

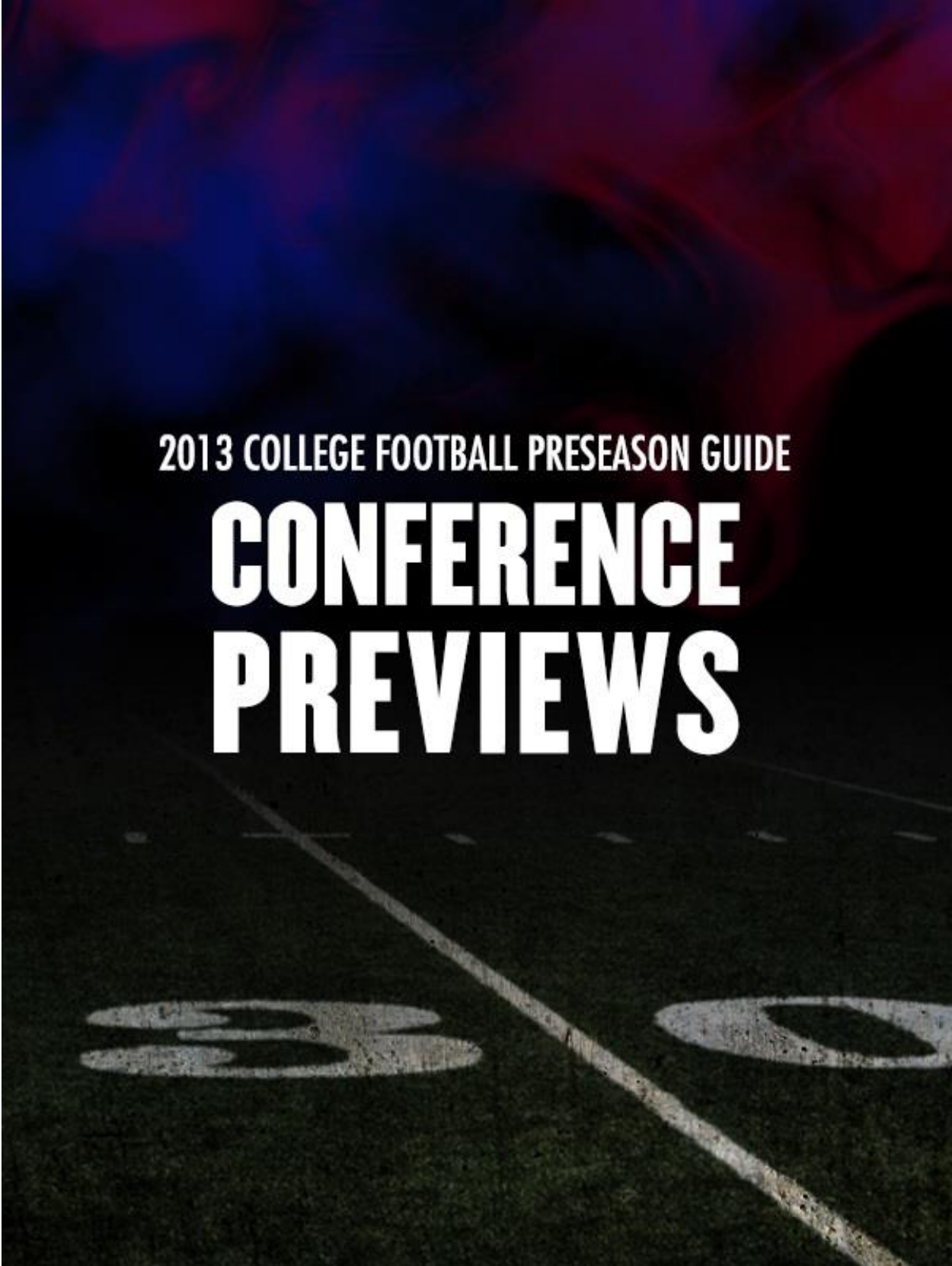


# 2013 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PRESEASON GUIDE



# TABLE OF CONTENTS:

CONFERENCE PREVIEWS.....	3
STEVE’S TOP 25 TEAM PREVIEWS .....	59
AWARD SEASON WATCH LIST.....	165
HEISMAN HOPEFULS.....	172
PRE-SEASON ALL-AMERICANS.....	183
BCS BOWL PREDICTIONS.....	188
FEATURE ARTICLES.....	190

A photograph of a college football field at night. In the background, a large American flag is illuminated with blue and red lights, creating a dramatic, wavy effect. The foreground shows the green turf of the field with white yard lines and large white numbers, including '33' and '30'.

2013 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PRESEASON GUIDE

# CONFERENCE PREVIEWS

# BIG 12:

## By Derrick Battle:

The Big-12 is always exciting to watch. The conference is again filled with dynamic offenses. This season as a whole, there are plenty of solid teams, but Oklahoma and Texas look to reign supreme.

## Oklahoma Sooners:

The Oklahoma Sooners were blown out in their season finale against Texas A&M in the Cotton Bowl last season. With quarterback Landry Jones in the NFL, the quarterback position is wide open between junior Blake Bell, sophomore Kendal Thompson and freshman Trevor Knight.

Bell is projected as the starter, but it is unknown what he can bring to the Sooners passing game. In two seasons, Bell was the Sooners goal line specialist and scored 24 career rushing touchdowns. However, he has not thrown for a touchdown. Running back Damien Williams brings experience to the backfield. Williams finished with 976 yards and 11 touchdowns.



The Sooners return seven players to its offense, but the defense only brings back four to its unit. The defensive secondary needs a lot of holes to be filled as only junior cornerback Aaron Colvin comes back.

**Players to watch on offense:** QB Blake Bell and RB Damien Williams

**Players to watch on defense:** CB Aaron Colvin and DE Chuka Ndulue

## **Texas Longhorns:**

To Longhorn fans, last year's 9-4 record was an ok season, but not a good or great season as it would be for many programs. Texas returns 18 of 22 starters from last season. Most importantly junior quarterbacks, David Ash and Case McCoy are back. Headed into the season Ash is the starter, but may split time again with McCoy.

With the core of their offense coming back such as running back Johnathan Gray, and wide outs Jaxon Shipley and Mike Davis, expect an increase in offensive production this season. Also Texas returns nine starters to its defense. Defensive end Jackson Jeffcoat is the Longhorns returning sack leader with four and linebacker Steve Edmond returns after recording 103 tackles last year.

Going 22-16 over the last three years is terrible in the eyes of Longhorn fans, so this may be a make or break year for Head Coach Mack Brown.

**Players to watch on offense:** RB Johnathan Gray and WR Jaxon Shipley

**Players to watch on defense:** DE Jackson Jeffcoat and DB Quandre Diggs

## **TCU Horned Frogs:**

TCU's first season in the Big-12 was a success, especially since they dismissed their starting senior quarterback Casey Pachall due to an off the field issue during the middle of the season. Although sophomore quarterback Trevone Boykin filled in solidly, Pachall is still coming in this season as the starter. While Boykin may not play quarterback full time this year, the Horned Frogs coaching staff has expressed the idea of using his athletic ability somewhere in the offense. The biggest question that the Horned Frogs need to answer is their offensive line. All-Big 12 guard Blaize Foltz and center James Fry graduated, so the interior of their offensive line is in need.

TCU returns 15 starters overall, nine of which is on the defensive side of the ball. Devonte Fields returns to the defensive line. Last season he finished with 10 sacks. The secondary will be the strength of TCU's 4-2-5 defense. Jason Verrett returns as one of the NCAA's top defensive backs. Verrett finished with six interceptions a year ago. With LSU and Big 12 opponents such as Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas and West Virginia on the schedule, TCU has their work cut out for them this season.

**Players to watch on offense:** QBs Casey Pachall and Trevone Boykin



**Players to watch on defense:** CB Jason Verrett and DE Devonte Fields

## **Oklahoma State Cowboys:**

Mike Gundy sure did have a quarterback carousel last season, alternating three times throughout the year. Senior quarterback Clint Chelf and sophomore J.W. Walsh saw the most success at quarterback while sophomore Wes Lunt was mediocre at best. Wide out Josh Stewart returns to the receiving corps and will be the main target to whoever will start at quarterback. Stewart finished last season with 101 catches for 1,210 yards and seven touchdowns.



With 14 starters returning (seven offense and seven defense), the Oklahoma State Cowboys look to build on their 8-5 record. Unfortunately, they will need to fill the void that Joseph Randle left at running back. Randle finished with 1,417 and 14 touchdowns in his final year with the Cowboys. Running back Jeremy Smith looked solid in limited play, scoring eight touchdowns, but the Cowboys will have to replace three linemen on the offensive line.

Oklahoma State was solid defensively, but will need to fill a gap at defensive end. While they added JUCO transfer Sam Wren and freshman Naim Mustafaa, depth is a main issue at the edges. While the defensive line needs help, the linebacking corps is solid. That unit is led by Shaun Lewis and Caleb Lavey, both of whom earned honorable mention All-Big 12 honors a year ago.

**Players to watch on offense:** QBs Clint Chelf, J.W. Walsh and Wes Lunt and WR Josh Stewart

**Players to watch on defense:** LBs Shaun Lewis and Caleb Lavey

## **West Virginia:**

Baylor, Iowa State, West Virginia, Kansas and Kansas State lost the most experience from last season, with West Virginia and Kansas State probably taking the biggest hits. The Mountaineers defense was one of the worst in the NCAA. While they do bring back seven starters from that side of the ball, their offense cannot bail them out anymore.

Quarterback Geno Smith along with wide receivers Tavon Austin, Stedman Bailey and other weapons are gone. Running back Andrew Buie is the only proven starter who returns to the offense, leading the returning players in rushing and receiving.

Safety Karl Joseph is the only real returning bright spot for a defense that ranked 108th in yards allowed a season ago. Joseph finished with 104 tackles. This may very well be a rebuilding year in West Virginia.

**Players to watch on offense:** RB Andrew Buie and whoever else can step up

**Player to watch on defense:** LB Karl Joseph

## **Kansas State Wildcats:**

Kansas State only returns senior safety Ty Zimmerman from last year's defense. The Wildcats defense features a young group that will need step in quickly. Randall Evans will have to step up from his nickel back role from a year ago and become a primary cornerback. Tre Walker who is coming back from a knee injury and Travis Britz will give depth to the linebackers unit.

Running back John Hubert and receiver Tyler Lockett return on offense. Despite that, it will be tough to build on the success the Wildcats had over the past couple of seasons without a stout defense and quarterback Collin Klein leading the offense. While the Wildcats do have talent at the quarterback position in Daniel Sams and Jake Waters, they are not proven and are tough to set apart since both bring a different dynamic to the offense.

**Players to watch on offense:** RB John Hubert and WR Tyler Lockett

**Player to watch on defense:** S Ty Zimmerman

## **Baylor Bears:**

At the skill positions, the Bears have plenty of depth. Running backs Lache Seastrunk and Glasco Martin combined for 1,901 yards last season. Wide outs Tevin Reese and Levi Norwood lead a talented receiving unit. Junior quarterback Bryce Petty is next in line to live up to what Robert Griffin III and Nick Florence did during their recent tenure at Baylor. With an experienced group of weapons to work with, Petty should have an opportunity to enjoy similar success.



Baylor's defense allowed plenty of points last season including 70 in a shootout against West Virginia. A pair of second team All-Big 12 linebackers, Bryce Hager and Eddie Lackey, look to improve the defensive unit. Both Hager and Lackey recorded over 100 tackles with Hager leading the Big 12 with 124 tackles. Former safety Sam Holl will join the linebacker unit as senior Ahmad Dixon will start at safety. The Bears also show depth at cornerback with a three man rotation.

**Players to watch on offense:** RBs Lache Seastrunk and Glasco Martin, WR Tevin Reese

**Players to watch on defense:** LBs Bryce Hager and Eddie Lackey

## **Iowa State Cyclones:**

Quarterback and running back are not a question for the Cyclones. Sam Richardson returns to lead the offense. Also the backfield has plenty of depth led by James White. However, Richardson lost his top three targets at wide receiver from last year. Several players who saw playing time a year ago are expected to contribute, including sophomore Quenton Bundrage who is projected as their No. 1 wide out.

Defensively, the Cyclones return an experienced secondary led by seniors Jacques Washington, Deon Broomfield and Jansen Watson. However, Iowa State loses a lot from their front seven. First-team All-Big 12 linebacker A.J. Klein is gone, as well as most of the defensive line. While another first-team All-Big 12 linebacker Jake Knott is still there, Jeremiah George will be the senior leader at middle linebacker.



**Players to watch on offense:** QB Sam Richardson and RB James White

**Players to watch on defense:** LBs Jake Knott and Jeremiah George

### **Kansas Jayhawks:**

Charlie Weis first year at Kansas was awful. The Jayhawks finished the season 1-11. With BYU transfer Jake Heaps as the new starting quarterback and experienced running backs returning, Kansas looks to improve from last season's debacle. Last year's Big 12 leader in rushing yards per game (112.6 ypg) senior James Sims returns. Sims ran behind an experienced offensive line last season. This year the Jayhawks will need to replace three on the line which clearly poses a big concern.

Junior linebacker Ben Heeney who finished third in the Big 12 in tackles returns, but other than him the defense will be made up of plenty of new pieces. Weis has seven junior college players in the mix to battle for starting positions throughout the defense. One of them is defensive lineman Marquel Combs who was rated the No. 1 junior college recruit by ESPN.

**Players to watch on offense:** RB James Sims and QB Jake Heaps

**Player to watch on defense:** LB Ben Heeney

### **Texas Tech Red Raiders:**

Head Coach Kilff Kingsbury is back as a Red Raider. But, instead of being a signal caller in the string of successful Texas Tech quarterbacks, he will be wearing a head-set.

Sophomore quarterback Michael Brewer is expected to meet the standard of Red Raider quarterbacks. Behind him is a running attack led by running back Kenny Williams. Williams rushed for 824 yards last season and is primed to be Texas Tech's first 1,000 yard rusher in 14 years. While 1,000 yard receiver wide out Eric Ward returns, the receiver corps is shaky behind him.

The Red Raiders now have their fifth defensive coordinator in the past five years. But Matt Wallerstedt looks to be the long term fit for a Texas Tech defense that struggles

with forcing turnovers. Wallerstedt will have a fairly experienced front seven to work with. In the secondary sophomore J.J. Gaines has made an impact in spring ball and is an early favorite to win a starting position.

**Players to watch on offense:** RB Kenny Williams and WR Eric Ward

**Player to watch on defense:** DB J.J. Gaines.

# BIG EAST/AAC:

## By Derrick Battle:

Over the past couple of years, the Big East Conference has seen many programs migrate to different conferences. In order to preserve the prestigious conference, the Big East, or now newly named the American Athletic Conference, added eight new schools.

### Louisville Cardinals:

After defeating Florida in the Sugar Bowl to conclude their season, the Louisville Cardinals are heavy favorites to win the conference for a second year in a row. With an 11-2 season under their belt, junior quarterback Teddy Bridgewater is one of seven offensive starters returning. In his sophomore campaign last season, Bridgewater threw for 3,718 yards and 27 touchdowns with just eight interceptions. Also, the Cardinals return their top receiver in DeVante Parker who led them with 40 catches for 744 yards and ten touchdowns.



Defensively, Louisville brings back their top three tacklers in senior linebacker Preston Brown, junior safety Calvin Pryor and senior safety Hakeem Smith. All three were awarded second team All-Big East nods.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Teddy Bridgewater and WR DeVante Parker

**Two to watch on defense:** LB Preston Brown and S Hakeem Smith

### Rutgers Scarlet Knights:

For the past two seasons, the Rutgers Scarlet Knights finished the year with a 9-5 record. While they received a share of their first conference title last year, they did not gain an at-large bid to play in a BCS game.

With junior quarterback Gary Nova back under the helm, Rutgers can yet again strive at a chance to win the conference. However, in order to do that they must get past Louisville who they have not beaten since 2009. Also, the Scarlet Knights will have to look for an answer at running back as Jawan Jamison was drafted into the NFL.

Known as the AAC's best defense last season, only allowing 14.2 points per game, the Scarlet Knights only return four starters from that unit.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Gary Nova and WR Brandon Coleman

**Two to watch on defense:** LB Jamal Merrell and DB Lorenzo Waters

### **Cincinnati Bearcats:**

The Cincinnati Bearcats return 13 starters from last year's team. However, the most interesting position to watch is quarterback. After leading the Bearcats to a 5-0 start with one of those wins coming against Virginia Tech, quarterback Munchie Legaux went 1-2 and was eventually benched for the final five games of the season in favor of Brendon Kay.

This season, although the senior Legaux is the projected starter, will he have his job wrestled away from him again? Legaux will not have running back George Winn (NFL) behind him as well as last year's top two targets in the passing game. Winn led Cincinnati with 1,334 yards and 13 touchdowns.

Another important factor in whether Legaux and the Bearcats will succeed is if they are able to adjust to first year Head Coach Tommy Tuberville. Tuberville will be the fourth head coach the Bearcats have had since 2004.

The leading American Athletic Conference tackler, linebacker Greg Blair, returns to the front seven of the Bearcats defense. Blair finished last season with 138 tackles and will need to produce as much or more since the Bearcats do not return a defensive lineman that recorded more than one sack last season.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Munchie Legaux and QB Brendon Kay

**Two to watch on defense:** LB Greg Blair and LB Nick Temple

## Connecticut Huskies:

The Huskies entered spring practice feeling comfortable with the stability at quarterback, as well as in the skilled positions and the offensive line. With experience returning expect UConn's offense to be more dynamic than the 110th ranked total offense of last season.

Redshirt junior running back Lyle McCombs returns as the Huskies eighth all-time rushing leader with 2,011 yards. With much of their offense back, redshirt junior quarterback Chandler Whitmer should be able to put up better numbers in 2013.

While the offense seems stable, the defense is in disarray. The Huskies must replace six starters from a defense that was ranked ninth in total defense last season. Linebacker Yawin Smallwood who led the Huskies with 120 tackles returns along with senior defensive end Jesse Joseph. The coaching staff has high expectations for Joseph although he is returning from a torn Achilles. Junior cornerback Byron Jones and redshirt junior safety Ty-Meer Brown bring experience to their secondary with 44 combined starts.



**Two to watch on offense:** RB Lyle McCombs and WR Jeremy Davis

**Two to watch on defense:** DE Jesse Joseph and S Ty-Meer Brown

## UCF Knights:

The University of Central Florida maybe a dark horse to challenge Louisville for the American Athletic Conference championship. The Knights finished with 10-4 record last season in their final year in the Conference USA.

