this year's team.

SEC

KALEN DEBOER (ALABAMA)

Few agents cash in on the coaching chaos like Jimmy Sexton, who just so happens to represent both Nick Saban and DeBoer. That isn't the only reason why DeBoer is in Tuscaloosa, but it didn't hurt with the expediency of the process. Personally, I think DeBoer is a top-five coach in the country. He's a brilliant offensive mind who brought Washington back to prominence and placed the building blocks for Michael Penix Jr. to be a first-round pick while serving as the OC at Indiana. DeBoer has dramatically improved the offense everywhere he's been and now he has a recruiting pipeline the likes of which he has never seen. This should work out just fine.

JEFF LEBBY (MISSISSIPPI STATE)

Former Bulldogs head coach Zach Arnett was placed into an impossible situation after the death of Mike Leach. His head coaching tenure lasted just one season, as the Bulldogs made the switch to an offensive mind once again by bringing in Leby. He was most recently the Oklahoma OC and also served as OC at Ole Miss and UCF. Expect the tempo to jump at Mississippi State. Also, if this goes poorly, expect some heat on the administration, as Leby was at Baylor when the program was embroiled in scandal.

MIKE ELKO (TEXAS A&M)

The Jimbo Fisher tenure in College Station was an abject failure. Fruitful recruiting classes were wasted and high expectations were never met. So, in comes Elko, who was a longtime DC before getting his first crack as head coach at Duke. He did an incredible job in Durham and parlayed that into a very well-paying gig with a booster base well-versed in handing out blank checks. Elko is a defensive mastermind and that side of the ball should be great, but it is OC Collin Klein who is the most important figure on this coaching staff.

PAC-2

TRENT BRAY (OREGON STATE)

While neither Power Four, nor Group of Five, I figured I'd give a nod to the Pac-2 under the Power Five heading. Bray takes over for Smith and the 41-year-old walks into a pretty low-stress situation. The Beavers don't really have expectations after elevating Bray from DC to HC and this was a move designed to keep as many players in-house as possible, since spending money wasn't really in the cards for Oregon State. Bray played in Corvallis from 2002-05 and has been with the program since 2018.

GROUP OF FIVE NEW HEAD COACHES

These are in alphabetical order by program:

TIM SKIPPER (FRESNO STATE; MOUNTAIN WEST)

This was a late one, as Jeff Tedford stepped down due to health reasons in mid-July. He took a leave of absence prior to the 2023 New Mexico Bowl, which Fresno State won 37-10 under Skipper as the interim head coach. The 46-year-old Skipper was the linebackers coach and assistant head coach prior to the bowl game and will serve as the interim HC for this season. Tedford, long viewed as an offensive genius, has not announced any plans to still be around the team, but there is now a lot of pressure on second-year OC Pat McCann, who came over from Eastern Washington for the 2022 season.

DELL MCGEE (GEORGIA STATE; SUN BELT)

There are a lot of good football players in Atlanta and throughout the southeast. Georgia State is hoping that McGee can recruit them. He has no coordinator experience and has been Georgia's running backs coach, but now he has a program of his own. McGee was a top-tier recruiter for Kirby Smart and he'll hope to bring some more talent to the Panthers, while relying heavily on 40 years of coaching experience from OC Jim Chaney and over 25 from longtime defensive assistant Kevin Sherrer.

BOB CHESNEY (JAMES MADISON; SUN BELT)

The Sun Belt will be a popular conference in this section. Chesney has the immense shoes of Curt Cignetti to fill as he makes the leap from Holy Cross of the FCS ranks. The Crusaders won five straight league titles and the 46-year-old Chesney is 111-46 as a head coach. The Crusaders rushed for over 2,900 yards last year, so expect Chesney to focus heavily on the offensive line and the ground game.

BRYANT VINCENT (LOUISIANA-MONROE; SUN BELT)

The UAB players lobbied very hard for Vincent to take over for the retiring Bill Clark, but the Blazers went in a different direction with Trent Diler. Vincent went to New Mexico and served as OC, but now gets to put his own stamp on a program with the Warhawks. He is a great offensive mind and took New Mexico from 131st to 35th in yards per play last season. ULM was 106th last season. I don't know how the defense will look, but the offense should improve by leaps and bounds, making the Warhawks a good Over bet on totals.

DEREK MASON (MIDDLE TENNESSEE; CONFERENCE USA)

After doing fairly well under extremely tough conditions at Vanderbilt, Mason is back in the Nashville metro area with the Blue Raiders. Longtime head coach Rick Stockstill parted ways with the program after going 113-111 over 18 seasons. Mason is a top-notch defensive mind and it will be up to former Northern Iowa OC/QB Coach Bodie Reeder to get the offense going. MTSU has seven bowl appearances in the last 11 years, but they haven't won more than eight games since Stockstill was an assistant elsewhere.

JEFF CHOATE (NEVADA; MOUNTAIN WEST)

It feels like forever ago that Jay Norvell left Reno for Fort Collins. That's probably because Nevada has been quite bad in that span. Choate comes over from Texas where he was the co-DC and might be a tremendous asset in the transfer portal after spending five seasons with Montana State. The Bobcats went from 4-7 in Year 1 to 11-4 in Year 4, losing in the semifinals in 2019. This is a full-fledged rebuild with a brutal schedule, so the team may look better, but the results may not be.

BRONCO MENDENHALL (NEW MEXICO; MOUNTAIN WEST)

It felt like Mendenhall was ready to be done coaching after a long stint at BYU and a not-as-long stint at Virginia. Apparently he was really eager to get back to it because he moved the family to Albuquerque to take over a Lobos program that has won at least five games only twice since 2007. It is hard to see the upside here for Mendenhall. While aforementioned Bryant Vincent fixed the offense, the defense is still awful and the resources and recruiting pipeline are very thin. But, this should be a tougher team.

TONY SANCHEZ (NEW MEXICO STATE; CONFERENCE USA)

Speaking of names we hadn't heard in a while, former UNLV head coach Tony Sanchez has a new gig with the Aggies. Sanchez went from Bishop Gorman HS to UNLV and had twice as many losses (40) as wins. New Mexico State's recent resurgence under Jerry Kill was remarkably impressive, but Sanchez has a better chance of taking the program back to where it was than upholding a new standard.

SEAN LEWIS (SAN DIEGO STATE; MOUNTAIN WEST)

The wunderkind has resurfaced as a head coach after one tumultuous year with Colorado. Lewis has to be excited to get away from the shadow of Deion Sanders and starts anew with an Aztecs crew that desperately needs an infusion of offensive creativity. Year in and year out, SDSU is very solid defensively, but this offense has been offensive more often than not. The 38-year-old Lewis went 24-31 at Kent State, but went from 2-10 in Year 1 to 7-6 in Year 2 and actually had two bowl game appearances, so it may not take long with better pieces in place.

KEN NIUMATALOLO (SAN JOSE STATE; MOUNTAIN WEST)

A year really does feel like a lifetime in college football, doesn't it? Niumatalolo's last season at Navy was 2022 after 20 years of service to the program. He was UCLA's TE coach and "Director of Leadership" last season, but the Spartans came calling when Brent Brennan took the Arizona job. Most importantly for bettors, Niumatalolo is NOT bringing the triple-option to SJSU, rather building an offense to fit the personnel and the system already in place. They'll certainly look to run the ball more, but it will not be the option.

MAJOR APPLEWHITE (SOUTH ALABAMA; SUN BELT)

Kane Wommack went to Alabama to be the defensive coordinator for Kalen DeBoer and South Alabama promoted Applewhite from OC to HC. I happen to think Wommack is an excellent coach, so this feels like a

big downgrade. The Jaguars did have a record-setting offensive season last year, but Wommack is a defensive guru and DC Corey Batoon also bailed for the SEC. This is Applewhite's second kick at the can after three unremarkable years at Houston. I think this is a team poised for a tumble.

GERAD PARKER (TROY; SUN BELT)

Troy has been a feeder system for bigger programs on the coaching front and Jon Sumrall is the latest to move on. Others include Neal Brown (West Virginia) and Chip Lindsey (UNC OC). Parker has been a longtime offensive assistant and actually coached for the two COVID years with Brown at WVU before being demoted for Graham Harrell. He was Notre Dame's OC last season and coached six games as Purdue's interim back in 2016, losing all six of them. Troy has been one of the most consistent Group of Five programs, but the transfer portal took away a lot of talent heading into Parker's first year.

JON SUMRALL (TULANE; AAC)

Speaking of Sumrall, he's now at Tulane to fill the impressive shoes of Willie Fritz. I think the 41-year-old is an excellent coach with a tremendous grasp of the defensive side of the ball. He was terrific at Kentucky for three years, including one as the co-DC, and did very well at Troy with back-to-back double-digit winning seasons. He brought OC Joe Craddock with him and this should be a top G5 team again.

SCOTTY WALDEN (UTEP; CONFERENCE USA)

This is arguably the hardest job in the country. Texas is a hotbed for high school football, but getting kids to El Paso is tricky. Dana Dimel never found a way to have success and now it is up to Walden, who comes in from Austin Peay. The 34-year-old Texas native served as the interim HC for Southern Miss for four games and then got the Austin Peay gig. They were a FCS playoff team last season. Expectations are so low for the Miners on an annual basis, but Walden is a fast riser in the coaching ranks and could breathe life into the program.

NATE DREILING (UTAH STATE; MOUNTAIN WEST)

There are a ton of changes in the Mountain West, including this late one. Former head coach Blake Anderson was fired for several violations of the terms of his contract, leaving Dreiling to pick up the pieces in mid-July. Dreiling is in his first season at Utah State after serving as New Mexico State's defensive coordinator the last two years, so we'll see what he picked up from Jerry Kill about being a head coach.

JAY SAWVEL (WYOMING; MOUNTAIN WEST)

With the retirement of legend Craig Bohl, Sawvel gets his first crack as a head coach. He's been the Cowboys DC for the last four seasons and was a DC at Wake Forest and Minnesota previously. Coaching under Jerry Kill, Dave Clawson, and Bohl has left Sawvel with no shortage of experience. The new DC is actually Craig's son, Aaron. Expect another hard-nosed Cowboys crew, but new OC Jay Johnson will spread things out more, so we'll see if that has an impact on both the offense and the defense.



Jay Sawvel

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PROGRAM STABILITY

By Steve Makinen

Since 2017, I have been sharing my methodology on College Football Stability with VSIN subscribers. The thought behind it: Teams in more stable year-to-year situations are better bets early, while those that have undergone a lot of change in the offseason should be faded. The logic is fundamentally sound. Returning fewer starters, starting over at quarterback, and welcoming in new head coaches or coordinators are always hurdles to get over for teams. Eventually, the teams may overcome these hurdles, even later that season, but the general thought is that it doesn't happen early, and oddsmakers don't account for these factors nearly enough in building their lines.

There are many reasons why things can change dramatically from one season to the next in college football, among them the four-year eligibility rules, the pressure now placed on coaching staffs at every level, the ever-growing transfer portal, and player transgressions off the field. The result is that there is always turnover from year to year, both on the field and on the sidelines. Bettors expecting to see the same thing they watched from a team at the end of the prior season can often be startled by the mammoth nature of the change.

Over the last 12 years, I have implemented an early season strategy that employs backing the teams with the greatest stability ratings in matchups against those in the most unstable situations. I can tell you that in those 12 years, I have NEVER experienced a losing record by playing the games on the lists for the four weeks of the season. The degree of success has varied during that span, but in all 12 years, I have closed with a profit, including last year, when the plays I shared went 30-23 ATS (56.5%). That is a typical year for this system, followed by 2022 results of 57.4%, and had a bettor been playing \$100 wagers on each game, they would have profited \$470. Of course, these numbers can be improved by factoring in other successful handicapping strategies or by more closely examining the individual factors of instability, but as a stand-alone strategy, the success level is tough to beat.

Below, I've put together a chart of the College Football Stability Scores for 2024. When the season arrives, I will put together lists in each of the first four weeks detailing the top mismatches. I have found that a Stability Mismatch score of 8 is the minimum on which I will consider a play for this thought process. Incidentally, SMU hosting Nevada in Week 0 shows the first 2024 playable game with a difference of 11.

For those of you reading now who might be new to my College Football Stability System, here are the basics for how I determine each team's Total Stability Score. The score is determined from five different stabilizing factors: Head Coach, Offensive Coordinator, Defensive Coordinator, Quarterback, and Overall Returning Starters. Here is how the scores are determined:

RETURNING HEAD COACH POINTS

Yes, same Head Coach as 2023: 4 points
No, new Head Coach for 2024: 0 points

RETURNING OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR POINTS

Yes, same Offensive Coordinator as 2023: 3 points
No, new Offensive Coordinator for 2024: 0 points

RETURNING DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR POINTS

Yes, same Defensive Coordinator as 2023: 3 points
No, new Defensive Coordinator for 2024: 0 points

RETURNING STARTING QUARTERBACK POINTS

Yes, same Starting Quarterback as 2023: 4 points
No, new Starting Quarterback for 2024: 0 points

Very important, so I reiterate...I consider a transfer quarterback who is expected to start for his team as a NEW QUARTERBACK, regardless of the starting experience level he brings to the table. For 2024, there are again numerous recognizable QBs that have found new starting homes across the country. For instance, Dillon Gabriel at Oklahoma or DJ Uiagalelei at Florida State are among the veteran QBs across the country who boast a wealth of college football experience but will be in new schemes this fall. While they are not your typical first-year quarterbacks, they are new to those programs.

TOTAL NUMBER OF RETURNING STARTERS POINTS

0-7 returning offensive & defensive starters: 0 points
8-9: 1 point
10-12: 2 points
13-16: 3 points
17-19: 4 points
20-22: 5 points

Looking back at the last five years, prior to the 2020 season, there were a total of 19 teams that were returning 17 starters or more. For 2021, there were 69 teams, more than half of the total FBS programs! The average for the last three seasons, including 2024, has been just 17.

Furthermore, in 2021, 89 teams brought back their starting quarterbacks, along with eight entire starting offensive units and nine full defenses. For 2022, those numbers dropped to 78 QBs, zero full offenses, and just one intact defense. In 2023, there were 72 returning starting QBs, and only one intact unit of any kind. Finally, in 2024, only 53 starting quarterbacks return to the spot they occupied last season. And only Virginia Tech's offense and Boise State's defense are intact.

Furthermore, there are also 30 new head coaches along with over 120 coordinator changes, resulting in 18 teams with Stability Scores of 3 or less, the most I have seen in a season since employing this system. I had naively predicted that there would be a return to normalcy after the 2021 season, but clearly, that has not been the case due to the transfer portal and its effect on both quarterbacks and coaching staffs.

Let's dig into the teams on both ends of the stability scale a little deeper.

HIGHLY STABLE TEAMS WITH SCORES OF 18 OR HIGHER

In 2019, there were seven teams with scores of 18 or higher, and in 2020, only three. For 2021, the number ballooned to 30 teams that met that benchmark for stability! Keep in mind the maximum score is 19. From 2022-2024, the average has been just 7.0, including the seven for this fall. Even with all of this inconsistency, the stability system continues to thrive as it is.

In short, these programs figure to be in good shape for the coming season, at least early.

VIRGINIA TECH (ACC) – 19

I wrote last week about how Virginia Tech's recruiting efforts have slightly fallen off in recent years. That doesn't figure to impact what could be a boom year for the Hokies, as they bring back 21 starters from their 7-6 and Military Bowl-winning team from 2023. Leading the charge is dual-threat quarterback Kyron Drones, who ran for over 800 yards and

Team (Conference)	2023 Record	HC?	Change? (0=Yes)			Ret Strs	Total Stability
			OC?	DC?	QB?		
Air Force (MWC)	9-4	4	3	3	0	0 (6)	10
Akron (MAC)	2-10	4	0	3	0	1 (9)	8
Alabama (SEC)	12-2	0	0	0	4	3 (13)	7
Appalachian St (SBC)	9-5	4	3	3	4	2 (11)	16
Arizona (B12)	10-3	0	0	0	4	3 (15)	7
Arizona St (B12)	3-9	4	0	3	0	2 (10)	9
Arkansas (SEC)	4-8	4	0	3	0	3 (16)	10
Arkansas St (SBC)	6-7	4	0	3	4	3 (16)	14
Army (AAC)	6-6	4	0	3	4	2 (11)	13
Auburn (SEC)	6-7	4	0	0	4	4 (17)	12
Ball St (MAC)	4-8	4	3	0	4	1 (9)	12
Baylor (B12)	3-9	4	0	3	0	4 (18)	11
Boise St (MWC)	8-6	4	0	0	0	4 (17)	8
Boston College (ACC)	7-6	0	0	0	4	4 (17)	8
Bowling Green (MAC)	7-6	4	3	3	4	3 (15)	17
Buffalo (MAC)	3-9	0	0	0	0	2 (10)	2
BYU (B12)	5-7	4	3	3	0	3 (13)	13
C Michigan (MAC)	5-7	4	0	3	0	3 (13)	10
California (ACC)	6-7	4	0	3	4	3 (15)	14
Charlotte (AAC)	3-9	4	3	3	0	2 (11)	12
Cincinnati (B12)	3-9	4	3	3	0	3 (15)	13
Clemson (ACC)	9-4	4	3	3	4	3 (14)	17
Coastal Carolina (SBC)	8-5	4	3	3	0	2 (12)	12
Colorado (B12)	4-8	4	0	0	4	3 (16)	11
Colorado St (MWC)	5-7	4	3	3	4	3 (14)	17
Connecticut (IND)	3-9	4	0	0	0	3 (13)	7
Duke (ACC)	8-5	0	0	0	0	2 (10)	2
E Michigan (MAC)	6-7	4	0	3	0	2 (10)	9
East Carolina (AAC)	2-10	4	0	3	0	3 (14)	10
FLA Atlantic (AAC)	4-8	4	3	3	0	2 (11)	12
FLA International (CUSA)	4-8	4	3	3	4	3 (14)	17
Florida (SEC)	5-7	4	3	3	4	3 (14)	17
Florida St (ACC)	13-1	4	3	3	0	1 (9)	11
Fresno St (MWC)	9-4	4	3	3	4	3 (13)	17
GA Southern (SBC)	6-7	4	0	3	0	3 (13)	10
Georgia (SEC)	13-1	4	3	3	4	3 (14)	17
Georgia St (SBC)	7-6	0	0	0	0	2 (10)	2
Georgia Tech (ACC)	7-6	4	3	0	4	3 (13)	14
Hawaii (MWC)	5-8	4	0	0	4	3 (15)	11
Houston (B12)	4-8	0	0	0	4	2 (10)	6
Illinois (B10)	5-7	4	3	3	4	3 (13)	17
Indiana (B10)	3-9	0	0	0	0	5 (20)	5
Iowa (B10)	10-4	4	0	3	4	4 (18)	15
Iowa St (B12)	7-6	4	0	3	4	4 (19)	15
Jacksonville St (CUSA)	9-4	4	3	0	0	1 (9)	8

Team (Conference)	2023 Record	HC?	Change? (0=Yes)			Ret Strs	Total Stability
			OC?	DC?	QB?		
James Madison (SBC)	11-2	0	0	0	0	4 (17)	4
Kansas (B12)	9-4	4	0	3	4	3 (13)	14
Kansas St (B12)	9-4	4	0	3	0	2 (12)	9
Kennesaw St (CUSA)	0-6	4	0	3	0	3 (16)	10
Kent St (MAC)	1-11	4	3	3	4	3 (13)	17
Kentucky (SEC)	7-6	4	0	3	0	4 (18)	11
La Lafayette (SBC)	6-7	4	3	0	4	3 (15)	14
La Monroe (SBC)	2-10	0	0	0	0	0 (7)	0
Liberty (CUSA)	13-1	4	3	3	4	3 (14)	17
Louisiana Tech (CUSA)	3-9	4	3	0	0	2 (10)	9
Louisville (ACC)	10-4	4	3	3	0	3 (14)	13
LSU (SEC)	10-3	4	0	0	0	2 (12)	6
Marshall (SBC)	6-7	4	0	3	0	2 (10)	9
Maryland (B10)	8-5	4	3	3	0	2 (12)	12
Massachusetts (IND)	3-9	4	0	3	4	2 (11)	13
Memphis (AAC)	10-3	4	3	0	4	4 (17)	15
Miami FL (ACC)	7-6	4	3	3	0	3 (16)	13
Miami Ohio (MAC)	11-3	4	3	3	4	2 (12)	16
Michigan (B10)	15-0	0	0	0	0	0 (7)	0
Michigan St (B10)	4-8	0	0	0	0	3 (15)	3
Middle Tenn St (CUSA)	4-8	0	0	0	4	0 (7)	4
Minnesota (B10)	6-7	4	3	0	0	3 (15)	10
Mississippi St (SEC)	5-7	0	0	0	0	1 (9)	1
Missouri (SEC)	11-2	4	3	0	4	3 (14)	14
N Illinois (MAC)	7-6	4	0	3	0	3 (16)	10
Navy (AAC)	5-7	4	0	3	0	3 (14)	10
NC State (ACC)	9-4	4	3	3	0	2 (12)	12
Nebraska (B10)	5-7	4	3	3	4	4 (17)	18
Nevada (MWC)	2-10	0	0	0	4	2 (12)	6
New Mexico (MWC)	4-8	0	0	0	0	1 (9)	1
New Mexico St (CUSA)	10-5	0	0	0	0	1 (8)	1
North Carolina (ACC)	8-5	4	3	3	0	2 (12)	12
North Texas (AAC)	5-7	4	3	3	0	2 (10)	12
Northwestern (B10)	8-5	4	0	0	0	3 (15)	7
Notre Dame (IND)	10-3	4	0	3	0	3 (14)	10
Ohio St (B10)	11-2	4	3	3	0	3 (15)	13
Ohio U (MAC)	10-3	4	3	0	0	0 (6)	7
Oklahoma (SEC)	10-3	4	0	3	0	3 (15)	10
Oklahoma St (B12)	10-4	4	3	3	4	4 (19)	18
Old Dominion (SBC)	6-7	4	3	3	4	2 (10)	16
Ole Miss (SEC)	11-2	4	3	3	4	5 (20)	19
Oregon (B10)	12-2	4	3	3	0	3 (16)	13
Oregon St (P12)	8-5	0	0	0	0	0 (5)	0
Penn St (B10)	10-3	4	0	0	4	3 (13)	11
Pittsburgh (ACC)	3-9	4	0	3	0	3 (13)	10

TEAM (CONFERENCE)	2023 RECORD	HC?	CHANGE? (0=YES)			RET STRS	TOTAL STABILITY
			OC?	DC?	QB?		
PURDUE (B10)	4-8	4	3	3	4	3 (14)	17
RICE (AAC)	6-7	4	3	3	0	3 (14)	13
RUTGERS (B10)	7-6	4	3	3	0	3 (15)	13
S ALABAMA (SBC)	7-6	0	0	0	0	0 (7)	0
SAM HOUSTON ST (CUSA)	3-9	4	0	0	0	2 (12)	6
SAN DIEGO ST (MWC)	4-8	0	0	0	0	2 (10)	2
SAN JOSE ST (MWC)	7-6	0	0	3	0	0 (7)	3
SMU (ACC)	11-3	4	3	3	4	3 (15)	17
SOUTH CAROLINA (SEC)	5-7	4	3	3	0	3 (15)	13
SOUTH FLORIDA (AAC)	7-6	4	3	3	4	4 (18)	18
SOUTHERN MISS (SBC)	3-9	4	0	0	0	2 (10)	6
STANFORD (ACC)	3-9	4	3	3	4	4 (18)	18
SYRACUSE (ACC)	6-7	0	0	0	0	4 (17)	4
TCU (B12)	5-7	4	3	0	4	3 (16)	14
TEMPLE (AAC)	3-9	4	3	3	0	2 (10)	12
TENNESSEE (SEC)	9-4	4	3	3	0	2 (11)	12
TEXAS (SEC)	12-2	4	3	3	4	4 (17)	18
TEXAS A&M (SEC)	7-6	0	0	0	4	4 (18)	8
TEXAS ST UNIV (SBC)	8-5	4	3	0	0	2 (11)	9
TEXAS TECH (B12)	7-6	4	3	3	4	3 (14)	17
TOLEDO (MAC)	11-3	4	3	3	0	1 (8)	11
TROY (SBC)	11-3	0	0	0	0	0 (4)	0
TULANE (AAC)	11-3	0	0	0	0	3 (15)	3
TULSA (AAC)	4-8	4	3	3	4	2 (12)	16
TX-SAN ANTONIO (AAC)	9-4	4	3	3	0	3 (14)	13
UAB (AAC)	4-8	4	3	3	4	2 (11)	16
UCF (B12)	6-7	4	0	3	0	3 (14)	10
UCLA (B10)	8-5	0	0	0	0	2 (12)	2
UNLV (MWC)	9-5	4	3	3	0	2 (11)	12
USC (B10)	8-5	4	3	0	0	3 (14)	10
UTAH (B12)	8-5	4	3	3	4	3 (15)	17
UTAH ST (MWC)	6-7	4	3	0	0	3 (15)	10
UTEP (CUSA)	3-9	0	0	0	4	1 (9)	5
VANDERBILT (SEC)	2-10	4	0	0	0	3 (14)	7
VIRGINIA (ACC)	3-9	4	3	3	4	3 (16)	17
VIRGINIA TECH (ACC)	7-6	4	3	3	4	5 (21)	19
W KENTUCKY (CUSA)	8-5	4	0	3	0	3 (13)	10
W MICHIGAN (MAC)	4-8	4	0	0	4	4 (17)	12
WAKE FOREST (ACC)	4-8	4	3	3	0	3 (14)	13
WASHINGTON (B10)	14-1	0	0	0	0	0 (5)	0
WASHINGTON ST (P12)	5-7	4	3	3	0	2 (10)	12
WEST VIRGINIA (B12)	9-4	4	3	3	4	3 (13)	17
WISCONSIN (B10)	7-6	4	3	3	0	3 (14)	13
WYOMING (MWC)	9-4	0	0	0	0	3 (13)	3

threw for over 2000 a year ago. Head Coach Brent Pry begins his third season in Blacksburg and might have a team capable of being a surprise contender in the ACC.

OLE MISS (SEC) - 18

While Georgia would seem to be the team to beat in a loaded and expanded SEC this fall, one team could be a looming threat to the Bulldogs supremacy, and that team hosts the head-to-head game between the teams in November. That would be Lane Kiffin's Ole Miss club, which comes off an 11-2 campaign in 2023 and has 10 starting players back on each side of the ball, including QB Jaxson Dart, a multi-year starter now that led the team to 35+ PPG. The defense also allowed a 9-year low of 22.5 PPG this past season. This team's loaded, and its SEC schedule is minus Alabama this season.

OKLAHOMA STATE (BIG 12) - 18

With its foremost rivals in the Big 12, Texas & Oklahoma, now off to the SEC, a very experienced Oklahoma State team could be a nice underdog wage as an option to emerge as the frontrunner this season. Most prognosticators have pegged Utah as the formal favorite, but head coach Mike Gundy's Cowboys host the Utes in a late September game and have 19 starters back from their 10-win team in 2023. Quarterback Alan Bowman is back at QB but will have to be better than last year when he had a 15-14 TD-Int ratio. The overall experience will have to make a bigger difference this fall, as OSU only outscored opponents by 1.0 PPG last year in going 10-4.

SOUTH FLORIDA (AMERICAN) - 18

South Florida was one of my best season-win total OVER wagers last season, winning seven games against a prop of just 3.5. The Bulls had won just eight games total in the prior four seasons combined but rode the dynamic talents of QB Byrum Brown to a major improvement. He accounted for over 4,000 yards of offense and 37 TDs and had a coming-out party for national viewers in a 45-0 thrashing of Syracuse in the Boca Raton Bowl. Brown will lead a group of 18 starters back for second-year head coach Alex Golesh. The schedule is enhanced, however, for this year and features at Alabama and home versus Miami in non-league play.

STANFORD (ACC) - 18

The timing could be ideal for second-year head coach Troy Taylor and Stanford in their move to the ACC, as the Cardinal bring back a wealth of experience to deal with their changing circumstances. There are 18 starters back from the 3-9 team of a year ago, including QB Ashton Daniels, who showed some promise as a sophomore starter. Taylor's team will have to be way better defensively to compete in the ACC, as the defenses are much more stingy there than in the Pac-12. This team's unit allowed a whopping 37.7 PPG. Stanford has one of the toughest road schedules in the country, and perhaps covering point spreads might be the most realistic goal.

NEBRASKA (BIG TEN) - 18

The expanded Big Ten will be a challenge for all the teams that used to reside in the conference's West Division, as all four teams being added to the league boasted elite offenses last season. Nebraska is one of the teams that figures to be affected most, as the Cornhuskers scored just 18 PPG last season. That said, head coach Matt Rhule, in his second year now in Lincoln, brings back 17 starters, although the starting QB might (should) be a different one than a year ago. Freshman Donovan Raiola, a highly touted recruit, figures to get the nod and provides plenty of reason for optimism. The "Blackshirt" defense was stellar last year in allowing just 18.3 PPG and could be even better with all but three starters returning. Rhule's teams at Temple and Baylor made significant leaps in his second season. Could that same thing happen for Nebraska this fall?

TEXAS (SEC) - 18

Georgia is commonly recognized as the national title favorite this season in college football. However, my pick will be Texas, with head coach Steve Sarkisian's team returning from a CFP playoff appearance with 15 starters back. Sure, the new surroundings in the SEC will make things tougher overall, but in my humble opinion, the Longhorns have the top returning quarterback in the country in Quinn Ewers. A junior now, Ewers has 22 starts on his record for Texas. The team's defense allowed just

18.9 PPG last season, their best since 2009. Coach Sark also knows the SEC. This is as good of a season for this program to make the leap to the SEC as ever.

UNSTABLE TEAMS WITH SCORES OF 2 OR LOWER

From 2019-21, there were 16 teams going into the fall with Stability Scores of 3 or lower. The numbers have been double-digits each year since, including this year's total of 14, matching the high mark from 2022. I haven't studied it as closely since 2021, with so many teams now qualifying, but at that point, the teams meeting this low benchmark were proven to be less than 45% ATS performers over the prior 5-year span.

BUFFALO (MAC) - 2

Former Buffalo head coach Maurice Linguist proved to be a better recruiter than on-field leader while there, and now that he and his staff have been replaced, it's up to newly hired Pete Lembo to turn the tide coming off a 3-9 campaign. Only 10 starters will be back to implement the new systems, and the first FBS game of the season will be extremely difficult at Missouri. I can tell you that the game already meets the criteria for a September 7 stability mismatch in favor of the Tigers.

DUKE (ACC) - 2

Duke suffered a big loss when HC Mike Elko opted to go back to College Station and take over the Texas A&M program. His teams were fantastic overachievers at Duke. His replacement for the Blue Devils is Manny Diaz, whose talented teams at Miami were best known for not living up to the billing. It should be an interesting season or two in Durham, as Diaz takes over a team that won 17 games over the last two years but now brings back only 10 starters. Diaz did bring in talented QB Maalik Murphy out of the transfer portal from Texas to fill the void left by Riley Leonard's move to Notre Dame.

GEORGIA STATE (SUN BELT) -2

When former head coach Shawn Elliott opted for an assistant job at South Carolina, Georgia State was left searching for answers. They hope they found the answer in Dell McGee, who was instrumental as an offensive assistant for Georgia in their recent title runs. McGee will bring new coordinators and systems with him and just 10 starters return for the Panthers in 2024, so it will be an unstable situation, at least early. This program has won bowl games in two of the last three seasons, so I wouldn't expect a total drop-off. However, GSU will be a fade play on the stability system in the opener at Georgia Tech.

SAN DIEGO STATE (MTN WEST) - 2

San Diego State has had plenty of great seasons and memories to savor over the last decade in college football, as the Aztecs have won double-digit games in five of the last nine seasons. The 2023 season left a bad taste in fans' mouths, and 2024 might too in the first season under new head coach Sean Lewis. It's unfortunate, as the program opens up its new home this year, Snapdragon Stadium. Only 10 starters will be back from last fall's 4-8 team. Lewis has commanded potent offenses at Colorado and Kent State in recent years but it could take some time to materialize at SDSU.

UCLA (BIG TEN) -2

The Bruins find themselves in a difficult spot as they make their first trek into Big Ten country this year. Not only does the program transition at head coach to DeShaun Foster, taking the reins of a team for the first time, but the 2024 schedule plots out to be one of the toughest in the country. Only 12 starters are back from the 8-5 team of a year ago, and recruiting took a hit in this first offseason under Foster. Earning a bowl bid would be a tremendous accomplishment this season.

MISSISSIPPI STATE (SEC) - 1

Last year was a tough one for the Mississippi State program. Not only were the Bulldogs still recovering from the death of former head coach Mike Leach in December 2022, but the team won just one SEC game, typing for the worst season since 2006. Veteran QB Will Rogers also transferred out, leaving just nine returning starters for 2024 and new Head Coach Jeff Leiby. Making matters far worse, the SEC is better

than ever this season, with Texas and Oklahoma coming on board. The MSU early schedule is manageable before a brutal league slate kicks in. Unfortunately for Leppy & Co., instability usually hits worst early.

NEW MEXICO (MTN WEST) – 1

I have to admit I was astounded to see the DraftKings win total for New Mexico this year set at 2, a figure one higher than the Lobos' stability score heading into the season. It seems that new head coach Bronco Mendenhall will have his hands full this season as he and his new staff work to field a team with just nine starters back. After digging deeper, it's tough to find even a single game where UNM "should" win this season, assuming the season isn't a total surprise. Even the opener versus an FCS team (Montana State) figures to be too tough for this unstable team.

NEW MEXICO STATE (CONF USA) – 1

Football may be quite tough to watch for fans in the great state of New Mexico. Perhaps watching native Walter White in five seasons of Breaking Bad might be a better option. Both of the state's colleges face stability scores of 1 to start the 2024 season. NMSU figures to be a bigger shock this year to most average college football fans. The Aggies come off two great seasons under former head coach Jerry Kill, who abruptly decided he couldn't muster the enthusiasm to do the job anymore. The program then lost stud QB Diego Pavia to the transfer portal. The new head coach is Tony Sanchez, who struggled to a 20-40 record in five years at UNLV. Quite realistically, this team would be a great bet to undergo the worst decline from 2023 to 2024.