Junior Quarterback Blake Bortles threw for 3,059 yards and 25 touchdowns last season and Head Coach George O'Leary said that he wanted the offense to air it out more. With Bortles size and speed complemented by a receiving corps with very good athletic ability, the Knights offense may live up to O'Leary's goal. The Knights also bring back



an experienced offensive line led by tackle Torrian Wilson who will protect Bortles' blindside.

Key losses on defense may be UCF's Achilles' Heel. While linebacker Terrance Plummer returns, the Knights will need their young players to fill holes throughout their entire defense.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Blake Bortles and LT Torrian Wilson

**Two to watch on defense:** LB Terrance Plummer and DB Clayton Geathers

### **Houston Cougars:**

Houston brings to the American Athletic Conference a high powered offense that will look to be more balanced. However, with running back Charles Sims' transfer to West Virginia on June 21<sup>st</sup>, backs Ryan Jackson and Kenneth Farrow will battle for the No.1 spot. Junior quarterback David Piland returns to the offense. The Cougars will look for junior college and former USC recruit Markeith Ambles to contribute heavily in the receiving game.

Houston's defense plagued them last season. The Cougars gave up 36 points per game and 483 yards a game. Unless there is significant improvement on that side of the ball, Houston will struggle to compete in their new conference.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB David Piland and WR Deontay Greenberry

**Two to watch on defense:** S Trevon Stewart and LB Derrick Mathews

### **SMU Mustangs:**

The SMU Mustangs ended their season on the good end of a 43-10 thumping of Fresno State in the Hawaii Bowl. The Mustangs return senior quarterback Garrett Gilbert who is looking to get rid of his turnover struggles. The Ex-Texas Longhorns quarterback had 15 touchdowns and 15 interceptions last season. While they will miss running back Zach Line, who led the team with 1,278 yards rushing and 12 touchdowns, SMU still has a lot of talent. Another ex-Longhorn running back Traylon Sheard has looked impressive in spring practice and will be able to fill in nicely in the running game. On the

offensive line, senior left tackle Ben Gottschalk will be instrumental in the effort to stabilize an overall inexperienced unit.

Defensively, the Mustangs had trouble adjusting to Head Coach June Jones 3-4 defense and with all three defensive line starters gone, expect SMU to struggle up front. Although the coaching staff has spoken highly of defensive end Beau Barnes, other young players will have to step in early in the trenches. While most of their secondary returns, the Mustangs need to improve on its 109th passing defense ranking from a year ago.

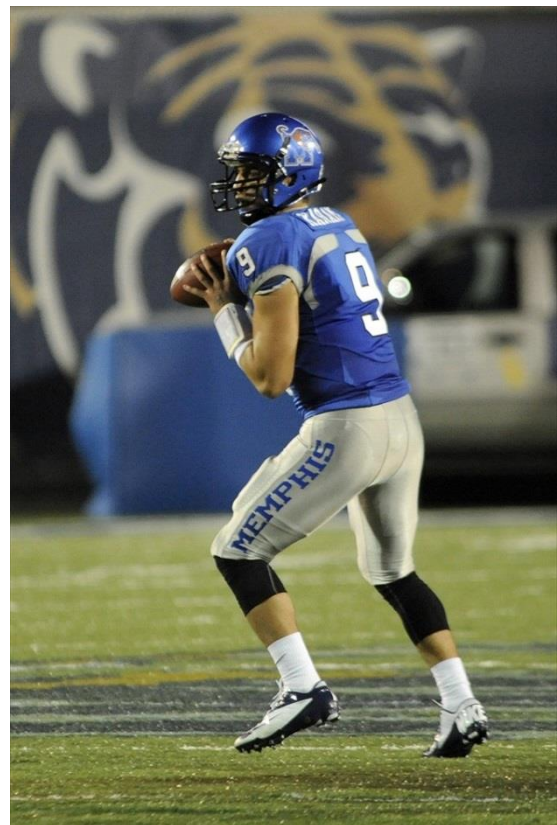
**Two to watch on offense:** RB Traylon Shead and LT Ben Gottschalk

**Two to watch on defense:** DE Beau Barnes and LB Stephon Sanders

## **Memphis Tigers:**

The Tigers exited the Conference USA winning three straight games. Now in their first year in the AAC, Memphis and second year Head Coach Justin Fuente have quietly put together a solid team.

Texas Tech transfer quarterback Jacob Karam had a good first season last year with the Tigers. He threw for 1,895 yards and 14 touchdowns with just three interceptions. While Karam did put up impressive numbers, freshman Paxton Lynch and junior Eric Mathews will also be in the running for the starting quarterback spot. All three had good spring practices and whoever starts will have tons of weapons to work with. Running back Brandon Hayes returns and the receiving corps adds ex-Clemson receiver Joe Craig.



Memphis made great strides defensively. Known as one of the worst units in college football, the Tigers ranked first in total defense in the Conference USA last year. Their defense also returns several key players from last season, one of which is defensive lineman Martin Ifedi who had 7.5 sacks a year ago.

**Players to watch on offense:** RB Brandon Hayes and WR Keiwone Malone

**Players to watch on defense:** DE Martin Ifedi and CB Bobby McCain

### **South Florida Bulls:**

New Head Coach Willie Taggart has had some great accomplishments early in his career. He led Western Kentucky to their first bowl game and he just seems to have a knack for winning. Bringing Western Kentucky from the FCS ranks and making them a success was challenging. That experience makes Taggart a great fit for the Bulls program.

USF has had the tools in the past to make a run in the AAC, but now they will have to do it without former four-year starting quarterback B.J. Daniels. Senior Bobby Eveld, Penn State transfer Steven Bench and sophomore Matt Floyd will battle to be No. 1 on the depth chart this season. The backfield returns Marcus Shaw who has been plagued with injuries. Shaw might share time with others behind him. The Bulls strength on offense comes from their receiving corps and offensive line. Wide outs Andre Davis returns as well as sophomore D'Vario Montgomery.

On the other side of the ball, the Bulls were dismal. USF could not protect a lead and frequently gave up big plays during the season. While senior linebacker DeDe Lattimore returns for his final year and Notre Dame transfer, Freshman All-American defensive end Aaron Lynch is eligible to play this year, USF still has big holes to fill in their defense.

**Players to watch on offense:** WRs Andre Davis and D'Vario Montgomery

**Players to watch on defense:** LB DeDe Lattimore and DE Aaron Lynch

### **Temple Owls:**

After Head Coach Al Golden left to take the job in Miami, Temple is trying to find stability. Junior quarterback Connor Reilly will be the third starting QB since 2011. Reilly

fits first year Head Coach Matt Rhule's style of offense which is more of a traditional drop-back passing game.

Temple does not present any household names offensively. They will need to fill voids in the running game and also find a go to receiver. Last year's productive running back tandem of ex-Boston College player Montel Harris and Matt Brown are both gone. The Owls will look for Kenny Harper and Jamie Gilmore to step up. While their line is generally young, they return four starters up front including guard Scott Roorda who is the only senior.

Although Temple finished last in defense in the AAC last season, the Owls have some pieces to work with this year. Linebacker Tyler Matakevich was the American Athletic Conference Rookie of the Year as a true freshman and middle linebacker Nate D. Smith was productive with 75 tackles. In their secondary, junior cornerback Anthony Robey was impressive and will look to be a vital part of an experienced defensive back unit.

**Players to watch on offense:** G Scott Roorda and QB Connor Reilly

**Players to watch on defense:** LBs Tyler Matakevich and Nate D. Smith

# **Pac 12:**

## **By Charlie Cason:**

The Pac 12 is a conference that has been dominated by Oregon and USC in the past. It is a conference that has so much offensive firepower that it has defensive coordinators constantly scratching their heads. Recently however, other teams have stepped up and are competing for titles. Teams such as Stanford, Oregon State, UCLA, and Washington are all improving and making the conference much more intriguing. With a hand-full of teams feeling that they have a shot to win it all in the Pac 12, let's see what each team needs to work on this year to improve their chances.

## **Arizona Wildcats:**

An explosive offense and experienced team led the Wildcats to an 8-win season in 2012 and a wild victory in the Gildan New Mexico Bowl. Rich Rodriguez returns for his second season in Tucson, and he must find a way to improve defensively.

Arizona allowed 35.3 points per game last year and ranked 105<sup>th</sup> in the FBS. They allowed 30 points or more in nine games last year, including a 49-point loss to Oregon and a 56-point loss to UCLA. They finished with a losing record (4-5) in the conference.

Defensive Coordinator Jeff Casteel will have an experienced unit return that he can work with. The Wildcats return 11 starters on defense, and the most overall players in the conference. The loss of QB Matt Scott could slow down the offense early in the season, but B.J. Denker has the experience and accuracy to lead the Wildcats down the field and to another bowl season.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB B.J. Denker and RB Ka'Deem Carey

**Two to watch on defense:** DL Tevin Hood and CB Derrick Rainey

## **Arizona State Sun Devils:**

A balanced offensive attack and a solid passing defense returns for the Sun Devils, as they look to be title contenders in the Pac 12 this year. In 2012, the Devils went 8-5 overall and were able to bounce back from a four-game losing streak late in the season.



Eight starters return to a defensive unit that was strong in pass coverage, but struggled stopping the run. They ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the conference in rushing defense, allowing 182.8



yards per game and allowed almost 25 points per game. Against Oregon last year, the Devils gave up 406 total rushing yards on their way to a 22-point loss. The experience and leadership of the returning starters will help, but they need better defensive consistency if they want to live up to their preseason hype.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Taylor Kelly and RB Marion Grice

**Two to watch on defense:** DT Will Sutton and LB Carl Bradford

## **California Golden Bears:**

Not much went right for California and Coach Jeff Tedford last season. The Bears finished the 2012 campaign with a 2-7 mark in conference play and were outscored in the last two games 121-31. They ranked in the bottom half of the conference in nearly every major offensive and defensive category.

The scariest part is that the Golden Bears only return three starters on offense. Defensively, they don't look good either but that unit may be more promising than the offense. California returns six starters to a defensive squad that allowed 33 points and 441.2 yards per game last year. Maybe a completely fresh start is just what they need after firing Tedford and bringing in Sonny Dykes to lead the program.

The Golden Bears will need to think of something fast, as Ohio State and Oregon loom in the first four games of their schedule. They will need to rely on their seniors to try and bring them out of the Pac 12 cellar.

**Two to watch on offense:** RB Brendan Bigelow and QB Zach Kline

**Two to watch on defense:** DT DeAndre Coleman and LB Nick Forbes

### **Colorado Buffaloes:**

Things could not have been worse for the Buffaloes. A 1-11 overall record, with that one win coming against lowly Washington State, Colorado struggled both offensively and defensively.

Firing former coach Jon Embree opened the door for Mike MacIntyre to try and work some magic. There is some hope because MacIntyre led San Jose State to a 10-win season in 2012 and he has 14 overall returning starters to work with this year.

Defensively, Colorado allowed 40 or more points and scored fewer than 20 in eight games last season. They ranked 120<sup>th</sup> in the FBS in points per game, and 124<sup>th</sup> in points allowed.

So is there any good news? A relatively young roster and an energetic new coach could mean potential for the future. As for the present, the Buffs will struggle again this season, but look for MacIntyre to steer the program in the right direction.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Jordan Webb and WR Nelson Spruce

**Two to watch on defense:** DB Kenneth Crawley and DB Greg Henderson

### **Oregon Ducks:**

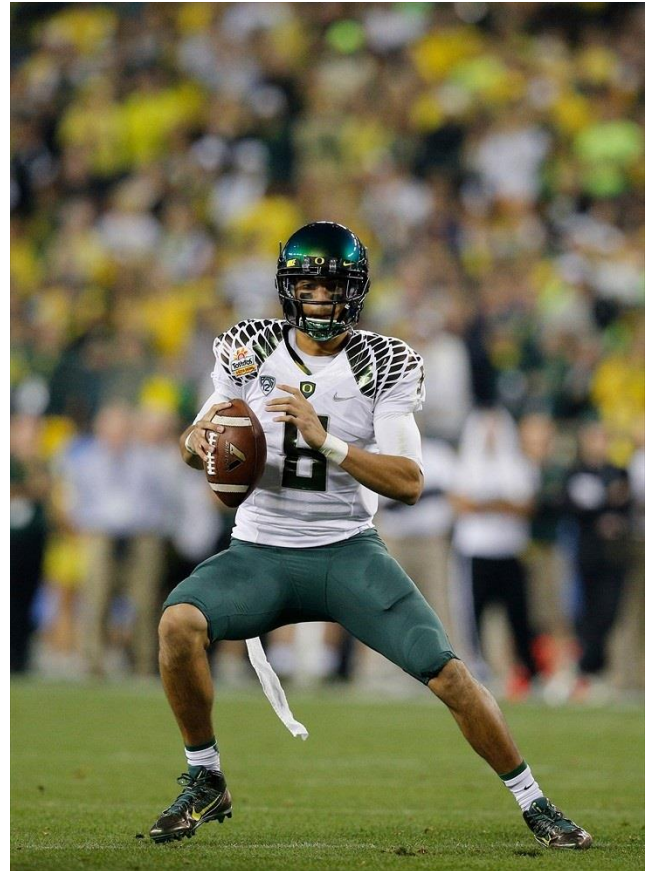
The high-flying quack attack returns this season looking for more after their 12-1 record and a victory in The Fiesta Bowl. The loss of former coach Chip Kelly is a major hit to the team, but the Ducks have the firepower to reload.

Oregon's offensive line returns with three potential All-Pac 12 starters and their backfield is something to absolutely fear. QB Marcus Mariota led the Ducks to the Fiesta Bowl in just his freshman season. The one area he and the team need to

improve on is the passing game. They ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the conference and 73<sup>rd</sup> in the FBS in their passing offense.

Defensively, Oregon was solid and consistent but the unit still needs work. They allowed 20 or more points in seven games last year, including a wild 62-51 victory over USC. They must improve on getting penetration and pressure on the QB, as well as defending downfield passes. If these things improve, then new Head Coach Mark Helfrich may have an easy track to the Pac 12 title game and potential BCS berth.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Marcus Mariota and WR Josh Huff



**Two to watch on defense:** CB Ifo Ekpere-Olomu and DB Terrance Mitchell

## **Oregon State Beavers:**

The Beavers started the season out 6-0 and seemed primed for a spot in the conference title game. They finished the year 9-4 after a loss to Texas in The Valero Alamo Bowl. Three of their four losses were by a total of 11 points.

Oregon State was led by QBs Cody Vaz and Sean Mannion, who combined to throw for 3,926 yards and 26 touchdowns. They split time throughout the year, and in the FBS together they ranked 19<sup>th</sup> in passing yards with just over 307 yards per game.

What the Beavers need to improve on if they want to take that next step to a championship is their running game. They were 10<sup>th</sup> in the conference and averaged only 124.5 yards per game.

Defensively, Oregon State lost some experience and talent that they will need to replace, but returning seven starters to a unit that allowed just over 20 points per game will give Mike Riley a lot to smile about.

They have a favorable schedule this coming season and host USC, Stanford, and Washington. If everything falls into place, it could be a magical season for Riley and the Beavers.

**Two to watch on offense:** RB Storm Woods and QB Cody Vaz/Sean Mannion

**Two to watch on defense:** DE Scott Crichton and CB Rashaad Reynolds

### **Stanford Cardinal:**

The reigning Pac 12 Champions return and boast one of the best defenses in the nation. In 14 games, they only allowed 20 or more points four times. They held Oregon to a season-low 14 points and beat UCLA twice in consecutive weeks. With eight returning starters, opposing offenses should not expect to have their best game when they face the Cardinal defense.



Offensively, there is definitely room for improvement and former RB Stepfan Taylor will need to be replaced. They ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in the conference in passing offense and 8<sup>th</sup> in total offense. QB Josh Nunes started the first seven games of the season, but only completed 52.7% of his passes and threw seven interceptions. Kevin Hogan took over for the remainder of the year, and was much more consistent. With Nunes retiring from football as a result of a devastating injury suffered during an off-season workout, Hogan will be the starter. He needs to be consistent and a stable leader in order for Stanford to have a chance at repeating as conference champions.

**Two to watch on offense:** OL David Yankey and QB Kevin Hogan

**Two to watch on defense:** LB Trent Murphy and DE Henry Anderson



## **UCLA Bruins:**

Head Coach Jim Mora was extremely successful in his first season in Los Angeles, but there is work that still needs to be done. The Bruins had an offense that could light up the scoreboard and it was very balanced. They were ranked in the top 40 in the nation in rushing and passing offense, and were 3<sup>rd</sup> in the conference in total offense.

UCLA had some issues defensively, and only returning five starters may raise more question marks. They allowed 30 or more points in six games last season, including 49 to Baylor in The Holiday Bowl. On average during conference games, they allowed over 27 points per game. The good news is that they could be stronger this year with All-American candidate, linebacker Anthony Barr anchoring the defense. If the back four can come in and play consistently, the Bruins can make some serious noise in the conference this season.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Brett Hundley and OT Xavier Su'a-Filo

**Two to watch on defense:** OLB Anthony Barr and ILB Eric Kendricks

## **USC Trojans:**

The Trojans had an extremely disappointing season last year. They went from the top preseason team to a mediocre 7-win team that lost to Georgia Tech in The Sun Bowl.

The good thing for USC is that they always seem to reload instead or rebuild. The main concern for Head Coach Lane Kiffin will be replacing QB Matt Barkley. It is a three-man



race for the starting job, and Kiffin needs to make the right decision. All-world receiver Marqise Lee returns and will help ignite the offense.

On defense, the Trojans need to slow down opposing offenses. They allowed 20 or more points in eight games last year and let Oregon put up 62 in Los Angeles. That should not come as a



complete shock, as USC was 8<sup>th</sup> in the conference in rushing defense. Seven returning starters will help crank up the energy on defense and the Trojans should be contenders in the Pac 12 South.

**Two to watch on offense:** WR Marqise Lee and the starting QB

**Two to watch on defense:** OLB Morgan Breslin and S Dion Bailey

### **Utah Utes:**

There wasn't much to be excited about last season if you are a Utah fan. It is never a good sign when you have a team as talented as Utah did, and still end up with a losing season.

The problems started on offense. The Utes were dreadful all-around on offense and were dead last in the conference in passing offense. Running the football wasn't much of an option either. They only averaged 133.8 yards per game and struggled to move the ball against the better teams in the conference. To make matters worse, they lose their best player, running back John White among several other key players.

Overall, Utah only returns nine starters and road games at USC and Oregon won't help. Head Coach Kyle Whittingham has a solid record with the Utes, but he will need to figure out how to fix his team this season if he wants to avoid the hot seat in the future.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Travis Wilson and RB Kelvin York

**Two to watch on defense:** DE Trevor Reilly and S Eric Rowe

### **Washington Huskies:**

This could be the year that Husky fans have been waiting for under Head Coach Steve Sarkisian. They return 16 starters this year, including nine on offense.