LOUISIANA MONROE (SUN BELT) – 0

A stability score of ZERO used to be unheard of prior to 2022, as usually, teams were able to bring back at least eight starters in a given year to earn that point. The transfer portal has decimated that theory so much that for 2024, we have six teams that produce that dubious score. I can assure you that teams in this state never do as well as the prior season and usually struggle to cover point spreads. Leading off the ZERO brigade is UL-Monroe, a team that brings back just seven starters from a 2-10 team for new head coach Bryant Vincent, who got his feet wet with UAB in the 2022 season and boasts a 7-6 career record. He faces his former team in early September and will be a stability system fade that game.

MICHIGAN (BIG TEN) – 0

College football fans will be as shocked as I am to find both CFP National Championship Game participants with stability scores of ZERO as they attempt to build off their landmark campaigns. Defending national champ Michigan starts anew with head coach Sherrone Moore taking over for Jim Harbaugh. Moore was a staunch supporter of Harbaugh in the controversial last few seasons and knows and bleeds Michigan Blue. However, just seven starters are back from the 15-0 team, and they'll have a new quarterback under center to replace first-round NFL pick JJ McCarthy. There's still plenty of talent in place, but instability is instability, and it can prove a challenge for ANY team. Of note, the Wolverines open the season at home against three very stable

programs for 2024 and will be stability system fade plays in all three, including Week 2 versus a loaded Texas team.

OREGON STATE (PAC 12) – 0

The Pac-12 crumbled around Oregon State and Washington State; the teams left to pick up the pieces. Now, what the future holds for what recently deceased Bill Walton once referred to as the "Conference of Champions" is still to be determined, but for now, Beavers will face a 2024 schedule heavy with teams from the Mountain West Conference. They will do it with a new coaching staff headed by Trent Bray and will return just five starters from the 8-5 team of 2023. While it certainly will be a season of transition and instability at the start, it doesn't mean this team can't win as many games against a softened slate.

SOUTH ALABAMA (SUN BELT) – 0

The South Alabama program has enjoyed back-to-back strong seasons, and former head coach Kane Wommack left on a high note with his team winning a 59-10 decision in its bowl game this past December against Eastern Michigan. The job of maintaining that level of success falls to Major Applewhite, whose last head coach role came at Houston in 2018. He was the OC here for the last three years, so this might not be as strong of a ZERO stability score as some other qualifiers. However, there are only seven total starters back for 2024, and the road slate is fairly tough, so getting to .500 and another bowl game might be a stretch.

TROY (SUN BELT) – 0

While I noted that Sun Belt rival South Alabama may have an easier transition as a stability zero than most others on this list, for Troy, the 2024 season figures to be a complete reboot. New head coach Gerard Parker comes over from Notre Dame where he was an OC/TE assistant. Only four starters are back from the Trojans' 11-3 team of a year ago, two on each side of the ball. After winning five games in each season from 2019-21, Troy recorded 23 victories over the last two years. It's a safe assumption to speculate that winning five games with this massively unstable situation would be a great achievement.

WASHINGTON (BIG TEN) – 0

Kalen DeBoer took Washington from a 4-8 team when he took over in 2021 to 25 victories and a spot in the national title contest in just two seasons. With him moving on to take Nick Saban's place at Alabama, ushering the Huskies into a new era of football in the Big Ten falls to Jedd Fisch. When I indicate "falls to," that might be a misnomer, as UW was thrilled to land Fisch, a coach whose star was on the rise after resurrecting the Arizona program over three seasons of work. That said, keeping the Huskies viable in a loaded Big Ten will be a challenge, particularly this season when just five total starters are back. The truly difficult job of replacing QB Michael Penix goes to transfer Will Rogers, who gained plenty of experience with Mississippi State. Fisch's team will be a stability system fade play in both of its early September FBS games against Eastern Michigan and Washington State. If they survive those games to go 3-0, perhaps the recent winning culture can catch up once the Big Ten season arrives.



Jedd Fisch

STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

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

COLLEGE FOOTBALL RETURNING STARTERS

TEAM	RETURNING	TEAM	RETURNING	TEAM	RETURNING
VIRGINIA TECH	21	UTAH ST	15	TULSA	12
INDIANA	20	CLEMSON	14	UCLA	12
OLE MISS	20	COLORADO ST	14	APPALACHIAN ST	11
IOWA ST	19	EAST CAROLINA	14	ARMY	11
OKLAHOMA ST	19	FLA INTERNATIONAL	14	CHARLOTTE	11
BAYLOR	18	FLORIDA	14	FLA ATLANTIC	11
IOWA	18	GEORGIA	14	MASSACHUSETTS	11
KENTUCKY	18	LIBERTY	14	TENNESSEE	11
SOUTH FLORIDA	18	LOUISVILLE	14	TEXAS ST UNIV	11
STANFORD	18	MISSOURI	14	UAB	11
TEXAS A&M	18	NAVY	14	UNLV	11
AUBURN	17	NOTRE DAME	14	ARIZONA ST	10
BOISE ST	17	PURDUE	14	BUFFALO	10
BOSTON COLLEGE	17	RICE	14	DUKE	10
JAMES MADISON	17	TEXAS TECH	14	EASTERN MICHIGAN	10
MEMPHIS	17	TX-SAN ANTONIO	14	GEORGIA ST	10
NEBRASKA	17	UCF	14	HOUSTON	10
SYRACUSE	17	USC	14	LOUISIANA TECH	10
TEXAS	17	VANDERBILT	14	MARSHALL	10
WESTERN MICHIGAN	17	WAKE FOREST	14	NORTH TEXAS	10
ARKANSAS	16	WISCONSIN	14	OLD DOMINION	10
ARKANSAS ST	16	ALABAMA	13	SAN DIEGO ST	10
COLORADO	16	BYU	13	SOUTHERN MISS	10
KENNESAW ST	16	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	13	TEMPLE	10
MIAMI FL	16	CONNECTICUT	13	WASHINGTON ST	10
NORTHERN ILLINOIS	16	FRESNO ST	13	AKRON	9
OREGON	16	GA SOUTHERN	13	BALL ST	9
TCU	16	GEORGIA TECH	13	FLORIDA ST	9
VIRGINIA	16	ILLINOIS	13	JACKSONVILLE ST	9
ARIZONA	15	KANSAS	13	MISSISSIPPI ST	9
BOWLING GREEN	15	KENT ST	13	NEW MEXICO	9
CALIFORNIA	15	PENN ST	13	UTEP	9
CINCINNATI	15	PITTSBURGH	13	NEW MEXICO ST	8
HAWAII	15	WESTERN KENTUCKY	13	TOLEDO	8
LA LAFAYETTE	15	WEST VIRGINIA	13	LA MONROE	7
MICHIGAN ST	15	WYOMING	13	MICHIGAN	7
MINNESOTA	15	COASTAL CAROLINA	12	MIDDLE TENN ST	7
NORTHWESTERN	15	KANSAS ST	12	SOUTH ALABAMA	7
OHIO ST	15	LSU	12	SAN JOSE ST	7
OKLAHOMA	15	MARYLAND	12	AIR FORCE	6
RUTGERS	15	MIAMI OHIO	12	OHIO U	6
SMU	15	NC STATE	12	OREGON ST	5
SOUTH CAROLINA	15	NEVADA	12	WASHINGTON	5
TULANE	15	NORTH CAROLINA	12	TROY	4
UTAH	15	SAM HOUSTON ST	12		

AAC BETTING PREVIEW

by Adam Burke

OF TIMES SELECTED BY VSIN EXPERTS TO WIN CONFERENCE

The American Athletic Conference looked a lot different last season with realignment, as Charlotte, Florida Atlantic, North Texas, Rice, UAB, and UTSA all made the move from Conference USA to the AAC. There are additional changes this year, as conference champion SMU is now a member of the ACC and Army has joined the conference as a football-only member.

It will be interesting to see how those six teams evolve. UTSA was one loss away from playing in the AAC Title Game, but four of the other five finished with losing records in conference play. With unbeaten SMU gone and Tulane going through some transition with Willie Fritz now at Houston, the door might open a crack for one of the old C-USA squads to step up and have an impact.

Only four teams had winning conference records last season and those teams combined to go 29-3. Three teams finished .500 at 4-4 and seven teams went 3-5 or worse, so we had one well-defined tier and a bunch of mediocre to bad teams the rest of the way.

Interestingly, with 30 new head coaches in college football this season, the only replacement here is Jon Sumrall for a Tulane team that went 11-3, so those bad teams didn't really make any changes with their leadership. Most Group of Five teams are struggling to keep their top talent nowadays, so it could be a long year for those at the bottom of the conference again.



2024 PROJECTED STANDINGS (BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	ALL GAMES		CONFERENCE		DRAFTKINGS O/U
					PRJW'S	PRJL'S	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	
TX-SAN ANTONIO	43.0	3.1	0.5	32.91 (105)	8.4	3.6	6.0	2.0	8
TULANE	44.0	3.3	0.1	36.79 (82)	7.9	4.1	6.0	2.0	7.5
MEMPHIS	46.0	3.0	-0.3	35.88 (88)	8.6	3.4	5.8	2.2	9.5
EAST CAROLINA	34.5	2.8	0.2	31.22 (127)	6.6	5.4	4.7	3.3	6
SOUTH FLORIDA	40.0	1.9	-0.4	37.65 (75)	6.6	5.4	4.7	3.3	7
FLA ATLANTIC	34.5	3.0	-0.3	28.77 (134)	7.2	4.8	4.4	3.6	6.5
ARMY	32.0	2.3	-0.1	32.99 (115)	5.6	6.4	4.2	4.8	6
RICE	38.5	2.4	0.0	33.54 (104)	7.0	5.0	4.1	3.9	6.5
NAVY	31.5	2.6	0.5	34.96 (97)	4.9	7.1	3.6	5.4	5.5
UAB	34.0	2.5	0.0	33.06 (112)	6.1	5.9	3.5	4.5	6.5
NORTH TEXAS	32.0	2.2	0.3	35.42 (93)	5.0	7.0	3.3	4.7	5.5
TULSA	29.5	2.0	0.4	32.17 (121)	5.0	7.0	3.1	4.9	4.5
CHARLOTTE	30.5	2.0	0.1	38.32 (72)	3.7	8.3	2.4	5.6	3.5
TEMPLE	20.0	2.6	-0.8	36.91 (80)	1.8	10.2	1.2	6.8	2.5

ARMY BLACK KNIGHTS

2023 Record: 6-6 SU & 5-6-1 ATS
Head Coach: Jeff Monken (11th)

Army is a conference member for the first time since 2004, as the Black Knights spent seven years in Conference USA. They were Independent from 1890-1997 before joining C-USA and then went Independent again in 2005. Even though Navy joined the AAC in 2015, the Army-Navy Game will still be considered a non-conference affair.

Obviously this write-up is about Army, but you cannot talk about the Black Knights in this conference without thinking about the trendline for the Middies. Navy hired Paul Johnson in 2002 and went 2-10 as he installed the triple-option. From 2003-14, Navy won at least eight games in 11 of 12 seasons, including the first seven under Ken Niumatalolo.

The Middies had a conference record of 7-1 in each of their first two seasons in the AAC. They have finished with a winning record in conference play in just one of the last seven. Now that teams see the option regularly, they've defended it more effectively and Army won't have the luxury that Navy had coming in cold.

OFFENSE

Army will go back to the traditional, under-center option after one year away from it. New OC Cody Worley has been with the program since 2020 coaching quarterbacks and takes over after one year of Drew Thatcher running the show from the shotgun. Worley was the run game coordinator last season as well, so we should expect to see Army's ground-and-pound more frequently.

Air Force led the service academies in rushing yards per carry by a wide margin, with Army second with 4.35 and Navy third with 4.26. QB Bryson Daily ran for 901 yards and seven touchdowns on 215 carries. No other back had more than 99, but Kanye Udoh is back after averaging 5.3 yards per carry.

DEFENSE

It is hard to analyze defensive performance for service academies because the offense carries the time of possession and the defensive lines are often undersized. Army allowed 5.9 yards per play last season, but faced the seventh-fewest defensive plays. Maybe a better indicator is that Army was 34th in total yardage allowed, despite the limited number of snaps.

After facing the 103rd-ranked schedule per Jeff Sagarin, Army steps up in a big way in terms of opposing offenses this year.

OUTLOOK

Army does avoid Memphis and Tulane, yet making a bowl game feels like a stretch. They do play Notre Dame in non-conference and actually only play three true road games. They'll play in Philly, the Bronx, and Foxborough this season. My numbers say 5.03 wins and I think 6-6 is a big stretch.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/30	LEHIGH	-31.5	2.5
9/7	at FLORIDA ATLANTIC	5.5	34.5
9/21	RICE	4	38.5
9/26	at TEMPLE	-9.5	20
10/5	at TULSA	-0.5	29.5
10/12	UAB	-0.5	34
10/19	EAST CAROLINA	0.5	34.5
11/2	AIR FORCE	1.5	35.5
11/9	at NORTH TEXAS	2.5	32
11/23	vs NOTRE DAME	30	61.5
11/30	UTSA	9	43
12/14	vs NAVY	0	31.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **32.99**
#115 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.3/0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 11 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 3

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	17.2	123	23.9	44
YARDS PER POINT	17.1	117	15.7	34
PLAYS PER GAME	64.7	108		
TIME OF POSSESSION	33:26	4		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	38.0%	67	38.9%	65
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	294.4	126	375.6	57
YARDS PER PLAY	4.6	119	6.1	108
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	49	3		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	202.7	10	182.9	115
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	70	5.2	123
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	14.3	132		
COMPLETION %	47.6%	132	60.9%	64
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	91.7	132	192.7	25
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.4	101	7.6	83
TURNOVERS	2.1	128	1.5	49

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

22-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

150-1

CFP CHAMPION

3000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 6



CHARLOTTE 49ERS

2023 Record: 3-9 SU & 6-6 ATS
Head Coach: Biff Poggi (3rd)

The revolving door of college football never stops spinning and Charlotte is a prime example. While the 49ers didn't get to their namesake with 49 players going in or out, they got pretty close and that means a new-look roster for head coach Biff Poggi. This was a 3-9 bunch last season, but the wins came over Tulsa and East Carolina, who combined to go 6-18, and South Carolina State, who went 4-4 against FCS competition last season.

Poggi felt like an odd hire. While he came from Jim Harbaugh's staff at Michigan and is a football lifer, he had only been a high school head coach until the Wolverines used him as an associate head coach in 2021-22. Many pro teams have gone the business route with hires and analysts, which is Poggi's background having run a hedge fund. It remains to be seen if it'll work in the Queen City.

OFFENSE

Former Florida QB Max Brown is one of two big highlights here. The other is RB Cartevious Norton from Iowa State. This was an objectively bad offense last season that ranked 123rd in yards per play and 122nd in total passing yards. Charlotte's seven passing TDs tied for the second-fewest and their 16 interceptions tied for 121st in the nation.

Even if Brown isn't a dude, he can't be worse than what the 49ers had last season. Second-year OC Mike Miller likes a mobile QB and Brown has some upside in that regard. Not only were the turnovers a problem, but Charlotte allowed 31 sacks and Poggi spent his NIL money on offensive line upgrades. But, this group needed a lot of help and it's hard to say they fully got it.

DEFENSE

All things considered, the defense wasn't a total debacle. The 49ers were 88th in yards per play allowed and 89th in scoring defense. Given that they were -5 in turnover margin, they did the best that they could in a lot of ways. Unfortunately, it would have taken a Herculean effort to make this team better, as the 49ers ranked 123rd in Brian Fremeau's Net Points Per Drive metric.

Leading sack man Eyabi Okie-Anoma ran out of eligibility and top tackler Demetrius Knight II ran out of patience and transferred. The defense is short on impact players and the transfer portal brought in a lot of lower-division guys, so DC Ryan Osborn's best hope might be a better offense.

OUTLOOK

Poggi's dedication to turning around the Charlotte program is admirable. He donated his own money to the program to pay assistants and fuel the NIL fund, plus his business background might be getting a few more donors. But, the talent here just isn't good enough and it is hard to sell transfers on a team with one bowl appearance since joining FBS in 2015. My numbers call for 2.87 wins.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	JAMES MADISON	10	42.5
9/7	at NORTH CAROLINA	21	48.5
9/14	GARDNER WEBB	-13	19.5
9/21	at INDIANA	14.5	42.5
9/28	at RICE	10.5	38.5
10/5	EAST CAROLINA	2	34.5
10/19	at NAVY	3.5	31.5
10/26	at MEMPHIS	18.5	46
10/31	TULANE	11.5	44
11/16	SOUTH FLORIDA	7	40
11/23	at FLORIDA ATLANTIC	7	34.5
11/30	UAB	1.5	34

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **38.32**
#72 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2/0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 11 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 6
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	16.9	126	30.9	101
YARDS PER POINT	18.3	125	12.7	109
PLAYS PER GAME	68.2	74		
TIME OF POSSESSION	32:18	13		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	23.1%	133	41.1%	90
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	309.7	115	393.1	70
YARDS PER PLAY	4.5	120	5.9	96
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.5	49		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	138.1	79	166.5	91
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.7	100	4.7	97
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.1	94		
COMPLETION %	56.0%	104	64.4%	106
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	171.6	117	226.6	62
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.1	115	7.7	90
TURNOVERS	1.8	113	1.5	56

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
80-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
300-1

CFP CHAMPION
5000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 3.5



EAST CAROLINA PIRATES

2023 Record: 2-10 SU & 5-7 ATS
Head Coach: Mike Houston (6th)

The seat under Mike Houston is warm as East Carolina begins the 2024 season. After having success at Lenoir-Rhyne, The Citadel, and James Madison, Houston has taken ECU to a couple of bowl games, but hasn't finished higher than third in the AAC. The conference keeps improving around him, but the Pirates just had a 2-10 season, their worst since 2004 when they finished 2-9.

The athletic department invested in the program this season. Higher-profile assistant coaches and two Power Five QB transfers have the chance to turn things around for the Pirates, who badly need to inject some life into the team and the fan base.

OFFENSE

All in all, the defense was quite good last season, but the offense was terrible. For a team generally known for having an above average offense, last season's 132nd finish in yards per play with 4.3 was a major departure from the past. ECU was one of four teams with fewer than 2,000 passing and rushing yards. The others were Kent State, Eastern Michigan, and Iowa.

Missouri backup and part-time Miami starter Jake Garcia and Michigan State's Katin Houser are in the battle for starting QB reps. It's hard to believe that ECU is just a year removed from having Holton Ahlers' 28 TD passes and 3,708 passing yards. It's even harder to believe that Keaton Mitchell ran for 1,452 yards in 2022 and the team ran for 1,360 in 2023. New OC John David Baker should have this group closer to 2022 levels, but not all the way there.

DEFENSE

If the offense does make some big strides, then ECU is going to be a surprise team in the AAC. With virtually no help from the other side of the ball, the Pirates defense finished 41st in yards per play against, 38th in scoring defense, and did so with only 18 sacks and 16 takeaways. The defense was fortunate to recover 10 fumbles, as their six interceptions were among the fewest in FBS.

With five Power Five transfers injected into Blake Harrell's defense, we may not see that big of a drop-off, if any. As mentioned, offensive upgrades could make the defense even stronger.

OUTLOOK

I like this East Carolina team and the schedule is very kind. They do get Liberty and App State in non-conference, but avoid Memphis, Tulane, and South Florida. My numbers put ECU at 6.45 wins and the market is juiced on Over 6 wins, which I agree with. There are a lot of spreads under a touchdown for this team, so there is a lot of potential variance in their record, but the talent and coaching have improved.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	NORFOLK STATE	-35	2
9/7	at OLD DOMINION	-0.5	32
9/14	APPALACHIAN STATE	8.5	46
9/21	at LIBERTY	14.5	46
9/28	UTSA	6	43
10/5	at CHARLOTTE	-2	30.5
10/19	at ARMY	-0.5	32
10/26	TEMPLE	-18	20
11/7	FLORIDA ATLANTIC	-3	34.5
11/14	at TULSA	-3	29.5
11/23	at NORTH TEXAS	-0.5	32
11/30	NAVY	-5.5	31.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 31.22
#127 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.8/0.2
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	14.9	131	24.5	51
YARDS PER POINT	18.1	123	14.8	55
PLAYS PER GAME	66	93		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:18	110		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	29.4%	126	40.0%	74
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	269.2	130	362.7	42
YARDS PER PLAY	4.1	131	5.4	58
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	31	106		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	107.1	112	126.4	33
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.5	110	3.5	22
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.4	60		
COMPLETION %	53.4%	119	62.4%	91
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	162.1	122	236.4	76
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5	132	8	107
TURNOVERS	1.7	106	1	112

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
18-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
80-1

CFP CHAMPION
3000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 6**



FLORIDA ATLANTIC OWLS

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

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

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

OFFENSE

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

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

DEFENSE

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

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

OUTLOOK

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

2024 SCHEDULE

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

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **28.77** #134 TOUGHEST OF 134
FIELD RATINGS **3/0.3** (HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 11 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 3
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

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

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
25-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
200-1

CFP CHAMPION
2000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 6.5



MEMPHIS TIGERS

2023 Record: 10-3 SU & 5-7-1 ATS
Head Coach: Ryan Silverfield (5th)

Even though the opportunity is very limited for a Group of Five team in the expanded playoff, the fact that an opportunity even exists is the best news for a program like Memphis. Liberty is the favorite among G5 teams to make the College Football Playoff because of a remarkably weak schedule, but Memphis is not a team to sleep on.

The Liberty Bowl champs beat Iowa State, lost a heartbreaker to SMU, and took Missouri to the wire in St. Louis last season. This year, they'll get a crack at Florida State in Tallahassee and have the type of roster capable of being among the top G5 teams in the country.

OFFENSE

Whether Memphis opened up the checkbook or head coach Ryan Silverfield is just really persuasive doesn't matter. What matters is that Memphis brings back a ton of talent and production. Three-year starter Seth Henigan should crack 100 career TD passes and already flew by 10,000 career passing yards. He'll also have nearly 2,000 yards worth of production and 122 catches from future NFLer Roc Taylor and WR2 Demeer Blankumsee back on the roster.

The loss of Blake Watson's 1,632 scrimmage yards is a potentially big deal, but Memphis brought in South Carolina transfer Mario Anderson, who could be a stud in a softer conference. Silverfield is a former offensive line coach, so it is hard to worry about that side of the ball at any point.

DEFENSE

The offense was 15th in yards per play and sixth in points per game. Unfortunately, the defense went in the complete opposite direction. The Tigers were 114th in yards per play against and 95th in scoring defense. Memphis racked up 6.55 yards per play and was just +0.29 in yards per play differential. What's crazy is that Memphis was actually +5 in turnover margin and 25th in third-down conversion rate against!

The Tigers gave up the fourth-most plays of 20+ yards with 38 and had very little early-down success. In hopes of figuring things out, the Tigers promoted LB coach Jordon Hankins to DC. He held that position for the Liberty Bowl after Matt Barnes was let go. Memphis allowed 446 yards on just 22 completions in that game.

OUTLOOK

The difficult part for Memphis is that their four hardest games are on the road - Florida State, South Florida, UTSA, and Tulane. So, even though this team looks quite loaded on offense and maybe improved on defense, I think the win total of 9 is very accurate. Memphis is a heavy home favorite in every game and favored in 11 of 12 games for me, but I have 9.11 wins in my projections. I'd lean 10-2 over 8-4, but 9-3 seems very likely.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	N ALABAMA	-34	15
9/7	TROY	-10	38.5
9/14	at FLORIDA STATE	18	60.5
9/21	at NAVY	-11.5	31.5
9/28	MIDDLE TENNESSEE	-21	28
10/11	at SOUTH FLORIDA	-4	40
10/19	NORTH TEXAS	-16.5	32
10/26	CHARLOTTE	-18.5	30.5
11/2	at UTSA	0.5	43
11/8	RICE	-10.5	38.5
11/16	UAB	-15	34
11/28	at TULANE	1.5	44

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 35.88
#88 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3/0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 17 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 10 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	38	7	30	96
YARDS PER POINT	11.9	6	15.1	49
PLAYS PER GAME	70.5	45		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:40	51		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	46.3%	16	36.0%	36
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	450.5	14	452.3	124
YARDS PER PLAY	6.4	14	6.4	123
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.2	101		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	147.3	72	165.2	87
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.6	40	4.7	96
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.8	16		
COMPLETION %	66.1%	20	60.8%	63
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	303.2	11	287.1	130
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.2	25	8.4	122
TURNOVERS	1	17	1.6	41

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+220

MAKE PLAYOFF
+550

CFP CHAMPION
1000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION OVER 9

NAVY MIDSHIPMEN

2023 Record: 5-7 SU & 5-7 ATS
Head Coach: Brian Newberry (3rd)

In my write-up about AAC newcomer Army, I touched on some of the difficulties that Navy football has been having. The Middies won 11 games back in 2019. They've won 16 combined games in four seasons since and played 10 games during the COVID year. They have had a winning conference record once in the last seven seasons in the AAC.

However, second-year head coach Brian Newberry did lead the team to five wins last season, the most since that 2019 campaign. But, this is a new era of Navy football, as former Mercer head coach Drew Cronic brings in the Wing-T offense and the Middies try something different in hopes of sparking the program.

OFFENSE

Cronic says that the offense will be a mash-up of the Wing-T, triple-option, and spread option, so...yeah. We'll see how that goes. We know that service academies are remarkably disciplined and the players will dive into the playbook in hopes of ending the four-year bowl drought. As we know, the service academies are at a disadvantage in present-day college football by not being able to utilize the transfer portal, so it all comes down to in-house performance and returning production.

Four QBs took snaps last season. Two are still on the roster. It appears that Blake Horvath holds the lead over Braxton Woodson. Horvath was the more effective runner and passer last season, but Woodson got more reps. The QB position is important in every offense, but so critical in this one, especially with the scheme change. Leading rusher Alex Tecza is back after ripping off six yards per carry last year.

DEFENSE

Navy was +11 in turnover margin last year, which helped the defense to one of its best seasons in a while despite finishing 64th in yards per play allowed. Navy's 24 takeaways were tied for 13th in the nation, leading to a 38th-ranked scoring defense. As with any service academy, it has to be pointed out that the style of offense limits exposure to the defense, but the defenses are undersized and can fail to generate a lot of negative plays by losing in the trenches.

The Middies had 29 sacks to go with 14 fumble recoveries, so they made a lot of plays, but I would expect turnover regression for this season. Navy only lost eight of 20 fumbles on offense and recovered 14 of 21 opponent fumbles. It isn't a circular ball, so it bounces in weird ways, but Navy was on the right side of both ends.

OUTLOOK

AAC defenses have been suffocating the triple-option for a while, so doing something new is exciting and potentially valuable. However, this feels like a transitional year under Cronic's complicated scheme. I have Navy down for just below five wins and agree with the vig on Under 5.5, especially since I think some of the AAC foes on the schedule will improve.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	BUCKNELL	-27	7
9/7	TEMPLE	-15	20
9/21	MEMPHIS	11.5	46
9/28	at UAB	4.5	34
10/5	at AIR FORCE	7	35.5
10/19	CHARLOTTE	-3.5	30.5
10/26	vs NOTRE DAME	30	61.5
11/2	at RICE	9	38.5
11/9	at SOUTH FLORIDA	10	40
11/16	TULANE	10	44
11/30	at EAST CAROLINA	5.5	34.5
12/14	vs ARMY	0	32

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **34.96**
#97 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.6/0.5**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	17.1	125	24.5	51
YARDS PER POINT	17.1	118	14.9	53
PLAYS PER GAME	64.3	114		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:34	26		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	28.8%	128	32.1%	18
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	292.8	127	365.2	48
YARDS PER PLAY	4.6	118	5.5	65
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	45.6	5		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	192.4	18	132.9	35
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	62	3.7	32
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	16.5	131		
COMPLETION %	50.3%	129	66.8%	126
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	100.5	131	232.3	71
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.1	116	8.2	113
TURNOVERS	1.2	40	2	3

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

40-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

250-1

CFP CHAMPION

2000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 5.5**



NORTH TEXAS

MEAN GREEN

2023 Record: 5-7 SU & 7-4-1 ATS
Head Coach: Eric Morris (3rd)

North Texas had a flair for the dramatic in Eric Morris' first season at the helm. The Mean Green went 5-7, losing by more than eight points just twice and winning by more than eight points just twice, once over a FBS team. "Can't happen" losses to FIU and Navy really marred what was an interesting season otherwise, with losses by 7 to Tulane, 3 to Memphis, and 8 to UTSA. Those are competitive showings against the top of the AAC.

The Dudes of Denton have a new backfield of former TCU players as they look to replace a ton of lost production and hope that transfers help what was a downright awful defense last season.

OFFENSE

Morris can coach offense. North Texas had a 1,000-yard rusher in Ayo Adeyi and a 1,000-yard receiver in Ja'Mori Maclin. Unfortunately, both of them are gone, but a new transfer QB takes over for departed Chandler Rogers in the person of Chandler Morris, who was a part-time starter for the Horned Frogs each of the last three seasons and was originally recruited to Oklahoma.

Morris brings a 16/5 TD/INT ratio into this Air Raid offense and old teammate Zach Evans comes in after two seasons at TCU, one at Ole Miss, and one on the sidelines injured at Minnesota. He's one yard shy of 2,000 for his career and has run for 6.9 yards per carry. Morris's scheme will create new pass-catching options to make up for the loss of Maclin and two others with over 400 yards last season.

DEFENSE

But, North Texas's ceiling will be defined by the defense. The Mean Green gave up 152 points in their five wins last season. They gave up 293 in their seven losses. They held one opponent under 27 points. This was an objectively bad group. How bad? UNT had 6.53 yards per play on offense to rank 17th. They had a negative yards per play differential.

The Mean Green defense allowed 6.56 YPP and ranked 125th. They were the only defense in the nation to give up over 3,000 rushing yards. The next closest allowed 2,877. Takeaways were few and far between with 14 in 12 games and the 3-3-5 defense only had 18 sacks for 90 yards, the fourth-fewest sack yards in the nation. Tons of transfers are now in place, so we'll see if gains can be made.

OUTLOOK

"All gas, no brakes" for the North Texas team makes them hard to predict. If the defense can even get slightly better, the offense should eat and this could be a bowl team. Right now, I have 5.36 wins, but I think Morris might be building something decent here and the defenders now fit the scheme. I think they could be a slight overperformer and a team I adjust up in my Power Ratings.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	at SOUTH ALABAMA	7	36.5
9/7	STEPH F AUSTIN	-17.5	16.5
9/14	at TEXAS TECH	18	48
9/21	WYOMING	3.5	38
9/28	TULSA	-4.5	29.5
10/12	at FLORIDA ATLANTIC	5	34.5
10/19	at MEMPHIS	16.5	46
10/26	TULANE	10	44
11/9	ARMY	-2.5	32
11/15	at UTSA	14	43
11/23	EAST CAROLINA	0.5	34.5
11/30	at TEMPLE	-9.5	20

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 35.42
#93 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.2/0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 10 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 4
DEFENSIVE: 6

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	33.5	19	37.6	127
YARDS PER POINT	14.7	77	12.9	104
PLAYS PER GAME	79.3	2		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:55	92		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	42.5%	37	45.5%	116
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	493.8	5	484.5	133
YARDS PER PLAY	6.2	21	6.5	125
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.1	52		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	190.6	19	262.9	133
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.1	16	5.7	131
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.8	11		
COMPLETION %	61.1%	63	59.3%	44
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	303.2	10	221.6	52
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.8	44	8.4	119
TURNOVERS	1.7	106	1.2	96

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
20-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
150-1

CFP CHAMPION
3000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION OVER 5.5



RICE OWLS

2023 Record: 6-7 SU & 8-4-1 ATS
Head Coach: Mike Bloomgren (7th)

Not that it's relevant to anything, but I found it very interesting last season that when Rice and Florida Atlantic joined Temple in the AAC, the conference had all of the FBS Owls. That isn't the case now with Kennesaw State. But, it is a fun trivia nugget!

This team hasn't won a bowl game since 2014, despite consecutive bowl appearances against Sun Belt teams in 2022 and 2023. Head coach Mike Bloomgren is 22-46 over six seasons, as Rice made a bowl at 5-8 in 2022 due to their APR scores. If the trend line holds, the Owls will win seven games this season, after going 4-8, 5-8, 6-7 over the last three seasons.

OFFENSE

A transfer QB once again holds the keys to the offense. It will be E.J. Warner this time, the son of Kurt, in case y'all want to feel old. It will actually be Warner's third season as a starter, as he swapped colors, but kept the mascot with his transfer from Temple. He actually had 41 TD passes and threw for over 6,000 yards for some pretty bad Temple teams.

The loss of WR Luke McCaffrey is a big deal here, as he had 13 of the team's 29 receiving touchdowns and a team-high 992 yards. RB Dean Connors was the second-leading receiver with 403 yards, including 80 on one of his 43 catches. Connors also ran for 6.4 yards per carry. So, he's a fine player, but the team needs a WR1 to emerge in hopes of finishing around the middle of the pack in yards per play again.

DEFENSE

The offense was 63rd in YPP and the defense was 61st, so the 6-7 record makes a ton of sense for a team that was very average. However, there are some clear positive regression signs. This was a team that made a bowl despite a -14 turnover margin. The defense only forced 12 takeaways and only three teams had fewer interceptions.

Given the lack of turnovers, Rice finishing 83rd in scoring defense isn't all that bad. A lot of returnees are back, which means a lot of returning production, but the defense is going to have to find a way to generate more pressure (23 sacks) and more takeaways.

OUTLOOK

The Rice offense has gotten better since OC Marques Tuiasosopo was hired prior to the 2021 season and this is an experienced defense. Rice does appear to be trending upward after a lot of seasons spinning in the mud. My numbers do call for bowl eligibility at 6.37 wins, but the vig on Over 6.5 is cost-prohibitive and would cause me to lean more towards 6-6 than 7-5.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	SAM HOUSTON	-13.5	27
9/7	TEXAS SOUTHERN	-38.5	2.5
9/14	at HOUSTON	6.5	43
9/21	at ARMY	-4	32
9/28	CHARLOTTE	-10.5	30.5
10/12	UTSA	2.5	43
10/19	at TULANE	9	44
10/26	at CONNECTICUT	-9	27
11/2	NAVY	-9	31.5
11/8	at MEMPHIS	10.5	46
11/23	at UAB	-2	34
11/30	SOUTH FLORIDA	-1.5	40

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **34.29** #104 TOUGHEST OF 134
FIELD RATINGS **2.4/0** (HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS OFFENSIVE: 6 DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	27.1	58	29.8	94
YARDS PER POINT	13	26	12.7	107
PLAYS PER GAME	64.8	106		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:32	53		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.0%	78	38.2%	55
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	352.8	86	380.3	59
YARDS PER PLAY	5.4	67	5.5	61
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28	124		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	100.4	119	159.1	75
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.6	105	4.2	65
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.4	34		
COMPLETION %	62.0%	53	58.8%	36
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	252.3	45	221.2	51
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.3	61	7.4	68
TURNOVERS	2.1	126	0.8	122

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE **14-1**
MAKE PLAYOFF **80-1**
CFP CHAMPION **5000-1**

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION UNDER 6.5

SOUTH FLORIDA BULLS

2023 Record: 7-6 SU & 7-6 ATS
Head Coach: Alex Golesh (3rd)

This is the most interesting team in the AAC for the 2024 season in my humble opinion. First-year head coach Alex Golesh took the Bulls to a bowl game, where they throttled a shorthanded Syracuse squad in Boca Raton. There is no telling how much it cost USF to keep Byrum Brown from transferring to a Power Four program, but the dual-threat signal caller is back and it seems likely that veteran DC Todd Orlando will shore up the defense.

Non-conference clashes with Alabama and Miami will be tough, but the conference schedule is very manageable and this is a dangerous team.

OFFENSE

I was absolutely shocked to read that Brown had USF's first-ever 3,000-yard passing season. With predecessors like Matt Grothe, B.J. Daniels, and Quinton Flowers, some good QBs have come through Tampa, yet Brown did something that none of them were able to accomplish. For good measure, he ran for 809 yards and 11 touchdowns. He comes into this season with the best completion rate (min. 25 pass attempts) in program history.

He's a special player and may go down as the best QB in school history if he performs to a similar level this season and stays for next season. And his supporting cast is mostly back. USF lost a lineman to the NFL, but leading (non-Brown) rusher Nay'Quan Wright is back and so is 1,000-yard receiver Sean Atkins. The Golesh/Joel Gordon offense is creative, up-tempo, and balanced, and nearly all hands are back on deck.

DEFENSE

This is the area that has to improve. USF was 112th in scoring defense (32.2 PPG) and allowed over six yards per play. USF's offense led the nation in offensive plays with 1,028, but ranked 105th in average time of possession, so the defense did get gassed at times. However, this was a top-25 unit in third-down defense, so early downs crushed them.

USF was tied for 13th with 24 takeaways, but only five teams allowed more passing touchdowns. It was a truly weird season on defense, but a lot of starters are back and Orlando is a well-respected DC, so there's hope for improvement.

OUTLOOK

This offense should only get better in Golesh's second season, so any shred of improvement from the defense elevates the profile of this team. I'm high on USF, as I have them a double-digit favorite in five AAC games and road chalk at Rice. Alabama, Miami, Tulane, and Memphis are all tough games, but I can't see them only winning six. That feels like a major failure. My numbers say 7.57 and I think 7-5 is the worst-case scenario.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	BETHUNE-COOKMAN	-38	4
9/7	at ALABAMA	28.5	65
9/14	at SOUTHERN MISS	-8	29.5
9/21	MIAMI FL	15.5	57
9/28	at TULANE	7.5	44
10/11	MEMPHIS	4	46
10/19	UAB	-8	34
11/1	at FLORIDA ATLANTIC	-2	34.5
11/9	NAVY	-10	31.5
11/16	at CHARLOTTE	-7	30.5
11/23	TULSA	-12	29.5
11/30	at RICE	1.5	38.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 37.65
#75 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 1.9/0.4
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 18 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 10 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	31.4	32	32.9	110
YARDS PER POINT	14.7	76	13.2	92
PLAYS PER GAME	82.1	1		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:35	101		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.0%	76	32.4%	19
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	460.8	13	435.8	116
YARDS PER PLAY	5.6	55	6	100
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	44.7	6		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	189.1	22	154.1	62
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	61	4.3	71
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.3	36		
COMPLETION %	64.5%	27	60.3%	54
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	271.7	28	281.7	127
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.9	39	8	104
TURNOVERS	1.8	109	1.6	41

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

+600

MAKE PLAYOFF

20-1

CFP CHAMPION

1000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 7



TEMPLE OWLS

2023 Record: 3-9 SU & 3-9 ATS
Head Coach: Stan Drayton (3rd)

The 2019 Owls won eight games. It was the first season under Rod Carey after he took over for Geoff Collins, inheriting the last year of Matt Rhule's final recruiting class. Since then, the Owls have 10 wins total and are just 6-18 under Stan Drayton, whose ties in the Philly area were the biggest selling point to making him the head coach.

Drayton gets another crack this year, but nothing seems to be working for the Owls. They beat Akron, Navy, and Norfolk State last season and have a more difficult schedule this year. It'll be a long one for the program.

OFFENSE

QB E.J. Warner transferred to Rice, so one of last year's few offensive bright spots is gone. Forrest Brock and Rutgers transfer Evan Simon are battling for reps at the position. Even with Warner, Temple finished 87th in yards per play and came in 123rd in rushing yards, as they trailed a ton and had to throw by virtue of being behind.

Leading rusher Darvon Hubbard is gone, leaving behind Joquez Smith, who only had 325 yards. Leading receiver Amad Anderson Jr. is and second-leading receiver TE David Martin-Robinson is also out. This is an offense severely lacking talent with inexperienced QBs and very little upside.

DEFENSE

The Temple defense finished 120th in yards per play allowed last season. They allowed nearly 36 points per game. The Owls only forced five turnovers. They had two fumble recoveries and three interceptions to finish -20 in turnover margin. Only one other team was higher than -15 in TO margin. Drayton and the staff had more success bringing in defenders through the transfer portal than offensive players, so maybe that will help.

One positive is that it is the second season as defensive coordinator for Everett Withers, which explains the portal success, as he's always been viewed as a strong recruiter. The 61-year-old Withers hadn't been a DC since he was the co-DC at Ohio State in 2013, but he was a head coach at James Madison and Texas State. He's a true football lifer.

OUTLOOK

This is likely to be one of the worst teams in the nation. I have them power-rated 133rd (out of 134) in the nation with 2.18 projected wins. Their season win total is 2.5, so I like the Under. Furthermore, if a sportsbook puts up a "Fewest Wins" prop, Temple has a great chance to be in the running. They don't play any FCS teams and play UConn on the road.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/30	at OKLAHOMA	43.5	60
9/7	at NAVY	15	31.5
9/14	COASTAL CAROLINA	11	33.5
9/21	UTAH STATE	12	34.5
9/26	ARMY	9.5	32
10/5	at CONNECTICUT	10.5	27
10/19	TULSA	7.5	29.5
10/26	at EAST CAROLINA	18	34.5
11/9	at TULANE	28	44
11/16	FLORIDA ATLANTIC	11.5	34.5
11/22	at UTSA	27	43
11/30	NORTH TEXAS	9.5	32

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 36.91
#80 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.6/0.8
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 10 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 5
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	19.3	114	38.1	129
YARDS PER POINT	18.6	128	12.1	124
PLAYS PER GAME	72.1	34		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:14	112		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.8%	68	48.4%	129
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	358.5	81	459.6	128
YARDS PER PLAY	5	95	6.3	120
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.4	131		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	78.6	130	204.5	127
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3	125	4.7	103
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	44.2	2		
COMPLETION %	55.1%	112	64.9%	114
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	279.8	21	255.1	108
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.3	106	9.2	132
TURNOVERS	2.2	129	0.5	133

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
350-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
300-1

CFP CHAMPION
5000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 2.5**



TULANE GREEN WAVE

2023 Record: 11-3 SU & 5-9 ATS
Head Coach: Jon Sumrall (1st)

The winds of change blew through New Orleans this offseason, as head coach Willie Fritz moved on to Houston and QB Michael Pratt moved on to the NFL. The Green Wave have a lot of holes to fill, but there is a very real possibility that this team is as good or better than last year's version. Former Troy head coach Jon Sumrall had two successful seasons with the Trojans and brought both coordinators with him.

The expanded playoff is a huge deal for a program like Tulane, who never had a chance to be in the top four, but certainly has a chance to be the top Group of Five team. It'll probably take at least one upset out of Kansas State and Oklahoma and running the AAC table.

OFFENSE

The loss of a veteran, accomplished QB like Pratt has not gone unnoticed at Tulane, but Oregon transfer Ty Thompson was once a five-star recruit and might get his chance now. Thompson was stuck behind Bo Nix each of the last two seasons. Oregon brought in Dillon Gabriel and Thompson took his chances in the portal, ending up with the Green Wave. He only has 66 career pass attempts, but has every opportunity to win the job over Kai Horton.

While Joe Craddock has to replace almost the entire receiver room, he does get a big boost in star RB Mekhi Hughes, who had 1,378 yards last season. He only had seven rushing touchdowns, a number that could easily go up after Kimani Vidal had 24 rushing scores for Troy over Craddock's two seasons there. TE Alex Bauman hit the portal, but came back to Tulane, and he'll be a top option alongside USC transfer Mario Williams and Alabama transfer Shazz Preston.

DEFENSE

The Tulane offense looks to be in great shape and the top three tacklers are all back on defense, so this unit may not fall off much either. The Green Wave were 34th in yards per play and 24th in scoring defense. DC Greg Gasparato brought some of his Trojans with him, so the secondary is actually in pretty good shape and now there are some guys that already know the scheme.

Both Troy and Tulane were similar in terms of average time of possession, as Tulane was about 30 seconds longer, so the defense should have a workload that resembles last season's. The Green Wave did have 27 takeaways last season compared to Troy's 23. It'll be interesting to see if they find the same success.

OUTLOOK

The more I researched this Tulane team, the more bullish I became. My numbers call for 7.83 wins, which sounds low, but the schedule is tough with two clear underdog spots against Kansas State and Oklahoma, plus a toss-up game against Memphis. But I like Over 7.5 wins and think Sumrall is an outstanding coach.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	SE LOUISIANA	-27.5	20
9/7	KANSAS STATE	9.5	56.5
9/14	at OKLAHOMA	18.5	60
9/21	at LOUISIANA	-1.5	39
9/28	SOUTH FLORIDA	-7.5	40
10/5	at UAB	-7.5	34
10/19	RICE	-9	38.5
10/26	at NORTH TEXAS	-10	32
10/31	at CHARLOTTE	-11.5	30.5
11/9	TEMPLE	-28	20
11/16	at NAVY	-10	31.5
11/28	MEMPHIS	-1.5	46

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **36.79**
#82 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **3.3/0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	25.6	68	21.5	25
YARDS PER POINT	14.3	67	15.9	29
PLAYS PER GAME	66.4	91		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:38	23		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.8%	81	37.7%	50
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	367.2	76	342.5	33
YARDS PER PLAY	5.5	62	5	30
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.4	35		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	155.5	68	117.3	21
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	79	3.6	26
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26	115		
COMPLETION %	61.2%	62	65.0%	116
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	211.7	80	225.2	59
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.1	27	6.7	28
TURNOVERS	1.3	54	1.8	20

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+350

MAKE PLAYOFF
11-1

CFP CHAMPION
500-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 7.5**

Tulsa

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

29.5
CONFERENCE: #13 OF 14
NATIONAL: #117 OF 134

TULSA GOLDEN HURRICANE

2023 Record: 4-8 SU & 5-6-1 ATS
Head Coach: Kevin Wilson (3rd)

Year 1 for a new head coach always presents a set of challenges, but the goal is to improve as the season goes along. Well, the Golden Hurricane went 3-2 over their first five games and only won one more. Nobody had delusions of grandeur about the games against Washington and Oklahoma, so being 3-2 felt "on schedule" for Kevin Wilson and Tulsa.

In the end, the finale win over East Carolina felt like a good way to go into the offseason with some kind of momentum, especially for a team that nearly knocked off Tulane on the road a couple weeks prior. Unfortunately, it looks like the building process has at least another year to go.

OFFENSE

When Davis Brin transferred to Georgia Southern, the hope was that Braylon Braxton would be able to take over and thrive. Instead, Cardell Williams got the most pass attempts and freshman Kirk Francis played out the string, including the win over ECU. Braxton only had 50 pass attempts and he bounced to Marshall.

It had to be a frustrating season for an offensive mind like Wilson, but the Golden Hurricane did achieve balance, gaining over 2,000 yards on the ground and through the air. All in all, they finished 84th in yards per play, but they racked up 477 yards in that 24-22 loss to Tulane, 434 against North Texas, and 446 against Tulsa. Maybe there were some positive signs at year's end after all.

DEFENSE

There were virtually no positive signs for the defense. Tulsa finished 127th in yards per play allowed with 6.58 and only mustered 21 sacks. Only UNLV allowed more plays of 30+ yards and only five teams allowed more plays of 20+ yards. Opponents had 53 pass plays of 20+ yards and 13 runs of 30+ yards. So, to say there were some holes in the defense would be an understatement.

Wilson did seek out a lot of help in the transfer portal to bolster the front seven. It may take time for those guys to gel, but the talent level is certainly improved. Wilson's influence in the Midwest has been a big part of the portal after spending six seasons at Ohio State and six as the head coach at Indiana.

OUTLOOK

This is a team that still ranks behind a lot of AAC squads and needs more than just one round of transfers to make bowl eligibility a reality in my opinion. My projections call for 4.87 wins, though I do think this could be a decent ATS team because they have upgraded the talent. Their season win total of 4.5 is juiced to the Over and I'd lean that way, as they avoid Tulane, Memphis, and have a more manageable non-conference slate.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	NORTHWESTERN STATE	-29.5	2
9/7	at ARKANSAS STATE	8	35.5
9/14	OKLAHOMA STATE	23.5	54.5
9/21	at LOUISIANA TECH	-3.5	23.5
9/28	at NORTH TEXAS	4.5	32
10/5	ARMY	0.5	32
10/19	at TEMPLE	-7.5	20
10/26	UTSA	12	43
11/2	at UAB	6.5	34
11/14	EAST CAROLINA	3	34.5
11/23	at SOUTH FLORIDA	12	40
11/30	FLORIDA ATLANTIC	2.5	34.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **32.17**
#121 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2/0.4**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 12 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 4

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	21.7	98	36.3	123
YARDS PER POINT	17.2	119	12.7	108
PLAYS PER GAME	74.4	16		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:55	67		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	44.1%	23	41.0%	88
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	373.8	74	462.2	130
YARDS PER PLAY	5	93	6.7	130
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	43.5	7		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	173.9	39	170.5	100
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	83	4.9	110
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.5	92		
COMPLETION %	55.4%	108	64.9%	113
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	199.9	94	291.6	131
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7	75	8.9	126
TURNOVERS	1.9	121	1.7	23

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

50-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

300-1

CFP CHAMPION

5000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 4.5**



UTSA ROADRUNNERS

2023 Record: 9-4 SU & 6-6-1 ATS
Head Coach: Jeff Traylor (5th)

Back in 2017, a bright-eyed kid named Frank Harris began his college career at UTSA. In 2023, it came to an end, marred by injury, including one that kept him out of the Frisco Bowl. Despite the injuries, Harris still had 336 of the 446 pass attempts for the Roadrunners, who got 742 yards, seven touchdowns, and four interceptions from the other guys.

Head coach Jeff Traylor will be looking for a QB1 and a team leader to emerge with Harris gone, but the Roadrunners are hardly devoid of talent. That being said, the losses are extremely significant. This is a team with 32 wins over the last three seasons, so expectations remain high, even with roster turnover.

OFFENSE

Traylor may have tipped his hand a little bit in the Frisco Bowl, as Owen McCown (son of Josh) got the start and went 22-of-31 for 251 yards and two touchdowns. He did throw two interceptions, but showed a little mobility with 38 yards on eight carries, including a 26-yard scamper. Harris threw for nearly 12,000 yards in his career, but also chipped in over 2,100 rushing yards, so it's a big part of this offense.

At least McCown (or Eddie Lee Marburger) will have last year's top three rushers back. Unfortunately, Joshua Cephus is not back, but the wide receiver room is in good shape with De'Corian Clark's return after missing all of 2023. We need to remember that this was an offense that ranked 70th in yards per play, so it wasn't like they were elite with Harris.

DEFENSE

This is the area of the team to really worry about. This was a borderline top-30 defense by yards per play and really buckled down after a slow start to the season. However, Trey Moore and Kam Alexander both transferred out. Moore had 14 sacks and Alexander had 15 pass breakups to go with a couple of picks.

A lot of returning production can be found elsewhere, but Jess Loepp will need impact players to emerge on his defense. Moore was third in the nation in sacks and Alexander was tied for fifth in passes defended. Terrion Arnold was also fifth and he was a first-round pick. As was Quinyon Mitchell, who was tied for second.

OUTLOOK

We'll find out in a hurry about UTSA. They face rapidly rising Texas State in Week 2 and Texas in Week 3. The conference schedule is weak, though, outside of a visit from Memphis. Even though UTSA has been lowered in my Power Ratings, the schedule yields a projection of 8.49 wins. If they can navigate the Texas State game, 11-1 is a very real possibility and that brings playoff hopes into the mix.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	KENNESAW STATE	-29	17.5
9/7	at TEXAS STATE	0.5	41.5
9/14	at TEXAS	28.5	69
9/21	HOUSTON BAPTIST	-38	8
9/28	at EAST CAROLINA	-6	34.5
10/12	at RICE	-2.5	38.5
10/19	FLORIDA ATLANTIC	-12	34.5
10/26	at TULSA	-12	29.5
11/2	MEMPHIS	-0.5	46
11/15	NORTH TEXAS	-14	32
11/22	TEMPLE	-27	20
11/30	at ARMY	-9	32

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 33.99
#105 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.1/0.5
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	31.9	27	24.1	47
YARDS PER POINT	13.2	33	15.3	41
PLAYS PER GAME	75.9	11		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:08	62		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	47.4%	13	38.7%	61
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	421.6	30	369.1	52
YARDS PER PLAY	5.6	59	4.9	24
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	39.7	24		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	171.8	41	135.5	37
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	59	3.7	29
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.3	35		
COMPLETION %	65.0%	25	56.1%	12
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	249.8	48	233.6	73
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.3	64	6.7	26
TURNOVERS	1.7	104	1.3	81

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+450

MAKE PLAYOFF
13-1

CFP CHAMPION
700-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION OVER 8



UAB BLAZERS

2023 Record: 4-8 SU & 6-6 ATS
Head Coach: Trent Dilfer (3rd)

UAB's players rallied around former offensive coordinator Bryant Vincent when Bill Clark announced that he was stepping down. The athletic department went in a different direction, though, as Super Bowl champ and then-high school coach Trent Dilfer took over. Dilfer went 44-10 at Lipscomb Academy in Tennessee before stepping up to the college ranks, where the Blazers lost twice as many games as they won.

Everybody was learning on the job for UAB last season, as OC Alex Mortensen and DC Sione Ta'ufu'ou were both first-time FBS play-callers. Ta'ufu'ou was the DC for Dilfer at Lipscomb, while Mortensen was on Nick Saban's staff at Alabama.

OFFENSE

Everything starts with a good QB and UAB has that. Jacob Zeno was second to Bo Nix in completion percentage at 73.6%. He made a couple too many bad decisions with nine interceptions and four fumbles lost, but he was an accurate passer in the first year of this offense. In fact, I'm surprised that UAB had the play distribution that they did with 426 runs and 427 pass attempts given Zeno's penchant for completions.

We'll see if that changes this year because leading rusher Jermaine Brown Jr. took his 803 yards and team-high 12 touchdowns with him after exhausting his eligibility. Leading receiver Tejhaun Palmer is trying to make it with the Arizona Cardinals. He was the big-play threat with over 18 yards per catch. This looks like a dink-and-dunk offense without much explosiveness.

DEFENSE

The Blazers struggled to stop the run, as they allowed 24 rushes of 20+ yards, which was tied for 118th in the nation. In fact, they were 125th in yards per carry allowed and were one of eight teams to allow at least 30 rushing touchdowns. To make matters worse, they ranked 131st out of 133 FBS teams in third-down defense. They couldn't get off the field without a turnover.

They did have 21 of those, though, and did get bigger up front through the transfer portal. That being said, depth was a huge issue in so many ways, as the mass exodus with Clark and Vincent not being associated with the program hurt.

OUTLOOK

As much as I don't love this team on paper, the schedule is fairly manageable and that's why their win total is 6.5. I have them with 6.1 wins and a bowl game would be a huge accomplishment for Dilfer and the staff in Year 2. If Zeno improves and the defense shows any improvement, going over is possible, but I truly don't see seven wins.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	ALCORN STATE	-26	10.5
9/7	at ULM	-10.5	21
9/14	at ARKANSAS	14.5	46.5
9/28	NAVY	-4.5	31.5
10/5	TULANE	7.5	44
10/12	at ARMY	0.5	32
10/19	at SOUTH FLORIDA	8	40
11/2	TULSA	-6.5	29.5
11/9	CONNECTICUT	-9.5	27
11/16	at MEMPHIS	15	46
11/23	RICE	2	38.5
11/30	at CHARLOTTE	-1.5	30.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **33.06**
#112 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.5/0**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 11 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 4

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	29.5	46	39.7	133
YARDS PER POINT	15.3	84	11.6	130
PLAYS PER GAME	74	19		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:59	89		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.6%	72	50.0%	132
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	449.3	16	459.9	129
YARDS PER PLAY	6.1	29	6.2	115
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36	68		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	160.5	58	201.8	125
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.5	45	5.3	126
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	35.1	29		
COMPLETION %	69.4%	7	62.7%	94
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	288.7	19	258.1	113
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.2	26	7.5	75
TURNOVERS	1.7	106	1.8	17

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

30-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

250-1

CFP CHAMPION

2000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 6.5

ACC BETTING PREVIEW

by Adam Burke

OF TIMES SELECTED BY VSIN EXPERTS TO WIN CONFERENCE

The Atlantic Coast Conference should probably have tried to swap names with the American Athletic Conference. The ACC now spans more of the country than the AAC with the inclusion of SMU, Cal, and Stanford to the conference this season. Clemson and Florida State are in talks to leave the conference and potentially follow in the footsteps of Oklahoma and Texas from the Big 12, but they will not only be members of the ACC this season, they are among the favorites.

The Seminoles have a Sunshine State-sized chip on their shoulders after getting left out of the College Football Playoff last year because of Jordan Travis' injury, despite a perfect record in the regular season and a win in the ACC Title Game over Louisville. Virtually everybody opted out of the Orange Bowl and the season ended with a dismal and depressing 63-3 loss to Georgia.

Mike Norvell's crew is ready to run it back with a slew of new recruits and transfers. Dabo Swinney's crew is hoping to take a step forward without the help of transfers. The annual hype of Miami and the renewed hopes for Louisville under Jeff Brohm could stand in the way of FSU and Clemson, as the conference has eliminated divisions with 17 teams in the league.

NC State added Coastal Carolina legend Grayson McCall to the roster in hopes of spoiling the party and "Enter Sandman" in Blacksburg took on a different feel last year as Virginia Tech is back on the map. The only newbie with a chance to make noise is SMU. The ACC can best be described as having a lot of good teams, but has limited potential for great teams.



2024 PROJECTED STANDINGS (BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	ALL GAMES		CONFERENCE		DRAFTKINGS O/U
					PRJW'S	PRJL'S	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	
FLORIDA ST	60.5	3.0	0.1	45.82 (37)	9.3	2.7	6.2	1.8	9.5
CLEMSON	58.5	2.5	-0.1	44.86 (47)	8.9	3.1	6.1	1.9	9.5
MIAMI FL	57.0	2.0	0.3	43.93 (57)	9.1	2.9	5.7	2.3	9
SMU	53.5	3.2	-0.2	40.34 (68)	9.1	2.9	5.5	2.5	8
LOUISVILLE	54.5	3.3	-0.4	46.43 (30)	8.2	3.8	5.5	2.5	8.5
NC STATE	51.5	3.0	-0.4	41.38 (65)	8.4	3.6	5.2	2.8	8.5
VIRGINIA TECH	50.0	2.2	-0.5	43.59 (58)	8.0	4.0	4.8	3.2	8
NORTH CAROLINA	48.5	2.9	-0.1	40.99 (66)	7.9	4.1	4.7	3.3	7.5
CALIFORNIA	48.0	2.4	-0.3	45.42 (44)	6.7	5.3	3.9	4.1	6
SYRACUSE	44.5	2.6	-0.3	41.47 (64)	6.7	5.3	3.4	4.6	7
GEORGIA TECH	46.0	1.6	0.3	49.23 (6)	4.8	7.2	2.8	5.2	5
PITTSBURGH	42.0	2.2	0.2	44.18 (55)	5.1	6.9	2.6	5.4	5.5
BOSTON COLLEGE	42.5	2.3	-0.2	44.78 (48)	5.1	6.9	2.6	5.4	5
WAKE FOREST	40.0	3.4	0.0	41.98 (63)	5.0	7.0	2.5	5.5	4.5
VIRGINIA	40.0	3.0	-0.3	45.78 (40)	4.3	7.7	2.3	5.7	4.5
DUKE	42.5	2.1	-0.5	44.36 (54)	5.2	6.8	2.2	5.8	5.5
STANFORD	39.5	1.6	0.0	46.12 (35)	3.7	8.3	1.8	6.2	3.5



BOSTON COLLEGE EAGLES

2023 Record: 7-6 SU & 5-8 ATS
Head Coach: Bill O'Brien (1st)

Bill O'Brien had agreed to become Ohio State's offensive coordinator, but then Boston College came calling. With family considerations on the East Coast, O'Brien jumped at the chance and he's now a college football head coach for the first time since 2013. For a program that has historically been about running the football and playing hard-nosed defense, things could look a lot different in Chestnut Hill this year.

Expectations are not high and it will take time for O'Brien, whose last two college stops have featured far more talented rosters at Alabama and Penn State, to put together the group he wants.

OFFENSE

Thomas Castellanos is what I'd call a 1.5-threat QB. He's a better runner than passer, ripping off 1,113 yards on the ground and 13 touchdowns, but he had a 15/14 TD/INT ratio. O'Brien has obviously worked with some top-notch signal callers in his career and has the chance to mold Castellanos into something more than a runner who also throws, but this is not a team that has paid tremendous attention to the WR position. After all, Zay Flowers was the first BC WR drafted since Kelvin Martin in 1987.

Kye Robichaux and Treshaun Ward make a good 1-2 tandem in the backfield and Lewis Bond is a good building block on the outside after racking up 52 catches for 646 yards and seven of the team's 15 receiving TDs. Robichaux had 4.8 yards per carry and eight scores, while Ward has over 2,200 career yards from scrimmage. The offense should be more interesting, but the scheme change will bring challenges.

DEFENSE

Former head coach Jeff Hafley left to become the Packers defensive coordinator, but this wasn't a great defense last year anyway. The Eagles were 118th against the run in total yardage allowed and 117th in yards per play. Even though they defended the pass fairly well under Hafley, whose level of expertise is with coaching defensive backs, this is a team that needs to get a lot tougher up front.

DC Tim Lewis is aggressive and the Eagles focused on pass rushers and guys that could cover in the portal, so this could be a boom-and-bust type of defense that harasses the QB more, but also gives up more big plays through the air.

OUTLOOK

To call this a transitional year is an understatement. It's not that O'Brien is against running the football, but this will not be the Steve Addazio Eagles. The schedule is tough, as other teams in the conference are a year or two ahead on their upward trajectories. My numbers have BC down for 4.15 wins.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
9/2	at FLORIDA STATE	21	60.5
9/7	DUQUESNE	-35.5	9
9/14	at MISSOURI	20	59.5
9/21	MICHIGAN STATE	-4.5	40.5
9/28	WESTERN KENTUCKY	-8.5	36
10/5	at VIRGINIA	0.5	40
10/17	at VIRGINIA TECH	10	50
10/25	LOUISVILLE	9.5	54.5
11/9	SYRACUSE	-0.5	44.5
11/16	at SMU	14.5	53.5
11/23	NORTH CAROLINA	3.5	48.5
11/30	PITTSBURGH	-2.5	42

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 44.78
#48 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.3/0.2
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 17 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 9 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.3	79	28.3	74
YARDS PER POINT	15.6	92	13.6	85
PLAYS PER GAME	71.5	36		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:11	36		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.5%	50	40.3%	79
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	378.9	70	383.9	64
YARDS PER PLAY	5.3	75	6.1	110
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	41.8	11		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	196.2	15	181.4	110
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.7	32	5.1	119
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.2	93		
COMPLETION %	55.3%	110	57.4%	23
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	182.8	105	202.5	31
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.5	97	7.6	84
TURNOVERS	1.6	86	1.3	74

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

150-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

150-1

CFP CHAMPION

800-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 5**

CALIFORNIA

GOLDEN BEARS

2023 Record: 6-7 SU & 6-7 ATS
Head Coach: Justin Wilcox (8th)

I saw a tweet on the day I started writing up the ACC that stunned me. Josh Pate of CBS Sports tweeted that 26 of the 32 NFL teams travel fewer miles than Cal, despite playing three more road games. As the Pac-12 disintegrated, Cal had to find a home and found it in the ACC, which seems to make zero logistical sense, but it is our new normal in college football.

The Golden Bears are now seven seasons into Justin Wilcox's tenure with one bowl game appearance to show for it and their expectations are low this year with the transition, travel, and a roster lacking explosiveness.

OFFENSE

New OC Mike Bloesch has an outstanding running back in Jaydn Ott to build around. Ott rushed for 1,305 yards and 12 touchdowns last season. Getting him more involved in the passing game would make sense, as Fernando Mendoza had a lot of dink-and-dunk throws with 1,708 yards on 243 attempts. Getting the ball to Ott in space might create more opportunities for big plays.

And the Golden Bears need more big plays. Cal tied for 98th with 21 plays of 30+ yards and finished 80th in yards per play. Transfers Tobias Merriweather and Mikey Matthews, along with holdover Trond Grizzell (39-590-5), will be looked upon to replace the production of leading receiver Jeremiah Hunter, who transferred to Washington.

DEFENSE

For Wilcox to be known as a defensive guy, this unit was awful last season. Cal was tied for 114th in scoring defense with 32.8 PPG allowed and allowed the fifth-most passing yards in the nation. The Cal defense was tied for the national lead in takeaways with 28, but the offense also turned the ball over 28 times.

Cal's 16 fumble recoveries were the most in the nation, so turnover regression seems like a real possibility. For a defense that got gashed through the air, it's hard to say that a change of conferences and all the travel are going to be positives, especially with a mediocre class of transfers.

OUTLOOK

And, yet, the schedule is kind of favorable for Cal, as they'll get some very winnable games at home. They also avoid Clemson and Louisville and I have them slightly favored on the road at Pitt and Wake Forest. They're catching some rebuilding ACC teams to give them a chance outside of the likely losses. My numbers say 6.01 wins, so a slight lean Under because of the new conference and travel.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	CAL DAVIS	-23	27.5
9/7	at AUBURN	8	53
9/14	SAN DIEGO STATE	-17	33
9/21	at FLORIDA STATE	16	60.5
10/5	MIAMI FL	7	57
10/12	at PITTSBURGH	-3.5	42
10/19	NC STATE	0.5	51.5
10/26	OREGON STATE	-6.5	44
11/8	at WAKE FOREST	-4.5	40
11/16	SYRACUSE	-6	44.5
11/23	STANFORD	-11	39.5
11/30	at SMU	9	53.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **45.42**
#44 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.4/0.3**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	30.2	35	34.1	116
YARDS PER POINT	13	24	12.2	121
PLAYS PER GAME	73.6	25		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:46	93		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.0%	62	41.4%	92
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	392.7	53	416.7	101
YARDS PER PLAY	5.3	73	5.6	70
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.8	45		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	165.8	53	135	36
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	53	3.8	34
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.1	37		
COMPLETION %	59.9%	75	63.4%	100
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	226.8	62	281.7	127
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	90	7.7	88
TURNOVERS	2.3	130	2	3

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

90-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

80-1

CFP CHAMPION

1000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION UNDER 6

CLEMSON TIGERS

2023 Record: 9-4 SU & 6-7 ATS
Head Coach: Dabo Swinney (17th)

Dabo Swinney's portal protest is one of the most interesting storylines in college football. There's something to be said about believing in your program and in your coaching staff to recruit guys that fit the systems and breed success. On the other hand, college football free agency is not only widespread, but it is the norm and the Tigers are coming off of their worst season in quite some time.

Assistant coaches have leveled up on Dabo's behalf and he seemed to throw OC Garrett Riley under the bus more than once last season. This is a good team, but will stubbornness and idealism keep them from being great?

OFFENSE

The defense has some production to replace, but the offense is mostly intact for Riley's second season. QB Cade Klubnik hasn't developed as anticipated, but the hope is that he'll evolve this season. He had chances for signature drives and came up short more often than not, including two overtime losses, one to Florida State where the Tigers were the better team.

Klubnik only had 19 TD passes and the Tigers only had 20 as a team, but RB Phil Mafah is a nice returning piece after finishing 35 yards shy of 1,000. The receiver group is almost back in its entirety, but with five-star freshman Bryant Wesco Jr. in the mix. Klubnik has no shortage of weapons and Riley is a very highly-regarded offensive mind. Hopes would be higher for this group if Dabo had gotten an offensive lineman to transfer in.

DEFENSE

The loss of Brent Venables hurt in 2022, as the Tigers finished outside the top 25 in yards per play allowed for the first time since 2012. Last year's group got right back on track under Wes Goodwin, as the Tigers were ninth in YPP. Clemson also tied for the national lead in takeaways with 28 and allowed the fourth-fewest red-zone attempts with 29.

But, this is another area where the portal could've come in handy. Clemson had heavy losses to the NFL Draft and also the transfer arena. We'll get a quick taste of the new-look Tigers defense against Georgia in the opener and see how much those absences could hurt as the season goes along.