Senior QB Keith Price returns along with talent at the running back, receiver, and tight end positions. Last year, Washington did struggle offensively a bit and averaged only 24

points per game. They were 10<sup>th</sup> in the conference in total offense and 9<sup>th</sup> in scoring offense.

Defensively, the Huskies return a majority of their unit that was 2<sup>nd</sup> in passing defense and 4<sup>th</sup> in total defense. They did have rough times during the season, allowing 52 points to both Oregon and Arizona, and losing The Apple Cup to rival Washington State.

Tough road games are ahead for the Huskies, including at Stanford, UCLA and Oregon State. The experience and patience, however, should pay off this season. Expect Washington to continue to improve and to compete in the North Division.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Keith Price and WR Kasen Williams

**Two to watch on defense:** DT Danny Shelton and LB Shaq Thompson

### **Washington State Cougars:**

Last season Washington State could certainly throw the football and rack up yards, but they could not put up points. The Cougars were 108<sup>th</sup> in the FBS and 11<sup>th</sup> in the conference in points scored, averaging a mere 20.4 per game. They were last in the conference running the football with a pathetic 29.1 yards per game average. The good news (if any) is that they defeated in-state rival Washington in The Apple Cup last year and have bragging rights.

Defensively, the Cougars weren't as bad as some people may have thought, but they weren't great. The area where they were the most productive was stopping the run. They only allowed 163 yards per game on the ground and with returning talent at defensive end and linebacker, that average could and should decrease.

Overall, Head Coach Mike Leach has a ton of returning talent this year, so we should expect to see some improvement out of the Cougars.

**Two to watch on offense:** WR Gabe Marks and RB Teondray Caldwell

**Two to watch on defense:** LB Darryl Monroe and S Deone Bucannon

# ACC:

## By Charlie Cason:

For the last several years, every major conference in the NCAA has been known for a particular characteristic in their teams. For instance, the SEC is known for swarming defenses that are consistently ranked at the top each year. The Big 12 has been an offensive conference that is able to spread the field and consistently rack up passing yards.

The ACC, however, has recently been known for being very unpredictable and inconsistent. They do not have a dominant team that can consistently compete for a national title and a majority of the teams suffer from a lack of depth. With the season just a few months away and spring games in the books, here is my preview of the conference and how each team will fare.

## Boston College Eagles:

The 2012 season was not kind to the Eagles, to say the least. A 1-7 record in league play and just 2 wins overall, one of which was over Maine, has put Boston College in the cellar of the conference and looking at a long road back.

The first step to recovery starts with the Eagles running game. In 2012, they averaged only 90.9 yards/game and were ranked 10th in total offense. Since the departure of QB Matt Ryan after the 2007 season, the Eagles offense has consistently struggled and they must find an answer running the football. Early season matchups against Southern California and Florida State will put their offseason work to the test.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Chase Rettig and WR Alex Amidon

**Two to watch on defense:** DB Sean Sylvia and LB Kevin Pierre-Louis

## Clemson Tigers:

In 2012, Tajh Boyd and the Clemson offense were explosive and caused problems for defenses all over the country. Boyd, who threw for 3,896 yards and 36 touchdowns last year, decided to return for his senior season and he appears to have the leadership

needed to lift the Tigers to another conference title.

The only gap that needs to be filled is the defense. They ranked 8th in the conference in rush defense and 7th in total defense. If those numbers can improve this season, Head Coach Dabo Swinney has an excellent chance to get his second ACC crown in three seasons.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Tajh Boyd and WR Sammy Watkins

**Two to watch on defense:** LB Justin Parker and CB Chiderah Onyeukwu

### **Duke Blue Devils:**

Despite losing its last 5 games last season, the Blue Devils have a lot to build on and look forward to this season. Duke seemed to improve overall as a team last year and competed in the school's first bowl game (Belk Bowl) since 1994.

Two areas that they struggled with severely were red zone defense and 3rd down conversions. They were last in the league in red zone defense and opponents scored on 42 out of 46 chances, with only 14 of those being field goals. In addition, offensively they only converted 34.7% of their third downs this past season and consequently they struggled to maintain a consistent offense.

With a favorable schedule this season, the Blue Devils and coach David Cutcliffe have a chance to return to a bowl game if they can create some consistency.

**Two to watch on offense:** RB Jela Duncan and WR Jamison Crowder

**Two to watch on defense:** DE Britton Grier and CB Jared Boyd



## **Florida State Seminoles:**

The reigning conference champions look to build upon their success from last season. With the departure of QB E.J. Manuel to the NFL, the Seminoles need to figure out who is best suited to command their offense. Redshirt freshman Jameis Winston shined in the spring game and appears to be the frontrunner for the job. Winston plays both football and baseball, so it will be interesting to see if that will have any impact on his physical and emotional ability to lead the team.

The offense struggled at times last season with turnovers and poor production. Head Coach Jimbo Fisher's conservative play calling in the 4th quarter was also in question.

On the other side of the ball, the defense will look to maintain the best overall defense in the league and the 6th best in the FBS. With 7 key losses on defense from 2012, FSU will need to rely on its depth in order to maintain that level of play.

This team has the potential to win the conference title again and get to a BCS bowl, but it must avoid the letdown play. Circle the October 19th matchup against Clemson in Death Valley, as the winner will more than likely win the Atlantic Division.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Jameis Winston and WR Rashad Greene

**Two to watch on defense:** DB Terrence Brooks LB Dorian Earley

## **Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets:**

Outside of their 2009 ACC championship run, Paul Johnson's team has struggled with inconsistent quarterback play and sloppy defense. Former defensive coordinator Al Groh was fired after their loss to Clemson last October, and Charles Kelly took over for the remainder of the year.

The team did end a disappointing year on a bright note by defeating preseason #1 Southern California in the Sun Bowl, and they can certainly build on that. First thing is first, and that is finding a quarterback that can take control of the option offense and develop a passing attack. Vad Lee split duties with Tevin Washington last season, but with Washington gone, it will be between Lee and Synjyn Days. I believe both will split time throughout the year, with Lee earning a majority of the snaps.

Defensively, the Yellow Jackets suffer from a lack of depth and size. A strong performance in the Sun Bowl is a great start to rebuilding, but new coordinator Ted Roof will need a defensive scheme that will contain the run and will be able to limit the

opponent's downfield passing game. They were 5th in the league in both passing defense and total defense. Look for Tech to compete, but fall behind in the Coastal Division.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Vad Lee and RB Zach Laskey

**Two to watch on defense:** LB Jeremiah Attaochu and LB Quayshawn Nealy



### **Maryland Terrapins:**

Randy Edsall's second year in College Park ended in yet another losing season, as Maryland ended 2012 with a 4-8 record and only a 2-6 mark in league play.

Injuries plagued the Terrapins throughout the year. In the 9th game of the year, they got down to their 5th string QB (yes, fifth) due to season-ending injuries to the previous four. Freshman linebacker Shawn Petty, a talented high school quarterback, was pressed into service as the Terps starting QB. He started the final 4 games and went 0-4.

If Maryland is going to make its final year in the ACC memorable, they will need a balanced offensive attack and better protection for their QB.

Last season, they finished 10th in the league in rushing offense and 11th in passing offense. They averaged just 284.8 yards/game. The good news is that they have a very young team that has the potential to improve with experience. They will need it quick with early season matchups against West Virginia and Florida State in consecutive weeks.

**Two to watch on offense:** WR Stefon Diggs and RB Brandon Ross

**Two to watch on defense:** DB Dexter McDougle and LB Alex Twine



## **Miami Hurricanes:**

Al Golden's club showed promise early in the year by starting out 3-0 in conference play, then stumbled down the stretch to finish with a 5-3 record and a tie for the Coastal Division crown. Although they won the tiebreaker, they decided to forego the title game due to pending NCAA investigations.

The Hurricanes struggled all season defensively, allowing 217.9 yards/game on the ground and 268.5 yards through the air. Along with that, they ranked near the bottom in total sacks throughout the season finishing with just 13. If defensive coordinator Mark D'Onofrio can fix their defensive woes, then the Canes could be looking strong to compete in the title game in December.

The return of Stephen Morris will ignite the offense that averaged 440.2 yards/game and ranked 3rd in the conference in passing. Look for Miami to take the Coastal Division and compete in the Conference Championship Game in Charlotte.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Stephen Morris and WR Phillip Dorsett

**Two to watch on defense:** LB Thurston Armbrister and LB Tyriq McCord

## **North Carolina Tar Heels:**

Although the Heels were ineligible for a bowl game last season, they can take a lot away from a successful season. They finished along with Miami and Georgia Tech at 5-3 in the conference and a share of the division crown.

An explosive offensive attack led by QB Bryn Renner and RB Giovani Bernard was 8th in the FBS in points/game with 40.6. The loss of Bernard to the NFL will hurt the running game, but Renner averaged nearly 300 yards/game in the air last season, so look for him to be at the top of the league in passing this season.

Defensively, North Carolina has some issues they need to work on. Their pass defense was not impressive, allowing nearly 247 yards/game and was in the bottom half of the league. Against Georgia Tech, they allowed 588 total yards and 68 points. If the Heels want to compete for a conference crown, it starts defensively. Three of their first five games are against South Carolina, Georgia Tech, and Virginia Tech, so their offseason work will be put to the test early.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Bryn Renner and WR Quinshad Davis

**Two to watch on defense:** CB Tim Scott and S Brandon Ellerbe

## **North Carolina State Wolfpack:**

The Wolfpack struggled last season to a 4-4 record in league play and finished with a Music City Bowl loss to Vanderbilt. The one signature win was against third-ranked Florida State 17-16 in Raleigh.

The struggles were both offensively and defensively, and there seemed to be a lack of leadership. The disappointing season led to former coach Tom O'Brien's termination and allowed the introduction of Dave Doeren as head coach.

Two areas that Doeren needs to make sure to improve upon is NC State's turnover margin and their special teams play. Their turnover margin was -9 and was 10th in the league, only above Maryland and Virginia. In regards to special teams, the Wolfpack managed to make only 13 field goals out of 23 attempts (56.5%). Their kickoff returns, punt returns, and punting yards were all ranked in the bottom half of the league and improvements must be made in those areas if they want to be a legitimate contender.



With a favorable home schedule and an early season game against Clemson, the Wolfpack have a chance to be competitive if they can stay consistent. Can they catch the league by surprise? Stay tuned!

**Two to watch on offense:** RB Shadrach Thornton and the starting QB

**Two to watch on defense:** S Dontae Johnson and LB D.J. Green

## **Pittsburgh Panthers:**

This will be the first year in the ACC for the Panthers, as they have made the move from the Big East along with Syracuse. It was an up-and-down year for the Panthers in 2012, finishing 6-7 with a BBVA Compass Bowl loss to Ole Miss to end the season.

A 3OT loss to Notre Dame and a solid victory over Rutgers showed Pitt's potential, but an opening loss to Youngstown State and Connecticut exposed their inconsistency. Pitt was 5th in the Big East in rushing yards in 2012 and averaged only 133 per game. They were pretty effective through the air with Tino Sunseri, but with his departure, the starting QB job is now up in the air. The Panthers will need to find a leader on the field who can take control of the offense and produce efficiency.

A season-opener against Florida State at home on Labor Day will give them national exposure. A win in that game would be a great way for Pitt to announce its arrival in the ACC. Unfortunately for the Panthers, they have a history of coming out of the gate slowly. So, an ugly loss to the Seminoles might just as easily prompt fans to start thinking about the upcoming basketball season!

**Two to watch on offense:** WR Devin Street and RB Issac Bennett

**Two to watch on defense:** DB K'Waun Williams and LB Ejuan Price

## **Syracuse Orange:**

As another Big East team looking to make its mark in a new conference, the Orange figure to build off the success of last season. They won 6 out of their last 7 games and ended with a crushing 38-14 win over West Virginia in the Pinstripe Bowl.

The Orange led the Big East in total offense, averaging 476.2 yards and 30 points per game. To compete for an Atlantic Division title, they will need to tighten up their defense. In their 5 losses last season, they allowed an average of 31.8 points a game.

Syracuse starts the season against Penn State and they begin conference play on October 5th against Clemson. A home game against the Tigers could be the perfect way to introduce themselves to the league.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Terrel Hunt and RB Jerome Smith

**Two to watch on defense:** CB Brandon Reddish and LB Dyshawn Davis

### **Virginia Cavaliers:**

A 2-0 start for Coach Mike London's team was quickly followed by a six game losing streak that included a 36-point loss to Georgia Tech and losses to ACC cellar teams Maryland and Wake Forest.

London has many issues to fix before the 2013 season begins, and they need to be addressed quickly since Virginia opens with BYU and Oregon in consecutive weeks. The Cavaliers ranked 8th in the league in scoring defense, allowing nearly 29 points/game, and they were dead last in interceptions.

On the offensive side of the ball, they averaged only 22.8 points per game and only scored over 20 points 4 times all season. With a majority of the conference's top teams coming to Charlottesville, London has a chance to bring his team back to glory. Can they compete with the conference big boys? It appears that they will have to do just that if London is to salvage his job.

**Two to watch on offense:** RB Kevin Parks and TE Zachary Swanson

**Two to watch on defense:** CB Demetrious Nicholson and DE Eli Harold

### **Virginia Tech Hokies:**

What was supposed to be a season of promise in 2012 for Frank Beamer and the Hokies turned into a fight to make it to a .500 record and a berth in a bowl game.

Virginia Tech's defense was solid as usual under coordinator Bud Foster, but their offense limped through the season. Junior quarterback Logan Thomas had very inconsistent play and threw 16 interceptions to only 18 touchdown passes. They had a -5 turnover margin and lost 9 fumbles as well. Through the air, they averaged 230.9 yards/game and Thomas only completed 51% of his passes.

Their spring game provided most of the same, a weak offense and strong defense. With Thomas returning for his senior season and the Hokies opening against defending National Champion Alabama, they will need to find an answer fast.

If Thomas can improve his passing and mobility and be able to limit his turnovers, the Hokies have a great shot at returning to the ACC title game and a potential BCS berth.

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Logan Thomas and RB J.C. Coleman

**Two to watch on defense:** CB Antone Exum and CB Kyle Fuller



## **Wake Forest Demon Deacons:**

With only 5 wins last season, the best being against North Carolina, Jim Grobe's team had a tough time on both sides of the ball.

Offensively, they only averaged 18.5 points and 301.3 yards/game and were at the bottom of the ACC rankings in nearly every offensive category. Defensively, they were equally as awful. They ranked 11th in scoring defense, 9th in rushing defense, 10th in pass defense, and 9th in total defense. They allowed an average of 432.8 yards per game.

Wake Forest is a small school that does not recruit many top players, so their depth is very limited. If they want to return to a bowl game this year, Grobe and defensive coordinator Brad Lambert are going to have to come up with a scheme that works for the size and speed of their defense. Three out of their first four games should be easy victories and a chance to work out their issues. Will they take advantage of the opportunity?

**Two to watch on offense:** QB Tanner Price and RB Josh Harris

**Two to watch on defense:** DE Tylor Harris and LB Zachary Allen

# Big Ten:

**By Tyler Fenwick:**

## **Nebraska Cornhuskers:**

Nebraska did not have an outstanding season in 2012, but by the time the Big Ten Championship rolled around in December, they looked to be in prime position to represent the conference in the Rose Bowl. However, Wisconsin absolutely rolled over the Cornhuskers and, with it, seemingly washed away the rest of the Nebraska season.

But if you're able to look past that, there was much to celebrate for Nebraska. Dual threat quarterback Taylor Martinez improved by leaps and bounds and turned this offense into a good one. Coupled with Martinez was the rushing ability of Rex Burkhead. Unfortunately for Cornhusker fans, Burkhead is now graduated and a member of the Bengals organization. Opposing tradition, defense was not a particular strength for Nebraska, but despite the struggles, they were able to lug through the conference season, only losing one game.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Taylor Martinez and RB Ameer Abdullah

I'm expecting Taylor Martinez to continue to develop as a passer for the 2013 season, making him a lethal weapon for the Nebraska offense. This won't be the Taylor Martinez we're used to seeing. Even last year, when he heavily improved his passing game, it wasn't quite enough to be a big-time threat. But I think that'll change for 2013. Ameer Abdullah will be one of the premier backs in the country this season, and I think he'll be taking some of the load off Taylor Martinez in the run game. Abdullah will get his touches and do his damage.

**Two defensive players to watch:** NB Cianté Evans and DT Thad Randle

Although Nebraska could not stop the run to save their lives last season, the pass defense was excellent. Anchored by Cianté Evans, I expect much of the same in 2013. Evans is now a senior, leading this defense on the field, and I think he'll have a huge impact on the fate of this Nebraska team. Thad Randle is a returning senior on the defensive line that gave up 539 rushing yards to Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship. That's unheard of. But Randle, along with the rest of his line, needs to have a vengeful spirit as 2013 inches closer.



## Michigan Wolverines:

It's sad to think the days of Denard Robinson are over in Ann Arbor. But it's time to usher in the era of Devin Gardner and a more traditional style of offense, orchestrated by offensive coordinator Al Borges. In 2012, the Wolverines were very close to getting a shot at a Big Ten championship but they could not beat Nebraska. Later, they fell in back-to-back weeks to Ohio State and South Carolina, which capped off a rather disappointing season for the maize and blue.



Looking ahead to 2013, I'm looking forward to seeing how Al Borges uses his weapons on offense, now that he has something more like what he's used to. Michigan will be transitioning from a spread offense to more of a West Coast offense, with hopes of implementing a full-time running back behind Devin Gardner.

Defensively, Brady Hoke and Coordinator Greg Mattison are masterminds, and they have the right bodies to do just about anything they please on that side of the ball.

### **Two offensive players to watch:** QB Devin Gardner and OT Taylor Lewan

Devin Gardner was one of the most highly-touted quarterbacks coming out of high school, but he was nearly forgotten behind Denard Robinson. Now he'll have a full season to display his skills, which I think will have us all amazed. He has a tremendously strong, accurate arm and has the ability to keep plays alive. He's very fun to watch.

On the line, Taylor Lewan's decision to come back saved Devin Gardner a lot of pain. Without Lewan, the offensive line would have been a mess and probably would have held the Wolverines back this season. Lewan went head-to-head with Jadeveon Clowney in the Outback Bowl and won a good portion of those battles, which goes to show what he's capable of doing.

### **Two defensive players to watch:** LB Jake Ryan and DE Frank Clark

Jake Ryan is my favorite player to watch in the Big Ten. He's a "Michigan Man" if I ever saw one, and he's primed for a huge season at linebacker. Watching him play in 2012, the kid has great pursuit skills, very good speed and can bring down anyone. He'll be the anchor for this Wolverine defense in 2013.