OUTLOOK

Clemson is still favored in 10 games in my spreadsheets, even though Dabo refuses to find external help for the roster. I guess he's still doing something right with his recruiting pipeline and the university is able to use the NIL budget to keep kids around. Still, I have the Tigers for 8.9 wins and I think there's a chance we definitely find out that Klubnik is not "a dude" this season.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	vs GEORGIA	15.5	73.5
9/7	APPALACHIAN STATE	-15.5	46
9/21	NC STATE	-10	51.5
9/28	STANFORD	-21.5	39.5
10/5	at FLORIDA STATE	5	60.5
10/12	at WAKE FOREST	-15	40
10/19	VIRGINIA	-21.5	40
11/2	LOUISVILLE	-7	54.5
11/9	at VIRGINIA TECH	-6	50
11/16	at PITTSBURGH	-14	42
11/23	THE CITADEL	-62	-1
11/30	SOUTH CAROLINA	-12	49.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **44.86**
#47 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.5/0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 9 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	26.8	59	21.4	24
YARDS PER POINT	14.1	60	14.3	66
PLAYS PER GAME	78.2	3		
TIME OF POSSESSION	32:43	8		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.5%	56	33.0%	21
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	379.7	68	305.8	11
YARDS PER PLAY	4.9	103	4.7	12
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	40.2	19		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	166	51	123.2	27
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	71	4	49
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	35.8	26		
COMPLETION %	62.0%	51	53.5%	4
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	213.7	76	182.6	12
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6	121	5.7	5
TURNOVERS	1.7	101	2.3	1

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

+350

MAKE PLAYOFF

+200

CFP CHAMPION

40-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 9.5**

DUKE BLUE DEVILS

2023 Record: 8-5 SU & 7-6 ATS
Head Coach: Manny Diaz (1st)

It wasn't always smooth sailing for David Cutcliffe, but it sure felt like the Blue Devil legend got the most out of his teams more often than not. Successor Mike Elko sure did in the two years he was in Durham. Now, Duke turns to Manny Diaz, the longtime defensive coordinator and former Miami head coach in hopes of keeping a two-year bowl streak alive.

Diaz was 21-15 over three seasons at Miami and went 0-2 in bowl games, drawing the ire of many for squandering some obscene talent in Coral Gables. He has far less talent here and a team with a lot of playing time battles on the horizon.

OFFENSE

Riley Leonard now resides in South Bend, so Duke will either turn to last year's fill-in Grayson Loftis or newcomer Maalik Murphy. With no future at Texas because of Quinn Ewers and Arch Manning, Murphy hit the portal and may very well get a shot right away in Jonathan Brewer's offense. Brewer and Diaz have history after working together at Miami. When Diaz went to Penn State, Brewer went to SMU and coached up quarterbacks.

So, Murphy may be in really good hands here. WR Jordan Moore hit the portal, but then backpedaled after he led the team with 835 yards and eight touchdowns. Unfortunately, RB Jordan Waters did leave and Leonard was the third-leading rusher with 352 yards. As a result, Murphy's legs may be the deciding factor in the QB battle and would elevate the ceiling of the team.

DEFENSE

You can see why the Duke athletic department would go from Elko to Diaz, as defense was the calling card of last year's Blue Devils bunch. They were 28th in yards per play allowed and 16th in scoring defense. For Duke, the goal is not to make the playoff or win conference titles. It is to go to bowl games and being stout on defense is the path of least resistance to get to six wins.

New starters dot the depth chart, but the two most important players from last year's defense - LB Tre Freeman (106 tkl) and S Jaylen Stinson (88 tkl, 6 PBU) - are back and will be something to build around.

OUTLOOK

It is entirely possible that Diaz will thrive with lower expectations. When he took over at Miami, the administration said that winning nine games per season wasn't enough when they fired Mark Richt. Diaz couldn't fill the shoes of Richt with those lofty goals. It may take a year to get his sea legs at Duke, where academic requirements are quite high, but this could certainly work out. I have Duke at 5.4 wins, so a slight lean Under with them as a dog in every ACC game.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/30	ELON	-22	22.5
9/6	at NORTHWESTERN	3.5	43.5
9/14	CONNECTICUT	-17.5	27
9/21	at MIDDLE TENNESSEE	-11	28
9/28	NORTH CAROLINA	4	48.5
10/5	at GEORGIA TECH	5.5	46
10/18	FLORIDA STATE	16	60.5
10/26	SMU	8.5	53.5
11/2	at MIAMI FL	17	57
11/9	at NC STATE	12.5	51.5
11/23	VIRGINIA TECH	5	50
11/30	at WAKE FOREST	1.5	40

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 44.36
#54 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.1/0.5
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 10 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 5
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	25.7	67	20	18
YARDS PER POINT	13	28	18.2	8
PLAYS PER GAME	63	123		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:41	98		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	35.4%	95	38.7%	62
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	334.8	97	364.3	45
YARDS PER PLAY	5.3	74	5	34
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.6	89		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	159.4	61	143.3	47
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.7	31	3.9	40
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28	96		
COMPLETION %	53.6%	118	62.9%	97
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	175.4	114	221.1	50
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.3	108	6.6	23
TURNOVERS	1.2	37	1.1	108

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
150-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
200-1

CFP CHAMPION
800-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION UNDER 5.5



FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES

2023 Record: 13-1 SU & 8-6 ATS
Head Coach: Mike Norvell (5th)

If this season were a movie, it would be called "The Revenge of D.J. Uiagalelei". The former Clemson QB is back in the ACC after a pretty good run at Oregon State. Head coach Jonathan Smith went to Michigan State and Uiagalelei flew south for the fall and winter. It is still hard to think about what transpired at the end of the season for the Seminoles last year, but no team is more motivated to right a wrong this year.

Jordan Travis was hurt in a meaningless game against North Alabama, but the Seminoles rallied to beat rival Florida and Louisville in the ACC Title Game. Their prize was a matchup against an angry Georgia team in the Orange Bowl, as the College Football Playoff Committee shunned Mike Norvell's team. This isn't the same roster and Travis has moved on, but the goal remains the same.

OFFENSE

OC Alex Atkins is suspended for the first three games due to recruiting violations, but he's had all spring and summer to work with DJU and the others in the QB room. A proven QB seemed to be a necessity for Atkins and Norvell and they got one, but now let's see how he's progressed under Smith's tutelage.

He has all kinds of weapons, as Keon Coleman and Trey Benson are gone, but this is a fast and talented group of backs and receivers. Roydell Williams ran for Alabama last year and Lawrance Toafili had 6.7 yards per pop in support of Benson. The loss of a borderline first-rounder like Coleman is a big deal, but look for the Seminoles to rely even heavier on the run after leading the conference in 2022 with well over 200 yards per game.

DEFENSE

Jared Verse may not be walking back through that Tallahassee door, but the Seminoles were extremely deep at defensive end and will continue to get after the quarterback. They had 46 sacks last season and Verse had nine of them. Braden Fiske also took six of them with him to the NFL, but DC Adam Fuller has a lot to work with here and, honestly, the Seminoles were 67th in yards per carry allowed, so you could run on them anyway.

It was all about stopping the pass and Florida State did that well enough to rank 24th in yards per play allowed. If they don't lead as often as they did last season, we'll see if the leaky run defense presents a problem, but there is still a lot of talent from a top-20 scoring defense that still faces a very manageable schedule.

OUTLOOK

The Seminoles are the favorite to win the ACC, as they'll get Clemson at home and have a little extra prep before facing Miami. DJU will determine the ceiling for this team, as a ground-and-pound attack with a top-tier defense leads to a very high floor. With a win total of 9.5, I have Florida State at 9.52 wins, so I lean closer to 10-2 than 9-3.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/24	vs GEORGIA TECH	-14.5	46
9/2	BOSTON COLLEGE	-21	42.5
9/14	MEMPHIS	-18	46
9/21	CALIFORNIA	-16	48
9/28	at SMU	-4	53.5
10/5	CLEMSON	-5	58.5
10/18	at DUKE	-16	42.5
10/26	at MIAMI FL	-1.5	57
11/2	NORTH CAROLINA	-15	48.5
11/9	at NOTRE DAME	3.5	61.5
11/23	CHARLESTON SOUTH	-58.5	5
11/30	FLORIDA	-10.5	53.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 45.82
#37 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3/0.1
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 9 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 4
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	32.8	23	19.8	17
YARDS PER POINT	12	8	17.2	12
PLAYS PER GAME	65.5	99		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:28	78		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.1%	88	29.4%	7
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	392.2	54	340.2	31
YARDS PER PLAY	6	36	4.9	23
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.8	97		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	142.6	73	152.9	61
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	56	4.2	60
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	31	68		
COMPLETION %	60.3%	69	48.2%	1
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	249.6	49	187.2	16
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.1	30	6.3	11
TURNOVERS	0.7	7	1.2	104

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+290

MAKE PLAYOFF
+160

CFP CHAMPION
25-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 9.5**

GEORGIA TECH YELLOW JACKETS

2023 Record: 7-6 SU & 8-5 ATS
Head Coach: Brent Key (3rd)

Brent Key must be doing something right in Atlanta. Georgia Tech is a tough place to play and a tough place to recruit. When running the triple-option, the Yellow Jackets were at least able to show teams something different and their proficiency with the gimmicky offense gave them a puncher's chance in more games than it should have due to the talent disparity.

Now, GT is a pretty similar team to anybody else and resides in the middle of a crowded ACC conference, yet Key didn't see a mass exodus of talent. In fact, the team seems committed to being together and giving it a run at returning to a bowl game for the second straight season.

OFFENSE

The Yellow Jackets profile as a team that could sneak up on somebody this year. They played one heck of a game against rival Georgia and gave the Bulldogs a legitimate scare. They won on the road at Miami and gave Louisville a real game in the season opener. It was clear that the offense was quite a bit better with Texas A&M transfer Haynes King at the controls and he's back for Round 2.

King threw for over 2,700 yards and 27 touchdowns, but he also threw 16 interceptions. For good measure, he added 10 tuddies on the ground. His 27 TD passes were the most since Joe Hamilton had 29 during the 1999 season. With more passing prowess, GT also had a 1,000-yard rusher in Jamal Haynes and it looks like another good offensive season is in store.

DEFENSE

Duke's loss may very well be Georgia Tech's gain. Former Blue Devils DC Tyler Santucci will try to fix a defense that allowed over 200 yards per game through the air and on the ground. Returning starters are always hard to quantify from a bad unit, especially when learning a new scheme, but Santucci is a Mike Elko disciple and that cannot hurt.

The Blue Devils had a top-30 defense by Rush EPA against and ranked just outside the top 50 against the pass. Georgia Tech's defense will be more aggressive this season and that could create more negative plays. A similar output with 25 takeaways (T-9th) wouldn't hurt.

OUTLOOK

King's dual-threat nature and a massive upgrade at defensive coordinator have me a little bit bullish on the Yellow Jackets, despite a brutal schedule. I think they'll be a better ATS team than a straight-up wins and losses crew, as they may only be favored in four games. I think they have a chance in more than that and my numbers call for 5.35 wins. I think they're going to pick somebody off and like this one Over the total.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/24	vs FLORIDA STATE	14.5	60.5
8/31	GEORGIA STATE	-15.5	31.5
9/7	at SYRACUSE	1	44.5
9/14	VMI	-36.5	11.5
9/21	at LOUISVILLE	11.5	54.5
10/5	DUKE	-5.5	42.5
10/12	at NORTH CAROLINA	5	48.5
10/19	vs NOTRE DAME	16	61.5
10/26	at VIRGINIA TECH	6	50
11/9	MIAMI FL	9.5	57
11/21	NC STATE	3.5	51.5
11/29	at GEORGIA	29.5	73.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 49.23
#6 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 1.6/0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 13 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	29.7	43	30.8	100
YARDS PER POINT	13.9	49	14.6	58
PLAYS PER GAME	68.3	73		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:39	99		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	42.0%	39	43.0%	103
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	411.8	36	449.3	123
YARDS PER PLAY	6	32	6.2	118
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.3	39		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	198.4	13	223.4	130
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.2	13	5.4	127
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.8	91		
COMPLETION %	60.0%	73	61.6%	82
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	213.4	78	225.8	61
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.4	59	7.8	91
TURNOVERS	1.6	86	1.8	11

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

75-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

80-1

CFP CHAMPION

500-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 5**



LOUISVILLE CARDINALS

2023 Record: 10-4 SU & 6-7-1 ATS
Head Coach: Jeff Brohm (3rd)

The ACC runner-up will look a lot different this season. Hopes are high that Jeff Brohm is the right man to put together an offense that lost a ton of last season's production. With his brother as the OC and his background in both playing QB and coaching a lot of them, it is entirely possible that the preseason concerns are overblown.

If the defense is able to perform to or improve upon last season's numbers, we may be looking at a true darkhorse expanded playoff contender. We could also be looking at a team that just isn't quite good enough. We won't find out much until September 28 at Notre Dame, but we will find out.

OFFENSE

Oregon and Texas Tech transfer Tyler Shough is the man that Brohm picked to replace Jack Plummer, who followed his head coach to Louisville from Purdue. Shough will have a dynamic WR prospect in South Alabama transfer Caullin Lacy to go with speedster Chris Bell, but failing to match last year's offensive balance may hurt the passing game.

Louisville was 21st in the nation in rushing yards, thanks to Jawhar Jordan and Isaac Guerendo, who combined for just under 2,000 yards. Both guys ripped off over six yards per carry and had 24 combined rushing touchdowns. Both guys are also gone. They allowed Plummer to get a lot of easy pitch-and-catch and play-action throws, yet he still threw 12 interceptions and got sacked 32 times. Brohm might be an offensive genius, but I'm worried about this unit.

DEFENSE

The worries are fewer and farther between on defense, where co-DC Ron English and Mark Hagen return a ton of production. Louisville allowed the 12th-fewest rushing yards in the nation and tied for 29th in sacks with 34. Ashton Gillotte had 11 himself and he's back for more as one of many top returnees.

There is no reason to believe that the defense falls off. The schedule isn't loaded with gifted offenses, though Louisville's ball control style may be harder to achieve and that could impact the defense. The Cardinals were 17th in average time of possession per game last season.

OUTLOOK

As I wrote in the intro, we may be looking at a playoff darkhorse...but I don't think we are. My projections have Louisville with 7.84 wins and I don't think they'll repeat what they did last season. I do have them as a very clear underdog only twice, but there are some toss-up games and four of the last five and six of the last eight games are on the road. I'm also not a Tyler Shough believer.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	AUSTIN PEAY	-28.5	29
9/7	JACKSONVILLE STATE	-19.5	37.5
9/21	GEORGIA TECH	-11.5	46
9/28	at NOTRE DAME	10	61.5
10/5	SMU	-4.5	53.5
10/12	at VIRGINIA	-11	40
10/19	MIAMI FL	-0.5	57
10/25	at BOSTON COLLEGE	-9.5	42.5
11/2	at CLEMSON	7	58.5
11/16	at STATEANFORD	-13	39.5
11/23	PITTSBURGH	-15.5	42
11/30	at KENTUCKY	-0.5	50.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 46.43
#30 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.3/0.4
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	28.8	52	22.9	37
YARDS PER POINT	13.7	46	14.3	62
PLAYS PER GAME	68.8	66		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:50	20		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.0%	79	30.4%	12
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	395.1	51	328.6	22
YARDS PER PLAY	5.7	47	5.3	46
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.6	48		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	166.8	49	100.2	11
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	48	3.4	18
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.8	90		
COMPLETION %	64.4%	28	56.6%	19
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	228.2	61	228.5	65
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.9	38	7.5	81
TURNOVERS	1.3	54	1.3	81

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+650

MAKE PLAYOFF
+500

CFP CHAMPION
150-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 8.5**

MIAMI FL HURRICANES

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

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

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

OFFENSE

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

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

DEFENSE

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

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

OUTLOOK

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

2024 SCHEDULE

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

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 43.93
#57 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2/0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 16 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 9
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

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

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+400

MAKE PLAYOFF
+210

CFP CHAMPION
55-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION OVER 9



NC STATE WOLFPACK

2023 Record: 9-4 SU & 6-6-1 ATS
Head Coach: Dave Doeren (12th)

NC State has only experienced two losing seasons over Dave Doeren's tenure. However, NC State has also never won double-digit games in more than a decade with him at the helm. They also haven't played in the ACC Title Game. The Wolfpack haven't won a bowl game since 2017. We won't count the Holiday Bowl forfeit in 2021. So, the bar is basically "good", but not "great".

This season looks to be setting up the same way, as this is a super reliable program with exactly nine wins in four of the last seven seasons and eight in two others. Is it possible that NC State levels up this year and gets over one of those three humps?

OFFENSE

Your view of NC State for this season begins and ends with Grayson McCall. The Wolfpack went into the portal for another QB after using Brennan Armstrong of Virginia last season. Armstrong was more effective as a runner than a passer, despite his experience with OC Robert Anae's offense, as he led the team in rushing yards and finished with an 11/7 TD/INT ratio. McCall is a thoroughly experienced four-year starter with some great collegiate numbers.

However, without Jamey Chadwell, McCall threw more interceptions (6) than he had over the previous two seasons combined (5) and just two fewer than he had in three years as the starter at Coastal. He has an all-purpose stud in Kevin Concepcion, who led the team in receiving yards by nearly 3.5 times the next player and was second in rushing yards with 320. Duke transfer Jordan Waters should lead the team this year.

DEFENSE

Leading tackler Payton Wilson took team-leading totals of 138 tackles and six sacks to the NFL, so he'll be a big void to fill at linebacker. This was a solid defense that ranked 53rd in yards per play and 25th in scoring defense. A +9 turnover margin helped and so did allowing just 34 red-zone attempts, tied for the 13th-fewest in the nation. Tony Gibson's defense played well and most of the secondary returns intact.

However, the front seven does have some question marks. The other thing is that NC State faces some negative regression on third down after being third in the nation at 27.8%. For a 9-4 team that had a five-game winning streak to end the regular season, a lot seemed to go right on this side of the ball.

OUTLOOK

The schedule is favorable on the whole and my numbers call for 8.48 wins, with seven instances of being a double-digit favorite. I'm not fully sold on McCall away from Chadwell, but Doeren is a good coach and he has good players. I think 9-3 is likelier than 8-4.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	W CAROLINA	-29.5	25
9/7	vs TENNESSEE	6.5	57.5
9/14	LOUISIANA TECH	-31.5	23.5
9/21	at CLEMSON	10	58.5
9/28	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	-20.5	33.5
10/5	WAKE FOREST	-14.5	40
10/12	SYRACUSE	-10.5	44.5
10/19	at CALIFORNIA	-0.5	48
11/2	STANFORD	-15	39.5
11/9	DUKE	-12.5	42.5
11/21	at GEORGIA TECH	-3.5	46
11/30	at NORTH CAROLINA	0.5	48.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 41.38
#65 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3/0.4
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 12 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.7	74	21.9	29
YARDS PER POINT	13.7	45	15.7	35
PLAYS PER GAME	66.9	86		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:53	18		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.4%	73	28.9%	5
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	337.9	95	343.9	34
YARDS PER PLAY	5	90	5.3	47
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.1	66		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	150	70	125	32
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	68	4.2	62
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.9	86		
COMPLETION %	56.8%	99	56.4%	17
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	187.9	101	218.9	47
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.5	96	6.6	21
TURNOVERS	1.3	45	1.9	8

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

+700

MAKE PLAYOFF

+470

CFP CHAMPION

150-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 8.5**

NORTH CAROLINA TAR HEELS

2023 Record: 8-5 SU & 6-7 ATS
Head Coach: Mack Brown (6th)

Replacing the No. 3 overall draft pick would be difficult in the old days of college football, but a team like North Carolina can just enter the transfer portal, spend some money, and get a proven starting QB. That's precisely what the Tar Heels did to bring in former Texas A&M and LSU QB Max Johnson after the Patriots took Drake Maye in the 2024 NFL Draft.

The Tar Heels, who haven't won a bowl game since 2019 and haven't won double-digit games since 2015 under Larry Fedora, will run it back with a lot of returning production on both sides of the ball. This is a team that has seemed destined for more in recent seasons and has found a way to watch it all go up in smoke late in the year.

OFFENSE

Johnson walks into a pretty good situation. RB Omarion Hampton rushed for 1,504 yards and had 15 touchdowns last season. WR Tez Walker is a notable loss, but over 1,000 yards of returning production are back at the position and TE Bryson Nesbit is in the running to be among the first tight ends drafted next April. Johnson is also well-versed in learning new offenses, as he's done it a lot in his career.

He had a 27/6 TD/INT ratio at LSU in 2021 before transferring to Texas A&M, where he played in 12 games over two seasons. He has a 47/12 TD/INT ratio and has thrown for nearly 6,000 yards. The offense ranked 13th in yards per play and 20th with 34.5 points per game. Even with the loss of Maye, those may be repeatable numbers.

DEFENSE

So, as always, it seems to come down to the defense. This season, the Tar Heels have a new DC in Geoff Collins, whose coordinator stops include Mississippi State and Florida. He's also been a head coach at Temple and Georgia Tech. After a year off, Collins inherits a defense that hasn't lived up to its talent level, but is improving.

The Tar Heels were 65th in yards per play allowed last season with 5.6 and finished 109th in total yardage allowed. At least that was an improvement from finishing 114th in YPP in 2022. The defense also went from 14 takeaways in '22 to 22 in '23, so the upward trend was taking place in Gene Chizik's second year.

OUTLOOK

The schedule is very kind to UNC this season. They play at Minnesota in the opener and don't have a game with over 200 miles of travel after that until November 2 at Florida State. If Collins can rehab the defense, this is a team with a very high ceiling. They avoid Clemson and Louisville and don't have a tough road schedule at all. My numbers say 7.74 wins, but I like the Over on this one.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	at MINNESOTA	-1	44.5
9/7	CHARLOTTE	-21	30.5
9/14	NC CENTRAL	-35.5	15.5
9/21	JAMES MADISON	-9	42.5
9/28	at DUKE	-4	42.5
10/5	PITTSBURGH	-9	42
10/12	GEORGIA TECH	-5	46
10/26	at VIRGINIA	-5.5	40
11/2	at FLORIDA STATE	15	60.5
11/16	WAKE FOREST	-11.5	40
11/23	at BOSTON COLLEGE	-3.5	42.5
11/30	NC STATE	-0.5	51.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **40.99**
#66 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.9/0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 12 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 5
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	32.5	24	29	79
YARDS PER POINT	14.9	78	14.3	64
PLAYS PER GAME	77.7	6		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:06	86		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	48.3%	9	38.2%	56
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	482.7	7	414.2	99
YARDS PER PLAY	6.2	22	5.7	75
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.8	32		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	185.8	25	168.3	93
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.8	28	4.4	76
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36	25		
COMPLETION %	62.7%	46	61.7%	83
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	296.9	13	245.9	92
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.2	24	7.5	79
TURNOVERS	1.4	68	1.4	58

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
30-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
40-1

CFP CHAMPION
400-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 7.5**



PITTSBURGH PANTHERS

2023 Record: 3-9 SU & 4-8 ATS
Head Coach: Pat Narduzzi (10th)

The state of Pitt football is in the hands of a 31-year-old. New OC Kade Bell was brought in to right the major wrong that Pat Narduzzi made by hiring Frank Cignetti. The Panthers offense stagnated and the team went from scoring 41.4 points per game in 2021 to 31.2 PPG in 2022 to 20.2 in 2023. We know that Narduzzi still has some defensive chops, but the ACC punished the Panthers last year.

Pitt won three games and only two were over FBS opponents, including one of the most random results of the year with a 38-21 win over Louisville. Narduzzi should still have some defensive chops, but after the team's worst win-loss season since the late '90s, large questions linger.

OFFENSE

Bell's Western Carolina Catamounts had a pretty prolific offense with 183 rushing yards and 321 passing yards per game. They scored 38 points per game and had 57 red-zone trips. Pitt tied for the fewest red-zone attempts with 25. A new scheme could help, and Desmond Reid and Rodney Hammond Jr. are a quality 1-2 punch in the backfield.

But, who will play QB? Maybe Bell's system can spark something, but Nate Yarnell, Christian Veilleux, and Eli Holstein all seem interchangeable. Yarnell beat Boston College late last year and finished with a 4/1 TD/INT ratio, but the WR room is mediocre and none of the QB options are proven.

DEFENSE

With limited help from the offense, Pitt's defense ranked 51st in yards per play allowed. Unfortunately, they've lost some impact players to the transfer portal and only have two returning starters. It will be a rebuild on the fly for Narduzzi and DC Randy Bates, as the entire front seven will be reimagined.

The defense only had 16 takeaways last year and 31 sacks. Narduzzi's D had 48 sacks and finished second in the nation in 2022. They had 54 sacks in 2021 and tied for the national lead with 46 in 2020. Maybe a lack of returning starters and production is a good thing to wipe the slate clean.

OUTLOOK

Pitt football is in a tough spot. Narduzzi is inked through 2030 and the transfer portal and NIL make it hard for a middle-of-the-road program like Pitt to get and keep high-end talent. It'll all come down to scheme, which could shine on both sides of the ball, but the talent here is severely lacking. My numbers call for 5.34 wins, but three of Pitt's favorite roles are -2 or lower.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	KENT STATE	-26	18.5
9/7	at CINCINNATI	4	43
9/14	WEST VIRGINIA	7.5	52
9/21	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	-15	29.5
10/5	at NORTH CAROLINA	9	48.5
10/12	CALIFORNIA	3.5	48
10/24	SYRACUSE	0	44.5
11/2	at SMU	14.5	53.5
11/9	VIRGINIA	-4.5	40
11/16	CLEMSON	14	58.5
11/23	at LOUISVILLE	15.5	54.5
11/30	at BOSTON COLLEGE	2.5	42.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 44.18
#55 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.2/0.2
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 13 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 9
DEFENSIVE: 4

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	17.9	122	29.2	80
YARDS PER POINT	16.9	113	13.2	99
PLAYS PER GAME	60.1	131		
TIME OF POSSESSION	26:07	131		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	28.7%	129	38.2%	54
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	302.2	120	384.2	65
YARDS PER PLAY	5	92	5.3	50
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.3	123		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	91.5	122	164.3	86
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.2	118	3.8	35
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.8	77		
COMPLETION %	51.8%	124	61.5%	80
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	210.7	83	219.9	49
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.1	70	8.1	109
TURNOVERS	1.9	121	1.4	65

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
150-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
110-1

CFP CHAMPION
1000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION UNDER 5.5

SMU MUSTANGS

2023 Record: 11-3 SU & 8-6 ATS
Head Coach: Rhett Lashlee (3rd)

The well-traveled SMU football team is now a member of the ACC after more than a decade in the AAC. The Mustangs were a Conference USA member from 2005-12 and played in the WAC from 1996-2004. The ironic thing is that Rhett Lashlee's team won its first conference title since 1984 in the Southwest Conference last year with a perfect AAC record and an 11-2 mark overall.

So, the move to the ACC comes at a pretty good time, as this is a solid roster capable of stepping into the conference and competing right away. Though SMU lost to Boston College in the Fenway Bowl, their only regular season losses were against Oklahoma and TCU, so I think they're dangerous this year.

OFFENSE

The Mustangs deserve a ton of credit for that AAC Title Game win over Tulane because it came without QB Preston Stone. Stone was injured at the tail end of the first half in a 59-14 win over Navy on November 25. Stone was 14-of-19 for 322 yards and three touchdowns in the first half before suffering a broken leg. The rehab process has been a success and he's ready to take aim at the ACC after posting nearly 3,200 passing yards and a 28/6 TD/INT ratio.

From a returning production standpoint, Lashlee's crew is in great shape. The top three backs combined for 1,731 yards and they are all back. Five pass catchers had 400+ receiving yards and they are all back. A little turnover on the offensive line is worth watching in a conference with some good edge rushers, but SMU is loaded otherwise.

DEFENSE

Yes, the offense was 31st in yards per play and eighth in points per game, but what took SMU to the mountaintop was the defense. They ranked sixth in yards per play allowed after finishing 105th in 2022 and 96th in 2021. Only one team (Penn State) registered more sacks than SMU's 47 last season.

That unit also features a lot of returning production, but it was also the focal point for Lashlee's portal bucks, so the Mustangs bring an even deeper defense to the ACC than they had last season. There are a lot of reasons for optimism in Dallas.

OUTLOOK

But, there is one reason for pessimism. When stepping up in class, SMU has struggled. Power Five wins were few and far between. They were 0-3 last season and 0-2 in 2022 (plus losses to Cincinnati, UCF, and BYU, who all went to the Big 12 the following season). Now, they're stepping up in class for every conference game. I love the roster and the returning production, though, and it seems like boosters opened their wallets with the Power Four move. I have SMU at 9.15 wins, one of my biggest win total overlays.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/24	at NEVADA	-25	25.5
8/31	HOUSTON BAPTIST	-49	8
9/6	BYU	-15	41.5
9/21	TCU	-8	48.5
9/28	FLORIDA STATE	4	60.5
10/5	at LOUISVILLE	4.5	54.5
10/19	at STATEANFORD	-12	39.5
10/26	at DUKE	-8.5	42.5
11/2	PITTSBURGH	-14.5	42
11/16	BOSTON COLLEGE	-14.5	42.5
11/23	at VIRGINIA	-10.5	40
11/30	CALIFORNIA	-9	48

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 40.34
#68 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.2/0.2
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	36.4	10	19.2	14
YARDS PER POINT	12.3	12	16.5	21
PLAYS PER GAME	74.8	15		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:26	57		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	41.8%	42	28.2%	4
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	446.9	18	315.5	14
YARDS PER PLAY	6	37	4.5	7
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	39.8	23		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	176.5	35	124.1	30
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	47	3.5	21
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.8	42		
COMPLETION %	57.9%	88	58.4%	32
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	270.4	30	191.5	21
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8	35	6.1	7
TURNOVERS	1	17	1.3	81

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

16-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

11-1

CFP CHAMPION

250-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 8**

STANFORD CARDINAL

2023 Record: 3-9 SU & 5-7 ATS
Head Coach: Troy Taylor (3rd)

I'm fond of saying "this season isn't about wins and losses" for teams that are rebuilding or in transition. That is true of Stanford's 2024 campaign. Head coach Troy Taylor is trying to build the Cardinal program back up and it takes time. Recruiting standards are high in Palo Alto and the talent pipeline has been running dry for a while.

But, he's in great shape going forward, as he brought in an awesome recruiting class by Stanford standards. 247 Sports graded Stanford's 2024 class as the 31st in the nation and Rivals had the Trees 27th. The best way to accelerate a rebuild is by infusing highly-rated talent and Taylor has done that.

OFFENSE

This running game was awful last season. The Cardinal averaged just 3.4 yards per carry and QB Ashton Daniels was the second-leading rusher with 296 yards. The passing game wasn't much better, as the team averaged just 5.03 yards per play to rank 110th. Daniels was clearly the best option and posted an 11/8 TD/INT ratio with a 58.8% completion rate, but he has a better offensive line this year and returns a 1,000-yard receiver in Elic Ayomanor.

The problem is that Stanford's transfer portal ranking was 128th per 247, so a lot of young kids will either have to make an immediate impact or bide their time while the more experienced players get reps. That leaves the Stanford offense with a very low ceiling again for this season, unless they are willing to be more creative.

DEFENSE

If you thought the offensive numbers were bad, avert your eyes from the defensive numbers. Stanford was 126th in yards per play allowed with 6.57 and only mustered 11 takeaways. It is Year 2 for the entire coaching staff, including DC Bobby April, so there is hope for improvement, especially in terms of generating negative plays. A lot of the commits with a chance to play right away are on defense.

The chief concern is that the Cardinal got picked apart by both the run, ranking 100th in yards per carry allowed, and the pass. They allowed the most passing yards per game with 298, nearly 10 more than any other defense. The conference change may help, as the ACC isn't as potent or explosive as last year's Pac-12 was, but the Trees need more help than that.

OUTLOOK

The outlook is bleak for 2024. Taylor, who has had offensive success at every stop of his career, may ultimately turn things around, but probably not this season. I have Stanford with 3.82 wins, but they're only favored three times in my Power Ratings and one is as a half-point favorite (Wake Forest). If the talent shines early, I'll adjust, but I'm skeptical for now.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/30	TCU	7.5	48.5
9/7	CAL POLY SLO	-37	4.5
9/20	at SYRACUSE	7.5	44.5
9/28	at CLEMSON	21.5	58.5
10/5	VIRGINIA TECH	8.5	50
10/12	at NOTRE DAME	25	61.5
10/19	SMU	12	53.5
10/26	WAKE FOREST	-1	40
11/2	at NC STATE	15	51.5
11/16	LOUISVILLE	13	54.5
11/23	at CALIFORNIA	11	48
11/29	at SAN JOSE STATE	-3	34

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 46.12
#35 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 1.6/0
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 18 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 10 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.4	108	38.4	131
YARDS PER POINT	17.1	116	12.1	125
PLAYS PER GAME	73.3	29		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:32	28		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	34.9%	97	49.3%	131
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	348.5	91	462.9	131
YARDS PER PLAY	4.8	108	6.4	122
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.6	88		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	113.1	105	163.2	85
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.4	114	4.7	92
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.5	20		
COMPLETION %	55.4%	109	66.1%	123
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	235.4	56	299.7	133
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.5	99	8.4	121
TURNOVERS	1.1	33	0.8	124

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

400-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

200-1

CFP CHAMPION

1000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 3.5**

SYRACUSE ORANGE

2023 Record: 6-7 SU & 5-7-1 ATS
Head Coach: Fran Brown (1st)

Even die-hard college football fans and bettors looked at each other with puzzled expressions when Syracuse hired Fran Brown. The name seemed to come out of nowhere, but credit to the Syracuse administration for prioritizing recruiting prowess over anything else. That's not to say that Brown, who spent the last two seasons at Georgia and has been an associate head coach twice in his career, is a nobody on the sidelines.

It's to say that he's commonly been referred to as an outstanding recruiter at every stop and his geographic resources in the Philadelphia/South Jersey area are parts of the country that Syracuse wants to hit.

OFFENSE

And that move has paid immediate dividends. Syracuse plundered the portal, securing commits that few people thought possible, including former Ohio State QB Kyle McCord. The Orange also brought in a top-40 class for 2024 and have a top-40 class for 2025 already on the hook. Finishing in the top 25 back in 2018 may not be the norm, but this is a program that went bowling a lot during the Paul Pasqualoni years from 1991-2004 and was regularly ranked.

So, that will be Brown's ultimate goal and it takes players to do that. The offense was 96th in yards per play last year, but the two-deep is made up almost entirely of transfers, outside of 1,000-yard back LeQuint Allen and 2022 leading receiver TE Oronde Gadsden II, who had 969 yards and a team-high 61 catches.

DEFENSE

All things considered, and with limited help from the offense, the Orange defense was pretty good last year. They ranked 49th in yards per play and had 22 takeaways. Along with being a top recruiter, Brown's other area of expertise is the secondary and that should help, as only nine of those 22 turnovers were interceptions. Syracuse tied for third in fumble recoveries, but Brown's tutelage may offset the negative regression by creating more picks.

DC Elijah Robinson has primarily been a defensive line coach, so the Orange should improve in that area as well. They were 87th in third-down defense, so that will be a focal point and Robinson comes from a Texas A&M team that was 18th in third-down D.

OUTLOOK

The schedule is pretty favorable for Syracuse to rise up and be a surprise team. There aren't a lot of games on the slate where they are a clear underdog, but there aren't many where they are a clear favorite either. My numbers conservatively say 6.68 wins. I do have an itchy trigger finger to upgrade this team, though, and I think they could rise quickly.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	OHIO	-15.5	31.5
9/7	GEORGIA TECH	-1	46
9/20	STANFORD	-7.5	39.5
9/28	HOLY CROSS	-19.5	27
10/4	at UNLV	-2.5	39.5
10/12	at NC STATE	10.5	51.5
10/24	at PITTSBURGH	0	42
11/2	VIRGINIA TECH	2.5	50
11/9	at BOSTON COLLEGE	0.5	42.5
11/16	at CALIFORNIA	6	48
11/23	CONNECTICUT	-20	27
11/30	MIAMI FL	10	57

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **41.47**
#64 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.6/0.3**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 17 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 9
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.1	110	27.5	70
YARDS PER POINT	15.7	95	14.7	56
PLAYS PER GAME	65.4	100		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:05	113		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.8%	80	42.5%	99
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	315.4	108	403.4	85
YARDS PER PLAY	4.8	106	5.4	56
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	39.8	21		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	163.3	55	156	67
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	76	4.1	51
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	23.2	125		
COMPLETION %	58.6%	82	63.7%	102
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	152.2	123	247.4	94
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.6	95	7.3	66
TURNOVERS	1.7	101	1.6	41

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

45-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

40-1

CFP CHAMPION

700-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 7

VIRGINIA CAVALIERS

2023 Record: 3-9 SU & 8-4 ATS
Head Coach: Tony Elliott (3rd)

The argument around returning production is more nuanced than most people make it out to be. Virginia is among the nation's leaders in returning production, but is that really a good thing with a 3-9 team that ranked 115th in red-zone touchdown percentage, 95th in points per game, and 100th in yards per play? Head coach Tony Elliott does have a more veteran roster to work with, but that is hardly a guarantee of success.

This is a team that is 6-16 over the last two seasons and keeps falling further behind the middle of the pack in the conference. On the other hand, Virginia lost by a field goal three times last season and lost by a point to James Madison. Could some positive regression be on the horizon for the Cavaliers?

OFFENSE

UVA has a lot of returning production. Unfortunately, the one loss is a huge one. Malik Washington had 1,426 receiving yards and nine touchdowns. He and Malachi Fields, who is still around, combined for over 74% of the team's receiving yards. Washington's receiving yardage total was actually higher than the team's total rushing yards (1,415). If not for short-yardage back Mike Hollins and his seven rushing scores, the ground game would have looked even worse.

Anthony Colandrea and Tony Muskett had something of a timeshare, due to both performance and injury. They're both back and the offensive line is a bit stronger, but a 19/14 TD/INT ratio doesn't inspire much confidence, especially with Washington gone.

DEFENSE

This was one of the youngest defenses in the nation last season due to injury. The Cavaliers gave up over six yards per play, but freshmen were thrown into the fire quickly. Virginia also had a severe lack of negative plays. They had 11 sacks in 12 games. BYU was the only other team with fewer sacks than games played and they were in the Big 12 for the first time, representing a huge step up in class.

Not only that, but Virginia only had 14 takeaways. The defense didn't help the offense at all in the field position department and didn't help themselves by giving up 31 plays of 30+ yards, tied for 102nd in the nation. Maybe they'll be healthier and maybe the kids will take a step forward, but a step isn't nearly enough.

OUTLOOK

Despite all the doom and gloom written above, my projections call for 4.75 wins, so over the win total of 4.5. However, I only have Virginia favored three times and I'm not sure they'll be favored over Boston College by Week 6 if Bill O'Brien gets to work quickly. This was also a team that lost a lot of close games last season and their best player is now a Miami Dolphin.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	RICHMOND	-23	19.5
9/7	at WAKE FOREST	3.5	40
9/14	MARYLAND	3.5	47
9/21	at COASTAL CAROLINA	-4	33.5
10/5	BOSTON COLLEGE	-0.5	42.5
10/12	LOUISVILLE	11	54.5
10/19	at CLEMSON	21.5	58.5
10/26	NORTH CAROLINA	5.5	48.5
11/9	at PITTSBURGH	4.5	42
11/16	at NOTRE DAME	24.5	61.5
11/23	SMU	10.5	53.5
11/30	at VIRGINIA TECH	12.5	50

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 45.78
#40 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3/0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 16 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.9	90	35.6	121
YARDS PER POINT	15.8	96	12	127
PLAYS PER GAME	74.2	18		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:25	30		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	35.7%	92	40.7%	83
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	361.2	79	427.3	113
YARDS PER PLAY	4.9	101	6.1	112
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.1	52		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	108.6	111	187.9	119
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	2.9	127	5.2	124
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.6	45		
COMPLETION %	62.4%	48	60.7%	61
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	252.5	44	239.4	81
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.5	54	7.3	67
TURNOVERS	1.6	93	1.2	96

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
150-1

CFP CHAMPION
1000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 4.5

VIRGINIA TECH HOKIES

2023 Record: 7-6 SU & 8-5 ATS
Head Coach: Brent Pry (3rd)

College football is better when Virginia Tech is firmly on the map. I have no connection to Blacksburg or the Hokies, but I still get chills every time the first chord of "Enter Sandman" hits and the stadium goes wild. I maybe even shed a tear in the first home game back after COVID. But, this is more than nostalgia and romanticism. This is about former DB U returning to relevance.

Baby steps were taken last season. The Hokies beat a very depleted Tulane team in the Military Bowl after bludgeoning rival Virginia to get back to a bowl game. They lost to both Big Ten teams and got throttled by Florida State and Louisville, but the program felt different after the 3-8 showing in 2022. Can Brent Pry ride that momentum up another level or two?

OFFENSE

OC Tyler Bowen has a special player in Kyron Drones, who amassed over 2,900 total yards, with more than 2,000 as a passer and over 800 as a runner last season. Drones accounted for 22 total touchdowns and only threw three interceptions. He had 20 carries for 176 yards in the bowl game with over a month to prepare, so maybe Bowen and the Hokies' offensive staff found something in the prep period.

Bhayshul Tuten had five yards per carry and 10 scores last season. Maybe we'll see more option looks for Drones and Tuten this season to open up some more real estate. The return of Ali Jennings should help, too, as the Old Dominion transfer only had five catches last season due to injury, but he had 116 catches for over 2,000 yards in two seasons at ODU. This looks like an offense ready to make a big leap.

DEFENSE

The offense went from 119th to 50th in yards per play. The defense went from 55th to 28th. Simultaneous improvement on both sides of the ball is how you really make a difference. And, honestly, being top 50 in both categories should have led to better than a 7-6 record.

The defense also went from 96th in sacks with 23 to 11th with 39. Most of those sacks are back, as the Hokies have a lot of returning production on defense. The secondary might take a leap forward, too, after racking up just seven interceptions last season. With that kind of pass rush, it is surprising that VT didn't force more TOs. Just another area to be excited about.

OUTLOOK

Virginia Tech gets Clemson at home, avoids Florida State, Louisville, and SMU, and is really only a clear road dog at Miami. The bye weeks are well-timed. Some feel like this team might win 10 games. My numbers call for 8.85, which is over the win total line of 8. I think 9-3 is extremely doable and 8-4 might be the bottom based on the schedule, so long as Drones stays healthy.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	at VANDERBILT	-11	37
9/7	MARSHALL	-16.5	35
9/14	at OLD DOMINION	-15.5	32
9/21	RUTGERS	-5.5	46.5
9/27	at MIAMI FL	9.5	57
10/5	at STATEANFORD	-8.5	39.5
10/17	BOSTON COLLEGE	-10	42.5
10/26	GEORGIA TECH	-6	46
11/2	at SYRACUSE	-2.5	44.5
11/9	CLEMSON	6	58.5
11/23	at DUKE	-5	42.5
11/30	VIRGINIA	-12.5	40

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **43.59**
#58 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.2/0.5**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 21 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 11 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 10

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	29.5	45	23.9	46
YARDS PER POINT	13.3	35	13.3	91
PLAYS PER GAME	67.5	83		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:10	38		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	34.9%	98	34.7%	29
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	391.5	55	318.6	15
YARDS PER PLAY	5.8	43	4.9	25
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.3	37		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	190	20	149.8	54
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5	21	4.3	68
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.4	105		
COMPLETION %	57.3%	94	61.0%	68
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	201.5	92	168.8	4
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.4	60	6.4	16
TURNOVERS	1.2	36	1.2	93

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

12-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

+950

CFP CHAMPION

300-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 8**

WAKE FOREST DEMON DEACONS

2023 Record: 4-8 SU & 4-8 ATS
Head Coach: Dave Clawson (11th)

Dave Clawson's job probably isn't in immediate danger in Winston-Salem, but last season's 4-8 showing was the worst since he went 3-9 in consecutive years in 2014 and 2015 at the start of his tenure. This is a Wake Forest team that was 11-3 and finished in the top 15 in the polls just two years ago. But, it all fell apart last season and the Deacs missed a bowl for the first time since that 2015 season.

Clawson is now 63-61 at Wake Forest and runs the risk of falling below .500 with a team that doesn't look up to snuff this season.

OFFENSE

Life without Sam Hartman proved to be difficult. Three quarterbacks combined on a 14/11 TD/INT ratio last season for the Demon Deacons and now they'll turn to Hank Bachmeier, who spent last season at Louisiana Tech after four seasons with Boise State. Bachmeier has a 51/21 TD/INT ratio and a 63% completion rate in his college career. He is not mobile at all, though, and Wake has some huge questions on the offensive line.

The QBs were sacked 49 combined times last season and the running game provided very little punch with just 3.3 yards per carry. The same faces are back in the backfield, but leading receiver Jahmal Banks is now at Nebraska. Bachmeier represents an upgrade at QB, but the skill positions have not been upgraded at all.

DEFENSE

The offense managed fewer than five yards per play and the defense allowed 5.84, so the Deacs had one of the worst yards per play differentials in the Power Five ranks. They also had one of the worst sack differentials at -26 and also finished -6 in turnover margin with only 16 takeaways.

In Year 3 under former Charlotte head coach Brad Lambert, this defense really needs to show more teeth. To reinvigorate the defense, transfers were brought in to surround the returning starters, so there is more experience, but that doesn't necessarily translate to more talent or production.

OUTLOOK

Wake Forest is favored in five games for me, but two of those games are -1 and -1.5, so they could certainly go either way. And, frankly, I'd lean against them going the other way. Bachmeier is way more experienced and Clawson has had success with experienced QBs, but there are a lot of other deficiencies on this roster. I have them at 5.01 wins, but that feels optimistic. With plus money on the Under, that's the way I'd lean.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	N CAROLINA A&T	-38.5	5
9/7	VIRGINIA	-3.5	40
9/14	OLE MISS	17	60.5
9/28	LOUISIANA	-4	39
10/5	at NC STATE	14.5	51.5
10/12	CLEMSON	15	58.5
10/19	at CONNECTICUT	-10.5	27
10/26	at STATEANFORD	1	39.5
11/8	CALIFORNIA	4.5	48
11/16	at NORTH CAROLINA	11.5	48.5
11/23	at MIAMI FL	19	57
11/30	DUKE	-1.5	42.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 41.98
#63 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.4/0
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18.7	117	28.1	73
YARDS PER POINT	17	114	14.2	68
PLAYS PER GAME	69.8	53		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:45	94		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	33.1%	113	43.0%	105
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	318.7	105	398.8	79
YARDS PER PLAY	4.6	117	5.9	92
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	39.4	28		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	133.4	88	158.9	74
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.4	111	4.3	67
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.5	112		
COMPLETION %	60.1%	72	62.0%	88
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	185.4	102	239.9	82
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7	74	8.3	114
TURNOVERS	1.8	113	1.3	87

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
150-1

CFP CHAMPION
800-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 4.5**

BIG 10 BETTING PREVIEW

by Adam Burke

OF TIMES SELECTED BY
VSIN EXPERTS TO WIN CONFERENCE

It stretches from Los Angeles to Chicago and nearly to New York. It can claim the reigning national champion and two of the nation's top three teams in the preseason. It has an impressive amount of money and power. The Big Ten is back, bigger and better than ever. On the heels of Michigan's 15-0 championship run, which ended the conference's eight-year slump, Ohio State and Oregon are title contenders in 2024.

It's a year of big changes. Jim Harbaugh, the architect of the Wolverines' perfect season, has departed to coach in the NFL. Expansion into the wild west has arrived, with four marquee programs — USC, UCLA, Oregon and Washington — ditching the Pac-12 to help form an 18-team superpower conference to rival the SEC. The future of college football is here, and the outlook is especially bright for the Big Ten.

With Harbaugh out of the way, the path appears cleared for the Buckeyes to lead the way. Ryan Day, who has lost three in a row to Michigan, is under pressure to coach Ohio State to its first national title since 2014. Day has a loaded roster and he recruited a high-profile head coach, Chip Kelly from UCLA, to become the Buckeyes' offensive coordinator. But the Ducks have at least two things the Buckeyes do not — the conference's top quarterback, Dillon Gabriel, and the most important home game on the schedule, against Ohio State in October.

The league no longer has East and West divisions (sorry, Iowa). It also introduces five new coaches, including Michigan's Sherrone Moore and Jedd Fisch of Washington, which lost the national title game.

Is Penn State primed to finally get over the hump? Where does Wisconsin fit into the puzzle? Is Nebraska returning to relevance? The biggest question is this: Will the Big Ten produce back-to-back national champions?



2024 PROJECTED STANDINGS (BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	ALL GAMES		CONFERENCE		DRAFTKINGS O/U
					PRJW'S	PRJL'S	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	
OREGON	69.0	3.2	0.1	47.63 (21)	10.7	1.3	7.8	1.2	10.5
OHIO ST	69.0	3.4	0.2	44.66 (49)	10.5	1.5	7.5	1.5	10.5
PENN ST	64.0	2.5	0.5	45.78 (39)	10.2	1.8	7.4	1.6	10.5
MICHIGAN	63.0	3.3	0.8	49.01 (9)	9.3	2.7	6.9	2.1	9
IOWA	53.0	2.9	0.6	46.23 (33)	8.0	4.0	5.6	3.4	7.5
USC	55.5	2.2	-0.1	51.93 (2)	7.0	5.0	5.3	3.7	7
WISCONSIN	52.0	2.7	0.0	48.82 (12)	6.7	5.3	4.6	4.4	7
WASHINGTON	53.5	2.6	-0.2	48.06 (19)	7.2	4.8	4.5	4.5	6.5
RUTGERS	46.5	1.8	0.3	42.5 (61)	6.6	5.4	4.3	4.7	6
NEBRASKA	47.5	1.8	0.0	45.47 (43)	6.5	5.5	4.1	4.9	7.5
MARYLAND	47.0	2.2	-0.3	46.77 (26)	6.2	5.8	3.8	5.2	6.5
UCLA	46.0	2.6	0.4	50.78 (3)	4.7	7.3	3.2	5.8	5.5
INDIANA	42.5	2.4	-0.2	40.8 (67)	5.8	6.2	3.0	6.0	5
MINNESOTA	44.5	2.7	0.3	46.2 (34)	5.2	6.8	2.8	6.2	5
NORTHWESTERN	43.5	1.8	-0.5	47.31 (23)	4.9	7.1	2.7	6.3	5
ILLINOIS	40.5	3.0	0.4	45.37 (45)	4.8	7.2	2.7	6.3	5
MICHIGAN ST	40.5	2.2	0.0	45.88 (36)	4.5	7.5	2.4	6.6	5
PURDUE	41.0	2.2	0.2	48.91 (10)	3.8	8.2	2.4	6.6	4.5

ILLINOIS

FIGHTING ILLINI

2023 Record: 5-7 SU & 3-9 ATS
Head Coach: Bret Bielema (4th)

Entering coach Bret Bielema's fourth year, Illinois is close to being a bowl team while also close to being the Big Ten's worst team. The Fighting Illini finished 5-7 last year and fell short of bowl eligibility with a season-ending 45-43 loss to Northwestern. But the Illini also had lots of close-game luck because their largest margin of victory was six points and each of their other four wins came by three points or fewer. There's not much to get excited about in Champaign.

OFFENSE

Bielema has a ground-and-pound offensive system, and junior quarterback Luke Altmyer fits in due to his scrambling ability. Altmyer ran for 282 yards last season, yet he threw for only 1,883 yards and had 10 interceptions in nine starts before getting benched. It's obvious why he transferred from Mississippi after two years — he was not good enough for the Rebels and is barely good enough to start for a bad Illini team. Predictably, the coaching staff is praising his improvement in the offseason, but we'll need to see it to believe it. Altmyer is working behind a big run-blocking line full of veterans, anchored by New Mexico transfer J.C. Davis, and that's the strength of every Bielema team. Kaden Feagin is a promising sophomore running back who should post some impressive numbers. The offense does have potential, if Altmyer improves.

DEFENSE

The defense that was so tough in 2022, when the Illini went 8-5 and allowed only one opponent to score more than 23 points, collapsed last year and allowed 29.4 PPG. Much of the decline had to do with losing coordinator Ryan Walters to Purdue and star cornerback Devon Witherspoon to the NFL. With five starters returning and corner Terrance Brooks added as a Texas transfer, this defense might be slightly better than last year's debacle.

OUTLOOK

On the bright side, Illinois has seven home games and five of those opponents (Eastern Illinois, Central Michigan, Purdue, Minnesota and Michigan State) are definitely beatable. On the flip side, will the Illini win any of their road games against Nebraska, Penn State, Oregon, Rutgers and Northwestern? Bielema went 5-7 in two of his three seasons and seems likely to win five games or fewer this time. Six wins is possible, but only if Altmyer makes dramatic strides. The roster appears to be Bielema's weakest in four years.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	E ILLINOIS	-28.5	15
9/7	KANSAS	10	54
9/14	CENTRAL MICHIGAN	-14.5	29
9/20	at NEBRASKA	8.5	47.5
9/28	at PENN STATE	25.5	64
10/12	PURDUE	-2.5	41
10/19	MICHIGAN	20.5	63
10/26	at OREGON	31.5	69
11/2	MINNESOTA	1.5	44.5
11/16	MICHIGAN STATE	-3	40.5
11/23	at RUTGERS	7.5	46.5
11/30	vs NORTHWESTERN	2	43.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 45.37
#45 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3/0.4
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 13 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 6 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.5	77	29.4	84
YARDS PER POINT	16	101	12.9	105
PLAYS PER GAME	71	40		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:24	108		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.0%	89	44.0%	112
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	391	57	378.3	58
YARDS PER PLAY	5.5	63	5.2	39
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33	94		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	126.4	97	150.2	55
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.8	91	3.9	44
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.6	32		
COMPLETION %	62.9%	43	60.4%	57
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	264.6	35	228.1	64
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.7	49	6.9	37
TURNOVERS	1.9	123	1.3	88

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
28-1

CFP CHAMPION
1000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 5.5

INDIANA HOOSIERS

2023 Record: 3-9 SU & 7-5 ATS
Head Coach: Curt Cignetti (1st)

The last three years of the Tom Allen era were depressing, with the Hoosiers going 9-27, including 3-24 in Big Ten games. Six of the victories came against Idaho (twice), Western Kentucky (twice), Indiana State and Akron. Hope is blooming in Bloomington with the arrival of new coach Curt Cignetti, who won 19 games at James Madison the last two years. Cignetti assembled a good-looking coaching staff and a promising recruiting class with a transfer quarterback. Indiana could go bowling and will not be relegated to the conference basement again this season.

OFFENSE

Kurtis Rourke started 34 games in four seasons at Ohio and passed for 7,651 yards and 50 touchdowns. The 6-foot-5 former Mid-American Conference Player of the Year turns 24 in October. It's easy to see why Cignetti pursued the transfer QB. Rourke's backup is promising sophomore Tayven Jackson. Cignetti also brought running back Kaelon Black, wideout Elijah Sarratt and tight end Zach Horton with him from James Madison. Black was the Dukes' leading rusher, and Sarratt made 82 receptions for 1,191 yards. The line is loaded with experienced players, including James Madison transfer guard Nick Kidwell and Wisconsin transfer tackle Trey Wedig. Rourke's final season for the Bobcats represented a step back, but he should bounce back at Indiana, where Cignetti is surrounding him with talented veterans.

DEFENSE

Cignetti brought several transfers from James Madison and at least four are expected to start on Indiana's defense. Junior middle linebacker Aiden Fisher was a star for the Dukes and will lead the Hoosiers, who take on an entirely new look with transfers also arriving from Stanford, Texas, UCLA and Kent State. It's not a defense with NFL prospects, but there are some pieces and the coaching staff can figure out the puzzle.

OUTLOOK

The Hoosiers typically line up a cupcake non-conference schedule (VSiN analyst and Indiana graduate Wes Reynolds makes no apologies for that) in a desperate attempt to launch themselves toward six wins and a bowl. This schedule opens with Florida International, Western Illinois and Charlotte. Indiana plays five games in September — also going to UCLA and hosting Maryland — and has a shot to emerge 4-1 before getting to the meat of the Big Ten grind. Cignetti is a winner and his team will play hard and improve. The Hoosiers upset Wisconsin last year and probably will pull off an upset or two in league play this year.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	FIU	-22	23.5
9/6	W ILLINOIS	-52	-6.5
9/14	at UCLA	6.5	46
9/21	CHARLOTTE	-14.5	30.5
9/28	MARYLAND	2	47
10/5	at NORTHWESTERN	3	43.5
10/19	NEBRASKA	2.5	47.5
10/26	WASHINGTON	8.5	53.5
11/2	at MICHIGAN STATE	0.5	40.5
11/9	MICHIGAN	19	63
11/23	at OHIO STATE	30	69
11/30	PURDUE	-3.5	41

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 40.80
#67 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.4/0.2
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 20 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 9
DEFENSIVE: 11

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.5	107	32	105
YARDS PER POINT	15.3	86	13.2	93
PLAYS PER GAME	67.6	79		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:45	95		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	33.3%	109	37.0%	43
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	313.3	111	423.5	106
YARDS PER PLAY	4.6	114	5.9	97
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	35.5	71		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	112.5	106	165.9	89
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.2	119	4.4	82
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30	76		
COMPLETION %	57.0%	97	61.9%	87
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	200.8	93	257.5	112
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	88	8	105
TURNOVERS	1.5	80	1.1	106

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
95-1

CFP CHAMPION
1000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 5.5**

IOWA HAWKEYES

2023 Record: 10-4 SU & 6-7-1 ATS
Head Coach: Kirk Ferentz (3rd)

Injuries, poor quarterback play and incompetent offensive coaching were all big problems last year for Iowa, which was shut out three times. So the Hawkeyes had a disastrous season, right? Kirk Ferentz has survived for 25 years in Iowa City by proving the critics wrong. He wins ugly with defense and special teams. Believe it or not, Ferentz finished 10-4 despite dealing with one of the nation's worst offenses. A new offensive coordinator and a better quarterback situation has the Hawkeyes looking like a factor in the conference race.

OFFENSE

The coach's son, Brian Ferentz, was finally booted as coordinator after the Hawkeyes produced an abysmal 15.4 PPG, with the defense and special teams setting up and scoring a significant number of points. Iowa was outscored 61-0 in season-ending losses to Michigan and Tennessee. New coordinator Tim Lester, a former head coach at Western Michigan, vows to unleash an aggressive attack. Senior quarterback Cade McNamara will pull the trigger after returning from a knee injury that shortened his season to five games and 90 pass attempts. McNamara had good numbers for Michigan in 2021. The line is big and strong and starts four seniors and one junior. Leshon Williams returns after leading the team with 821 rushing yards. The Hawkeyes, who averaged 234.6 yards per game to rank last in the nation, will use a power rushing attack to show off a much-improved offense.

DEFENSE

Phil Parker is as good as it gets as a coordinator and his defense surrendered only 14.8 PPG. Eight starters come back, led by senior middle linebacker Jay Higgins, who made 171 tackles last season. Nick Jackson, another senior linebacker, is off a 110-tackle season. Despite the departure of star corner Cooper DeJean, a second-round pick by the Eagles, the Iowa defense will be rock solid, as always.

OUTLOOK

What's most notable about the schedule is who's not on it: Michigan, Oregon and Penn State. The Hawkeyes open with three home games (Illinois State, Iowa State and Troy) before hitting the road to Minnesota and Ohio State. Iowa figures to be favored in 10 games and catches a break by getting Washington, Wisconsin and Nebraska in Iowa City. If McNamara stays healthy and the offensive optimism proves to be legit, this team will win at least eight games.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	ILLINOIS STATE	-26.5	29.5
9/7	IOWA STATE	-2	54
9/14	TROY	-17	38.5
9/21	at MINNESOTA	-6.5	44.5
10/5	at OHIO STATE	19	69
10/12	WASHINGTON	-2.5	53.5
10/19	at MICHIGAN STATE	-11	40.5
10/26	NORTHWESTERN	-13	43.5
11/2	WISCONSIN	-4	52
11/8	at UCLA	-5	46
11/23	at MARYLAND	-4.5	47
11/29	NEBRASKA	-8.5	47.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 46.23
#33 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.9/0.6
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 18 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 10 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	15.4	130	14.8	4
YARDS PER POINT	15.3	85	19.1	5
PLAYS PER GAME	61.9	128		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:32	102		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	29.4%	125	31.3%	16
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	235.4	133	281.9	5
YARDS PER PLAY	3.8	133	3.9	1
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.7	77		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	116.8	103	111.2	14
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.4	113	3.1	9
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	24.9	119		
COMPLETION %	48.9%	131	56.1%	14
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	118.6	130	170.7	5
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	4.8	133	5.1	2
TURNOVERS	1.6	85	1.1	111

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

40-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

+650

CFP CHAMPION

300-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 8**

MARYLAND TERRAPINS

2023 Record: 8-5 SU & 7-6 ATS
Head Coach: Mike Locksley (6th)

It's fair to call Maryland a mystery team because almost everything but the quarterback position looks good on paper. The quarterback who departed, Taulia Tagovailoa, will be hard to replace. Despite attracting many critics over the years, coach Mike Locksley has done a terrific job with the Terrapins the past three years, compiling a 23-16 record with three consecutive bowl victories. This appears to be a middle-of-the-pack team in the conference, but that's not a bad place to be when the Big Ten looks so impressive at the top and respectable at the bottom.

OFFENSE

Tagovailoa passed for 3,377 and 25 touchdowns last season to wrap a record-setting career at Maryland. He was bypassed by the NFL and is playing in the CFL. Locksley has not named a starter, but North Carolina State transfer MJ Morris is the favorite in a competition with Billy Edwards, who led the offense in a victory over Auburn in the Music City Bowl. There are plenty of playmakers on this side of the ball, with Roman Hemby, Colby McDonald and Nolan Ray set to lead the run-heavy attack. Kaden Prather and Tai Felton are big-time receivers, and Preston Howard is a reliable tight end. Left guard Kyle Long is the lone returning starter on a rebuilt line that will also feature transfers from Georgia, Purdue and Rutgers.

DEFENSE

Several veterans return and some transfers have been added to a defense that will be spearheaded by senior middle linebacker Ruben Hyppolite and nose tackle Jordan Phillips. While the front seven is the strength, senior safety Dante Trader is a reliable leader in the secondary. The best news for this defense is it will not face a high-powered offense until mid-October.

OUTLOOK

Ohio State and Michigan are not on the schedule, so the Terrapins catch those breaks while also getting Iowa, Rutgers and USC at home. There's a decent shot Maryland will start 6-0, if it can survive road trips to Virginia and Indiana, before facing the Trojans on Oct. 19. Count on the road games against Oregon and Penn State being losses, but the remaining 10 games are winnable. Still, with so many mysteries about the quarterback and offensive line, nothing is a lock for a Maryland team that could wind up being a mediocre 6-6.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	CONNECTICUT	-22.5	27
9/7	MICHIGAN STATE	-8.5	40.5
9/14	at VIRGINIA	-3.5	40
9/21	VILLANOVA	-14	35
9/28	at INDIANA	-2	42.5
10/11	NORTHWESTERN	-6	43.5
10/19	USC	6	55.5
10/26	at MINNESOTA	0.5	44.5
11/9	at OREGON	25.5	69
11/16	RUTGERS	-2.5	46.5
11/23	IOWA	4.5	53
11/30	at PENN STATE	20	64

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **46.77**
#26 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.2/0.3**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 12 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 4
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	29	51	23.8	42
YARDS PER POINT	13.2	31	14.2	67
PLAYS PER GAME	67.1	85		
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:46	118		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	42.5%	37	33.5%	26
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	382.3	64	338.9	29
YARDS PER PLAY	5.7	50	4.7	16
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.7	120		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	103.7	115	123.6	29
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.6	102	3.3	15
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.2	23		
COMPLETION %	64.8%	26	57.4%	25
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	278.6	22	215.3	43
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.7	47	6.7	31
TURNOVERS	1.8	109	2	3

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

100-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

16-1

CFP CHAMPION

500-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 6.5

MICHIGAN WOLVERINES

2023 Record: 15-0 SU & 9-5-1 ATS
Head Coach: Sherrone Moore (1st)

After winning three consecutive Big Ten titles and capping off the run with a 15-0 national-championship masterpiece, the Wolverines were stripped down by the NFL this spring. Michigan had 13 players picked, the most of any college program, and also lost coach Jim Harbaugh to the Chargers. The roster was not stripped bare, but only seven players who started return for new coach Sherrone Moore, who draws a tougher schedule that includes a trip to Ohio State. A playoff appearance is possible, but don't count on Moore to work a miracle.

OFFENSE

The key to Michigan being a surprise team, if you will, is redshirt sophomore quarterback Alex Orji. J.J. McCarthy went 27-1 as the starter, so the dropoff in experience is drastic. Orji is a talented runner and is technically in a battle with four others for the starting job in August camp, but he's the clear favorite. Running back Donovan Edwards and tight end Colston Loveland are the top returning veterans. The offensive line is unproven and the wide receivers are young, so Michigan's run-heavy offense is going into the season as a mystery.

DEFENSE

This is not going to be the nation's No. 1 scoring defense (10.4 PPG) again, but it will be solid against the run with Mason Graham, Kenneth Grant, Josaiah Stewart and Derrick Moore on the line and Jaishawn Barham at middle linebacker. Will Johnson is one of the Big Ten's top cornerbacks. Wink Martindale, a longtime NFL coordinator, takes over after Harbaugh took Rick Minter with him to the Chargers. The defense will be strong enough to keep the Wolverines in almost all games.

OUTLOOK

It will obviously help an inexperienced team to have five home games to start the season, but Fresno State is no cupcake for an opener and Texas will be favored in Ann Arbor in the second week. The Wolverines also host USC and Oregon and face Washington and Ohio State on the road. If Michigan loses to all three top-five preseason opponents (the Longhorns, Ducks and Buckeyes), that makes a 9-3 finish the ceiling. With Harbaugh and both coordinators gone, in addition to a stunning number of departed star players, there are too many new faces to assume the Michigan machine will keep cranking out wins. The only way to look is Under 9 wins.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	FRESNO STATE	-22.5	43.5
9/7	TEXAS	2.5	69
9/14	ARKANSAS STATE	-31	35.5
9/21	USC	-11	55.5
9/28	MINNESOTA	-21.5	44.5
10/5	at WASHINGTON	-7.5	53.5
10/19	at ILLINOIS	-20.5	40.5
10/26	MICHIGAN STATE	-26	40.5
11/2	OREGON	3	69
11/9	at INDIANA	-19	42.5
11/23	NORTHWESTERN	-23.5	43.5
11/30	at OHIO STATE	8.5	69

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **49.01**
#9 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **3.3/0.8**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 7 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 2
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	35.9	12	10.4	1
YARDS PER POINT	10.7	1	23.8	1
PLAYS PER GAME	62.7	124		
TIME OF POSSESSION	32:14	15		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	42.8%	34	29.1%	6
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	383	62	247.1	1
YARDS PER PLAY	6.1	24	4.1	4
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.3	51		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	169.3	43	90.1	6
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.5	42	3	7
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	24	120		
COMPLETION %	72.2%	3	55.3%	9
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	213.7	76	157	2
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.9	15	5.7	4
TURNOVERS	0.5	2	1.8	18

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

+600

MAKE PLAYOFF

+115

CFP CHAMPION

30-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 9

MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS

2023 Record: 4-8 SU & 5-6-1 ATS
Head Coach: Jonathan Smith (1st)

Which team will finish last in this 18-team superconference? Michigan State is the most likely cellar dweller, following the firing of Mel Tucker during a 4-8 disaster. The rebuilding has begun in East Lansing, where things will be looking up soon enough due to the arrival of new coach Jonathan Smith. At Oregon State, Smith quickly turned around a program in pitiful shape and went 18-8 the past two years. When the Pac-12 fell apart, Smith was smart to take the Big Ten money and run.

OFFENSE

Smith brought his top quarterback prospect from Oregon State. As a true freshman backup for the Beavers, Aidan Chiles completed 24 of 35 passes for 309 yards and four touchdowns without an interception. He's also got running ability and should eventually develop into a star. His backup now is Tommy Schuster, another transfer who started for four years at North Dakota. The Spartans bring back their leading rusher, Nathan Carter, and leading receiver, Montorie Foster. Senior center Tanner Miller anchors the line, which could be a weakness, as a former Oregon State starter. Tight end Jack Velling also started for the Beavers and made an impact. Michigan State was shut out twice last year, by Michigan and Penn State, but Smith will build a much better offense.

DEFENSE

Senior linebacker Cal Haladay, who led the team with 91 tackles, is one of only a few returning starters. But as with many other teams, veteran transfers will fill several starting roles. The Spartans lost several transfers in the spring and will welcome key transfers from Wisconsin, Oregon, Arizona State, Georgia Tech, Old Dominion and UCF. Smith also hired defensive coordinator Joe Rossi away from Minnesota. Rossi is highly respected, but he's got a lot of work to do.