On the defensive line, Frank Clark showed a lot of what he can do in 2012, really leading that line to whatever success they had. Clark's biggest improvement will come in the run game, which is why I'm excited to see him play this season.

### **Northwestern Wildcats:**

The Northwestern Wildcats proved to us in the 2012 season that fans of the purple have a lot to look forward to this coming season. We saw a quarterback in Kain Colter who silently damaged opposing defenses—a kid who should have his name scrambled in with the best of the Big Ten right now. And we saw an improved defense that will be returning seven starters. The biggest area for improvement will be in the passing game, which will be rested upon the shoulders of Colter. If he can become reliable through the air, look out for the Wildcats to really compete in 2013.

#### **Two offensive players to watch:** QB Kain Colter and RB Venric Mark

Last season, Kain Colter really split the quarterback duties with Trevor Siemian (a more traditional passer), but I think the Wildcats will give Colter that full-time responsibility in 2013 because of how much more he brings to the table. He didn't get too many attempts through the air last year, but when he did, his completion percentage was pretty high. And we already know he can run the ball.

Venric Mark will be vital for the Wildcat offense this year. Without his production, it's hard to see Northwestern really competing for anything in a division with Nebraska and Michigan. If Mark can have the same type of production he did last year, the Wildcats will be in good shape.

#### **Two defensive players to watch:** DE Tyler Scott and CB Daniel Jones

Tyler Scott showed a lot of promise in his junior year on the defensive line, and he'll be expected to be the anchor this season. The main concern for Scott and the rest of the line will be disrupting the timing of the quarterback with his receivers because the Northwestern secondary isn't always reliable.

But, while I believe the secondary as a unit isn't always reliable, there is cornerback Daniel Jones who does a fine job in pass defense. He can cover pretty much anyone in the conference, which is what I most like about him.

## Michigan State Spartans:



Michigan State had a truly disappointing season in 2012. The Spartans only won back-to-back games last year: their first two games and their last two games. Needless to say, it was a year East Lansing would like to forget about and just move forward, which is what the 2013 schedule might allow them to do. Outside of the question marks on offense, if you just look at the Spartan's schedule, they

do not have to play Wisconsin, Ohio State or Penn State. That's convenient.

### **Two offensive players to watch:** QB Andrew Maxwell and OG Blake Treadwell

This is a little different. I'm not necessarily saying you need to look out for Andrew Maxwell because he will be blowing you away; I'm saying look out for him because he will almost single-handedly decide the fate of this team. In 2012, Maxwell's success ranged from minimal to non-existent. He'll need to improve for the better of the team.

Blake Treadwell doesn't pop out to anyone, but he'll be very big part of any running game the Spartans can get going this season. It was obviously a big hit when Running back Le'Veon Bell declared for the draft, so now there's even more pressure on the line to perform.

### **Two defensive players to watch:** DE Marcus Rush and FS Kurtis Drummond

The name says it all. Marcus Rush has one job: rush the quarterback. If he can continue to get into the backfield, he can really help this defense's chances of keeping the team in games when the offense can't get going. There will be a lot of pressure on the defense, in that sense.

Kurtis Drummond has a big responsibility as the free safety. Michigan State only has a certain number of big plays they can give up before it deflates the team as a whole. Drummond's job is to keep those plays in check. He is also very good in deep coverage. He does a fine job of tracking the ball in the air.

## **Iowa Hawkeyes:**

Iowa took yet another stumble in 2012, going 4-8 (2-6) and, perhaps worst of all, not really seeing any hope of life for the 2013 season. It's a dead time for Kirk Ferentz and his Hawkeyes. We were expecting veteran quarterback James Vandenberg to have a strong season, but he was never able to get anything going. And there wasn't a real threat on the outside for the Hawkeyes. It was a rather dull season offensively for Iowa.

Defensively, the woes came in bunches, as Iowa gave up 22.9 points per game. Any team with a decent quarterback and/or running back basically had their way with the Hawkeyes. All in all, it was a season they would love to forget in Iowa City.

**Two offensive players to watch:** RB Mark Weisman and WR Kevonte Martin-Manley

Mark Weisman was the single bright spot for the Iowa offense last season. He came onto the scene early and showed a lot of potential. Although he declined heavily in the latter half of the season, he showed what he's capable of—nearly 900 yards on the ground and eight touchdowns. He'll have to be a consistent back to give the Hawkeyes a chance in games.

Martin-Manley returns as the team's leading receiver, and he'll have to make his presence felt on the outside, in order to gain the respect of the secondary. He has the ability; it's just a matter of getting someone who can deliver the ball to him.

**Two defensive players to watch:** LB James Morris and DE Dominic Alvis

James Morris is expected to be the leader of this Hawkeye defense, and I'm excited to see how he commands his troops because Iowa did a terrible job at stopping the run last year. That's where Morris will be huge. He'll have to be diagnosing the play before the snap to give his guys the best shot at containing a good running back.

Sticking to the running game, Dominic Alvis needs to be the force up front. He's a returning starter from last season, so he's now very familiar with the schemes of opposing offenses. Familiarity will go far for these experienced Hawkeyes, which should ultimately lead to a much improved defense.

## **Minnesota Golden Gophers:**

Minnesota had a disaster of a year in 2012. Still trying to get the Jerry Kill ship going, the Gophers only won two conference games, did not stand out in any facet of the game, and did not provide a whole lot of hope for 2013. Notice: I did not say "...did not provide ANY hope..." because quarterback Philip Nelson was a bright spot for this

offense in the second half of the season. Only a sophomore now, they'll need him to step up big for the Gophers week after week.

On defense, it was actually the exact opposite. Minnesota did a fabulous job of stopping the run and pass. They just had trouble doing it at the same time.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Philip Nelson and OT Ed Olson

Philip Nelson is the immediate future of Golden Gopher football. Fans, if you're reading this, please realize you should put your faith in one person and one person only: Philip Nelson. I know he's still young and has a lot to prove, but the kid is a competitor, and I think this situation will bring out the best in him. I'm very eager to see him play.

Up front, Ed Olson will be a huge reason Philip Nelson has success. He holds down the fort at offensive tackle, and he needs to anchor that protection for Nelson. Otherwise, it could be a very, very long year for Minnesota.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DT Ra'Shede Hageman and CB Derrick Wells

Senior Ra'Shede Hageman is likely headed towards All-Big Ten 1<sup>st</sup> team nomination. It took him a while, but he's finally figured out how to bring all his size and skill together to create one, very good defensive tackle. Last season, Hageman recorded 35 tackles and six sacks, numbers that will likely be improved in 2013.

Derrick Wells is moving from his comfort zone at safety to the corner position, all in an effort to replace Troy Stoudermire and Michael Carter. His coverage skills will need to improve, but I love what I see from a tackling and tracking standpoint. I think he'll be a stronger corner than he was a safety.

**Ohio State Buckeyes:**

A year removed from a perfect season, the Ohio State Buckeyes have set the bar extremely high for 2013.

Realistically, shooting for two perfect seasons in back-to-back fashion is a bit foolish. But what if this Buckeye team can do it? Led by quarterback Braxton Miller, Ohio State has a lethal offensive attack, both on the ground and through the air—credit to Miller for really improving his passing skills.



Although the defense only returns four starters from a good (at best) defense, they'll still be very talented on that side of the ball. That unit is young and athletic, characteristics you can easily expect from an Urban Meyer team.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Braxton Miller and RB Carlos Hyde

Going into last season, we weren't exactly sure what to expect from Braxton Miller. We knew he could run, but beyond that, there were a lot of question marks for the electric quarterback. He spent the 2012 season not just answering those questions, but solidifying his status as one of the best in the nation. He returns with his key threats surrounding him, and I really don't see a defense in the Big Ten that will be capable of stopping Miller.

Carlos Hyde is a returning starter at running back who came so close to eclipsing 1,000 yards last year. His biggest contribution to this team will be proving himself as a reliable back. Because the better he does, the less Braxton Miller's legs have to be depended upon. And that will mean a great deal for injury prevention.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DT Michael Bennett and CB Bradley Roby

Last year, the Buckeyes didn't necessarily excel in either run defense or pass defense. There's room for improvement in both. Michael Bennett is a returning starter up front, and he will need to be the key to stopping the run this season. We know there are some question marks up front for the Buckeyes, which means he has to be a solid figure on the line.

Bradley Roby was considering the NFL but wisely chose to stay at Ohio State. He won't tower over anyone, but his coverage skills will be needed in order to keep opposing passing attacks at bay.

## **Penn State Nittany Lions:**

Things are obviously a mess in Happy Valley, right? The University gave Head Coach Bill O'Brien a hefty pay raise to keep him at the college level, and there are some large question marks all over the place for Penn State on the field.

Defensive coordinator Ted Roof left for Georgia Tech, but this is a defense that returns six starters from a squad that did a fantastic job of keeping opposing teams out of the endzone. So there are a lot of mixed emotions about this Penn State football team, but if the offense can get going, this will be a team to watch.

**Two offensive players to watch:** WR Allen Robinson and RB Zach Zwinak





Allen Robinson returns as the Nittany Lion's leading receiver—77 receptions, 1,018 yards, 11 touchdowns—and needs to be a reliable outlet for whoever comes in as quarterback. There are two, main options for quarterback, and Robinson has to be that guy they can look to in any situation.

Zach Zwinak hit exactly 1,000 yards last season, and he'll need to do even more in 2013 to help out the shaky quarterback situation. He'll need to develop more endurance and pound out more yards. I'm expecting Zwinak to have a big-time season and really put the Penn State offense on his back.

#### **Two defensive players to watch:** LB Glenn Carson and DT Deion Barnes

Glenn Carson returns as one of the few defensive players with experience. At the linebacker position, he'll be in charge of quarterbacking the rest of the defense. Bill O'Brien's main concern on defense is stopping the run, so I'm looking for Carson to be put in a little more aggressive role with this scheme.

Deion Barnes is one of the defensive linemen being asked to step in and try to fill in for losses. Barnes certainly has the potential with his size and strength, but putting it all together on the field will be a completely different challenge.

#### **Wisconsin Badgers:**

The Wisconsin Badgers found themselves in a very unique situation last season. Even though they finished third in the Leaders Division, the two teams above them—Penn State and Ohio State—were both ineligible for post season play. So Wisconsin made an appearance in the Big Ten Championship, destroyed Nebraska, then went on to represent the Big Ten in the Rose Bowl. The biggest reason for that was the run game, led by running backs Montee Ball and James White. Unfortunately for Badger fans, Ball is now gone, and there isn't a whole lot of stability at quarterback.

#### **Two offensive players to watch:** RB James White and TE Jacob Pedersen

James White will now take the full load of the running game for Wisconsin, and I'm really excited to see the numbers he'll be putting up. It's amazing what he was able to

do while sharing the burden, but this 2013 season could be a huge one for White. And that will really benefit the Wisconsin offense with that quarterback situation.

Jacob Pedersen is the star of this offense. He's very versatile at the tight end position; he's a capable run blocker with good size, and he can also make big plays with his hands, pending a decent throw. He'll be a big play threat for the Badgers, which is unique for a tight end.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DE David Gilbert and LB Chris Borland

I really could have picked any of the big boys on the defensive line, but I'm thinking David Gilbert will have the most impact down there. He's an incredible pass rusher, disrupting many quarterbacks and has great closing speed.

Chris Borland was considering going to the NFL but decided to stick back with Wisconsin. And he'll now be the star on this Badger defense. It'll be fun to watch how he commands such a talented defense and to see his skill on display.

## **Purdue Boilermakers:**

The big news for Purdue fans is the firing of head coach Danny Hope. He really isn't a bad coach, but the athletic department wants to start seeing results, something Hope wasn't doing.

Purdue finished last season with a record of 6-7, losing to Oklahoma State in the Heart Of Dallas Bowl. Purdue spent the 2012 season relying on the arms of Robert Marve and Caleb TerBush, but both are now gone to the NFL. That leaves an open spot at quarterback for new offensive coordinator, John Shoop, but he has plenty of options heading into the season.

Defensively, Purdue has a lot of work to do. They gave up over 30 points per game in 2012 and had a terrible time trying to stop both the run and pass on a consistent basis.

**Two offensive players to watch:** RB Akeem Hunt and WR Dolapo Mccarthy

Akeem Hunt will be such a vital piece to this offense in 2013. Last season, he only rushed for 225 yards and two touchdowns, but there is a load of inexperience behind him now, and he'll need to step up in that running back spot. Hunt has been plagued with injury in the past, so staying healthy will be just as important as anything else.

Dolapo Maccarthy is a wide receiver who will fit perfectly in this new pro-style offense that John Shoop is trying to transition into. He has a big body at 6'4", 220 pounds, and

he has experience as a junior. Look for McCarthy to really break out and be the core of this receivers group.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DE Ryan Russell and CB Ricardo Allen

Ryan Russell will not be able to single-handedly replace Kawann Short on the defensive line, but he'll have to be the new anchor of the front. With 37 tackles and four sacks a year ago, Russell has a lot of talent to put on display, and he'll definitely be battling for an All-Conference spot by the end of the season.

Ricardo Allen will probably be the star of this defense. He's a senior with a lot of experience, and he's a big reason teams had troubles through the air against Purdue last year. The biggest issue for Allen and the rest of the secondary will be consistency.

**Indiana Hoosiers:**

It's odd when you look at the Hoosiers in 2012 because they actually featured a very strong offense. The season's starting quarterback, Tre Robinson, broke his leg in the second game of the season. However, backup Cameron Coffman stepped in and led the Hoosiers to big numbers on the scoreboard. It was the defense that absolutely killed Indiana. Consider this: Indiana scored 28.9 points per game and finished the season 4-8.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Tre Robinson and RB Stephen Houston

Tre Robinson returns as a very underrated player in this conference. He's a big-time, dual-threat quarterback who has the ability to take apart any defense in the Big Ten. Yes, I believe he's that good. I'm ecstatic to see how he performs this year. Although he is coming off a serious injury, I don't believe that will affect him this season.

Stephen Houston is not supposed to be a big part of this offense. And that's okay. Everything runs through Robinson, as it



should. But if Houston can take advantage of his opportunities and force opposing teams to respect the run, which could open up some huge chances for Tre Robinson to do some serious damage.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DE Bobby Richardson and LB David Cooper

Bobby Richardson will be one of three defensive linemen who are trying to make up for the losses of guys like Larry Black and Adam Replogle. He only played in nine games last season, but at 6'3", 275 pounds, he has the size and strength needed on the front line to stop the run, something Indiana could not do last season.

David Cooper will be the quarterback of this defense. Coming out of Junior College in 2011, he put up huge numbers for the Hoosiers last season, and they'll be expecting the same type of production from him again this season.

## **Illinois Fighting Illini:**

The Fighting Illini would probably like to pretend that 2012 did not happen. Finishing the season 2-10 and losing every conference game, it was just plain ugly for Illinois.

Quarterback Nathan Scheelhaase was not able to live up to expectations—1,361 yards on the season—and there was no one behind him to step up when Scheelhaase couldn't get it done. On defense, it was just as ugly. The Illini gave up 32.1 points per game and gave up just a hair under 200 yards for both passing and rushing. In major defensive statistics, Illinois did not rank better than sixth in the conference for any of them.

**Two offensive players to watch:** RB Donovan Young and WR Ryan Lankford

Donovan Young has to become a more reliable back this year. There are no guarantees at the quarterback position for the Illini, so Young needs to be that other option. Last season, he finished with 571 yards on 131 attempts. In order for Illinois to take some steps forward with this offense, I think Young will have to consistently get to the century mark on 20 to 30 attempts per game.

Ryan Lankford returns as the leading receiver for Illinois. In 2012, Lankford racked up 469 yards and five touchdowns. He's the best receiver in the bunch, and he'll have to be a reliable target for Nathan Scheelhaase this season. As you know, when a quarterback can put all his trust in a receiver, things start looking up.

**Two defensive players to watch:** LB Mason Monheim and LB Jonathan Brown

Mason Monheim led the Illini in tackles last year with 86 of them. He's the catalyst of the defense, and I'm expecting the same kind of production of out him this season. He's a quick linebacker with good size and closing speed. I love the way he plays. This is a kid that could help the defense start to make a turn for the better.

Jonathan Brown returns as the Illini's leading sacker from 2012. He's very quick in shooting the gap and he has a relentless attitude when he gets in the backfield. His presence will be huge for Illinois.

# SEC PREVIEW:

**By Steve Shoup:**

## **1. Alabama Crimson Tide:**

Last year, the Crimson Tide won their 3rd National Title in four years with a 42-14 win over Notre Dame in the National Championship game. They rolled through the season and were only really challenged in three games all year. At LSU, Alabama barely squeaked out a victory, the next week though they faced their biggest surprise as conference newcomer Texas A&M upset them at home.

Later in the SEC Championship game Alabama faced their third biggest test against Georgia, in a game which was essentially for a National Title spot. The Bulldogs played the Tide well for the first three quarters, but Alabama's rushing attack proved to be too much for Georgia.

This year despite a number of player losses to the NFL, Alabama is still considered the cream of the crop and a favorite to go back to the Title game. They once again will be tested by Texas A&M and LSU, and could very well have a rematch with Georgia in the SEC Title game.

The biggest challenge will likely be Texas A&M, as that game is on the road and the 2nd week of the season. The Tide should once again have a very capable passing attack, while possessing one of the most potent rushing attacks in college football. Defensively Alabama should once again be one of the top units after finishing 1st in the country in scoring defense.



**Two Offensive Players to watch:** QB A.J. McCarron and RB T.J. Yeldon

McCarron is back for his senior year, and could take on an even bigger role in this offense. He was highly efficient last season, and should exceed 3,000 yards passing



this season. With Eddie Lacy moved on to the NFL, Yeldon is now the premier back at Alabama. Yeldon could enter into the Heisman discussion and is poised to have a big year for the Crimson Tide.

**Two Defensive Players to watch:** LB C.J. Mosley and S Haha Clinton-Dix

Mosley is one of the best linebackers in the country, showing great range both in run defense and pass coverage. Clinton-Dix is a high upside safety and has the potential to be as good as Mark Barron was.

## **2. Texas A&M Aggies:**

The Aggies may have been the newcomers to the SEC, but they quickly showed they belonged. They finished 11-2, with their only losses coming against Florida and LSU, and they handed the National Champion Alabama Crimson Tide their only loss of the season. Even in those two losses, the Aggies gained quite a bit of respect as they led both of those games for a while and were never out of them, despite the fact that both the Gators and Tigers were powerhouse teams.

Head Coach Kevin Sumlin, brought his spread offense from Houston to Texas A&M and with Heisman winner Johnny Manziel at quarterback, they put the SEC on notice. Manziel was just a redshirt freshman last year, so with a year under his belt, he could actually improve his game this year.

The big question facing the Aggies is their defense. Last year it was a pretty impressive unit, but they lost a lot of key players on that side of the ball. If Texas A&M can get past the Tide in early September they should have smooth sailing until their 2nd to last game which is on the road against LSU. Though not as strong as Alabama, they do have legitimate National Title hopes, and will just need a few games to go their way.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Johnny Manziel and WR Mike Evans

Manziel was the first freshman to ever win the Heisman trophy and could look to improve upon his incredible 2012 season. Evans figures to be Manziel's go to receiver this year and should be among the nation's leaders in catches, yards and TD's.

**Two defensive players to watch:** LB Steven Jenkins and CB Deshaun Everett

Jenkins is a very talented linebacker, who should lead the Aggies in tackles. Everett is a good cover corner and has a knack for coming up with big plays.

### 3. Georgia Bulldogs:

For the 2nd straight year the Bulldogs made it to the SEC Title game, only to lose to a team that went on to the National Championship Game. The Bulldogs hung in with Alabama for quite a while, but even their impressive defense couldn't stop the Tide's rushing attack.

Georgia will have to replace a significant portion of their defense that moved on to the NFL, but they have recruited extremely well and are still expected to have a very strong defense. Offensively the Bulldogs return 10 starters and a number of key back-ups, including senior quarterback Aaron Murray and star running back Todd Gurley.

The Bulldogs are the early favorite in the Eastern division, and should be in the National Championship mix. To do so though, Georgia has to finish the job this year and win the SEC Title. And, to do that, the Bulldogs will need to get past a tough early schedule where they face Clemson (on the road), South Carolina and LSU. If they get through unscathed (or even just one loss), the rest of their schedule is favorable with the exception of Florida and possibly Vanderbilt.



**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Aaron Murray and RB Todd Gurley

Murray has improved every season and should be at the top of his game as a senior. Gurley burst onto the scene last year and could be even better this season as the featured back in Georgia's offense.

**Two defensive players to watch:** LB Jordan Jenkins and CB Damian Swann

Jenkins quickly showed himself as a star in the making last year, and should be Georgia's leading sack master this season. Swann is a good starting corner capable of matching up with most receivers one-on-one.

### 4. South Carolina Gamecocks:

The Gamecocks lost just two games last season, both on the road, to LSU and Florida. Other than that, they dominated their schedule, including wins over Vanderbilt, Georgia, Clemson and Michigan. The Gamecocks will once again be in the mix to win the

Eastern division, and possibly enter the National Championship discussion.

On offense they return dual threat quarterback Connor Shaw, who has been effective when he plays despite not putting up huge yardage numbers. Shaw had dealt with some injury issues, and if that occurs again Dylan Thompson will take over at quarterback. Thompson beat Clemson in the final week of the season and came in late to help beat Michigan in the Outback Bowl game. Behind the quarterback will be a new running back as South Carolina lost their top two backs from a year ago. Taking over for them is the highly touted Mike Davis, who figures to play a prominent role in this offense.

South Carolina's offense though is not the reason why some believe they could win the SEC. The Gamecocks defense returns just 5 starters, but they are feared because they return DE Jadeveon Clowney, perhaps the most talented player in the country. Clowney is a dominating pass rusher and run defender, and can dictate the game to the opposing offense. Most teams will have to double and triple team Clowney which should free up the rest of the defense.

The Gamecocks schedule features two tough non-conference games versus North Carolina and Clemson, to start and end their season respectively. In conference though, they luck out considerably as they avoid Alabama, Texas A&M, LSU and Ole Miss from the Western Division. If they can knock off Georgia on the road early on, they could have a real chance to win the East as Vanderbilt, Mississippi State and Florida are all at home.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Connor Shaw and RB Mike Davis

Shaw isn't as talented as some of the quarterbacks in this conference, but he's still effective. He isn't a great thrower, but he gets the job done and is pretty accurate. Davis has big shoes to fill, but he also has the talent and potential to do that. The Gamecocks are desperate for a consistent rushing threat and Davis should be the workhorse.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DE Jadeveon Clowney and CB Victor Hampton

Clowney is simply an incredible player and should lead the nation in both sacks and tackles for a loss, despite being double teamed for most of the year. Hampton has a lot of potential and has flashed the ability of a star corner. This could be the year it comes together for him.

## **5. Florida Gators:**

The Gators were 11-1 last year in the regular season after a schedule that saw them having to face Texas A&M and LSU from the West and Florida State in their annual rivalry game. Their only loss was to Georgia, and it was the only thing preventing them

from an SEC Title Game appearance and the chance to play for a spot in the National Title game.

Florida represented the SEC in the Sugar Bowl where they were beaten by the Louisville Cardinals quite handily. While Florida certainly earned the prestige of their ranking, they were a team that didn't wow you on the field. Their rushing attack did finish 39th in the country, but their passing attack was a woeful 118th, and their scoring finished 78th. Where they won games was with their impressive defense, which finished 5th in the nation.

Florida lost quite a bit of talent to the NFL and will need players on both sides of the ball to step up this season for them to have a chance to compete for a title. The Gators do have a favorable schedule to start the year, but their final seven games include matchups against LSU, Georgia, Vanderbilt, South Carolina and Florida State to close out the year. It's going to be a rough road, but it is doable if the offense finally holds up their end of the bargain.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Jeff Driskel and RB Matt Jones

Driskel was a top quarterback recruit, but has yet to show that he can be a star quarterback. This could be the year though that he finally puts it all together. Jones figures to be the top back and workhorse of this offense. He should be a safe bet for 1,000 plus yards and will get plenty of touchdown opportunities.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DL Dominique Easley and CB Loucheiz Purifoy

Easley can play both end and tackle and has the potential to be a dominant defender. Purifoy is one of the best corners in nation and figures to have an All-American caliber season.

## **6. LSU Tigers:**

The Tigers National Title dreams were dashed last year with losses to Florida and Alabama in the regular season. They did win games against three other ranked opponents as well as a talented Ole Miss team, but it wasn't enough for LSU.

The Tigers offense sputtered for much of the year and even though their record looked strong, most weeks LSU didn't look like a championship caliber team. Auburn and Arkansas were two of the worst teams in the conference last year, but LSU only beat them by a combined 9 points.

The Tigers defense carried them last season, but they return only 5 starters and even lost a couple key back-ups. The offense led by highly touted QB Zach Mettenberger needs to step up and do their part if LSU is to make a run at a BCS Bowl.

With Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Texas A&M on their schedule, the Tigers face four of the top 5 SEC teams. To compete for a serious bowl opportunity, they will need to at least split those games. Their non-conference schedule is fairly easy and shouldn't give the Tigers any problems. It could be a long tough road this year, but LSU is a team that you never want to count out.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Zach Mettenberger and WR Odell Beckham



Mettenberger was a top quarterback recruit, but struggled much of last season. New offensive coordinator Cam Cameron could be the catalyst he needs to reach his potential. Beckham is another elite recruit who has yet to match his hype, but he should improve this year, particularly if LSU throws the ball more.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DT Anthony Johnson and LB Lamin Barrow

Johnson is one of the premier defensive tackles in the country and will be asked to anchor this young line. Barrow was overshadowed by Kevin Minter last season, but now that he is in the spotlight, people will begin to notice just how good he really is.

## 7. Mississippi Rebels:

Ole Miss won just 3 conference games last year, but that is more than the Rebels won in the previous two years combined. Though they lost to most of the powerhouses of the SEC, they for the most part played them in some really close games. With a year under their belt this young team should be on the rise.

After having perhaps the best recruiting class in the SEC come in this year, Mississippi figures to rely on a number of highly touted freshmen to round out this roster. If those players come close to their level of potential, this is a team that could surprise this year.

Head Coach Hugh Freeze has a wide open attacking offense that gave many SEC defenses fits last year. On defense, top recruit DE Robert Nkemdiche figures to give the pass rush a significant jolt this season. The Rebels schedule is far from easy, but they

could be capable of winning 8 or 9 games in the regular season.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Bo Wallace and WR Donte Moncrief

Wallace did pretty well in his first year as a starter. Now with a year under his belt and better weapons and protection, he is expected to take the next step. Moncrief had nearly 1,000 yards receiving and caught 10 TD's last season and should continue to develop into a quality receiver this year.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DE Robert Nkemdiche and LB Denzel Nkemdiche

Robert Nkemdiche was the premier recruit this year, and figures to make an instant impact on the Rebels defensive line. His older brother Denzel, wasn't as elite of a recruit, but has developed into one of the Rebels best defenders, and led the team in tackles last year.

## **8. Vanderbilt Commodores:**

After years of being the doormat of the SEC, Vanderbilt has built up a nice program. They won 9 games last season, their highest win total since 1915, and had a winning record in the SEC.

Their defense was 15th in the nation last year in points allowed, a feat that is even more impressive considering the quality of offenses they face. They return 6 defensive starters and the defense figures to once again carry this team and be one of the stronger units in the conference (which is saying something).

Offense is another issue. The Commodores were a solid 56th in scoring last year, but they are losing both their starting quarterback and top running back. Seven other starters return including star receiver Jordan Matthews.

Vanderbilt's non-conference schedule is easy, but they will have to face divisional opponents Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, while getting Texas A&M and Ole Miss from the West. Nine wins could be a stretch for them this season, but eight is doable.

**Two offensive players to watch:** WR Jordan Matthews and QB Austyn Carta-Samuels

Matthews is one of the premier receivers in the country, and was last year as well despite playing on the 81<sup>st</sup> ranked passing offense. Carta-Samuels is a dual threat quarterback who figures to win the job this year. If he can play up to his potential, the Commodores shouldn't see much of a drop-off offensively.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DE Caleb Azubike and CB Andre Hal

The Commodores have a number of impressive pass rushers, but Azubike may be the most talented of the group and should lead the team in sacks this year. Hal is a very talented cornerback and could get some All-Conference and All-American consideration.

## **9. Mississippi State Bulldogs**

Head Coach Dan Mullen has really turned around the Bulldogs program, but the question is, where do they go from here? They have beaten up on the lower teams and their non-conference opponents, but struggle against ranked SEC opponents (and other quality teams). On top of that they have lost a number of key players the last two years, including just about their entire receiving corps and the Jim Thorpe Award winner, CB Johnthan Banks this past season.

In state rival Ole Miss seemed to pass them by last season, and it could be tough for Mississippi State to crack the top eight of the SEC this year. The Bulldogs lost five of their final six games last season and could be headed to another late season collapse as they face South Carolina and Texas A&M on the road and Alabama and Ole Miss at home over the final five weeks.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Tyler Russell and RB LaDarius Perkins

Russell really had a nice all-around year last season, This time though, he'll have to succeed with a completely new set of receivers and tight ends. Perkins was a 1,000 yard rusher last year and could have an expanded role this season while the passing game works to get on the same page.

**Two defensive players to watch:** LB Benardrick McKinney and DL Denico Autry

McKinney, as a freshman last year recorded over 100 tackles. With a year under his belt he could be in line for a big season. Autry had 4 sacks and 9.5 tackles for a loss last season, and is expected to be a featured pass rusher this year.

## **10. Tennessee Volunteers**

The Volunteers were once a powerhouse in the SEC, but have fallen on hard times in recent years. They are hoping that changes now with the addition of former Cincinnati Head Coach Butch Jones leading the team.

Jones has his work cut out for him as the Volunteers lost their top 3 receivers and star quarterback to the NFL. Jones does return one of the premier offensive lines in college football (and that is with the loss of Dallas Thomas), but not much else on offense. The





team figures to be pretty run focused early on, but they will need more out of runners Rajion Neal and Marlin Lane, especially since they won't have the explosive passing attack to back them up.

Defensively, Tennessee was the worst in the SEC last year in points allowed. They do bring back All-American LB A.J. Johnson to lead the team. Despite pulling Alabama from the West, their schedule isn't too bad, as Auburn, Kentucky, Missouri are all potential wins, and in-state rival Vanderbilt is at home this year. Two to three wins is possible in conference play, but it is likely going to be a rough year.

**Two offensive players to watch:** OT Antonio Richardson and RB Marlin Lane

Richardson is one of the premier offensive linemen in the country and should help make the lives of all the skill position guys that much easier. Lane has big play potential, but it is just a matter of whether he is willing to put in the work to be a feature back.

**Two defensive players to watch:** LB A.J. Johnson and DT Daniel McCullers

Johnson led all SEC players in tackles last year and is a star in the making on defense. McCullers is a nasty run stopper in the middle of Tennessee's defense and is expected to take the next step this year to be an every down force.

## 11. Auburn Tigers

Gus Malzahn is one of the most innovative offensive minds in college football and now he is the Tigers head coach. Auburn's greatest success in recent years came with Malzahn as the offensive coordinator (2009-2011).

While much of the hype surrounds Auburn's 2010 National Championship season, Malzahn's offenses have been productive wherever he's coached in college football. Though much of the credit for the National Championship is given to quarterback Cam Newton, it should be remembered that Malzahn got the most out of him, and that there wasn't a ton of additional talent on that team.

Malzhan won't have that much to work with to start at Auburn this time, but his offensive innovation should help keep the Tigers from being the lowest scoring team in conference play this year. Junior running back Tre Mason is a 1,000 yard back who is returning and he should be the focal point of the offense. Auburn's schedule is pretty rough this year, including finishing the year back-to-back versus Georgia and Alabama, but they could find a way to steal a couple of wins.

**Two offensive players to watch:** RB Tre Mason and QB Kiehl Frazier

Mason is the returning star of the offense and should see quite a few carries this season. He should be the work-horse back and the offense may even flow through him to start. Frazier was highly recruited (by Malzahn) and while he struggled last year, he could be in line for a big bounce back year with Malzahn at the helm.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DE Carl Lawson and DE Dee Ford

Lawson was the Tigers biggest recruit this year and one of the top three defensive ends in the country. He's expected to start early and make a big impact as a freshman. Starting opposite him will be returning sack leader Dee Ford. Ford should have more help on defense this year and will likely make a bigger impact.

## 12. Missouri Tigers

The Tigers first year in the SEC didn't quite go as planned. Their junior quarterback James Franklin was constantly banged up and saw his numbers plummet last year. That led them to just a pair of conference wins, and had them scoring the 4th fewest points in the conference. To make matters worse, their defense, which wasn't strong to begin with, lost a couple of their top players, leaving them pretty thin on that side of the ball.

The Tigers are hoping to be healthier this year as both Franklin and running back Henry Josey could be back and 100%. That would be a big boost to their offense, which has a number of promising playmakers on the outside.

Their schedule is fairly favorable as they have four easy non-conference games to get their feet wet before the grueling SEC schedule kicks in. They do avoid Alabama and LSU this year, but unfortunately they didn't get either of Auburn or Arkansas. It could be tough for them to win more than two games in conference, but they should be at least more competitive this year.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB James Franklin and WR Dorial Green-Beckham

Franklin had a pretty impressive 2011 year as a first year starting dual threat

quarterback, but saw his production slip last year. If he can exceed his 2011 year, the Tigers could have something special on offense. Green-Beckham is one of the top receiving recruits in recent years and could be in line for a breakout sophomore season.

**Two defensive players to watch:** CB E.J. Gaines and LB Andrew Wilson

Gaines is the best returning member of the Tigers secondary and held his own versus some of the SEC's best. Wilson has led the team in tackles each of the last two years and is likely to make it three this season.

### **13. Kentucky Wildcats:**

The Wildcats finished 0-8 in the conference last year, managed just 89 points in conference play and have to replace their best player in guard Larry Warford. Fortunately there is some good news for Kentucky fans as well. New coach Mark Stoops has assembled an impressive staff and had one of the strongest recruiting classes that they've had in the 20 years.

In addition the Wildcats were a young team last year and should be a better all-around team with a year of experience. One of the most interesting things with Kentucky this year is the implementation of a spread passing attack. After managing just 2,100 yards and 13 TD's last year, the Wildcats passing offense needed an overhaul and this could be a good fit for them. Their quarterback battle is up in the air, but junior Maxwell Smith could be an interesting option. He had over 950 yards and 8 TD's through the first 3 games of the season, before a foot injury caused him to miss the rest of the year. He could fare well in a wide open passing attack and give a nice boost to their offense.

Though Kentucky's overall schedule is pretty difficult, they do face two of the weaker SEC teams (Missouri and Tennessee) at home, giving them a nice chance to pick up a couple wins.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Maxwell Smith and RB Raymond Sanders

Smith has some really nice promise and could be a gunslinger in this new offense. Sanders averaged 5.35 yards per carry last year and could benefit with a more open passing attack that will put less of the opponent's defensive focus on the ground game.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DE Alvin Dupree and DE Za'Darius Smith

Dupree is the Wildcats leading sacker from a year ago and should do better now that he's returned to his more natural defensive end position. Playing opposite Dupree is JUCO transfer Za'Darius Smith who was highly sought after this past season and is expected to be strong pass rusher for the Wildcats.

## 14. Arkansas Razorbacks:

The good news for the Razorbacks is they landed one of the premier college football coaches in Wisconsin's Brett Bielema to get them back to the top of the SEC. Unfortunately that is about the only good news to report for Arkansas as they are poised to have a long year.

Bielema doesn't inherit much to work with as the Razorbacks lost their starting quarterback, top two running backs, top receiver, tight end and offensive lineman. And that is from the side of the ball that was actually decent last year.

To make matters worse Arkansas has a ridiculously tough SEC schedule this year including a four-game stretch in September and October, against Texas A&M, Florida, South Carolina and Alabama. That doesn't even take into account their games against Ole Miss, Mississippi State and LSU which should all be far superior teams to Arkansas. It will be tough for the Razorbacks to win more than one SEC game, and even that could be a stretch.

**Two offensive players to watch:** QB Brandon Allen and RB Jonathan Williams



Allen and Williams were both highly touted recruits who are now getting their first real chance to start. Both have a lot of promise and upside, both for this season and going forward. Between the two, Williams is probably a safer bet to produce given how much Bielema likes to run the football.

**Two defensive players to watch:** DE Chris Smith and DE Trey Flowers

Smith and Flowers were the Razorbacks top two sack leaders a year ago, combining for 15.5. Both should improve this year and could combine for over 20 sacks this season if they stay healthy.



2013 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PRESEASON GUIDE

# **STEVE'S TOP 25 TEAM PREVIEWS**

## **STEVE'S PRESEASON TOP 25 RANKING:**

1. Alabama
2. Ohio State
3. Texas A&M
4. Oregon
5. Georgia
6. Stanford
7. South Carolina
8. Clemson
9. Florida
10. Florida State
11. Boise State
12. Louisville
13. Notre Dame
14. Texas
15. Michigan
16. Oklahoma State
17. LSU
18. Nebraska

19. TCU
20. Wisconsin
21. Oregon State
22. Mississippi
23. Northwestern
24. Fresno State
25. Oklahoma

You'll find in-depth previews for each of Steve's Top 25 teams written by Steve Shoup and our guest writers Alan Zlotorzynski, Tyler Fenwick, Charlie Cason and Derrick Battle.