OUTLOOK

Aside from home games against Florida Atlantic and Prairie View A&M, the Spartans rarely will be favored. The Big Ten schedule includes Michigan, Ohio State, Oregon and Iowa. So, why is the win total set at 5? Michigan State does get Indiana, Purdue and Rutgers at home. If Chiles turns into the playmaker Smith expects him to become, the Spartans could win six games and get to a bowl. But with six being the best-scenario, it's probably better to bet on four or five wins. Smith is a turnaround artist, so this team won't stay down for too long.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/30	FLORIDA ATLANTIC	-8.5	34.5
9/7	at MARYLAND	8.5	47
9/14	PRAIRIE VIEW	-40	3
9/21	at BOSTON COLLEGE	4.5	42.5
9/28	OHIO STATE	26.5	69
10/4	at OREGON	31.5	69
10/19	IOWA	11	53
10/26	at MICHIGAN	26	63
11/2	INDIANA	-0.5	42.5
11/16	at ILLINOIS	3	40.5
11/22	PURDUE	-1.5	41
11/30	RUTGERS	4	46.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 45.88
#36 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.2/0
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 5
DEFENSIVE: 10

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	13.3	132	29.6	87
YARDS PER POINT	20.6	133	13.8	81
PLAYS PER GAME	64.5	110		
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:55	115		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	29.0%	127	36.8%	41
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	273.5	129	407.5	93
YARDS PER PLAY	4.2	128	5.8	88
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30	113		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	83.1	129	158.8	73
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	2.8	130	4.3	66
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.4	60		
COMPLETION %	56.7%	101	61.0%	68
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	190.5	98	248.7	98
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.9	125	8	106
TURNOVERS	1.8	113	1.4	65

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
95-1

CFP CHAMPION
1000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 5**

MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS

2023 Record: 6-7 SU & 4-9 ATS
Head Coach: P. J. Fleck (8th)

P.J. Fleck is back for his eighth year as Minnesota's coach, whether he likes it or not. Fleck has been trying to escape Minneapolis, according to reports, and threw his hat in the ring for the UCLA job, among others. The Golden Gophers put together consecutive 9-4 seasons in 2021 and 2022 before regressing to 6-7 last year. Minnesota won only five games in the regular season yet was allowed to go bowling because it had the top Academic Progress Rate of the five-win teams, so it pays for players to go to class.

OFFENSE

Darius Taylor became a star as a freshman, rushing for 208 yards to power the Gophers past Bowling Green in the Quick Lane Bowl. Taylor missed five games with a leg injury before carrying the ball 35 times in the bowl. The ground attack is always the foundation for Fleck's offenses. Max Brosmer is the new quarterback to replace Athan Kaliakmanis, who transferred to Rutgers. Brosmer was a highly successful passer at New Hampshire, where he led the FCS level by throwing for 3,464 yards in addition to 29 touchdowns. Daniel Jackson, who led the Gophers with 59 receptions and eight touchdowns, returns to be Brosmer's primary target. Four senior starters return on the line, so Minnesota should be potent offensively if Brosmer adjusts well to the Big Ten.

DEFENSE

Senior middle linebacker Cody Lindenberg is one of the league's best at his position. The defense returns several other veterans, including end Jah Joyner, who had 7.5 sacks a year ago. Fleck had to change coordinators when Joe Rossi left for Michigan State, and the new DC is Corey Hetherman from the Rutgers staff. Minnesota should be much improved after allowing an average of 35.3 points in losses to Illinois, Purdue, Ohio State and Wisconsin at the tail end of last season.

OUTLOOK

Fleck is riding a five-game bowl winning streak. The Gophers should start 3-0 by beating North Carolina, Rhode Island and Nevada prior to the conference opener against Iowa. It's a relatively tough league schedule that excludes Indiana, Northwestern and Purdue and concludes with Penn State and Wisconsin. The win total is the right number because this looks like a team that will win either five or six games. The lean is to the Over, but it's not a recommended bet.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	NORTH CAROLINA	1	48.5
9/7	RHODE ISLAND	-28	19
9/14	NEVADA	-21.5	25.5
9/21	IOWA	6.5	53
9/28	at MICHIGAN	21.5	63
10/5	USC	8	55.5
10/12	at UCLA	4	46
10/26	MARYLAND	-0.5	47
11/2	at ILLINOIS	-1.5	40.5
11/9	at RUTGERS	3.5	46.5
11/23	PENN STATE	17.5	64
11/29	at WISCONSIN	10	52

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **46.20**
#34 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.7/0.3**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.9	102	26.7	63
YARDS PER POINT	14.4	68	13.8	80
PLAYS PER GAME	64.5	111		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:52	19		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	35.6%	93	46.0%	118
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	300.9	122	368.4	50
YARDS PER PLAY	4.7	113	5.8	86
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.8	31		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	157.5	65	149.1	51
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	78	4.7	93
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	24	120		
COMPLETION %	52.6%	121	62.4%	93
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	143.4	126	219.3	48
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6	122	7.3	64
TURNOVERS	1.3	54	1.5	55

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

180-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

70-1

CFP CHAMPION

900-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 5.5**

NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS

2023 Record: 5-7 SU & 4-7-1 ATS
Head Coach: Matt Rhule (3rd)

One win from bowl eligibility for the first time since 2016, Nebraska finished the season with four consecutive losses and a 5-7 record. Matt Rhule's first season as coach was a failure and too often a comedy of offensive errors. But it's darkest before the dawn and things are about to change for the brighter in Lincoln, with a freshman phenom leading the way at quarterback. The Cornhuskers open the season with five home games in the first six weeks, and fans can start making plans for that long-awaited bowl trip.

OFFENSE

Dylan Raiola is a five-star recruit who tends to be indecisive, so that could be a red flag, and expectations might be a little too high considering he's projected by some to resemble the next Patrick Mahomes. Raiola committed to Ohio State and then Georgia before shifting to Nebraska, where his dad was an All-American offensive lineman and his uncle currently coaches the line. Raiola should be a major upgrade from last year's three-ring QB circus of Jeff Sims, Heinrich Haarberg and Chubba Purdy. The Cornhuskers committed 31 turnovers last season, the most in the nation. The line will be solid with three seniors and two juniors starting, and Rhule recruited transfer wideout Jahmal Banks from Wake Forest.

DEFENSE

While a freshman leads the offense, the defense will be loaded with all juniors and seniors in the starting lineup. Senior safety Isaac Gifford, the team's leading tackler, returns along with team sack leader Jimari Butler on the edge. A defense that allowed 18.3 PPG was good enough to get Nebraska to a bowl game last season, and this unit should be just as strong.

OUTLOOK

The Cornhuskers dropped four games by exactly three points last season — three of them by the score of 13-10 — and the obvious reason was an abysmal offense. It's a new era with the Rhule-Raiola duo. A schedule that excludes Michigan, Oregon and Penn State sets the table for a bowl. UTEP, Colorado, Northern Iowa and Illinois visit Lincoln before a trip to Purdue and another home game against Rutgers. A 6-0 start is possible by early October, but it's probably not going to be that easy. The back end of the schedule is far more difficult and includes Ohio State, USC, Iowa and Wisconsin. The prediction here is Rhule will flip the record from 5-7 to 7-5.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	UTEP	-27	22.5
9/7	COLORADO	-1.5	48.5
9/14	N IOWA	-21.5	27.5
9/20	ILLINOIS	-8.5	40.5
9/28	at PURDUE	-4.5	41
10/5	RUTGERS	-2.5	46.5
10/19	at INDIANA	-2.5	42.5
10/26	at OHIO STATE	25	69
11/2	UCLA	-3	46
11/16	at USC	10	55.5
11/23	WISCONSIN	2.5	52
11/29	at IOWA	8.5	53

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **45.47**
#43 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **1.8/0**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 17 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 9 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18	120	18.3	11
YARDS PER POINT	17.4	121	16.6	17
PLAYS PER GAME	64	117		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:53	45		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.7%	70	37.2%	47
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	312.8	112	303.5	9
YARDS PER PLAY	4.9	100	4.4	5
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	39.8	21		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	176.8	34	92.9	7
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	46	3	6
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	21.8	128		
COMPLETION %	52.1%	122	59.5%	46
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	135.9	128	210.6	37
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.2	109	6.1	8
TURNOVERS	2.6	133	1.2	100

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
55-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
+850

CFP CHAMPION
200-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 7.5



NORTHWESTERN WILDCATS

2023 Record: 8-5 SU & 9-4 ATS
Head Coach: David Braun (3rd)

David Braun was a Cinderella coaching story a year ago, taking over a team that went 1-11 in 2022 and turning it into an eight-win surprise party. The Wildcats seemed to be freefalling while dealing with a crisis after popular coach Pat Fitzgerald was fired, so what they accomplished following an unimpressive season-opening 24-7 loss at Rutgers was the nation's most impressive comeback tale. Is Braun for real or will the Wildcats crash back to reality? Hint: The quarterback situation is a mess and the schedule is more difficult.

OFFENSE

Heisman Trophy odds are not posted on Mike Wright or Jack Lausch, and no matter who wins the job, Northwestern will have the worst starting quarterback in the Big Ten. Wright is a transfer who started a total of 14 games at Vanderbilt and Mississippi State. Lausch, a redshirt sophomore, has 78 career passing yards. There is some offensive optimism. Zach Lujan, the new coordinator, was highly successful at South Dakota State. The top three receivers — A.J. Henning, Bryce Kirtz and Calvin Johnson — can make plays if the QB can deliver the ball. Cam Porter is a 220-pound power runner who will find some holes behind an experienced line.

DEFENSE

With a run-based offense and sturdy defense, the Wildcats will be in several low-scoring games. Senior linebacker Xander Mueller returns after totaling 110 tackles, five sacks and three interceptions. Mueller is a first-team all-conference candidate on a defense that boasts veterans all over the field. Northwestern's defense was the main reason it closed the season with four consecutive wins, including a 14-7 upset of Utah in the Las Vegas Bowl.

OUTLOOK

The Wildcats cashed in on a lot of close-game luck, winning three games by three points or fewer, and lost only one fumble all season. Braun went 8-5 when the betting market projected he would win three games. Ohio State and Michigan are back on the schedule, and the Wildcats will be underdogs in all five league road games. It's worth noting that with Ryan Field being renovated, Northwestern will play five home games at an Evanston facility near Lake Michigan and two at Wrigley Field. This team is not bad, but the quarterback picture is problematic. Don't forget the Wildcats went 1-11 and 3-9 prior to last year's miraculous turnaround.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	MIAMI OH	-4	41
9/6	DUKE	-3.5	42.5
9/14	E ILLINOIS	-30.5	15
9/21	at WASHINGTON	13	53.5
10/5	INDIANA	-3	42.5
10/11	at MARYLAND	6	47
10/19	WISCONSIN	6.5	52
10/26	at IOWA	13	53
11/2	at PURDUE	0	41
11/16	vs OHIO STATE	26	69
11/23	at MICHIGAN	23.5	63
11/30	vs ILLINOIS	-2	40.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 47.31
#23 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 1.8/0.5
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22	97	22.8	32
YARDS PER POINT	13.8	48	15	51
PLAYS PER GAME	69.1	63		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:28	106		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.3%	58	39.2%	67
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	303.3	118	341.6	32
YARDS PER PLAY	4.4	126	5	28
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.3	81		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	95.3	121	157.5	70
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	2.8	129	4	50
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.8	69		
COMPLETION %	61.6%	58	65.2%	119
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	207.9	87	184.1	14
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	85	6.7	27
TURNOVERS	0.8	8	1.8	11

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
130-1

CFP CHAMPION
1000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION UNDER 4.5



OHIO STATE BUCKEYES

2023 Record: 11-2 SU & 7-5-1 ATS
Head Coach: Ryan Day (6th)

It might not be now or never for Buckeyes coach Ryan Day, but the pressure on him to win a national championship is cranked up now. On top of three consecutive losses to Michigan, Ohio State was forced to watch Jim Harbaugh coach the Wolverines to the national title. Harbaugh enjoyed making belittling comments about Day along the way. Day is fighting back, compiling arguably his most talented roster in his sixth full season in Columbus, and taking back control of the Big Ten.

OFFENSE

Chip Kelly, no longer wanting to deal with the recruiting hassles involved in the free agency and NIL era of college football, stepped down as UCLA head coach to join the Buckeyes as their offensive coordinator. Kelly made the move because of his long relationship with Day, who played quarterback for Kelly at New Hampshire from 1998 to 2001. Kelly is a run-first play caller and the Buckeyes have the horses to run wild. Leading rusher TreVeyon Henderson returns and will be complemented by Quinshon Judkins, a transfer from Mississippi who ran for 1,158 yards and 15 touchdowns last season. Kansas State transfer Will Howard, the favorite to start at quarterback, is a capable passer who's also a tough runner. The loss of Marvin Harrison Jr. is not a problem for the Buckeyes, who remain loaded at wide receiver with Emeka Egbuka, Jeremiah Smith and Carnell Tate. The line brings back four veterans, including senior guard Donovan Jackson. Howard has the experience to help improve an offense that sputtered in some big games. Kelly could be the most valuable assistant coaching addition in the country.

DEFENSE

Eight starters return for coordinator Jim Knowles, whose defense ranked No. 2 in the nation in scoring (11.2 PPG). The front is led by NFL prospects Tyleik Williams, Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloua. The most impactful newcomer will be safety Caleb Downs, a transfer from Alabama. The Buckeyes allowed 17 points or fewer in 12 of 13 games last season.

OUTLOOK

In his five seasons since taking over for Urban Meyer, Day is 38-3 in Big Ten games, including 1-3 versus Michigan. Day catches a break with the Wolverines, minus Harbaugh, visiting Columbus. However, the conference schedule will be challenging for the Buckeyes, who face Oregon and Penn State on the road. The Kelly-coordinated offense will bulldoze defenses on the ground, and the defense is elite. Day will likely go 11-1 and beat Michigan to quiet critics.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	AKRON	-49	23.5
9/7	WESTERN MICHIGAN	-40	32
9/21	MARSHALL	-37	35
9/28	at MICHIGAN STATE	-26.5	40.5
10/5	IOWA	-19	53
10/12	at OREGON	3	69
10/26	NEBRASKA	-25	47.5
11/2	at PENN STATE	-2.5	64
11/9	PURDUE	-31	41
11/16	vs NORTHWESTERN	-26	43.5
11/23	INDIANA	-30	42.5
11/30	MICHIGAN	-8.5	63

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 44.66
#49 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.4/0.2
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 6
DEFENSIVE: 9

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	30.2	35	11.6	2
YARDS PER POINT	13.3	36	23.2	2
PLAYS PER GAME	66	93		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:32	73		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	43.0%	32	26.7%	2
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	401.8	45	268.3	3
YARDS PER PLAY	6.1	28	4.1	3
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.7	85		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	140.2	76	121.3	25
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	66	3.5	19
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.6	71		
COMPLETION %	63.8%	35	51.7%	2
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	261.6	39	146.9	1
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.6	17	5	1
TURNOVERS	1.1	26	0.8	122

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

+155

MAKE PLAYOFF

-650

CFP CHAMPION

4-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 10.5

OREGON DUCKS

2023 Record: 12-2 SU & 10-3-1 ATS
Head Coach: Dan Lanning (3rd)

Dan Lanning was a candidate to replace Nick Saban at Alabama, but the 38-year-old rising star realized he has a great thing going at Oregon. Lanning is 22-5 in two seasons, with three losses by exactly three points each to Washington. The Ducks will host the Huskies and Big Ten favorite Ohio State this season, so the schedule sets up for Lanning to make a run at a national title. He's got the quarterback to do it.

OFFENSE

Bo Nix departed for the NFL after posting incredible numbers (77.5% completions, 45 touchdown passes, three interceptions) in the Oregon offense last season. Don't expect a decline at the position because Oklahoma transfer Dillon Gabriel is a Heisman Trophy frontrunner. Gabriel has an NIL deal worth a reported \$1.4 million. In 50 games at Oklahoma and UCF, Gabriel passed for 14,865 yards and 125 touchdowns, in addition to rushing for 1,060 yards and 26 TDs. Tez Johnson and Evan Stewart will be big-play receivers for Gabriel, who also can lean on tight end Terrance Ferguson and running back Jordan James. While the line has a new look, it does feature three senior starters. It will be tough to top last year's production (44.2 points and 531 yards per game), but the offense should be similarly explosive.

DEFENSE

A former defensive coordinator at Georgia, Lanning will have this unit ready to compete in the Big Ten, a more physical conference than the Pac-12. The Ducks have an impressive mix of returnees, led by linebackers Jeffrey Bassa and Justin Jacobs, and transfer portal additions. Jabbar Muhammad (Washington) and Kobe Savage (Kansas State) will start in the secondary. The defensive front is not as strong on paper as Ohio State's front, but Lanning has recruited so well that the talent should not be doubted. The Ducks, who allowed only 16.5 PPG last season, will fit into a league full of rugged defenses.

OUTLOOK

Oregon projects as the favorite in all 12 regular-season games. There are five big-time games on the schedule — Ohio State, Washington and Boise State at home, plus Michigan and Wisconsin on the road — and the Ducks will win three or four of those to get to 10 wins and a playoff spot. If Gabriel stays healthy (his backup is UCLA transfer Dante Moore), Oregon can win 11, but that's a risky bet. The October showdown with the Buckeyes is as big as it gets.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	IDAHO	-37.5	34.5
9/7	BOISE STATE	-23	49
9/14	at OREGON STATE	-22	44
9/28	at UCLA	-20.5	46
10/4	MICHIGAN STATE	-31.5	40.5
10/12	OHIO STATE	-3	69
10/18	at PURDUE	-26	41
10/26	ILLINOIS	-31.5	40.5
11/2	at MICHIGAN	-3	63
11/9	MARYLAND	-25.5	47
11/16	at WISCONSIN	-14.5	52
11/30	WASHINGTON	-19	53.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 47.63
#21 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.2/0.1
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 16 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 9

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	41.4	4	17.2	10
YARDS PER POINT	12.5	19	19	6
PLAYS PER GAME	68	78		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:01	43		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	51.4%	3	36.6%	39
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	516.2	2	327.5	21
YARDS PER PLAY	7.6	2	4.9	22
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	31	106		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	171.9	40	99.1	10
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.5	5	3.5	23
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.6	18		
COMPLETION %	76.5%	1	61.0%	71
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	344.3	1	228.5	65
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	9.4	5	6.3	10
TURNOVERS	0.5	3	1.3	81

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

+215

MAKE PLAYOFF

-290

CFP CHAMPION

8-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 10.5**

PENN STATE NITTANY LIONS

2023 Record: 10-3 SU & 9-4 ATS
Head Coach: James Franklin (11th)

While there is no shame in being the Big Ten's third- or fourth-best team, it's time for coach James Franklin to start beating the heavyweights and stop talking about it. The Nittany Lions, who have dropped seven straight to Ohio State and three in a row to Michigan, were outclassed by their rivals last year. Franklin has a better team, especially offensively, and an easier schedule this season. Penn State hosts the Buckeyes in Happy Valley in early November.

OFFENSE

The numbers say Drew Allar exceeded most expectations as a freshman by passing for 25 touchdowns with two interceptions. But those numbers are hiding a lie. In losses to the Buckeyes and Wolverines, Allar combined to go 28-for-64 with only 261 yards passing. Franklin wanted to shake up the offense and hired coordinator Andy Kotelnicki from Kansas. The creative Kotelnicki and a maturing Allar should be a nice combination. Expect a balanced and powerful attack that features big-time running backs Kaytron Allen and Nicholas Singleton. Allar has a couple of reliable targets in wideout Julian Fleming, an Ohio State transfer, and veteran tight end Tyler Warren. The line will continue to be a strength despite losing left tackle Olu Fashanu, a first-round pick by the Jets.

DEFENSE

Manny Diaz, who coordinated one of the nation's top defenses that pitched three shutouts last season, took the head-coaching job at Duke. Franklin hired former Indiana head coach Tom Allen, who's an emotional basket case and a question mark until proven otherwise. Junior end Abdul Carter should be a first-team all-conference standout for a dominant line, but the Lions are inexperienced and appear to lack elite talent at some spots. If youngsters emerge around Carter, middle linebacker Kobe King and safety Kevin Winston, this will be a typically tough Penn State defense.

OUTLOOK

Franklin, 21-5 the past two seasons, is a polarizing coach who recruits at a high level and has a strong track record as a favorite, yet he often mismanages games and can't get over the hump against Ohio State. He gets a home date with the Buckeyes and misses Michigan, Oregon and Iowa on the schedule this season. The most difficult road tests (West Virginia, USC and Wisconsin) are hurdles the Lions are good enough to clear. Nine wins would be a disappointment. Franklin should go at least 10-2 with a favorable schedule, so expect a playoff appearance.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	at WEST VIRGINIA	-9.5	52
9/7	BOWLING GREEN	-30	36.5
9/21	KENT STATE	-48	18.5
9/28	ILLINOIS	-25.5	40.5
10/5	UCLA	-20	46
10/12	at USC	-7	55.5
10/26	at WISCONSIN	-10	52
11/2	OHIO STATE	2.5	69
11/9	WASHINGTON	-13	53.5
11/16	at PURDUE	-21.5	41
11/23	at MINNESOTA	-17.5	44.5
11/30	MARYLAND	-20	47

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 45.78
#39 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.5/0.5
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 13 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 6 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	34	15	14	3
YARDS PER POINT	11.4	4	18.3	7
PLAYS PER GAME	71	40		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:42	21		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.2%	60	31.0%	13
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	388.4	60	256.6	2
YARDS PER PLAY	5.5	64	4	2
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.9	43		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	174.3	36	75	1
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.6	37	2.2	1
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	31.8	64		
COMPLETION %	58.0%	86	59.8%	49
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	214.1	75	181.6	11
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	86	6.7	30
TURNOVERS	0.7	5	1.8	11

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+500

MAKE PLAYOFF
-145

CFP CHAMPION
22-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 10**

PURDUE BOILERMAKERS

2023 Record: 4-8 SU & 4-8 ATS
Head Coach: Ryan Walters (3rd)

After a 4-8 finish in his debut, Purdue coach Ryan Walters was dealt a few bad cards. The team's top offensive player, wide receiver Deion Burks, transferred to Oklahoma while the top defensive player, Nic Scourton, left for Texas A&M. On top of those personnel losses, the Boilermakers must contend with one of the nation's toughest schedules. A Big Ten media poll picked Purdue last in the 18-team league. The honeymoon phase in West Lafayette is over for Walters.

OFFENSE

Texas transfer Hudson Card battled through injuries to pass for 2,387 yards and rush for 203 yards while accounting for 20 total touchdowns. The highlight of his season was a game-winning drive against Indiana. Card was a highly-touted recruit for the Longhorns and he's got the ability to put together a big year. He's also got talent to work with in running backs Devin Mockobee and Reggie Love (Illinois transfer) and transfer wideouts C.J. Smith (Georgia), Kam Brown (UCLA) and Jahmal Edrine (Florida Atlantic). An above-average line is anchored by center Gus Hartwig, who ranks among the league's best. The Boilermakers showed some explosiveness by averaging 42.7 points in victories over Illinois, Minnesota and Indiana. Burks was a star, but the offense looks better on paper this year.

DEFENSE

Walters was a standout defensive coordinator at Illinois before landing the Purdue job, but his defense needs some work after allowing 38 points or more in losses to Michigan, Ohio State, Wisconsin and Fresno State. Without Scourton, who was the Big Ten's sack leader, veterans Kydran Jenkins and Yanni Karlaftis will need to pressure quarterbacks. The best player on this unit is one of the best defensive players in the nation — sophomore safety Dillon Thieneman had 106 tackles and six interceptions as a freshman. Walters recruited several promising transfers to raise the talent level.

OUTLOOK

Two years after reaching the Big Ten championship game with former coach Jeff Brohm, Purdue is far from a contender. The media forecast of a last-place finish seems harsh because the Boilermakers appear to be more talented than Illinois, Indiana, Northwestern and Michigan State. Walters' biggest problem is a brutal schedule that includes five road games in league play and adds Notre Dame, Oregon and Penn State. The win total is posted at 4 and 4.5, and another four-win finish is more likely than 5-7.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	INDIANA STATE	-33.5	10
9/14	NOTRE DAME	19	61.5
9/21	at OREGON STATE	6	44
9/28	NEBRASKA	4.5	47.5
10/5	at WISCONSIN	13.5	52
10/12	at ILLINOIS	2.5	40.5
10/18	OREGON	26	69
11/2	NORTHWESTERN	0	43.5
11/9	at OHIO STATE	31	69
11/16	PENN STATE	21.5	64
11/22	at MICHIGAN STATE	1.5	40.5
11/30	at INDIANA	3.5	42.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 48.91
#10 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.2/0.2
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 6

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.9	82	30.4	98
YARDS PER POINT	15.9	99	12.6	112
PLAYS PER GAME	73.2	31		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:25	58		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	35.8%	91	40.7%	85
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	379.9	67	382.1	61
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	81	5.5	63
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.5	34		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	168.8	44	140.6	44
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	54	3.9	42
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.7	56		
COMPLETION %	59.7%	77	54.3%	6
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	211.2	82	241.5	86
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.5	98	7.8	95
TURNOVERS	1.5	76	1.5	49

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

300-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

130-1

CFP CHAMPION

800-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 4.5

RUTGERS SCARLET KNIGHTS

2023 Record: 7-6 SU & 7-5-1 ATS
Head Coach: Greg Schiano (5th)

A victory over Miami in the Pinstripe Bowl put Rutgers at 7-6 and gave coach Greg Schiano his first winning season in his second tour with the Scarlet Knights, who should be better offensively. A new quarterback will help improve what was a pitiful passing attack. Schiano took advantage of a weak schedule last year to reach bowl eligibility, and he's got a realistic shot to win six of the seven home games on this schedule, so bet on back-to-back bowl appearances.

OFFENSE

The Scarlet Knights produced 10 touchdown passes all of last season, so Schiano grabbed Minnesota transfer Athan Kaliakmanis and handed him the starting job after spring practice. The "Greek Rifle" will open up what was a one-dimensional offense. The go-to guy will still be Kyle Monangai, a 5-foot-9 cannonball who led the Big Ten with 1,262 rushing yards. Monangai had six 100-yard games, including 163 yards against the Hurricanes in the bowl. Four seniors are set to start on the line, and the receiving corps looks capable with Christian Dremel returning and Dymere Miller transferring from Monmouth. Rutgers averaged 8.4 points in losses to Michigan, Ohio State, Iowa, Penn State and Wisconsin, so it was a bully offense that was only effective against the worst defenses.

DEFENSE

Star cornerback Max Melton was a second-round draft pick by the Cardinals, yet the defense returns plenty of veterans and will again be strong. Edge rushers Wesley Bailey and Aaron Lewis are back along with senior linebacker Mohamed Toure, who totaled 93 tackles and 4.5 sacks. This will rank statistically among the league's top defenses, partly because Ohio State, Oregon and Penn State are off the schedule.

OUTLOOK

Not only do the Scarlet Knights avoid the Buckeyes, Ducks and Nittany Lions — the consensus top three teams in the conference — they also miss Michigan and Iowa on a schedule that looks like it was scripted by Schiano. The season begins with lightweights Howard and Akron, and Rutgers also should be favored at home against UCLA, Minnesota and Illinois. The roster is not incredibly talented, but this team will be Iowa-like in its ability to run the ball and play defense. While six wins is a safe bet and seven is a risky call, the prediction is a lean to 7-5.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	HOWARD	-36	12
9/7	AKRON	-25	23.5
9/21	at VIRGINIA TECH	5.5	50
9/27	WASHINGTON	5	53.5
10/5	at NEBRASKA	2.5	47.5
10/12	WISCONSIN	3.5	52
10/19	UCLA	-2	46
10/25	at USC	11	55.5
11/9	MINNESOTA	-3.5	44.5
11/16	at MARYLAND	2.5	47
11/23	ILLINOIS	-7.5	40.5
11/30	at MICHIGAN STATE	-4	40.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 42.50
#61 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 1.8/0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.8	103	22.8	32
YARDS PER POINT	14.2	61	14.5	59
PLAYS PER GAME	62.6	125		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:11	35		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.5%	85	40.0%	74
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	295.4	125	330.8	25
YARDS PER PLAY	4.7	110	5	27
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.8	32		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	160.5	59	141.7	45
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	69	4.1	54
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	22.8	127		
COMPLETION %	46.9%	133	59.7%	47
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	134.9	129	189.1	17
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.9	123	6.2	9
TURNOVERS	1.1	26	1.5	49

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

120-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

20-1

CFP CHAMPION

800-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 6.5**



UCLA BRUINS

2023 Record: 8-5 SU & 6-7 ATS
Head Coach: DeShaun Foster (1st)

With an awkward opening statement at Big Ten media days in late July, new coach DeShaun Foster displayed some doubt about his readiness for the job. Foster's challenge is considerable because he's got to replace coach Chip Kelly, handle several personnel changes and make the transition to a tougher schedule in a new league. For the Bruins to reach bowl eligibility, Foster will need to pull off a few upsets. The betting market in the offseason has been flooded with anti-UCLA money.

OFFENSE

Foster, a former star tailback for the Bruins, was on Kelly's staff and will continue to emphasize a ground attack that topped the Pac-12 in rushing yards each of the past two seasons. New coordinator Eric Bieniemy comes from the NFL. Ethan Garbers returns at quarterback after starting six games and passing for 1,136 yards and 11 touchdowns with three interceptions as a junior. Running back T.J. Harden, who had 827 yards and eight touchdowns, also returns along with receivers J. Michael Sturdivant and Logan Loya. The line is full of senior starters and should be a strength. The Bruins were inconsistent at the end of last season, averaging 36.5 points in victories over USC and Boise State yet scoring only seven in each of their losses to Arizona State and Cal.

DEFENSE

Two losses will sting on this side of the ball — coordinator D'Anton Lynn left for USC and linebacker Laiatu Latu, the team's sack leader, was the 15th pick and first defensive player selected in the NFL Draft. Lynn improved a weak unit from 87th to 11th in total defense in one year. The top players will be interior linemen Jay Toia and Keanu Williams and linebacker Kain Medrano.

OUTLOOK

Kelly, obviously fatigued by recruiting hassles in the transfer portal and NIL era, stepped down to become offensive coordinator at Ohio State. Kelly left on a high note, winning 17 games and the LA Bowl in his final two years, but he did not recruit at a high level. The Bruins are breaking in a new coach who's learning on the job and the schedule includes road trips to Hawaii, LSU, Penn State, Rutgers, Nebraska and Washington — meaning the team will travel a league-high 22,050 miles this season. If UCLA wins all of the games it should (Hawaii, Indiana, Minnesota and Fresno State), five to six wins is a reasonable goal, but don't bet on it.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	at HAWAII	-12.5	31.5
9/14	INDIANA	-6.5	42.5
9/21	at LSU	18	61
9/28	OREGON	20.5	69
10/5	at PENN STATE	20	64
10/12	MINNESOTA	-4	44.5
10/19	at RUTGERS	2	46.5
11/2	at NEBRASKA	3	47.5
11/8	IOWA	5	53
11/15	at WASHINGTON	9.5	53.5
11/23	USC	7	55.5
11/30	FRESNO STATE	-5	43.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 50.78
#3 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.6/0.4
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 12 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.8	84	19.3	15
YARDS PER POINT	17.3	120	15.9	30
PLAYS PER GAME	76.6	8		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:27	80		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	44.4%	21	35.2%	34
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	411.7	37	307.3	12
YARDS PER PLAY	5.4	69	4.5	8
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	40.4	17		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	180.9	30	80	2
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.5	44	2.7	2
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.8	55		
COMPLETION %	58.0%	85	61.1%	72
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	230.8	59	227.3	63
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7	71	6.5	19
TURNOVERS	1.8	109	1.8	11

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

150-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

28-1

CFP CHAMPION

700-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION UNDER 5

USC TROJANS

2023 Record: 8-5 SU & 4-9 ATS
Head Coach: Lincoln Riley (3rd)

For all of his successes as a coach, Lincoln Riley has no College Football Playoff wins. And he's unlikely to get one this season, either. USC is switching to the Big Ten, which has stronger defenses than the old Pac-12 and at least three better teams (Ohio State, Oregon and Penn State). The Trojans will be competitive and contend for a title if everything goes right, but everything must go right for a team with a new quarterback and a rebuilt defense that needed a major makeover.

OFFENSE

If the Holiday Bowl was an indication of what's to come and not a fluke, it's Miller time for the Trojans. Caleb Williams, the No. 1 draft pick by the Bears and a former Heisman winner, will likely be replaced by redshirt junior Miller Moss. In the bowl win over Louisville, Moss passed for 372 yards and six touchdowns. If he falters, UNLV transfer Jayden Maiava is waiting to take the job. USC always has speed and playmakers, and sophomore Zachariah Branch is ready to bust out as a star after emerging as a dynamic kick returner a year ago. Woody Marks, a veteran transfer from Mississippi State, is the top running back. While the line has a few question marks, Riley can be counted on to coach up the offense.

DEFENSE

A beleaguered defense that surrendered 34.4 PPG will be much improved due to the hiring of coordinator D'Anton Lynn, who worked wonders at UCLA. The Bruins went from 87th to 11th in total defense in one year. Riley not only hired Lynn, he snagged former North Dakota State head coach Matt Entz to be linebackers coach. Lynn inherits some talent, starting with tackle Bear Alexander and senior middle linebacker Mason Cobb. Lynn also brought safety Kamari Ramsey from the Bruins and lured Oregon State transfer safety Akili Arnold. Are the offensive and defensive lines tough enough to win at the highest level in the Big Ten?

OUTLOOK

One of the nation's most difficult schedules will make reaching eight, nine or 10 wins extremely tough to do. The Trojans open against LSU in Las Vegas and face road trips to Michigan, Minnesota, Maryland and Washington. The home schedule is highlighted by Penn State, Wisconsin, Nebraska and Notre Dame. It's not too much to ask of USC to win eight games, but pick here is a lean to 7-5, so this is not a bet.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
9/1	vs LSU	5.5	61
9/7	UTAH STATE	-23	34.5
9/21	at MICHIGAN	11	63
9/28	WISCONSIN	-5.5	52
10/5	at MINNESOTA	-8	44.5
10/12	PENN STATE	7	64
10/19	at MARYLAND	-6	47
10/25	RUTGERS	-11	46.5
11/2	at WASHINGTON	0.5	53.5
11/16	NEBRASKA	-10	47.5
11/23	at UCLA	-7	46
11/30	NOTRE DAME	4.5	61.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **51.93**
#2 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.2/0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 5
DEFENSIVE: 9

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	41.8	2	34.4	117
YARDS PER POINT	11.1	2	12.6	110
PLAYS PER GAME	66	93		
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:39	120		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	43.4%	29	43.2%	107
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	466.5	11	432.8	114
YARDS PER PLAY	7.1	5	5.9	93
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.8	125		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	133.5	87	186.5	117
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.8	29	4.8	106
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	35.5	27		
COMPLETION %	68.0%	11	64.0%	104
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	333	4	246.4	93
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	9.4	7	7.7	87
TURNOVERS	1.3	54	1.2	93

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

22-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

+440

CFP CHAMPION

65-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 7.5

WASHINGTON HUSKIES

2023 Record: 14-1 SU & 7-7-1 ATS
Head Coach: Jedd Fisch (1st)

A run to the national championship game ended with a loss to Michigan and then an avalanche of coach and players losses for Washington. That's the price often paid for great success, and the Wolverines are paying it, too. Jedd Fisch, the artist of an incredible turnaround at Arizona, takes over for Alabama-bound coach Kalen DeBoer. The Huskies have only a few full-time starters returning and several stars to replace, but Fisch dipped into the transfer-portal pool to hook some impact players.