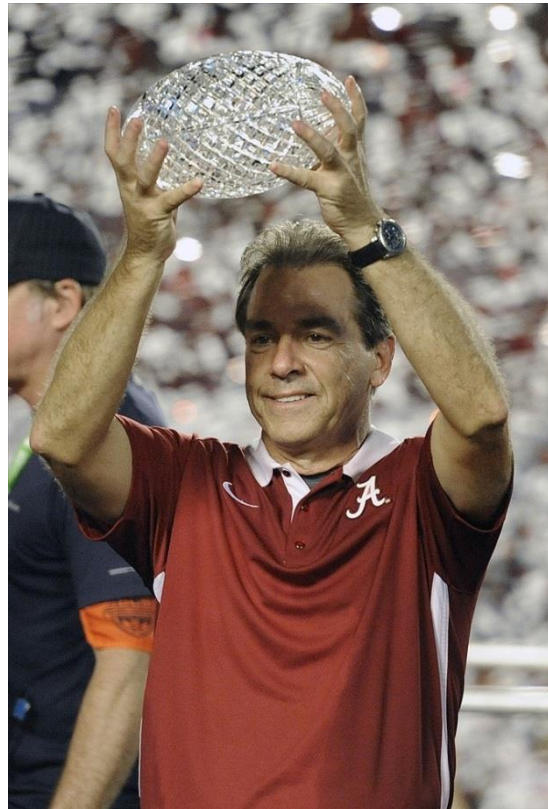
# #1 – ALABAMA:

By Alan Zlotorzynski:

## 2012 SEASON RECAP:

As they have done every season since Nick Saban strode into town, Alabama entered 2012 as one of the favorites to win the SEC Championship---But having to replace six starters on defense would be tough to overcome in the nation's toughest conference. Saban had to be hoping for a 10-win season, pointing towards this season (2013) to win the National Championship.

Any thoughts that Alabama was going to be a very good--- but not a great SEC team was quickly thrown out the window by halftime of their first game. Facing then Heisman Trophy Candidate Denard Robinson and the No.8 ranked Michigan Wolverines, the Crimson Tide led 31-7 after 30 minutes and won 41-14, with the reserves playing much of the game's final quarter.



Yep---from then on, everyone knew the Tide were going to roll-- and roll they did. Saban wasn't rebuilding, he was simply reloading for a run that saw Alabama shutout it's next two opponents and by the time the schedule hit October 1, the Crimson Tide were in the driver's seat of the SEC once again. Alabama was 5-0 and outscored their opponents 201-35.

The Tide rolled through October with almost as much ease as they did September. They were 3-0 during the month and outscored their opponents 124-37. Heading into their tough November slate, Alabama was 8-0 and had a point differential of plus 253.

November is when the BCS picture is formed and Alabama played a crucial role in victory and in defeat in helping decide how the final portrait would look. During a span of 28-days (Nov 3- Dec 1), the Tide was involved in the three best games of the season against LSU, Texas A&M and Georgia.

During all three, the Tide managed to lose the turnover battle -6, but they were able to overcome two of the three with a veteran quarterback, a future NFL offensive line and a physical, downhill running game.

Against LSU, Alabama scored with 51 seconds left to win in the Bayou. Trailing by three on the final drive, RB T.J. Yeldon took a screen pass 28 yards to the end zone to put Alabama up for good in a rematch of 2011 BCS title game.

The following week at home versus Johnny Football and Texas A&M, the Tide's defense simply did not have answer for Heisman Trophy winner Johnny Manziel but the Tide still outgained the Aggies and had a chance to win at the end. AJ McCarron threw a red zone interception on the goal line that thwarted an Alabama go-ahead score and then the Tide's defense jumped offside in final minute, which allowed Texas A&M to run out clock.

The loss to the Aggies did nothing to hurt Alabama's chances, after all, how many teams in the country would have been 2-0 after playing LSU and Texas A&M in consecutive weeks and in November. The upset did vault quarterback Johnny Manziel to the front of the Heisman race and the Aggies to the Cotton Bowl, where Manziel shined once again.

As for the Crimson Tide, they would go on to play the Georgia Bulldogs in the SEC Title game after finishing the regular season with two straight 49-0 shutouts. Despite dominating the Dawgs in the SEC title game, Alabama outrushed Georgia 350-113 and outgained them in the contest 512-394, the Bulldogs, through Alabama mistakes and Georgia good will, led by 11 points late in the third quarter.

That is when Alabama picked it up and turned on the crimson jets. They outscored Georgia 28-7 during the final 19 minutes of the game to move onto the BCS Title game with a 32-28 victory. Nevertheless, Georgia still had a chance to win. WR Chris Conley came up a few yards short with Georgia driving down the field in the final seconds trailing by four points. Conley caught a deflected pass at the Alabama 5, fell down and could only watch as the Bulldogs' championship hopes expired.

Alabama moved onto face Notre Dame in the BCS Championship and jumped out to a 35-0 lead over Notre Dame, cruising to a 42-14 win. Alabama was the first team to win back-to-back BCS National Championships and the first team in the Poll era (since 1936) to win 10 national championships – AP or Coaches' poll. The Crimson Tide also joined Nebraska (1994-95, 1997) and Notre Dame (1946-47, 1949) as the only teams in the Poll era to win three national championships in a four-year span.

The Crimson Tide secured the SEC's seventh consecutive national title and nine of the 15 BCS championships. The only other times a conference has won three straight titles

were when the Big Ten won three straight from 1940 to 1942 and the SEC won three in a row from 1978 to 1980.

By the end of the season, the Alabama defense led the nation in total defense, scoring defense and rushing defense and ranked seventh in passing defense.

Offensively, the Alabama offense ranked 12th in scoring offense, 16th in rushing offense, 31st in total offense and 75th in passing offense. But those numbers do not tell the whole story. When you look only at game situations with the score within 28 points (eliminating blowout situations), Alabama ranked second in the FBS in yards per play behind the Oregon Ducks, and third in the nation in points per drive. The defense, in the same scoring situation, ranked second in yards per play and first in points per drive. Therefore, from an efficiency standpoint, the Alabama offense is on par with the Alabama defense.

As for individuals, Alabama's offensive MVP was quarterback AJ McCarron. He did not have the most explosive numbers in the country, but he did finish first in passing efficiency, finishing ahead of UGA's Aaron Murray. McCarron made crucial touchdown passes to TJ Yeldon against LSU and Amari Cooper against Georgia to seal both wins in the fourth quarter. He proved to be what Murray was not, a finisher. Yes, he benefited from a strong offensive line, emerging receivers and a nasty running game, but he is the clutch performer the team relied on when push came to shove.

The Eddie Lacy-TJ Yeldon combo picked up right where the Lacy-Trent Richardson combo left off. Lacy, rushed for 1,182 yards and 16 touchdowns, while Yeldon rushed for 1,000 yards and 11 touchdowns. The Richardson-Lacy combo combined for 28 touchdowns in '11.

On defense, linebacker CJ Mosley and defensive back Dee Milliner led the Tide. Milliner, Mosley and Jesse Williams all had great seasons in helping the Tide back to the promise land, but the defense did lack a dominant pass rusher. It was a team effort that allowed Defensive coordinator Kirby Smart to add to his already stellar resume as an assistant coach.

Several players were recognized for their individual accomplishments on the field. Starting center Barrett Jones won both the Rimington Trophy and the William V. Campbell Trophy, and was named as the Academic All-America of the Year; defensive coordinator Kirby Smart was named the 2012 AFCA FBS Assistant Coach of the Year.

In addition, five players were named to various All-America Teams with Jones and C. J. Mosley being consensus selections and Dee Milliner and G Chance Warmack being unanimous selections.

How good was Alabama in 2012, consider the following from the BCS National Championship game. The Crimson Tide shut down Notre Dame in the first half of the game and to put that in perspective, consider this stat---- Alabama scored four first-half touchdowns----Notre Dame ran four plays in Alabama territory in the first half.

Nick Saban's Alabama teams have not allowed a touchdown in the first half of their three BCS Championship appearances. And Oh By The Way: Notre Dame had not allowed a touchdown drive longer than 75 yards all season. It allowed four in the BCS championship game.

## **2013 SEASON OUTLOOK:**

### **OFFENSE:**

The 2013 college football season has the potential to highlight one of the greatest quarterback classes ever. Eight of the top 10 teams in last year's final AP Poll return their starting quarterbacks, and every conference except the Big 12 returns either their first- or second-team quarterbacks from last season.

Near the top of that list is senior QB AJ McCarron. McCarron was one of 15 quarterbacks who threw for at least 30 touchdown passes last season, and perhaps most impressively, he did so while throwing only three interceptions on 314 attempts. His touchdown-to-interception ratio (10 to 1) and his 175.3 pass efficiency both led the FBS.

McCarron will look to build off back-to-back national championships with a deep core of receivers that are young but talented. Rising sophomore Amari Cooper, with whom McCarron built a strong rapport toward the end of the season, leads the group. Of Cooper's 59 receptions, 27 came in the last five games of the year. Six of his 11 touchdown receptions also came during this span, including two in the National Championship game against Notre Dame.

Cooper will be joined by senior Kevin Norwood, the second-leading receiver last season, and redshirt freshman Chris Black, who was the 22nd overall prospect in the 2012 recruiting class according to the ESPN 150 and the second-rated wide receiver.

In addition to claiming offensive linemen Chance Warmack, D.J. Fluker and Barrett Jones, the NFL draft also took Eddie Lacy, Alabama's leading rusher last season. Alabama will look to replace Lacy with T.J. Yeldon, who rushed for more than 1,000 yards and 12 touchdowns as a freshman last season.

## **DEFENSE:**

Each year, Alabama loses key pieces of their defense to the NFL Draft. Just in the last two April's, the Tide have lost eight players to the NFL. In 2011, they lost four players before pick No.37 in the second round and this year, lost CB Dee Milliner, the ninth overall pick by the NY Jets, as well as ILB Nico Johnson and defensive ends Damion Square and Quinton Dial.

While that may hurt many teams, like SEC rival LSU this season---Nick Saban is the best coach and recruiter in college football. Saban will ensure there is not much of a drop off with players such as Jeoffrey Pagan, Brandon Ivory and LaMichael Fanning, who should perform as many expect. Senior Ed Stinson should be able to provide a more consistent pass rush for Bama in 2013.

C.J. Mosley decided to stay and try for the three-peat. He returns to lead a linebacking corps that loses just one contributor (Nico Johnson) from 2012. Replacing Johnson might just mean more snaps for Mosley, who earned team MVP honors in 2012 despite starting just 10 games. Junior Adrian Hubbard is the biggest threat to bring down the quarterback.

Alabama's secondary will be a mix of reliable veterans and promising youngsters. Eight players had starts in the 2012 season. Six of these eight players (John Fulton, Deion Belue, Ha Ha Clinton-Dix, Nick Perry, Geno Smith and Vinnie Sunseri) will return for the 2013 season. Another defensive back that did not start in 2012, but played in all 13 games, was Landon Collins, the top player in the state of Louisiana his senior year in high school.

While it is never easy to replace a player like Milliner, or any of the other NFL Draft picks, the Tide may be able to move forward without blinking an eye with this mix of veteran leadership and youth on the 2013 defense.

## **SCHEDULE:**

As if Alabama needs any help, the Crimson Tide will also look to capitalize on a favorable schedule. They have just four true road games and a neutral site game in the season opener against Virginia Tech. What are thought to be the Tide's two toughest matchups, at Texas A&M and home against LSU, each come after a bye week.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Opponent</b>	<b>Site</b>
<b>Aug. 31</b>	<b>Virginia Tech</b>	<b>Atlanta, Georgia</b>

**Sept. 14 \*at Texas A&M      College Station, Texas**

Sept. 28 \*Ole Miss      Bryant-Denny Stadium

Oct. 5    Georgia State      Bryant-Denny Stadium

Oct. 12   \*at Kentucky      Lexington, Kentucky

Oct. 19   \*Arkansas      Bryant-Denny Stadium

Oct. 26   \*Tennessee      Bryant-Denny Stadium

**Nov. 9    \*LSU                      Bryant-Denny Stadium**

Nov. 16   \*at Mississippi State   Starkville, Mississippi

Nov. 23   Chattanooga      Bryant-Denny Stadium

Nov. 30   \*at Auburn      Auburn, Alabama

\*SEC GAME

**(Key Games in Bold)**

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

With the above said, the SEC West was already one of the toughest divisions in all of college sports with Alabama, LSU and Texas A&M all expected to be contenders to play not just in Atlanta but Pasadena as well at the end of the season. But the additions of newcomers Gus Malzahn at Auburn and Bret Bielema at Arkansas ensure that the winner of the West will have to pass through an even more dangerous test of offensive and defensive styles on the way to an SEC and BCS Title berth.

Alabama will get past both Auburn and Arkansas but it will not be as easy as it was last year when the Tide rolled by a combined score of 101-0 against both teams. Losing to the Aggies this year will cost Alabama the right to play in Atlanta. However, I think they are simply too good to lose to Johnny Football two years in a row, even if the game is in College Station. Look for Saban to once again get the best of the Miles and his Tigers--- at Bryant-Denny Stadium this year.



## #2 – OHIO STATE:

By Tyler Fenwick:

### 2012 Recap:



Urban Meyer stepped onto the scene in 2012 with a very talented football team. Whether or not he could debut as the hero or Columbus remained a mystery. But Buckeye fans anticipated his arrival because of his track record with deadly offensive attacks. As we all know, Meyer would lead the Buckeyes to a perfect 12-0 in his first year. Unfortunately for the Buckeyes, NCAA sanctions ruled them ineligible for any postseason play. Without that, Ohio State would have been competing for national championship.

Ohio State didn't have a very challenging non-conference schedule last season, maybe besides California in week three. But other than that, it was smooth sailing for the Buckeyes. And heading into the conference season, we knew Braxton Miller had really improved in the passing game, which

was vital for that team to compete within the Big Ten. The biggest scare for Ohio State came in a home against a Purdue team that was 3-3. The Buckeyes needed a late drive, scoring and then converting the two point conversion, to tie the game with three seconds remaining. From there, they took care of it in overtime and walked away with a victory. But after that win, some people began doubting the Buckeyes and questioning whether they were serious or not.

The biggest win of the season came in the very last week against Michigan. Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson did have a pretty good game, but Braxton Miller and the Buckeyes proved to be too much, winning 26-21, capping off the perfect season.

The star of the 2012 team was, with no doubt, Braxton Miller. Miller went into that season with some unanswered questions about his throwing ability. Because everyone knew the kid could run. And he was way too electric to not play, so there was never really a question of if he would be Ohio State's guy. But Miller ended up spending the whole 2012 season making peoples' jaws drop. By the end of it, he eclipsed the 2,000 yard mark in passing and added an additional 1,271 yards on the ground, making him one of the most lethal quarterbacks in the nation. That's why I have him on my Heisman watch list for 2013.

Running back Carlos Hyde helped fuel the perfect season with 970 rushing yards on

185 attempts. He'll be returning as a senior in 2013, and he should be able to give the running game an even bigger boost, now that teams have to respect the Buckeyes through the air, too.

Leading the way for the Ohio State defense last season was defensive end John Simon. Simon led the Big Ten in sacks with nine and placed second in tackles for loss with 14. Unfortunately for Buckeye fans, Simon, along with the rest of the defensive line, is gone. That will be a major area of concern for the Buckeyes, heading into the season.

Cornerback Bradley Roby considered the NFL but wisely chose to stay behind. He'll return to the Buckeyes as one of—if not, the best—cornerbacks in the conference. Roby has had five interceptions in his career at Ohio State, and he recorded a career high 41 tackles last season.

## **2013 Outlook:**

The Buckeyes have a couple question marks for this 2013 team, including the defensive line and the efficiency of Braxton Miller through the air. But this is still a team that is expected to compete for a Big Ten title and possibly a national championship.

### **Offense:**

Braxton Miller is the face of this Ohio State team. And as Braxton goes, so do the Buckeyes. It's a lot of pressure on the junior, but that's just how it is. My expectations for Miller aren't too abnormal. There are two, main things I'm looking for this season. First, I want to see that he has become more efficient in the passing game. I know he's definitely developed that part of his game, but he could improve his completion percentage by another 6-8 percent, which would take it to about 65%. I'd say that's idea for a quarterback like Braxton Miller. Second, I'm looking for him to not run the ball so much this season. In 2011, Miller ran the ball 159 times. In 2012, that number was bumped up to 227. That isn't a number that Urban Meyer is looking to increase. At least I hope that's the case. Obviously, Braxton Miller's legs are huge for this offense. But it only takes on big hit, and, all the sudden, your team is looking for offensive production. I think getting that number back closer to what it was in 2011 would be very beneficial to Miller and, ultimately, this team.

Braxton Miller favored two wide receivers last year: Cory Brown and Devin Smith. Brown edged Smith in the total yards category with 669 yards, while Smith had 618 yards. However, Smith averaged almost double the yards per catch that Brown did. Either way, both were productive in the offense, and both are returning. Assuming Braxton Miller's passing game continues to develop, these two men could be huge catalysts for the offense.

I honestly don't expect either of them to go beyond 1,000 yards this season-, just because Miller probably won't be throwing the ball around enough for that. But I do

expect them to stay relatively close together in those numbers, much like they did last season. I can see them adding 100-150 more yards to those totals, which still doesn't make them stellar numbers. But that's all this team needs them to do.

In the backfield, Carlos Hyde got things rolling for the Buckeyes in 2012, and he's ready to do the same this season. Hyde's success out of the back field goes a long way in determining what kind of plays Ohio State runs. If he's having a good game, imposing his will on the defense, they might let Braxton Miller unleash it down field a few more times than usual. And on the flip end, if Hyde can't get anything going, they'll stick with simple reads for Braxton, while spreading out the defense.

My expectations for Carlos Hyde are a little lofty, but I think he'll be a high achiever this season. I'm expecting Hyde to break that thousand yard mark by another hundred yards or so. And if he can do that for this team, that would give Braxton Miller—I know, everything always has to relate back to Braxton Miller—a plethora of opportunities at quarterback.