OFFENSE

The voids left by quarterback Michael Penix Jr., wideout Rome Odunze and the entire line are immense. Penix led the nation with 4,903 passing yards. Will Rogers, who transferred from Mississippi State, is a suitable replacement with 12,315 passing yards, 94 touchdowns and 40 starts in his career. All 11 starters are history, but Fisch added some transfer reinforcements by bringing in running back Jonah Coleman (Arizona) and wideout Jeremiah Hunter (California) among many others. Running back Cameron Davis, who missed last year with a knee injury, returns to form a potent backfield with Coleman. An all-new line is a major concern.

DEFENSE

DeBoer took the majority of his staff to Tuscaloosa, leaving Fisch to assemble his own crew of assistants. Steve Belichick, a linebackers coach with the Patriots, is the new coordinator. Fisch is a former New England assistant himself and has close ties to Bill Belichick. There is some experience returning on this side of the ball, most notably senior linebackers Carson Bruener and Alphonzo Tuputala and junior corner Elijah Jackson, all of whom ranked in the team's top five in tackles. Fisch also brought along a few promising Arizona transfers.

OUTLOOK

Fisch was the ideal hire for a rebuilding project. He went 1-11 in his first season in Tucson and followed with records of 5-7 and 10-3. He will win sooner in Seattle. The Huskies open with Weber State, Eastern Michigan, Washington State and Northwestern, so a 4-0 start is anticipated. Michigan, UCLA and USC are winnable home games, as well. Nothing will be easy in the Big Ten this season, but a veteran quarterback could help Fisch coach his way to at least six wins and seven is not a stretch. While it's a long fall from 14-1 and a playoff appearance, this new-look Washington team should be a little better than expected.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	WEBER STATE	-29	26.5
9/7	EASTERN MICHIGAN	-30	25.5
9/14	vs WASHINGTON STATE	-11.5	41.5
9/21	NORTHWESTERN	-13	43.5
9/27	at RUTGERS	-5	46.5
10/5	MICHIGAN	7.5	63
10/12	at IOWA	2.5	53
10/26	at INDIANA	-8.5	42.5
11/2	USC	-0.5	55.5
11/9	at PENN STATE	13	64
11/15	UCLA	-9.5	46
11/30	at OREGON	19	69

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **48.06**
#19 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.6/0.2**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 5 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 1
DEFENSIVE: 4

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	36	11	24.8	54
YARDS PER POINT	12.8	20	16.4	22
PLAYS PER GAME	66.5	89		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:08	64		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	43.9%	24	38.5%	59
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	462.1	12	406.9	92
YARDS PER PLAY	7	7	5.7	78
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.3	130		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	118.5	102	148.3	49
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	58	4.7	98
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.3	12		
COMPLETION %	65.4%	23	59.3%	43
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	343.7	2	258.6	114
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	9	13	6.7	25
TURNOVERS	1.3	60	1.3	74

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
80-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
11-1

CFP CHAMPION
300-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 6.5**

WISCONSIN BADGERS

2023 Record: 7-6 SU & 6-6-1 ATS
Head Coach: Luke Fickell (3rd)

The celebrated hiring of coach Luke Fickell fell well short of the hype. Fickell went 7-6 in his first year at Wisconsin, and his second chance might not go any better. As with most Big Ten teams, the Badgers must deal with a scheduling grind that includes Alabama, USC, Penn State, Iowa, Oregon and Nebraska. Fickell turned around the Cincinnati program in his second year by going from 4-8 to 11-2, but his magic touch is unlikely to be realized so soon in Madison.

OFFENSE

Injuries were a factor, but a new offensive system that was designed to feature a better passing attack simply flopped. Late in the season, the Badgers scored only 14 points in a loss at Indiana and 10 points in a stunning home loss to Northwestern. Things are not going to change much unless Miami transfer quarterback Tyler Van Dyke triggers something special. First, the inconsistent Van Dyke has to beat out sophomore Braedyn Locke, who started three games, for the No. 1 job and keep it. Leading rusher Braelon Allen is gone, but Chez Mellusi returns in the backfield and Tawee Walker arrives as an Oklahoma transfer. The receiver group looks good with Will Pauling and Bryson Green back after productive seasons. The Badgers will start three seniors on a typically tough line.

DEFENSE

Fickell plans to start eight veterans on a defense that allowed 20.2 PPG and kept the team within striking range in narrow losses to Iowa, Ohio State and LSU. Jaheim Thomas, a transfer from Arkansas and Cincinnati, will step in as a leader at a linebacker spot along with Darryl Peterson, who led the team with 4.5 sacks. The secondary features pro prospects Ricardo Hallman (seven interceptions last season) and Hunter Wohler (120 tackles, two interceptions).

OUTLOOK

After some of last year's disasters, it's tough to be too optimistic about the Badgers. An improved offense is the key to the season. Aside from Western Michigan, South Dakota and Purdue, who all come to Madison, there are no opponents that present sure-fire wins. However, Wisconsin should beat Northwestern and Minnesota and, if all of that happens, would need two wins in the other seven games to get Over the win total of 6.5. It's easier said than done, but Fickell's track record instills just enough faith.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/30	WESTERN MICHIGAN	-22.5	32
9/7	S DAKOTA	-23.5	31.5
9/14	ALABAMA	10.5	65
9/28	at USC	5.5	55.5
10/5	PURDUE	-13.5	41
10/12	at RUTGERS	-3.5	46.5
10/19	at NORTHWESTERN	-6.5	43.5
10/26	PENN STATE	10	64
11/2	at IOWA	4	53
11/16	OREGON	14.5	69
11/23	at NEBRASKA	-2.5	47.5
11/29	MINNESOTA	-10	44.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 48.82
#12 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.7/0
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 6
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.5	87	20.2	19
YARDS PER POINT	16.2	107	17.1	14
PLAYS PER GAME	72.8	32		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:16	83		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	44.2%	22	39.6%	71
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	380.6	65	344.1	35
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	79	5	26
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.9	76		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	160.4	60	135.5	37
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.6	38	3.9	38
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.1	24		
COMPLETION %	59.9%	74	61.0%	70
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	220.2	69	208.6	35
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.1	117	6.5	18
TURNOVERS	1.3	54	1.3	81

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
65-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
+950

CFP CHAMPION
200-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 6.5**

BIG 12 BETTING PREVIEW

by Adam Burke

OF TIMES SELECTED BY VSIN EXPERTS TO WIN CONFERENCE

Ask any college football handicapper which conference is the most wide-open and almost every one of them will likely say the Big 12. Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah all join from the Pac-12 this season to form a 16-team league that is rife with parity.

Despite playing its first year in the conference, Utah is the preseason favorite to win the championship game (+320). Arizona (10-1) – now led by former San Jose State head coach Brent Brennan – brings back 15 starters. Among that returning production is quarterback Noah Fifita, who completed 72% of his passes and threw 25 touchdowns in nine starts last season while leading the Wildcats to a 10-3 SU/11-2 ATS record. Not much is expected of Colorado (30-1) or Arizona State (100-1), but the Buffaloes are exciting, and they arguably have the best signal-caller in the conference in Shedeur Sanders.

Texas and Oklahoma are gone, but there are some traditional Big 12 powers expected to compete for a championship this season.

The one with the most hype is Kansas State (+380). Chris Klieman's squad brings back just 12 starters—only four on defense—but sophomore quarterback Avery Johnson has bettors and fans alike excited about the Wildcats' potential.

Oklahoma State (+750) has 19 starters returning from a team which won 10 games and finished as the runner-up to Texas in the conference last season.

UCF (+900) and Kansas (+900) have high-end quarterback talent in KJ Jefferson and Jalon Daniels, respectively, and both programs should have elite offenses.

Iowa State (10-1) also brings back 19 starters from last season, and sophomore quarterback Rocco Becht is primed to make another leap.

Do not sleep on any one of Texas Tech (14-1), West Virginia (18-1) or TCU (18-1) either, all of which have eight or more starters coming back on at least one side of the ball.

For years the Big 12 has been a chaotic conference which has turned out some dramatic results down the stretch of conference play. This season is shaping up to be no different, with about 10 teams being able to make a realistic case for a conference championship.



2024 PROJECTED STANDINGS (BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	ALL GAMES		CONFERENCE		DRAFTKINGS O/U
					PRJW'S	PRJL'S	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	
UTAH	56.5	3.4	-0.1	44.4 (53)	9.3	2.7	7.3	2.7	9.5
KANSAS ST	56.5	3.2	0.1	45.79 (38)	8.9	3.1	7.1	2.9	9.5
ARIZONA	53.5	1.8	0.1	44.4 (52)	8.2	3.8	6.3	3.7	8
OKLAHOMA ST	54.5	2.9	0.3	46.73 (27)	8.3	3.7	5.9	3.1	8
KANSAS	54.0	1.7	-0.3	42.98 (60)	8.5	3.5	5.8	3.2	8
IOWA ST	54.0	2.8	-0.1	46.27 (32)	8.0	4.0	5.6	3.4	7.5
WEST VIRGINIA	52.0	3.0	-0.2	49.21 (7)	6.8	5.2	4.9	4.1	6.5
UCF	49.0	2.8	-0.3	44.83 (42)	6.9	5.1	4.7	4.3	7.5
TEXAS TECH	48.0	2.5	-0.4	44.13 (56)	6.9	5.1	4.4	4.6	7.5
TCU	48.5	2.3	0.0	45.61 (41)	6.2	5.8	4.2	4.8	7.5
COLORADO	48.5	2.8	-0.5	48.7 (13)	5.9	6.1	3.9	5.1	5.5
BAYLOR	44.5	3.2	0.2	46.59 (29)	5.2	6.8	3.5	6.5	5.5
CINCINNATI	43.0	3.4	0.0	44.59 (50)	5.2	6.8	3.1	5.9	5
HOUSTON	43.0	1.9	0.1	49.4 (5)	4.1	7.9	2.7	6.3	3.5
BYU	41.5	2.6	0.1	48.29 (17)	3.9	8.1	2.5	6.5	4.5
ARIZONA ST	40.0	2.3	0.2	48.42 (16)	3.5	8.5	2.0	7.0	4.5

ARIZONA WILDCATS

2023 Record: 10-3 SU & 11-2 ATS
Head Coach: Brent Brennan (1st)

Arizona was a surprise last season. It went 10-3 SU/11-2 ATS and won a bowl against Oklahoma to end the year. Jedd Fisch departed for Washington in the offseason, but most of the production remained in Tucson, including quarterback Noah Fifita. Brent Brennan comes in from San José State with a loaded team and expectations of competing for a conference title in the program's first season in the Big 12.

OFFENSE

Fifita did not start until Week 5 last season, but once he grabbed the starting job he instantly became one of the best quarterbacks in the Pac-12. As a starter Fifita completed 71.3% of his passes and threw 25 touchdowns to six interceptions. Only Bo Nix was a higher graded passer by PFF in the Pac-12 after Fifita took the job.

Brennan hired Dino Babers as his offensive coordinator, a hire that should make Arizona one of the better-coordinated offenses in the Big 12. Babers has a plethora of weapons at his disposal this season.

Tetairoa McMillan opted to return after a strong season in which he caught 90 passes for 1,396 yards and 10 touchdowns. New Mexico transfer Jacory Croskey-Merritt ran for 1,190 yards and averaged 6.3 yards last season. The offensive line only loses one starter – albeit a massive one – in first-round draft pick Jordan Morgan.

DEFENSE

Arizona was extremely strong up front last season. The Wildcats allowed just 3.6 yards per carry and 118.2 yards per contest. That led to a ton of success on early downs, and as a result, they were 30th in opponent EPA on early downs. The defensive line was a driving force behind that success, but the unit is being essentially rebuilt this season.

Four starters depart from the line, and in their place are a litany of transfers from San José State, Syracuse, Stanford and USC. Their run defense figures to regress this season, but the Wildcats' secondary—which finished 40th in opponent EPA per dropback—figures to be a strength once again as the Wildcats return a ton of production.

Their linebacker room remains mostly intact from last season, led by leading tackler and First Team All-Pac 12 middle linebacker Jacob Manu. Defensive back Tecario Davis was their highest-graded corner in coverage by PFF (87.5). He had 12 pass breakups and an interception, and he was charged with three other dropped picks last season.

OUTLOOK

Brent Brennan has an absolutely loaded roster for his first season in Tucson, and he has a great staff around him. Arizona must make road trips to Kansas State and Utah, as well as play host to Texas Tech and West Virginia. To get to nine wins, the Wildcats will have to pull off a road upset while being essentially perfect in games in which they are favored. That is a tough ask in a conference rife with parity.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	NEW MEXICO	-30.5	25.5
9/7	N ARIZONA	-31	24
9/13	at KANSAS STATE	6	56.5
9/28	at UTAH	6.5	56.5
10/5	TEXAS TECH	-7.5	48
10/12	at BYU	-9.5	41.5
10/19	COLORADO	-7.5	48.5
10/26	WEST VIRGINIA	-3.5	52
11/2	at UCF	-2	49
11/15	HOUSTON	-12	43
11/23	at TCU	-3	48.5
11/30	ARIZONA STATE	-15	40

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **44.40**
#52 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **1.8/0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	34.3	14	22.6	30
YARDS PER POINT	13	23	16.2	25
PLAYS PER GAME	69.5	57		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:20	32		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	49.4%	5	42.1%	96
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	445.5	19	365.8	49
YARDS PER PLAY	6.4	13	5.4	54
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.9	109		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	135.8	84	121.6	26
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	52	3.8	37
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.5	19		
COMPLETION %	71.2%	5	59.4%	45
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	309.7	8	244.2	89
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.5	19	7.3	62
TURNOVERS	1	17	1.5	49

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

10-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

10-1

CFP CHAMPION

150-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 8

ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS

2023 Record: 3-9 SU & 5-6-1 ATS
Head Coach: Kenny Dillingham (3rd)

Kenny Dillingham took over a program with a bare cupboard in 2023 and got the expected results. Arizona State went 3-9 SU/5-6-1 ATS, but put forth some inspiring efforts. The Sun Devils beat Washington State as five-point home underdogs and went to UCLA and won outright as 17-point underdogs. Dillingham got this team to play consistently in 2023 and that is not going anywhere in 2024.

OFFENSE

Dillingham had four quarterbacks attempt a pass in 2023. The inconsistent presence under center led to Arizona State finishing 130th in EPA per play on offense and 132nd in EPA per dropback. Only one of those quarterbacks – Trenton Bourget – remains on the roster this season. The favorite to win the job is Michigan State transfer Sam Leavitt. Jeff Sims also transfers in, but had an extremely poor season at Nebraska.

There is not much continuity along the offensive line, but there was not much to begin with last season. The Sun Devils were decimated at the position in 2023 due to injury. Four players who started multiple games are gone, but seven transfers have been added to the room to bolster the depth.

Skill positions are in much better shape. Arizona State's top three rushers return. Cameron Skattebo is an explosive back who forced 51 missed tackles and had 21 runs of 10 or more yards. Their leading receiver departs, but four of the top six pass catchers return.

DEFENSE

The Sun Devils' defense was ahead of its offense in 2023, but not by much. Arizona State was 94th in opponent EPA per play and 90th in opponent EPA per dropback. The secondary lost three starters from last season, but that might not be a negative considering how poor the group was. Dillingham bolstered the position group with many transfers, and it should be better than what it was in 2023.

Arizona State's front seven is in decent shape. It allowed 4.2 yards per carry and finished 60th in opponent EPA per rush. Multiple defensive linemen depart from that group, but in their place are transfers from Power Four programs. At linebacker, Dillingham went to the portal and grabbed San Diego State linebacker Zyus Fiascu and Keyshaun Elliot from New Mexico State. Both were their teams' leading tacklers last season.

The defensive staff remains mostly in place for the Sun Devils this season. The scheme will not change much, but there is some change on a defense which brings back just four starters. Considering how poor the group was in 2023 there are real expectations this unit should be better in 2024.

OUTLOOK

Arizona State impressed last season with its willingness to play hard despite overwhelmingly negative results. That led to some good ATS results, but the team ultimately finished with a losing ATS record. This season, we could see a good ATS record without the wins. The Sun Devils go to Oklahoma State, Kansas State and Arizona in conference play, and they host Kansas, Utah and UCF. Dillingham might not improve that record this season, but Arizona State could still be better in 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	WYOMING	-4.5	38
9/7	MISSISSIPPI STATE	2.5	44.5
9/12	at TEXAS STATE	4	41.5
9/21	at TEXAS TECH	10.5	48
10/5	KANSAS	11.5	54
10/11	UTAH	14	56.5
10/19	at CINCINNATI	6	43
11/2	at OKLAHOMA STATE	17	54.5
11/9	UCF	6.5	49
11/16	at KANSAS STATE	19.5	56.5
11/23	BYU	-0.5	41.5
11/30	at ARIZONA	15	53.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **48.42**
#16 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.3/0.2**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 10 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 6
DEFENSIVE: 4

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	17.2	124	32.8	109
YARDS PER POINT	18.5	126	12.6	111
PLAYS PER GAME	70.7	44		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:22	60		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	32.1%	116	40.7%	83
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	317.8	106	412.4	97
YARDS PER PLAY	4.5	123	5.8	90
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.9	110		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	109.8	109	137.7	41
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.6	107	4.3	72
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.2	15		
COMPLETION %	55.0%	113	65.3%	120
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	208	86	274.6	124
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.6	127	7.5	80
TURNOVERS	1.8	113	0.8	124

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
100-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
110-1

CFP CHAMPION
1000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 4.5

BAYLOR BEARS

2023 Record: 3-9 SU & 3-8-1 ATS
Head Coach: Dave Aranda (5th)

Dave Aranda enters his fifth season in Waco squarely on the hot seat. In four years, he is 23-25 with a 47.9% cover rate and one winning season to his name. The former LSU defensive coordinator had one of his most experienced teams back in 2024, which is good for a coach looking to save his job.

OFFENSE

Quarterback has been a position that has troubled Aranda throughout his tenure. This offseason, he elected to fix that through the transfer portal with the addition of Toledo quarterback DeQuan Finn. Finn is a strong dual-threat weapon, and he is coming off a career year as a passer. The sixth-year senior completed a career-high 63.0% of his passes, averaged 8.3 yards per attempt and accounted for 29 touchdowns. He will be an upgrade at the position without a doubt.

The skill positions are loaded with returning production for Baylor as well.

The Bears' top three wide receivers return from last season, as do their top five rushers. Monaray Baldwin struggled with drops (6), but he is an explosive receiver who averaged 8.1 yards after catch per reception. Ketron Jackson led the team in yards per reception (17.5). They also brought in tight end Michael Trigg to bolster a position that lost its top two from 2023.

Aranda also hired Jake Spavital to be the offensive coordinator. Spavital is the former Texas State head coach who filled the same role at Cal last season. The expectation is that Spavital will have the Bears running a more up-tempo style. In the end, Baylor has a new coordinator, an upgrade at quarterback and experienced skill positions. This unit should be better than it was a year ago.

DEFENSE

Another sign of the pressure Aranda is under is how he is handling his defense this season.

Matt Powledge will remain the defensive coordinator, but by all accounts, Aranda will handle play-calling. How much Aranda's coordination will improve this unit remains to be seen, but it cannot be much worse for a team that finished 132nd in opponent EPA per play.

Secondary is the most experienced group on the roster, but Baylor was 133rd in opponent EPA per dropback in 2023. The expectation is that the combination of experience and Aranda's play-calling could fix this issue, but it is not realistic to expect a leap back to average here.

The defensive line loses both starting defensive ends, but the Bears return good production up the middle at both nose tackle and linebacker. Still, this team finished 114th in opponent EPA per rush. They allowed 5.1 yards per carry. Aranda could improve this unit, but it is more than likely Baylor is a below average defense once again.

OUTLOOK

Baylor has five conference games on the road this season, but only one of them is against a conference favorite (Utah). With Finn at quarterback this team has a real chance to take a big leap on offense. The Bears also face BYU and Houston while also getting winnable games against Colorado, Kansas and TCU. The defense might not be much better, but the offense could do enough to save Aranda's job.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	TARLETON STATE	-21	26.5
9/7	at UTAH	15	56.5
9/14	AIR FORCE	-12	35.5
9/21	at COLORADO	6.5	48.5
9/28	BYU	-6	41.5
10/5	at IOWA STATE	12	54
10/19	at TEXAS TECH	6	48
10/26	OKLAHOMA STATE	7	54.5
11/2	TCU	1	48.5
11/16	at WEST VIRGINIA	10.5	52
11/23	at HOUSTON	0	43
11/30	KANSAS	6	54

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 46.59
#29 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.2/0.2
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 18 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 9
DEFENSIVE: 9

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.5	94	35.7	122
YARDS PER POINT	16.8	111	12.4	116
PLAYS PER GAME	74	19		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:16	33		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	35.6%	94	46.5%	122
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	376.6	72	443	119
YARDS PER PLAY	5.1	89	6.6	126
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.2	91		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	100.7	118	188.7	120
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3	122	5.1	115
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.7	13		
COMPLETION %	60.2%	70	65.9%	122
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	275.9	24	254.3	104
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.3	62	8.9	127
TURNOVERS	1.3	49	1.4	65

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
60-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
50-1

CFP CHAMPION
800-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION OVER 5.5

BYU COUGARS

2023 Record: 5-7 SU & 5-7 ATS
Head Coach: Kalani Sitake (9th)

BYU took a large step back in 2023 despite 15 returning starters from an eight-win team in 2022. This season, Kelani Sitake has 14 starters back, eight of which come on offense. The market does not expect much from the Cougars, but if certain pieces make an improvement this team could surprise some bettors this season.

OFFENSE

The biggest question for BYU heading into the season is quarterback. Jake Retzlaff started four games for the Cougars last season, but they lost all four contests and he posted a 46.7 PFF passing grade in those games. The favorite to start is Gerry Bohanon, who has not played since 2022. Neither inspires confidence, and it could be another rough season at the most important position for Sitake.

LJ Martin returns at running back, and he could be the Cougars' best weapon. Martin started four games and led the team in rushing (546 yards, 4.8 yards per carry). Only two starters are gone from the offensive line in front of Martin, so it would not be out of the question to expect him to push for 1,000 yards this season. Six of the top seven receivers from last season are back as well.

BYU was 131st in EPA per play on offense and 130th in EPA per dropback in 2023. Much of that stemmed from abysmal quarterback play. The position does not look much better this season, but it is likely this unit will improve, as it is hard to be the worst in consecutive seasons.

DEFENSE

BYU was not great on defense, but it did have some strength. The Cougars were 67th in opponent EPA on early downs. They forced 20 turnovers as well. Only six starters are back from that group, but some of the returning production played pivotal roles in their limited success.

The best player in this unit is defensive end Tyler Batty. He led BYU in tackles (57), pressures (34) and sacks (5.5). Batty is back along the defensive line for 2023, but he is one of just two starters back at the position.

BYU's biggest issue will be on the backend. The team was 96th in opponent EPA per dropback, and three starters from last season are back in the fold. Some were young, but rolling back out a secondary that was among the worst in college football could be a problem in 2024.

OUTLOOK

There is some talent for BYU, but Sitake could be in for another down season. The Cougars drew nearly every contender in the Big 12 this season. They go to Utah and UCF in conference play. Kansas State, Arizona, Oklahoma State, and Kansas all go to Provo. Add in some tough non-conference opponents such as SMU and Wyoming—both on the road—and asking this group for five wins seems like a foolish endeavor.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	S ILLINOIS	-9.5	34.5
9/6	at SMU	15	53.5
9/14	at WYOMING	-0.5	38
9/21	KANSAS STATE	12.5	56.5
9/28	at BAYLOR	6	44.5
10/12	ARIZONA	9.5	53.5
10/18	OKLAHOMA STATE	10.5	54.5
10/26	at UCF	10	49
11/9	at UTAH	18.5	56.5
11/16	KANSAS	9.5	54
11/23	at ARIZONA STATE	0.5	40
11/30	HOUSTON	-1	43

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 48.29
#17 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.6/0.1
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 13 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 6

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	21.5	100	31.1	102
YARDS PER POINT	14.1	59	13.6	83
PLAYS PER GAME	65.3	101		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:17	111		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	27.9%	132	44.6%	114
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	302.2	120	424.3	109
YARDS PER PLAY	4.6	115	5.9	91
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.5	112		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	109.7	110	186.3	116
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.6	103	5	112
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.1	52		
COMPLETION %	54.4%	115	62.1%	90
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	192.5	96	238	80
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.8	126	7	45
TURNOVERS	1.6	93	1.6	39

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
120-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
110-1

CFP CHAMPION
1000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 4.5**



CINCINNATI BEARCATS

2023 Record: 3-9 SU & 4-8 ATS
Head Coach: Scott Satterfield (3rd)

Scott Satterfield enters his second season with Cincinnati with nowhere to go but up from last season. The Bearcats were just 3-9 SU/4-8 ATS and won just one game in conference play. With 15 starters back Satterfield has a group that can improve its record from 2024 if someone can step up at the quarterback position.

OFFENSE

Quarterback is undecided as Cincinnati enters camp. The contenders for the position are Brendan Sorsby – an Indiana transfer – redshirt junior Brady Lichtenberg and true freshman Samaj Jones. Regardless of who wins the job, he will have plenty around him.

Corey Kiner returns at running back. Kiner ended his season strong, running for over 100 yards in four of his last six games. He totaled 1,050 yards and averaged 5.5 yards per carry. He is a shifty back who forced 53 missed tackles. In front of Kiner is an offensive line that returns every starter from last season. In that group is one of the best interior linemen in the country in right guard Luke Kandra. Wide receiver is in good shape as well with leading receiver Xzavier Henderson returning.

Cincinnati finished 65th in EPA per play last season, but 32nd in EPA per rush. If Satterfield can get quality quarterback play from whoever wins the job in the summer, this group should be better this season.

DEFENSE

The Bearcats were one of the worst defenses in the country last season. They finished 123rd in opponent EPA per play (0.207) and 129th in EPA per play on early downs. Seven starters return from that group, but it was a young group. Many returners are juniors on this unit, and it could take a massive leap this season.

Red zone defense and turnovers are going to be areas which Cincinnati must improve the most. Opponents scored on 87.0% of their red zone possessions, and the Bearcats forced just 13 turnovers in 2023.

The group does have good talent. Defensive tackle Dontay Corleone was a First Team All-American in 2022 and a Second Team All-Big 12 member last season. They are also shifting to a 3-3-5 defense, a scheme which is known to create havoc and raise the floor of production for a unit.

OUTLOOK

There is nowhere to go but up for Cincinnati, and it seems that is the direction the Bearcats are heading this season. In terms of the schedule, Cincinnati has some opportunities. It must go to Iowa State and Kansas State, but they host Houston, Arizona State and TCU. Towson and Miami (OH) are part of the schedule as well. If this program improves as expected then a bowl game is within the realm of possibility.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	TOWSON	-31	15.5
9/7	PITTSBURGH	-4	42
9/14	at MIAMI OH	1	41
9/21	HOUSTON	-3.5	43
9/28	at TEXAS TECH	7.5	48
10/12	at UCF	9	49
10/19	ARIZONA STATE	-6	40
10/26	at COLORADO	8.5	48.5
11/9	WEST VIRGINIA	5.5	52
11/16	at IOWA STATE	14	54
11/23	at KANSAS STATE	16.5	56.5
11/30	TCU	2	48.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 44.59
#50 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.4/0
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.3	109	31.5	104
YARDS PER POINT	19.9	131	13.1	101
PLAYS PER GAME	75.4	14		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:59	17		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.5%	55	40.3%	80
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	404.4	43	411.9	95
YARDS PER PLAY	5.4	71	6.6	129
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	42.9	9		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	216.2	7	181.6	112
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5	17	5.5	128
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.3	72		
COMPLETION %	58.6%	83	57.1%	22
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	188.2	100	230.3	68
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.2	111	8.4	116
TURNOVERS	1.5	72	0.9	120

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

80-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

40-1

CFP CHAMPION

1000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 5**

COLORADO BUFFALOES

2023 Record: 4-8 SU & 7-4-1 ATS
Head Coach: Deion Sanders (3rd)

Deion Sanders' first season at Boulder was must-watch television, but it was hardly successful. After a 3-0 SU/2-1 ATS start, the Buffaloes finished the regular season 1-8 SU/5-3-1 ATS. Expectations within the program are always great, and with 16 starters back, Colorado and Coach Prime could improve on their record in 2024.

OFFENSE

Shedeur Sanders is a first-round talent at quarterback, and as long as he is healthy, this Buffaloes offense is going to be effective. Sanders was the third-highest-graded quarterback by PFF in the Pac-12 (89.4). He completed 68.5% of his passes, totaled 31 touchdowns throwing and rushing combined, and committed just eight turnovers. He was pressured on 37.0% of his dropbacks – some of which was his own doing – and that threatens to be his downfall as a signal-caller.

Still, the offensive line was poor. The group allowed a program record 56 sacks and the running game averaged just 2.3 yards per carry. Sanders hit the transfer portal hard in the offseason, and while only one starter returns, one could make the argument this position group is in much better shape.

Running back went through a similar makeover in the offseason, as the team's top three rushers from last season are gone. In their place are a litany of transfers, one of which is former Ohio State running back Dallan Hayden.

Sanders loses his leading receiver from last season, but bettors can expect Travis Hunter to play a large role at the position once more. Transfers from FAU, TCU and Vanderbilt are in as well, and third-leading receiver Jimmy Horn is back.

DEFENSE

Eight starters return for Colorado on defense by some measures, but that is not necessarily a good thing. The Buffaloes finished 114th in opponent EPA per play. They allowed 6.3 yards per play and 4.7 yards per carry. Only two defenders – Hunter and Shilo Sanders – had a PFF defensive grade over 70!

Coach Prime did take steps to improve this unit. He hired Robert Livingston, a former Cincinnati Bengals secondary coach, to coordinate the defense. Sanders also brought in transfers at each position to bolster the depth. Still, with so much returning from last season, it would be foolish to assume a massive leap in production.

The secondary could see the biggest improvement. Hunter missed three games last season. If he is healthy, he will improve their play. Sanders also landed some solid transfers here, namely former Auburn corner Colton Hood and Arkansas transfer RJ Johnson.

OUTLOOK

The betting public might be strong in its support of Colorado, but the schedule presents some challenges. The Buffaloes play two of their first three on the road. They open with North Dakota State before consecutive rivalry games on the road against Nebraska and Colorado State. In conference play, Colorado must go to UCF, Arizona and Kansas. It hosts Kansas State, Utah and Oklahoma State; the three shortest shots to win the conference. The market is shaded to the Over on 5.5 wins, but that seems like a near-perfect season for Colorado.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	N DAKOTA STATE	-8	43.5
9/7	at NEBRASKA	1.5	47.5
9/14	at COLORADO STATE	-11	35
9/21	BAYLOR	-6.5	44.5
9/28	at UCF	4	49
10/12	KANSAS STATE	5.5	56.5
10/19	at ARIZONA	7.5	53.5
10/26	CINCINNATI	-8.5	43
11/9	at TEXAS TECH	2.5	48
11/16	UTAH	5	56.5
11/23	at KANSAS	7.5	54
11/29	OKLAHOMA STATE	3.5	54.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 48.70
#13 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.8/0.5
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 16 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	28.2	57	34.8	119
YARDS PER POINT	12.9	21	13	102
PLAYS PER GAME	74	19		
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:33	123		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.6%	53	46.1%	119
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	363.6	78	453.3	125
YARDS PER PLAY	4.9	97	6.1	105
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.8	116		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	68.9	133	176.4	102
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	2.3	133	4.7	95
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	39.5	10		
COMPLETION %	68.1%	10	64.5%	107
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	294.7	14	276.9	126
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.5	58	8	102
TURNOVERS	0.9	12	1.7	30

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

30-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

20-1

CFP CHAMPION

250-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION UNDER 5.5

HOUSTON COUGARS

2023 Record: 4-8 SU & 6-6 ATS
Head Coach: Willie Fritz (1st)

Willie Fritz enters his first season as head coach of Houston, and his first season as the head man of a Power Four program. Fritz has a history of building programs, but the roster for Houston is thin this season. With 10 returning starters and new systems on both sides of the ball it could be a long season for the Cougars in Fritz's first year.

OFFENSE

Donovan Smith returns after starting all 12 games for Houston last season. Smith completed 64.2% of his passes last season, averaged 7.0 yards per attempt and threw 22 touchdowns. However, he regressed in a big way in the final five games of the regular season. Over that span Smith was the third-worst quarterback by PFF standards and threw six touchdowns while committing a turnover-worthy play on 4.2% of his attempts. He is the starter by default, but is hardly in command of the job.

The biggest concern for the Cougars is the offensive line. They lost four starters from last season, one of those losses being perennial All-Conference left tackle Patrick Paul. Fritz brought in numerous transfers to bolster the group, but this is a massive concern heading into the season.

Skill positions are similarly thin, but there are some bright spots. All three leading running backs from last season return. Parker Jenkins averaged 4.7 yards per attempt and forced 27 missed tackles. He should have the reins to start the season. Wide receiver is a different story, but Fritz bolstered the position with transfers.

DEFENSE

Five starters are back from a unit that finished 120th in opponent EPA per play in 2023. That could be a positive, but some of the losses were huge.

Two All-Big 12 defensive linemen were among the losses, and that position was rebuilt in Fritz's first offseason. Multiple bodies come in along the line from the transfer portal, but this is a brand new group. The same could be said of the defensive backfield, which lost four players who started four or more games last season.

Shiel Wood comes from Tulane with Fritz to run the defense. The Green Wave were 56th in EPA per play last season, and their run defense was among the best in the country. Wood will have this team schemed well, but given the lack of talent, bettors can expect another below-average defensive season from Houston.

OUTLOOK

The future of Houston is bright, given Fritz's history, but this season projects to be rough. Not only is the roster being completely rebuilt, but the schedule is brutal. The Cougars have to go to Oklahoma in non-conference play, then make road trips to Kansas and Arizona. They host Utah and Kansas State. Even Houston's opener against UNLV is going to be a massive challenge. The Cougars could potentially steal one from any of the bottom dwellers on the schedule – Rice, Cincinnati, Baylor and BYU – but they would need to be near perfect in those contests to surpass the win total in the market.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	UNLV	-5	39.5
9/7	at OKLAHOMA	19.5	60
9/14	RICE	-6.5	38.5
9/21	at CINCINNATI	3.5	43
9/28	IOWA STATE	9	54
10/4	at TCU	7.5	48.5
10/19	at KANSAS	12.5	54
10/26	UTAH	11.5	56.5
11/2	KANSAS STATE	11.5	56.5
11/15	at ARIZONA	12	53.5
11/23	BAYLOR	0	44.5
11/30	at BYU	1	41.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 49.40
#5 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 1.9/0.1
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 10 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 5 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.7	85	31.5	103
YARDS PER POINT	15.2	83	13.5	86
PLAYS PER GAME	66.2	92		
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:48	117		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.0%	77	47.9%	126
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	360.2	80	424.1	107
YARDS PER PLAY	5.4	66	5.8	89
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.9	114		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	118.7	101	168.8	95
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	86	4.3	74
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34	38		
COMPLETION %	64.0%	33	68.5%	129
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	241.5	53	255.3	109
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.1	69	8	103
TURNOVERS	1.3	45	1.2	100

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

110-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

95-1

CFP CHAMPION

1000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 3.5**

STATE

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

54.0
CONFERENCE: #4 OF 16
NATIONAL: #23 OF 134

IOWA STATE CYCLONES

2023 Record: 7-6 SU & 7-6 ATS
Head Coach: Matt Campbell (9th)

Winning seasons have become a regular occurrence in Ames since Matt Campbell was hired in 2016. But – double-digit wins in a single season, as well as a conference championship – have eluded the Cyclones over that time. This season, Campbell has one of the most experienced teams in his time at Iowa State, and the Cyclones have all the pieces needed to win the Big 12 for the time in program history.

OFFENSE

Quarterback is always the starting point, and Iowa State has one of the better ones in Rocco Becht. The redshirt sophomore comes into 2024 looking to build on a strong 2023. Becht was the fifth-best graded passer by PFF standards in the Big 12 last season, and he was tied for third in turnover-worthy play rate (2.6%). Now in his third year under Campbell, Becht could take a massive leap this season.

Becht's top two receivers from 2023 are back in the fold as well. Jayden Higgins (53 receptions, 983 yards) was named to the preseason All-Big 12 team. Jaylin Noel led the team in touchdown receptions (7). In all, Becht has his top four receivers back in the fold. All five starters return along the offensive line for Iowa State as well. The most productive runner is also back in Abu Sama (611 yards, 7.3 YPC).

The Cyclones were an average offense last season. They finished 62nd in EPA per play (0.063) and averaged 26.2 points per game. However, their per play average (6.2) and EPA per dropback (0.220) showed signs of an offense that was ready to explode. If Sama can give Iowa State some balance this could be one of the best offenses in the Big 12.

DEFENSE

The Cyclones were a great defense in 2023, and with nine starters back from that group, this should be another strong season.

Iowa State's primary strength was up front. It allowed just 3.8 yards per carry and 136.6 yards rushing per contest. That led to the Cyclones finishing 46th in opponent EPA per rush (0.058) and 26th on early downs (-0.084). Every starter returns along the defensive line this season, as does the majority of the linebacker room.

On the back end the Cyclones have one of the best defensive backs in the conference in Jeremiah Cooper. Cooper was an honorable mention All-American and First Team All-Big 12 player last season. He allowed just two touchdowns on 58 targets, broke up 10 passes and picked off five. He leads a secondary with three starters back in the fold. Despite losing another dominant defensive back in TJ Tampa, this group should be one of the best in the Big 12.

OUTLOOK

It's hard not to be extremely high on Iowa State this season. The team has 19 starters back in the fold, the entirety of its offensive line, a third-year quarterback and an above-average defense. The Cyclones also have a schedule that is littered with opportunities. Iowa State must face Iowa in Week 2, but it does not face Utah or Kansas State until the last two weeks of the regular season. Road games against West Virginia and Kansas will be a challenge, but this is a team that has the potential to win 10 games and the Big 12 without a doubt.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	N DAKOTA	-29.5	27.5
9/7	at IOWA	2	53
9/21	ARKANSAS STATE	-21.5	35.5
9/28	at HOUSTON	-9	43
10/5	BAYLOR	-12	44.5
10/12	at WEST VIRGINIA	1	52
10/19	UCF	-8	49
11/2	TEXAS TECH	-9	48
11/9	at KANSAS	2	54
11/16	CINCINNATI	-14	43
11/23	at UTAH	6	56.5
11/30	KANSAS STATE	0	56.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **46.27**
#32 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.8/0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 19 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 10 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 9

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	25.9	66	23.9	45
YARDS PER POINT	14.5	71	15.5	38
PLAYS PER GAME	60.8	130		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:27	79		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.5%	49	37.5%	48
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	374.5	73	370.2	54
YARDS PER PLAY	6.2	23	5.2	43
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.6	117		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	118.8	100	136.6	40
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	82	3.9	41
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.2	75		
COMPLETION %	62.7%	47	56.4%	16
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	255.8	43	233.6	72
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.5	20	6.8	32
TURNOVERS	0.9	12	1.4	58

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

10-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

+750

CFP CHAMPION

350-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 7.5**



KANSAS JAYHAWKS

2023 Record: 9-4 SU & 8-5 ATS
Head Coach: Lance Leipold (4th)

Kansas has improved its win total each season under Lance Leipold since he took over in 2021. The Jayhawks will look to continue that trend this season and win double-digit games for the first time in 17 years. With 13 starters back and a healthy veteran quarterback in Jalon Daniels, it would seem Kansas is primed to achieve that feat.

OFFENSE

Daniels played in just 12 games over the last two seasons, but Kansas was able to go 15-11 SU/15-10-1 ATS because of the presence of Jason Bean. This season Bean departs, meaning the health of Daniels will be paramount to the Jayhawks' success. He totaled 2,452 yards passing and rushing in 2022 and accounted for 25 touchdowns. If Daniels can stay on the field then Kansas has one of the better signal-callers in the conference.

Kansas returns its top two receivers from last season in Lawrence Arnold and Quentin Skinner. The duo combined for 1,364 yards and eight touchdowns. At running back, Devin Neal is back after a 1,280-yard season. Neal is a powerful runner who takes care of the football. He fumbled just once last season and averaged 3.63 yards per carry after contact.

The Jayhawks were an explosive offense in 2023. They finished seventh in EPA per rush, averaged 7.1 yards per play and finished 18th in the country in scoring (33.7). With Daniels back and healthy Kansas should replicate the production from 2023. If Daniels is forced to miss time, this is not a position group that can save the Jayhawks' season like Bean did last year with a former walk-on and a true freshman in reserve.

DEFENSE

Similar to its compatriots in the Big 12, Kansas ranked among the worst in the country in many defensive metrics. The Jayhawks were 100th in opponent EPA; allowed 5.8 yards per play and 4.5 yards per rush attempt. With six starters back, it is unlikely we see much of an improvement from this group this season.

Among the defensive losses are Kansas' top two graded starters by PFF standards: defensive end Austin Booker and safety Kenny Logan. How much improvement can occur with a bad defensive team that lost its two best defenders?

A positive is that the cornerback position is largely intact from last season. Cobee Bryant and Mello Dotson return to man the outside, and behind them is safety Marvin Grant. Those three were members of a secondary that ranked 93rd in opponent EPA per dropback, but all three are seniors and give Kansas some steady play at key positions.

OUTLOOK

The Jayhawks have a very high ceiling this season, but to achieve that, Daniels must be available. However, it would be foolish to expect a quarterback who has played in just 12 games the last two seasons to be available throughout the season. The Jayhawks do avoid both Utah and Oklahoma State, but with a poor defense and an oft-injured quarterback, the recommendation here can only be Under.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	LINDENWOOD	-57	-1.5
9/7	at ILLINOIS	-10	40.5
9/13	UNLV	-16	39.5
9/21	at WEST VIRGINIA	1.5	52
9/28	TCU	-7	48.5
10/5	at ARIZONA STATE	-11.5	40
10/19	HOUSTON	-12.5	43
10/26	at KANSAS STATE	6	56.5
11/9	IOWA STATE	-2	54
11/16	at BYU	-9.5	41.5
11/23	COLORADO	-7.5	48.5
11/30	at BAYLOR	-6	44.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 42.98
#60 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 1.7/0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 13 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 6

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	33.7	18	27.3	69
YARDS PER POINT	13.1	29	14.3	63
PLAYS PER GAME	63.3	121		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:24	59		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	47.8%	12	43.3%	109
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	439.9	21	391.7	69
YARDS PER PLAY	7	6	5.6	74
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.3	36		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	202.8	8	168.8	96
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.3	11	4.6	87
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	23.6	123		
COMPLETION %	62.9%	42	66.2%	125
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	237.1	55	222.8	54
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	10.1	2	7.4	70
TURNOVERS	1.3	60	1.3	74

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+950

MAKE PLAYOFF
+700

CFP CHAMPION
200-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 8**

KANSAS STATE WILDCATS

2023 Record: 9-4 SU & 9-4 ATS
Head Coach: Chris Klieman (6th)

Kansas State returns only 12 starters from last season, and eight come back on the defense. Despite losing a ton of production on offense – including the all-time leader in touchdown passes in Will Howard – hopes are high in Manhattan. The Wildcats are the second choice on the board to win the Big 12 and much of it has to do with a true sophomore quarterback with a ton of potential who is one of the top choices to win the Heisman Trophy.

OFFENSE

Avery Johnson played in only seven games and started just once last season, but the potential for the former four-star prospect is clear. As a freshman in the bowl game against NC State, he threw two touchdowns and ran for another. In his seven appearances, he accounted for 12 total touchdowns and 790 total yards.

Johnson will have some help at the skill positions. DJ Giddens returns at running back after a massive season in which he totaled 1,552 yards from scrimmage and scored 13 touchdowns. Jayce Brown – another sophomore – led the team in yards per reception (16.2) and yards per route run (2.38) in 2023.

Kansas State finished 25th in overall EPA per play in 2023. The loss of a starting quarterback to Ohio State and a completely rebuilt offensive line could mean a step back for the Wildcats. But, if Johnson progresses like many believe it would not be a surprise to see the Wildcats at least replicate their offensive success last season, if not surpass it.

DEFENSE

The Wildcats' defense is a candidate to improve this season as well. Eight starters are back from a unit that finished 29th in the country in opponent EPA per play (-0.033). Kansas State is strong at all three levels despite not having a single defensive player on the All-Big 12 preseason team.

One of the biggest areas of improvement for the Wildcats is against the run. Kansas State allowed 5.1 yards per carry and 159.3 rushing yards per contest, which ranked them 50th in EPA against the run. Three of their opponents this season finished as top-30 rushing offenses last season, so this weakness will be tested.

With that in mind, this should be another top defense in the Big 12 and another ranking inside the top 30 in opponent EPA per play should be expected. Of the two facets, this is by far the biggest strength and most known commodity for Kansas State this season.

OUTLOOK

The upside is great for Kansas State, but the downside is a possibility. Johnson has just 72 dropbacks in his career. The offensive line is down four starters from last season. The Wildcats also draw a challenging schedule. The potential is there, but it is hard to realistically project 10 or more wins for the Wildcats this season.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	TENN-MARTIN	-35	24.5
9/7	at TULANE	-9.5	44
9/13	ARIZONA	-6	53.5
9/21	at BYU	-12.5	41.5
9/28	OKLAHOMA STATE	-5	54.5
10/12	at COLORADO	-5.5	48.5
10/19	at WEST VIRGINIA	-1.5	52
10/26	KANSAS	-6	54
11/2	at HOUSTON	-11.5	43
11/16	ARIZONA STATE	-19.5	40
11/23	CINCINNATI	-16.5	43
11/30	at IOWA STATE	0	54

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 45.79
#38 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.2/0.1
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 12 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 4
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	36.4	9	22.8	32
YARDS PER POINT	11.9	7	16.9	16
PLAYS PER GAME	75.4	13		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:41	22		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	48.0%	11	30.3%	11
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	433.6	25	384.7	66
YARDS PER PLAY	5.7	46	5.8	87
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	41.1	13		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	202.3	11	159.3	76
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.9	23	5.1	116
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33	54		
COMPLETION %	59.6%	78	55.4%	10
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	231.3	58	225.4	60
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7	73	6.7	29
TURNOVERS	0.9	12	1.9	8

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+380

MAKE PLAYOFF
+310

CFP CHAMPION
70-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 9.5



OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS

2023 Record: 10-4 SU & 8-6 ATS
Head Coach: Mike Gundy (20th)

Oklahoma State had one of the wildest seasons a program can have in 2023. Following a home blowout loss to South Alabama, the perception of the Cowboys was at an all-time low. But, Oklahoma State would proceed to finish the season 8-3 SU/7-4 ATS in its last 11 contests, make it to the Big 12 Championship and win the Texas Bowl. The Cowboys bring back 19 starters from 2023 and look to finish the job after being blown out by Texas in the conference title game.

OFFENSE

Any analysis of the Oklahoma State offense begins with Ollie Gordon. The junior running back led the country in rushing yards (1,732), was second in rushing touchdowns (21) and third in runs of 10+ yards (45). Gordon will be the focal point of this offense, and he gets his entire offensive line back in front of him. That includes two members of the All-Big 12 preseason team: Dalton Cooper and Joe Michalski.

Quarterback is the biggest question for the Cowboys. Alan Bowman returns for a seventh season, but he is not a quarterback on the same level as a fellow seventh-year signal caller in Cam Rising. Bowman threw for only 15 touchdowns and 14 interceptions last season. He finished eighth in PFF passing grade (74.4) among qualified quarterbacks in the conference, and he committed the most turnover-worthy plays (22). If he does not improve as a passer, this offense – which finished 89th in EPA per dropback – could be even worse.

Ten starters are back for this group this season. The potential is unreal. But, a team can only go as far as its quarterback can take them, and the Cowboys have the worst signal-caller of the contenders in the conference.

DEFENSE

Nine starters return for Oklahoma State on defense, but this wasn't a particularly dominant unit last season. The Cowboys were 82nd in opponent EPA per play (0.081) and 107th in opponent EPA per dropback (0.221). They were 121st in the country in opponent yards per play (6.48). Is returning nearly every piece from one of the worst defenses in the country a positive?

There are some strengths for this unit. Linebackers Nick Martin and Collin Oliver were preseason All-Big 12 selections. Oklahoma State did only 4.5 yards per carry and finished 51st in opponent EPA per rush. However, most of that was due to the opposition having so much success through the air. All four starters return for the secondary, as does DC Bryan Nardo.

OUTLOOK

Expectations are high for Oklahoma State after a surprising 10-win season in 2023, but the market might be too high. Their defense was extremely poor in multiple facets last season, and nearly everyone on that unit returns. The Cowboys also have one of the more challenging Big 12 schedules. If this defense is similar to last season and Bowman does not improve it is hard to invest in the Cowboys meeting their lofty expectations in 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	S DAKOTA STATE	-5.5	51.5
9/7	ARKANSAS	-10.5	46.5
9/14	at TULSA	-23.5	29.5
9/21	UTAH	-1	56.5
9/28	at KANSAS STATE	5	56.5
10/5	WEST VIRGINIA	-5.5	52
10/18	at BYU	-10.5	41.5
10/26	at BAYLOR	-7	44.5
11/2	ARIZONA STATE	-17	40
11/9	at TCU	-4	48.5
11/23	TEXAS TECH	-10	48
11/29	at COLORADO	-3.5	48.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 46.73
#27 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.9/0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 19 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 10 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 9

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	29.8	42	29.8	91
YARDS PER POINT	14.4	70	15	52
PLAYS PER GAME	73.2	30		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:44	71		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	38.1%	66	42.3%	97
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	430.2	27	445.7	122
YARDS PER PLAY	5.9	41	6.4	121
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.2	103		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	155.8	67	170.2	98
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.8	25	4.6	88
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	40.2	8		
COMPLETION %	60.2%	71	60.3%	56
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	274.4	27	275.5	125
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	82	8.8	125
TURNOVERS	1.5	78	1.7	27

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+750

MAKE PLAYOFF
+700

CFP CHAMPION
200-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 8**



TCU HORNERD FROGS

2023 Record: 5-7 SU & 5-7 ATS
Head Coach: Sonny Dykes (3rd)

Only 10 starters returned for Sonny Dykes last season, and the stepback many expected came to fruition in 2023. TCU went 5-7 SU and ATS and regressed mightily on offense. The outlook is somewhat different this season with 16 returners back from 2023. Dykes and the Horned Frogs are looking to sneak up on some folks once more in the Big 12.

OFFENSE

Redshirt sophomore Josh Hoover is the expected starter for TCU after he started six games last season. Hoover – thrust into action due to injury – completed 62.3% of attempts for 7.4 yards per attempts and 13 touchdowns as a starter. The sophomore will have to cut down on turnover-worthy plays (12) this season, but his 84.3 PFF passing grade when kept clean signified an ability to keep the offense on track when he was protected.

Luckily, Hoover has plenty of returning production to work with. TCU's top two receivers in 2023 – Savion Williams and JP Richardson – return this season. Williams was an explosive weapon who averaged 14 yards per reception and caught four touchdowns. Richardson lined up mostly in the slot where he averaged 6.4 yards after catch per reception.

If Hoover does not develop as expected, he could hold this group back. So could an offensive line that returns just two players who started multiple games for TCU last season. Multiple transfers come in—James Brocemeyers from Alabama is the big name—but the position should be weaker in 2024.

DEFENSE

One of the sneaky surprises of last season for TCU was a defense that performed statistically better than the group that made it to the College Football Playoff. The Horned Frogs allowed just 4.0 yards per carry, 27.8 points per game and 5.6 yards per play. This season, nine starters return from that unit.

An expected weakness for TCU will likely be the secondary. Cornerback Josh Newton was a fifth-round draft pick, and safety Mark Perry departed in the offseason. With those two in the lineup, the Horned Frogs finished 83rd in opponent EPA per dropback. Despite the addition of some transfers, this group is likely to finish no better than that mark this season.

The 2023 unit would not be confused with any of the best defenses in college football, but it was a serviceable group. With a defensive line and linebacker group that returns mostly intact, they should be just as effective against the run this season. Should new DC Andy Avalos get more out of this group, it wouldn't be a surprise to see TCU push for a top-50 run defense.

OUTLOOK

Everything for TCU hinges on the play of Hoover. If he can take a legitimate step forward as a quarterback, this group could compete for a Big 12 title. The schedule is daunting, but they draw most of the big boys at home. Dykes has shown an ability to get the most out of an offense, and this group has more than last season. Don't be shocked to see TCU floating around the top of the league near season's end.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/30	at STATEANFORD	-7.5	39.5
9/7	LIU POST	-45	6
9/14	UCF	-2	49
9/21	at SMU	8	53.5
9/28	at KANSAS	7	54
10/4	HOUSTON	-7.5	43
10/19	at UTAH	11.5	56.5
10/26	TEXAS TECH	-3	48
11/2	at BAYLOR	-1	44.5
11/9	OKLAHOMA STATE	4	54.5
11/23	ARIZONA	3	53.5
11/30	at CINCINNATI	-2	43

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 45.61
#41 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.3/0
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 16 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 9

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	30.5	34	29.8	92
YARDS PER POINT	15.4	87	14.1	69
PLAYS PER GAME	78	4		
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:35	122		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	47.3%	14	39.4%	70
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	468.9	10	421.5	104
YARDS PER PLAY	6	34	5.7	82
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.5	90		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	156.8	66	160.9	81
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.7	33	4.1	57
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	42.7	4		
COMPLETION %	61.9%	54	61.0%	67
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	312.1	7	260.6	118
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.3	63	7.9	97
TURNOVERS	1.5	80	0.9	120

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

18-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

13-1

CFP CHAMPION

350-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 7.5**

TEXAS TECH RED RAIDERS

2023 Record: 7-6 SU & 6-7 ATS
Head Coach: Joey McGuire (3rd)

Joey McGuire enters his third season in Lubbock with mounting pressure on his performance as head coach. The Red Raiders took a small step back with one fewer win than 2022, and while quarterback injuries tell part of the story, Texas Tech took some unquestionably bad losses last season. McGuire has most of his offense back this season, and many believe the Red Raiders are the dark horse to take the conference in 2024.

OFFENSE

Quarterback has been a nightmare for McGuire in his time at Lubbock. In his first two seasons the Texas Tech head coach has had six different starting quarterbacks. Presumed starter Behren Morton missed spring with a shoulder injury, but swore to the media during Big 12 media days that he was "100% healthy" and ready to go.

For Texas Tech to surpass market expectations, that needs to be true. Morton also needs to improve as a passer. The fourth-year signal caller is extremely volatile when on the field. In 526 career dropbacks he has a turnover-worthy play rate of 4.4%. For reference, that would place him 104th among qualified quarterbacks last season. If Morton can take care of the football, the Red Raiders have the pieces in place to be explosive on offense.

Tahj Brooks is one of the best running backs in the Big 12. He ran for 1,538 yards, averaged 5.3 yards per carry and forced the most missed tackles in the conference (91). Coy Eakin was the third-leading receiver in 2023, but finished just seven receptions behind the leader last season. Five-star wide receiver Micah Hudson comes in this season as well.

DEFENSE

Texas Tech's defense is the biggest question mark, as is usually the case with Big 12 programs. Only five starters are back from last season, but last season's group was hardly reminiscent of 2011 Alabama.

The Red Raiders lose quite a bit of talent along the defensive line this season. Myles Cole was a seventh-round draft pick. Third-team Big 12 nose tackle Jaylon Hutchings and Tony Bradford are gone. McGuire supplemented the group with transfers from power programs, but it figures to be worse.

In even worse shape is the secondary. Three starters departed, and all three were extremely productive. In all, seven interceptions and 13 pass breakups are gone from last season's group. This group finished 58th in opponent EPA per dropback in 2023, but it is certainly taking a step back this season after the losses it suffered in the offseason.

OUTLOOK

Like many programs, the success of Texas Tech hinges upon the health and play of its quarterback. Morton is expected to start, but even when he was on the field, he was average at best. If he does not improve – or he misses time – what will the realistic expectation be for the Red Raiders? The market is shaded to the Over on the team's win total, but seven or fewer wins seems like a safer expectation.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	ABILENE CHRISTIAN	-30.5	20
9/7	at WASHINGTON STATE	-3	41.5
9/14	NORTH TEXAS	-18	32
9/21	ARIZONA STATE	-10.5	40
9/28	CINCINNATI	-7.5	43
10/5	at ARIZONA	7.5	53.5
10/19	BAYLOR	-6	44.5
10/26	at TCU	3	48.5
11/2	at IOWA STATE	9	54
11/9	COLORADO	-2.5	48.5
11/23	at OKLAHOMA STATE	10	54.5
11/30	WEST VIRGINIA	1.5	52

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **44.13**
#56 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.5/0.4**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 9 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	26.3	63	27.9	72
YARDS PER POINT	14.6	75	14.1	71
PLAYS PER GAME	74.3	17		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:38	100		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.2%	59	42.0%	94
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	384.4	61	393.6	72
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	82	5.5	59
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.2	62		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	158	63	161.8	82
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	55	4.4	77
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.4	22		
COMPLETION %	60.9%	66	60.9%	65
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	226.4	63	231.8	70
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.2	110	7	44
TURNOVERS	1.8	119	1.2	100

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

14-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

+950

CFP CHAMPION

250-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 7.5

UCF KNIGHTS

2023 Record: 6-7 SU & 5-8 ATS
Head Coach: Gus Malzahn (4th)

There are many college football bettors who would point to UCF as being a dark horse candidate in the Big 12 this season. Gus Malzahn brings 15 starters back from 2023 and they landed a big fish – literally and figuratively – in the transfer portal in quarterback KJ Jefferson. If everything goes right “The Bounce House” in Orlando could be rocking once again this season.

OFFENSE

The addition of Jefferson is massive for Malzahn. His system thrives with athletic quarterbacks like Jefferson, and his profile has brought up comparisons to Cam Newton’s time under Malzahn in 2010.

Jefferson ran for 2,477 yards in his time at Arkansas, and he averaged 4.48 yards per carry after contact due to his overwhelming size. He is also a very solid passer who completed at least 64.2% of his passes each season as a starter and posted a 64/17 TD/INT ratio. His turnover-worthy play rate was just 3.6% in three seasons.

The Knights have plenty of talent at the skill positions as well. Wide receiver Kobe Hudson was fourth in the Big 12 in yards per reception last season (20.7). Running back RJ Harvey was third in the conference in rushing (1,416) and named to the third-team All-Big 12. He helped lead an offense that finished 10th in EPA per rush. The addition of Jefferson to this group should make them even more dangerous this season.

DEFENSE

This will ultimately be what holds UCF back if it fails to achieve what some believe it could. The Knights were 105th in overall opponent EPA per play last season and 125th against the run. Opponents averaged 4.9 yards per carry and 5.8 yards per play. Eight starters return from that group.

Malzahn took steps to improve the defense in the offseason by bringing in Ted Roof for the position of defensive coordinator. Roof was the DC at Oklahoma last season. Perhaps a better scheme could help improve this group, but a leap that big is massive and unlikely.

The group does return some talent. Defensive end Malachi Lawrence was second in both sacks (8) and pressures (25) last season. Lee Hunter – arguably their best tackler and run defender – returns to play defensive tackle alongside him.

OUTLOOK

UCF is just +900 to win the Big 12 at DraftKings to win the Big 12 and a few handicappers seem to be in on the Knights’ chances. They get the benefit of not playing Kansas State this season, but their schedule presents quite a few challenges. UCF must face Arizona and Utah, but will host both. They have to go to Iowa State and West Virginia. To surpass the win total, the Knights must improve from last season by two wins. That is not something I am willing to wager on, even with an upgrade such as Jefferson at quarterback.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	NEW HAMPSHIRE	-27	25
9/7	SAM HOUSTON	-24.5	27
9/14	at TCU	2	48.5
9/28	COLORADO	-4	48.5
10/5	at FLORIDA	8	53.5
10/12	CINCINNATI	-9	43
10/19	at IOWA STATE	8	54
10/26	BYU	-10	41.5
11/2	ARIZONA	2	53.5
11/9	at ARIZONA STATE	-6.5	40
11/23	at WEST VIRGINIA	6.5	52
11/29	UTAH	4.5	56.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 45.58
#42 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.8/0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 6
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	29.9	39	26.8	64
YARDS PER POINT	16	102	15.1	47
PLAYS PER GAME	69.3	60		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:42	97		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	49.4%	7	41.9%	93
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	477.6	8	404.7	89
YARDS PER PLAY	6.9	8	5.7	81
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	39.6	26		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	226.3	4	203.7	126
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.7	3	5	114
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.8	99		
COMPLETION %	61.6%	59	58.6%	35
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	251.3	46	201	29
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	9.1	11	7	49
TURNOVERS	1.5	76	1.3	88

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+950

MAKE PLAYOFF
+700

CFP CHAMPION
300-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 7.5**

UTAH UTES

2023 Record: 8-5 SU & 6-6-1 ATS
Head Coach: Kyle Whittingham (20th)

The Utes are favored to win the Big 12 in their first season, and for good reason. Nine starters return on a defense that was one of the best in the country. Only six come back on offense, but Cam Rising will play his seventh season after missing 2023 with an injury. Utah is old, physical and talented. Coupling that with a manageable schedule in conference play and their status as favorite makes all the sense in the world.

OFFENSE

Rising's return to college football is massive for Utah. The seventh-year quarterback had the fourth-best PFF offense grade in the Pac-12 in 2022 among fellow signal-callers. Rising threw for 3,030 yards, ran for 523 yards and was responsible for 32 total touchdowns that season. If he can recapture that form then Utah has one of the best quarterbacks in the Big 12.

Running the ball is a staple for Utah, but both offensive line and running back are positions of question for the Utes. Three offensive linemen departed from last season's team, one of which was a sixth-round draft pick for the Seahawks. Jaylon Glover – who started one game and ran for just 562 yards – is the leading returner in the backfield. At wide receiver, the Utes return a pair of seniors that should help bring Rising along quickly. He also gets the benefit of throwing to tight end Brant Kuithe, who was selected to the All-Big 12 preseason team.

Production might not be on the same level as 2022, but Utah should be much improved than it was last season when it finished 103rd in the country in EPA per play.

DEFENSE

Utah finished last season 11th in the country in opponent EPA per play (-0.119). Nine starters return from that unit, and the Utes look like the best defensive team in the Big 12 as we enter the 2024 season.

The position of strength for Utah will be its defensive line. Johan Ellis was drafted in the third round by Denver, but the rest of the position group returns from last season. Defensive tackle Junior Tafuna – also named to the preseason All-Big 12 team – is among the best defensive linemen in the country.

There are some losses in the defensive backfield, but not enough to be concerned about the Utes. This group's worst ranking was 21st by EPA standards against the run last season. They allowed just 5.1 yards per play and finished fourth in the country in opponent early-down success rate. Expect similar production this season, with so much returning from 2023.

OUTLOOK

Utah is the rightful favorite to win the Big 12 in the betting market. Rising gives them one of the best quarterbacks in the conference, and one of the best defenses from a season ago remains largely intact. They also have a favorable schedule, in which they avoid Kansas State, Kansas, and UCF. The path is extremely clear to a Big 12 championship game.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	S UTAH	-33.5	26.5
9/7	BAYLOR	-15	44.5
9/14	at UTAH STATE	-20	34.5
9/21	at OKLAHOMA STATE	1	54.5
9/28	ARIZONA	-6.5	53.5
10/11	at ARIZONA STATE	-14	40
10/19	TCU	-11.5	48.5
10/26	at HOUSTON	-11.5	43
11/9	BYU	-18.5	41.5
11/16	at COLORADO	-5	48.5
11/23	IOWA STATE	-6	54
11/29	at UCF	-4.5	49

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 44.40
#53 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.4/0.1
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 6 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 9

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.5	93	20.3	20
YARDS PER POINT	15.2	82	15.8	31
PLAYS PER GAME	70	49		
TIME OF POSSESSION	33:34	2		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	41.2%	46	30.1%	9
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	342.1	94	322.2	17
YARDS PER PLAY	4.9	99	5.1	38
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	42.5	10		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	178.5	32	84.6	4
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	63	3.1	8
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	25.6	116		
COMPLETION %	57.3%	93	59.1%	40
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	163.6	120	237.6	79
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.4	102	7.2	58
TURNOVERS	1.1	26	1.1	108

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

+320

MAKE PLAYOFF

+260

CFP CHAMPION

60-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 9.5**

WEST VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEERS

2023 Record: 9-4 SU & 8-5 ATS
Head Coach: Neal Brown (6th)

Neal Brown was in a genuine hot seat heading into the 2023 season. He had gone 22-25 in his first four seasons in Morgantown, winning no more than six games in a single season. However, after a blowout loss to Penn State, West Virginia would finish the season 9-3 SU/8-4 ATS with a bowl win over North Carolina. The Mountaineers bring back a majority of their offense in 2024 and Brown has expectations of another winning season.

OFFENSE

Garrett Greene's play at quarterback was a large reason why West Virginia ended the season the way it did. The senior signal-caller was injured Week 3 and missed the win over Texas Tech, but when he was on the field, he was great. Greene posted a career-best 83.3 PFF passing grade and accounted for 3,172 yards and 29 touchdowns, all while turning the ball over just seven times. Greene's size makes him an injury risk, but he is clearly a weapon for the Mountaineers.

West Virginia finished 20th in EPA per rush last season. Greene was obviously a big part of that, but so, too, was the Mountaineers' offensive line. A majority of that line returns, including preseason All-Big 12 LT Wyatt Millum, LG Thomas Rimac and C Brandon Yates. In fact, Phil Steele ranks this group as his 11th-best offensive line in the country.

The skill positions are in a fine place as well. Leading rusher Jahiem White (7.7 yards per carry) returns, as do six of the top seven receivers from 2023. The Mountaineers were 44th in EPA per dropback last season. Greene is somewhat limited as a passer, so we can expect that to be the weakest facet of this group. Still, this should be one of the best ground games in the country once more.

DEFENSE

West Virginia was extremely poor last season on this side of the ball. It finished 104th in opponent EPA per play (0.126) and allowed 5.8 yards per play. Only five players return from that group, something that could be a positive considering how poorly they performed in 2023.

Secondary is one of the biggest position group rebuilds for Brown this season. Three transfers are expected to start in the defensive backfield. Aubrey Burks was the team's highest-graded defender by PFF and he returns, but he moves from safety to linebacker. This group could be just as poor as the group that finished 91st in opponent EPA per dropback.

The front seven is in slightly better condition with Burks moving up and two starters back along the defensive line. This group might not be worse than it was in 2023, but it is unlikely to make great strides.

OUTLOOK

West Virginia could be the fly in the ointment for Big 12 title contenders this season. The Mountaineers should have one of the better offenses in the conference, and they get their crack at nearly every top team. They face a brutal schedule that might not lead to an improvement in wins, but this team will likely have its say as to which program wins the Big 12 in 2024.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	PENN STATE	9.5	64
9/7	ALBANY	-20.5	35
9/14	at PITTSBURGH	-7.5	42
9/21	KANSAS	-1.5	54
10/5	at OKLAHOMA STATE	5.5	54.5
10/12	IOWA STATE	-1	54
10/19	KANSAS STATE	1.5	56.5
10/26	at ARIZONA	3.5	53.5
11/9	at CINCINNATI	-5.5	43
11/16	BAYLOR	-10.5	44.5
11/23	UCF	-6.5	49
11/30	at TEXAS TECH	-1.5	48

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **49.21**
#7 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **3/0.2**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 13 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 8 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	29.4	47	26.9	66
YARDS PER POINT	14.3	64	14.6	57
PLAYS PER GAME	68.7	68		
TIME OF POSSESSION	32:46	7		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.1%	61	39.4%	69
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	419.3	31	393.2	71
YARDS PER PLAY	6.1	26	5.7	84
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	43	8		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	222.7	5	155.9	66
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.2	14	4.6	89
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	24.9	118		
COMPLETION %	53.9%	117	61.3%	75
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	196.6	95	237.3	78
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.9	40	7.4	69
TURNOVERS	1	17	1.2	100

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
18-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
13-1

CFP CHAMPION
400-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 6.5**