The offensive line returns with two starters: Jack Mewhort and Andrew Norwell. Both are seniors. Outside of those two, the offensive line won't have a lot of experience, but there is some serious talent waiting to step in. Guys like Corey Linsley and Marcus Hall will bring a lot to the line. Even though it may look like an area of concern on paper, it really isn't

## **Defense:**

Immediately, the thing that pops out about this Ohio State defense is the defensive line. All four starters from a year ago are now gone, meaning the Buckeyes will be relying heavily on guys who haven't even had the chance to prove themselves in game situations.

As of now, it looks as though sophomore Spence Noah will start at one defensive end, and junior J.T. Moore will start at the other. Filling in the two tackle spots will probably be sophomore Adolphus Washington and junior Michael Bennett. So barring a serious injury or a breakout year that leads to the NFL, all of these guys will be together for at least the next two years.

Junior linebacker Ryan Shazier is the only returning starter for the linebackers. This will be his first season being put in a serious role of a captain for the Buckeyes. Last season, Shazier had 70 solo tackles (115 total), including 19 tackles for loss. He also returned an interception for 17 yards.

His role for the Buckeyes will be expanded this year. Although I'm expecting the coaching staff to keep as the outside linebacker, he'll have to be the quarterback up front. As far as numbers are concerned, if he can contribute in the same manner he did last season, both he and his teammates will be in good shape.

Senior Christian Bryant is a returning starter at safety. In 2012, Bryant's highlight was an interception against California late in the game, which sealed the win for the Buckeyes. He's been a very silent, consistent player for the Buckeyes. He ranks among the top current Buckeyes in tackles and pass break-ups. It will be another year of the same for Bryant, but his contributions are very important to this defense.

## **SCHEDULE:**

vs Buffalo  
vs San Diego St.  
@ California  
vs Florida A&M  
**vs Wisconsin**  
**@ Northwestern**  
vs Iowa  
**vs Penn State**  
@ Purdue  
@ Illinois  
vs Indiana  
**@ Michigan**

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

The non-conference schedule looks easy for Ohio State this season, with the exception of California and maybe San Diego St. But I don't see any trap games in there, so I think it's safe to say, with confidence, the Buckeyes will be going into conference play undefeated. If that happens, it means Ohio State will have won 16 consecutive games, dating back to last season.

The Buckeyes open up the conference season with a tricky team in Wisconsin. Not tricky in the sense that the Badgers are illusionists, but tricky in that fact that it's a team that can be very tough if they fill in some of the key missing pieces. Going to Northwestern the next week could also spell trouble for the Buckeyes. The Wildcats have a very good offense that can score in a hurry, and the defense is dependable. I'm not expecting too many problems from Iowa and Penn State in the follow weeks. Both games are home, and even though the Nittany Lions do have a good football team, Ohio State's offense is too good for their style of play.

Back-to-back weeks on the road against Illinois and Purdue shouldn't pose much of a threat, although the Boilermakers did give Ohio State a scare last year in the Horseshoe. The regular season then wraps up with a home game against Indiana and then a trip to Ann Arbor. But before the Buckeyes start looking ahead, Indiana will have one of the best offenses in the conference this year and will be able to score with Ohio State. Going on the road to play Michigan will obviously be a tough task. The Wolverines will be improved in every facet of the game since their last meeting.

## #3 – TEXAS A&M:

By Alan Zlotorzynski:

### 2012 RECAP:

The Aggies would surely have been a team to contend for a National Championship if last year were 2015. Texas A&M's 5th place finish in the AP Poll was the highest for the program since 1956. Behind freshman sensation QB Johnny Manziel, A&M would have been the hottest team heading into the BCS playoffs.

To say that the Aggies' debut season in the SEC was a huge success, would be an understatement.

With an 11-2 record, they finished with more than 10 wins for the first time since 1998. In the process they beat No.1 ranked Alabama at Bryant-Denny Stadium and then destroyed former Big 12 rival Oklahoma, 41-14 in the Cotton Bowl. After winning Conference USA coach of the year honors twice in four years at Houston, Kevin Sumlin was the SEC coach of the year in his first season with the Aggies.



Sumlin's spread offense took College Station by storm. The Aggies set a school record with 578 points and 7,260 yards, finishing in the top five in the nation in scoring and total offense. The biggest benefactor of the Aggies offense was redshirt freshman quarterback Johnny Manziel.

Johnny Football became the first freshman to win the Heisman Trophy, and this season is looking to join Archie Griffin as the only two-time Heisman winners. Manziel shattered the SEC record for total offense in a season, accounting for over 70 percent of the Aggies yards. His 5,116 yards were nearly 800 more than the previous SEC record, set by Heisman winner Cam Newton in 2010.

He was the fifth player -- and first freshman -- in FBS history to pass for 3,000 yards and run for 1,000 yards in the same season. The only other player from a BCS-AQ

conference to hit both those marks was Vince Young in 2005.

The biggest emerging star not named Manziel on offense was receiver Mike Evans. A former basketball player at 6 feet-5 inches, he is an NFL receiver in the making. As a freshman, he led the team in receptions and yards, not senior Ryan Swope. Evans totaled 75 catches for 1,022 yards and five touchdowns. Swope caught 64 passes for 809 yards and seven touchdowns. Experienced veterans Swope, Uzoma Nwachukwu and Kenric McNeal, combined with freshmen Evans and Thomas Johnson to provide Manziel with some real weapons at wide receiver.

While it is true the backs and receivers were special, the biggest reason for the Aggies success on offense was the play of their offensive line. Last year's group was probably the second best line in the SEC, behind only Alabama. Tackles Luke Joeckel and Jake Matthews, as well as center Patrick Lewis were as good as any trio in the country. They pushed around defensive lines and provided Manziel with more than enough time in the pocket to find open receivers or run for big yards. Now a member of the Jacksonville Jaguars, Joeckel was the second overall selection in April's NFL Draft.

The Aggies defense was perhaps the most underrated in all of college football last season. They played well enough to win every football game and the SEC. When you consider the two games, the Aggies lost to Florida and LSU – both teams scored late in the second half to essentially steal a win. Defensive end Damontre Moore was a monster and if Jarvis Jones or Jadeveon Clowney played in another conference, Moore would be the face of defense in the SEC. The NY Giants selected him in the third round (81) this past April.

Moore totaled 12.5 sacks and 20 tackles for loss for the Aggies last season. He had help, senior linebackers Jonathan Stewart, Steven Jenkins and Sean Porter also had great seasons. All three combined for 202 tackles, 13 tackles for loss, seven sacks and two interceptions. The Aggies weakness came in the secondary. Senior Dustin Harris and sophomore Deshaun Everett led this group, as Harris recorded 10 pass breakups for the season. The Aggies played well but needed to force more turnovers in the big games early in the season and by big games, I mean Florida and LSU.

Texas A&M forced 15 total turnovers the entire season. Defenses like Alabama, Florida and LSU forced 28 to 31 each. In the end, Texas A&M set a new standard for Aggies football in 2012. With that said, the nation will be watching to see if last season was merely beginners luck in the tough SEC or a new tradition of excellence in the nation's best conference.

## **2013 OUTLOOK:**

### **OFFENSE:**

The biggest question for the Aggies offense heading into 2013 is can Johnny Manziel



repeat, or come close to his performance from a year ago. According to ESPN Stats & Info, recent history has proven that some of the top freshman quarterbacks have been able to repeat their successes even after the spotlight has been shined upon them.

Since 2006, there have been four quarterbacks who ranked in the top 10 in non-clutch weighted Total QBR during their freshman seasons — Andrew Luck, Terrelle Pryor, Sam Bradford and Colin Kaepernick. Luck and Bradford went on to lead the nation in Total QBR in their sophomore seasons, and all four players ranked in the top 12 in QBR again before leaving for the NFL.

Pryor, in particular, can be used as a model to show that players can replicate strong scrambling seasons. After scrambling for 357 yards in 2009, Pryor went on to scramble for 356 yards and average 9.9 yards per scramble in 2010.

One area in which Manziel can improve heading into next season is his downfield accuracy. He completed less than 42 percent of his passes thrown more than 15 yards downfield, which ranked 40th out of 108 qualified BCS-AQ quarterbacks. However, aside from becoming a YouTube sensation for throwing football's through tires from the upper deck of Kyle Field, Manziel has spent the offseason working with "quarterback guru" George Whitfield Jr., who is helping the Heisman Trophy winner improve his downfield touch.

Manziel will once again have plenty of help on offense despite losing Ryan Swope. The new Arizona Cardinal WR, who is apparently missing time at NFL OTA's from lingering college concussions, departed A&M as the school's career leader in receptions and receiving yards.

However, it is likely that Swope's records will not last long with 6'5" sophomore Mike Evans catching passes. The possibly already NFL ready Evans, who finished last season with 82 catches for 1,105 yards, is a matchup nightmare for most defensive backs. Creating even more headaches for SEC defenses will be Juniors Malcome Kennedy, LeKendrick Williams and senior Derel Walker. All three had impressive moments last season and should all play key roles in 2013. Nevertheless, they will be pressed for playing time by an extremely impressive array of newcomers like Ricky Seals-Jones and Ja'Quay Williams.

One of the most unbelievable stats from last season is that Manziel led the entire SEC in rushing with 108.5 yards per game. But that may be a tall chore this year and not because he is not capable; it is because the Aggies backfield could be the best in the nation.

Many say A&M's backfield is as good as it was when Greg Hill, Rodney Thomas and Leeland McElroy shared time way back in the early 1990's. This season, the Aggies have Ben Malena (808- 8TD's) returning, a powerfully punishing runner who averaged nearly six yards per carry in 2012. They have speed as well in Trey Williams (376-5 TD's), who also averaged almost six yards per carry last season. Joining the backfield,

this season is two very talented transfers. Brandon Williams (Oklahoma) and Tra Carson (Oregon) give the Aggies explosive depth in the backfield.

Can you imagine how good the Aggies offensive line could have been this season if the No.2 pick in the NFL Draft and Outland Trophy winner, Luke Joeckel, returned for his senior season? But have no fear Aggies fans, Manziel and company will still be well protected by one of the best units in the conference.

The Aggies have shifted All-American Jake Matthews, who did stay for his senior season, to left tackle. Matthews is a likely first round Top 10 pick in May's NFL Draft (that is weird to say---May's Draft). Another Matthews will join him on the Aggies line. Taking over for Patrick Lewis (Green Bay Packers) at center will be Matthews's brother, Mike. Junior Cedric Ogbuechi, who may also be playing on Sunday's in 2014, moves from guard to right Tackle. The Aggies round out a very stout group up front with Jarvis Harrison and Germain Ifedi.

## **DEFENSE:**

The obvious thing to watch with this unit in 2013 is how they start the season and try to replace Damontre Moore, Jonathan Stewart and Sean Porter. Junior LB Donnie Baggs moved from weak side LB to the middle during the spring and Tyrell Taylor will be expected to pick up the slack.

The Mathews brothers on the offensive line are not the only set of siblings playing for the Aggies, Tyrell's twin brother Tyrone, will also be counted on but he will need to bring pressure to opposing quarterbacks.

The heart of the A&M defense this season rests on the shoulders of senior Steven Jenkins, who finished third last year on the team with 79 tackles. Jenkins did not participate in the spring practices as he is recovering from shoulder surgery to repair a torn labrum. Tommy Sanders has spent the spring under the tutelage of Jenkins and is expected to become a significant contributor on the outside as well.

The defensive line is expected to have two sophomores a junior and a senior starting this season. Jr. Gavin Stansbury and sophomore defensive tackle Alonzo Williams have shown flashes during their time and both could be pressed for playing time by freshman Isiah Gold and Justin Manning. On the other lies the key to the Aggies defensive line in sophomore Julien Obioha. He made 12 starts as a true freshman last season but he missed the Cotton Bowl with a back injury. If he can stay healthy, the Aggies front seven could once again be a very pleasant underrated surprise.

\*Note: S Floyd Raven and CB Deshazor Everett were recently arrested and could possibly be suspended or kicked off the team

The secondary must be better in 13 than it was 2012. The Aggies were 12 of 14 SEC teams last season in pass defense. Chances are this unit could be the strength of the Aggies defense this year. Three players, Howard Matthews, Floyd Raven and Toney

Hurd form a very formidable safety position. De’Vante Harris and Deshazor Everett will man the cornerback position. Both are considered good cover corners. Everett produced 56 tackles last season, broke up seven passes and had two interceptions, including the big one that helped secure the win over No.1 Alabama.

## **SCHEDULE:**

Aug. 31: Rice, Kyle Field  
Sept. 7: Sam Houston State, Kyle Field  
**Sept. 14: Alabama, Kyle Field**  
Sept. 21: SMU, Kyle Field  
Sept. 28: at Arkansas (Fayetteville, Ark.)  
Oct. 12: at Ole Miss (Oxford, Miss.)  
Oct. 19: Auburn, Kyle Field  
Oct. 26: Vanderbilt, Kyle Field  
Nov. 2: UTEP, Kyle Field  
Nov. 9: Mississippi State, Kyle Field  
**Nov. 23: at LSU (Baton Rouge, La.)**  
Nov. 30: at Missouri (Columbia, Mo.)

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

The Aggies schedule is perhaps as easy as any in the SEC. The season starts with sacrificial opponents Rice and Sam Houston State before the rematch with Alabama matchup. This time the game will played in College Station that is the good news. The bad news is-- the Crimson Tide gets two weeks to prepare for Johnny Football this time around and unlike last season, should be well rested and injury free on September 14.

A&M will then play SMU to complete a four-game home stand to start the season. It will be the first of two such home stands as the Aggies who will then travel to Arkansas and Ole Miss before returning home to face Auburn, Vanderbilt, UTEP and Mississippi State. The final tests of the season will then come on the road as A&M travels to Death Valley to take on LSU and then to Missouri to take on the Tigers.

## #4 - OREGON:

By Steve Shoup:

### 2012 Season Recap:

The 2012 Season started out about as well as the Ducks could expect since they won their first 10 games, including three contests versus ranked opponents. In only one of those 10 games did the other team get within 17 points of the Ducks - when USC lost by 11, 62-51.

The Ducks were poised to be in the National Championship Game, as they were 2<sup>nd</sup> in the BCS poll and were atop the USA Today, AP and Harris Polls. They had two ranked opponents in their final two games, and if they won them they would have gone on to



the Pac-12 Championship Game. With a win there, they would have easily made it to the BCS Title Game.

Not only were they set to redeem their Title Game loss from two years ago, but the road looked very favorable for them.

The first of their final two games was against Stanford, at home. The Ducks had just put up 50+ points on the

Cardinal in back-to-back years, and that is with Andrew Luck on the field for Stanford. Next was the in-state rivalry game at Oregon State. The Ducks have pretty much dominated the rivalry since the 1980's and had won the previous four meetings. After that would be USC (whom the Ducks just beat on the road) or UCLA in the Conference Championship Game. And regardless of which team they played, the game would be held at the Ducks home stadium. So, things were set up pretty nicely for Oregon going into that Stanford game.

Unfortunately, the Ducks hopes for the season came crashing down as Stanford won on a field goal in overtime. Not only did it take the Ducks out of the National Championship game contention, but it meant they lost the Pac-12 after winning it the year before (and back-to-back Pac-10 Championships before that). Oregon had to settle for a Fiesta Bowl win over Kansas State, and a final ranking at number 2 in most polls. Interestingly enough, if there was a playoff system in place, the Ducks were 4<sup>th</sup> in the BCS standings

after Conference Championship Week and would have been given a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance.

In addition to losing their National Title and Pac-12 chances, the Ducks lost their head coach Chip Kelly to the NFL after the season. Kelly who took over as head coach heading into the 2009 season, amassed a 46-7 total record and 33-3 conference record, while leading the Ducks to three conference titles, one National Title game appearance, and ranked finishes of 11<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup>. Those are big shoes to fill for Kelly's successor, his offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich.

## **2013 Season Outlook:**

The Ducks aren't expected to see much of a drop off even with the loss of their head coach. They have 15 of 22 starters returning (8 on offense, 7 on defense), including a number of key players. In addition a number of top back-ups and contributors are back and set to take the open starting roles. Overall this is a very experienced team with a potent offense and a quality defense.

### **Offense:**

Quarterback Marcus Mariota was a redshirt freshman last year, yet quickly showed that he deserved the starting quarterback job and that he had immense potential. The Ducks have long had athletic quarterbacks who can make teams pay with their legs, but they really haven't had a quarterback with a good quality arm in quite some time. In Mariota they have both, and with the development we saw from him his freshman year, things should only get brighter going forward.

Mariota accounted for a combined 37 touchdowns for the Ducks last season (32 throwing and 5 rushing), to go along with 752 yards rushing and 2,677 yards in the air. He got better as the season wore on, having probably his best month both rushing and throwing in November. Mariota could see his passing expand under Helfrich, considering that prior to Helfrich's move to Oregon, he had primarily worked with more throwing systems.

One of Mariota's top targets this year will likely be a guy who lines up in the backfield with him, running back De'Anthony Thomas. Thomas is primarily a running back, but the Ducks really play him all over the place. With Kenjon Barner heading to the NFL, Thomas is now finally going to get the chance to start for the Ducks.

In a part time role these past two seasons, Thomas has electrified this offense with his speed and play-making ability. He already has 1,296 rushing yards and 18 touchdowns, on just 147 career attempts (8.8 ypc). In addition he has 1,050 receiving yards and 14 touchdowns on 90 catches (11.5 ypc). That is over 2,300 yards and 32 TD's on less than 250 offensive touches.

Thomas could easily get that many touches this year (though likely more from running than receiving) and should well exceed 2,000 combined yards. He will likely give up his returning duties, but may be placed back there in certain situations, given his four career TD returns.

Senior receiver Josh Huff and junior tight end Colt Lyster figure to be the most likely beneficiaries of an expanded passing attack. Huff led the team in receiving yards and touchdowns last year and was a favorite of Mariota down the stretch. Lyster is an athletic tight end who can both stretch the field and be a safety valve option for Mariota.

The offensive line returns three starters and quite a bit of experience. Left tackle Tyler Johnstone and right tackle Jake Fisher have a lot of promise and are expected to take the next step in 2013. Center Hroniss Grasu is one of the better centers in college football and will likely be the first team All-Pac-12 center.

### **Defense:**

The Ducks defense lost their most feared pass rusher in Dion Jordan and their top two linebackers in Michael Clay and Kiko Alonso. What they return though is seven starters including their entire secondary, led by star cornerback Ifo Ekpre-Olomu. Ekpre-Olomu is an All-American candidate, who forced 6 fumbles and intercepted 4 passes.

Though Jordan got the hype, actually defensive tackle Taylor Hart led the team in sacks with eight. Hart will now need to show he can do that again without Jordan getting the primary focus. Hart is the leader of the front seven and given how he's developed in his three previous years, is a good bet for a strong season.

Overall the Ducks defense doesn't get the credit their offense does, but did finish with the 25<sup>th</sup> best scoring defense in the country and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the conference in that category behind Stanford.

### **Schedule:**

vs Nicholas State  
@ Virginia  
vs Tennessee  
vs California  
@ Colorado  
@ Washington  
vs Washington State  
**vs UCLA**  
**@ Stanford**  
vs Utah  
**@ Arizona**  
**vs Oregon State**

## **Schedule Overview:**

Despite traveling across country in one game and facing an SEC opponent in another, the Ducks non-conference schedule shouldn't give them any problems. Virginia looks to be rebuilding this year and would need a miracle to give the Ducks a game, even in Charlottesville. Tennessee is among the weaker SEC schools and they are in a serious rebuild mode of their own.

Oregon won't seriously be challenged until their final five games, when they play their four toughest opponents: UCLA, Stanford, Arizona, and Oregon State. Before that Stanford game the Ducks should have smooth sailing. The game at Washington has the potential to get tricky, but the Ducks right now appear to be far too superior. Those four critical games at the end of the season though could be another matter.

UCLA has their own redshirt sophomore star quarterback to lead them this season in Brett Hundley. Hundley has a number of weapons to get the ball too, and will provide the Ducks with their best offensive challenge at that point of the season. At home Oregon should easily be favored, but UCLA is not a team to take for granted.

Stanford represents the Ducks biggest challenge of the season. They are a top 10 caliber team, and have a very tough defense to go along with a promising young quarterback in Kevin Hogan. This team beat the Ducks in Oregon last season, and now will get the chance to host them this year. They were the only defense to hold the Ducks under 35 points last year, when they limited Oregon to just 14 points in a game that went into overtime.

Arizona isn't seen by many as a major threat given some of the uncertainties they have as a team. But it is a road game against an explosive offense, late in the season. With UCLA and Stanford games already in the books and the "Civil War" game the next week against Oregon State, this Arizona game has the potential to be a trap game for the Ducks.

Though the Ducks have been the favorite recently in the Civil War game, Oregon State is no pushover. The Beavers are an improving team and could have quite a bit to play for when they meet the last week of the season. The game is at home so that is an added advantage for Oregon, but the Ducks can't let up in this game.



## #5 - GEORGIA:

By Alan Zlotorzynski:

### 2012 SEASON RECAP:

The 2012 season in Athens was one of the most successful football seasons in Georgia Bulldogs football history. Head Coach Mark Richt silenced most of his critics by capturing the school's second straight SEC East title and the fifth in the last 11 years. In addition, they won 12 games for only the third time in school history.

The 'Dawgs came within a few seconds and five yards from a win in the SEC Championship Game that would have propelled Georgia to the national title game. Along the way, the 'Dawgs defeated rivals Tennessee, Florida, Auburn, and Georgia Tech all in the same season for the second straight year. The team set 16 team records--11 offensive marks and five bowl records.



Individually, quarterback Aaron Murray set 14 school records becoming the first player in SEC history to pass for over 3,000 yards in three straight seasons. OLB Jarvis Jones was named consensus All-American for the second straight season.

Behind Murray and two freshman running backs, Todd Gurley and Keith Marshall, Georgia took advantage of an easy early season "Little Sisters of the Poor" schedule that saw the Georgia offense average almost 50 points per game in starting 5-0.

Gurley and Marshall, the freshman running backs, combined to rush for 2,144 yards and 25 rushing touchdowns. The two helped the Bulldogs to post 7.09 yards per play, tops in the nation barely ahead of Texas A&M. The 17 rushing TD's by Gurley alone broke Hershel Walker's school record for rushing TD's by a freshman.

However, the No.5 Bulldogs disappointed in their first stiff test of the season by losing badly to No.6 South Carolina in Week 6. The 35-7 beat down delivered by the

Gamecocks dropped Georgia to No.13 and following a mere five point win at Kentucky, Georgia was made under "dawgs" versus the Gators in Jacksonville.

In typical SEC fashion, the world's largest outdoor cocktail party delivered as advertised. In a battle of top defenses, the Bulldogs proved to be better on this day. Led by Jarvis Jones, who recorded a game high 13-tackles, the Bulldogs prevailed 17-9 in Jacksonville. Jones single handedly stopped Florida on two late drives to seal the win for Georgia. His two forced fumbles came as Florida was marching towards the end zone. In fact, one of those fumbles was forced as a Florida player was reaching for pay dirt.

Once Georgia got past Florida, they cruised to the SEC Championship Game by winning their final four games by an average of 32 points, including a 42-10 win against cross state rival, Georgia Tech. The Bulldogs met Alabama in the SEC Championship Game and appeared to be heading for victory with a 21-10 lead late in the third quarter. But as the Bulldogs have done during the Richt era at critical times, they failed to finish--or as Georgia fans tell it--- just ran out of time to win the game. Either way, the Crimson Tide outscored the Bulldogs 22-7 during the game's final 20 minutes to capture the SEC crown with a 32-28 win.

Georgia had one final drive that almost helped the Bulldogs reach the promised land but in the end, Alabama was simply the better team. The Tide outgained the Bulldogs 512-394 and rushed for 350 yards on 51 carries, as the Georgia defense could not stop the Tide from rolling.

The loss was devastating in that Georgia was still expected to earn a BCS Bowl berth but that went to the Gators, whom Georgia beat the month before. Instead, the Dawgs played in the Capital One Bowl in Orlando and behind Aaron Murray's five touchdowns and 427 passing yards, pulled away to beat Nebraska, 45-31.

The 2012 season proved that Georgia is where it needs to be to contend in the tough SEC under Mark Richt and all questions about him and the future of the program need to be put to rest for the time being. However, the 2012 season also frustrated in that Georgia fans know that they are one of the top-level SEC schools not to win a National Championship during the conference's current six year championship run. Bulldogs fans just want a chance to play for a BCS title.

That could change this year, as Richt, Murray and Georgia look to shake the "Very Good" but "Not Great" label. Ironically, this is the last season under the current BCS Title format, the playoffs start next season.

## **2013 SEASON OUTLOOK:**

### **OFFENSE:**

With the losses of key defensive players to either graduation or the NFL Draft, Mark Richt knows that the defensive unit will face a number of questions and challenges during the offseason. But his offense, led by fourth year QB Aaron Murray, should be one of the best in the nation again this season. The best offense in Georgia history, at least statistically speaking, returns eight starters.

How good is the crop of quarterbacks at the top of the SEC this season? Murray is listed as the third best signal caller in the conference behind Johnny Manziel, who only won the Heisman as a freshman and Alabama's A.J. McCarron.

Murray played well enough against Alabama's stout defense in the SEC Championship and in the Capital One Bowl to answer critics who claim he does not perform in big games. Nevertheless, Murray still needs to prove, like his team, he can perform in crunch time and finish. His three-interceptions thrown in the first half almost cost Georgia its win against Florida last year.

Tailbacks Todd Gurley and Keith Marshall (who combined for 2,144 rushing yards and 26 total touchdowns last year) need to avoid sophomore slumps, and they will get increased attention from defenses. The offensive line, which was average, last year, needs to improve and should be better this year. Center David Andrews and guard Chris Burnette are solid returners and sophomore John Theus is a strong candidate to move to left tackle while Kenarious Gates moves to the right side.

In all, the offensive line needs to get Murray and Georgia's offense past Jadeveon Clowney this year and luckily, or unluckily for them, that happens in Week 2 this season when the Dawgs host the Gamecocks in Athens.

At receiver, Georgia lost Tavarres King (950 9TD's) but will get a full season from Malcolm Mitchell who spent the first four weeks last season playing defensive back. Once he moved back to catching passes instead of defending them, Mitchell was Georgia's second leading receiver (572 yards 4 TD's) and is expected to push for First Team All-SEC honors this season.

The Bulldogs may be an SEC anomaly in that they will need their offense to carry them until the defense matures. The schedule, unlike last season, is top heavy in 2013 and the Dawgs will need to put up points early to protect the defense. They are more than capable of accommodating---even in the SEC.

## DEFENSE:

Defensive coordinator Todd Grantham is excited about the potential of what his young defense could do this year in the nation's toughest conference. Nevertheless, you cannot expect the Dawgs not to feel the effects of losing two-time first-team All-American Jarvis Jones, leading tackler Alec Ogletree, three-fourths of the starting secondary and almost the entire defensive line.

Georgia returns just four starters but it is possible that one of them, Jordan Jenkins, could emerge as a star this year. The sophomore played significant snaps as a true freshman last season and finished second on the team with five sacks. Junior inside linebacker Amarlo Herrera is the teams returning leading tackler and will captain the Bulldog defense from the inside linebacker position. Both have the potential to be ALL-SEC but they could also be hampered by the question marks that remain at the position. Junior Ramik Wilson and a few freshman will vie to fill in with the most likely player to emerge being sophomore James DeLoach, who was used sparingly last season.

The Bulldogs defensive line is totally revamped but that does not mean it is inexperienced. The Bulldogs run a 3-4 Pro style hybrid defense and the nose tackle position is crucial to its success. Long gone are 350 pounders John Jenkins and Kwame Geathers, as well as end Cornelius Washington but this unit does have some experience and boasts a returning senior in Garrison Smith. They will also fill in the voids with two third year players in Ray Drew and Sterling Bailey.

Drew is drawing some attention from Bulldog fans, as one prominent Dawgs Blogger recently wrote, "Another name to watch will be Ray Drew, a former five-star prospect who is in line to win playing time at defensive end and outside linebacker as a junior. Drew picked up his production in the second half of last season, and Grantham said his progress continued during offseason conditioning, noting that "he's a guy that has really I think shown up in our offseason workouts as a man, meaning I see his size, I see his explosiveness."

Nevertheless, the question is at nose tackle where it is likely to be a nose tackle by committee defense this season in Athens. Mike Thornton is small but has experience and plays tough in the trenches, junior college transfer Chris Mayes will also see time, as will a pair of freshman, John Atkins and John Taylor. Toby Johnson could also see snaps if he is fully recovered from an ACL injury.

The secondary could be where the biggest drop off occurs this season, as 125 starts have departed Georgia. Sanders Commings, Branden Smith, Bacarri Rambo and Shawn Williams are all gone. The only returning starter is Damien Smith, who is a No.1

cornerback. The guy to watch will be safety Tray Matthews. Wide receiver Chris Conley called the freshman fearless and he has been turning heads during off-season workouts. Matthews attended the same high school as Alec Ogletree and like the new St. Louis Rams linebacker, could be headed for an NFL career and stardom at Georgia.

Sophomore Josh Harvey-Clemons could be huge at the strong safety spot and along with Matthews at free safety, provide a more than formidable secondary for Mark Richt's team.

## **SCHEDULE:**

The Bulldogs easy schedule to start the season last year was a curse and a blessing. It allowed the offense to get into rhythm but did not provide any tests until Week 6 when the Dawgs were destroyed at South Carolina.

This year, the Dawgs will know who they are and likely, where they are going after the first two weeks and for sure before October 1 this season.

They begin with what is likely the marquee matchup of week 1 as the play Clemson, who starts the year ranked No.6 by the AP. The schedule does not get easier in week 2, as Georgia welcomes preseason No.5, South Carolina, to Athens. Last year, the Gamecocks dominated the Dawgs, and this game is likely to set the tone for the SEC East.

**Aug. 31: at Clemson**

**Sept. 7: South Carolina**

Sept. 14: Bye Week

Sept. 21: North Texas

**Sept. 28: LSU**

Oct. 5: at Tennessee

Oct. 12: Missouri

**Oct. 19: at Vanderbilt**

Oct. 26: Bye Week

Nov. 2: Florida

Nov. 9: Appalachian State

Nov. 16: at Auburn

Nov. 23: Kentucky

Nov. 30: at Georgia Tech

**(Key Games in Bold)**

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

If playing two teams, whose combined preseason rankings do not add up to a dozen is not enough to kick off the season, the September schedule finishes with a battle against LSU---But again, Richt and company are home for the contest.

The Dawgs also have to take on the likes of an improved Vanderbilt team (on the road) and Florida. Nothing will be easy for the Bulldogs in the 2013 but this offense is as explosive as any in the country. If Aaron Murray and the talented young sophomores in the backfield can stake the Dawgs early in the season, the defense should mature in time to help them finish the job----And finish is the operative word here.

## #6 – STANFORD:

**By Charlie Cason:**

### 2012 Season Recap:

Stanford capped off David Shaw's first season as head coach with a Pac 12 championship and a third-straight BCS bowl game. They defeated Wisconsin in The Rose Bowl to finish the season 12-2 overall, and 8-1 in the conference.

Their two losses came in the first half of the season to Washington and Notre Dame. They lost both games by a total of 11 points.

Stephan Taylor was the heart and soul of the team, particularly the offense. He ran for 1,530 yards last season and was the go-to guy in critical situations.

Their overall success was led by the defense. They only allowed 17.2 points per game that was highlighted in a 17-14 win over Oregon in Eugene.

### 2013 Outlook:

#### Offense:

Stanford's offense didn't light up the scoreboard last season, but they had enough efficiency and productivity to score when it mattered. A veteran offensive line that led the way for Taylor returns, as well as QB Kevin Hogan. Hogan threw for over 1,000 yards and completed nearly 72% of his passes as he took over for Josh Nunes midseason.

The strength will lie in their receiving unit. Although no player on the 2013 roster caught a touchdown pass last season, David Shaw still believes they will be successful. WR Ty Montgomery is back to full health and he will look to become a force in the conference.



The weakness could be in the running game. Replacing Taylor is no easy task, and he was basically the entire running game they had last season. Anthony Wilkerson will take



over and he will need to take advantage of that power-filled offensive line creating holes in defenses.

### **Defense:**

The Cardinal boasted one of the best defenses in the country last season, and they only reload and improve this season. They return eight starters, including their entire secondary that had 15 interceptions and returned four of them for touchdowns.

Their biggest strength will be their front seven. They led the nation in sacks (57) and tackles for loss (124), and they led by a wide margin. OLB Trent Murphy was in the backfield the most last season, registering 10 sacks and 18 tackles for loss. The secondary is pretty good, too. FS Ed Reynolds was one blown call away from two NCAA records last season, as he intercepted six passes and returned three of them for touchdowns.

The depth on this defensive unit is deep and talented. It will be tough for any offense to move the ball efficiently, and this will come in handy against teams like Oregon, USC, and UCLA.

### **Schedule:**

Sept. 7 SAN JOSE STATE  
Sept. 14 at Army  
Sept. 21 ARIZONA STATE  
Sept. 28 at Washington State (in Seattle at CenturyLink Field)  
Oct. 5 WASHINGTON  
Oct. 12 at Utah  
Oct. 19 UCLA  
Oct. 26 at Oregon State  
Nov. 7 OREGON  
Nov. 16 at USC  
Nov. 23 CAL  
Nov. 30 NOTRE DAME

### **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

**October 5<sup>th</sup> vs Washington—** This game will be all about revenge for Stanford. Any early season hopes of a national title were dashed by the Huskies last season. Washington scored the go-ahead touchdown with under five minutes left and their defense shut down Taylor and the offense. Stanford's defense will look to shut down QB Keith Price and minimize the big-play potential.

**October 26<sup>th</sup> at Oregon State**—Any team that travels to Corvallis can struggle. With the Beavers being a conference title contender, Stanford better be careful. Oregon State has a stingy defense that will challenge the offensive line and pressure Hogan. This could be a critical game in the Pac 12 North.

**November 7<sup>th</sup> vs Oregon**—What a game this was last year. Somehow, the Cardinal defense held Oregon to only 14 points and left Autzen Stadium with an overtime victory. Oregon simply reloads this season, but the home field advantage will benefit Stanford. The defense will need to play its best game of the year if they want to have the same success against the quack attack.

**November 30<sup>th</sup> vs Notre Dame**—This will be another revenge game. Notre Dame won an amazing game with a controversial ending last season. This will be the final game of the regular season and Senior Day in Palo Alto. The crowd will be fired up and loud. Oh yeah, Notre Dame did pay in the national title game last season.

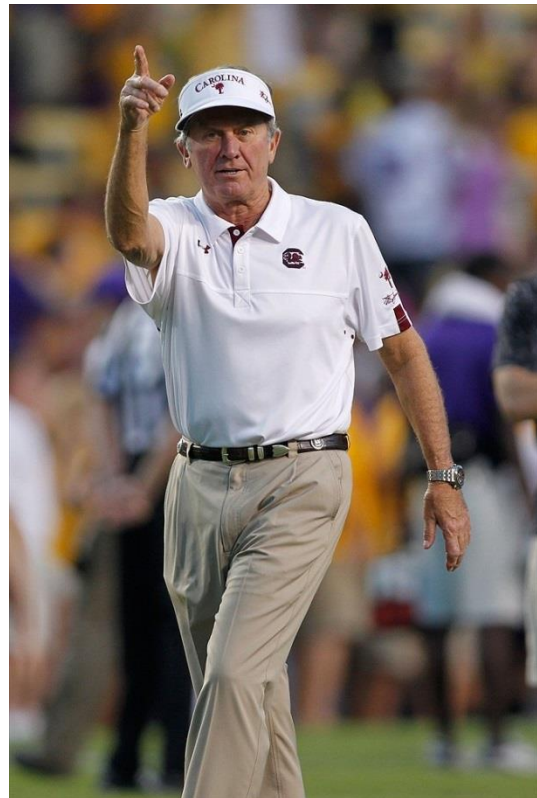
## # 7 – SOUTH CAROLINA:

By Alan Zlotorzynski:

### 2012 SEASON RECAP:

The Gamecocks followed up a school-record 11-win season in 2011 with another 10-win season in 2012. It was the first time Carolina has logged back-to-back double-digit winning seasons, and just the third 10-win campaign in school history. The 1984 team is the only other 10-win squad.

The Gamecocks began the season ranked No. 8 and finally appeared headed to the top of the SEC, as head coach, Steve Spurrier envisioned when he took over at USC east in 2005. Like every team in the nation's toughest conference, rough stretches must be navigated through in order to play for the National Championship. The Old Ball Coach's team would hit that stretch after a 5-0 start to the year and looked poised to dominate the three games after humiliating Georgia 35-7 in the first game of that three game season make or break span.



The next two games proved to be fatal to the Gamecocks season as a tough two point loss at LSU was followed up with a humiliating turnover laden beat down at the hands of the Florida Gators. Spurrier's old team defeated his new one 44-11, ending any national title hopes.

The Gamecocks would finish the season with five straight wins, including a fourth straight win over cross state rival Clemson. USC would finish the season by beating Michigan 33-28 in the Outback Bowl in Tampa on New Year's Day. South Carolina finished the season exactly where they began, ranked No.8 in the country. From an individual standpoint, every college football fan in the country will never forget October 27 and not because USC held onto to defeat Tennessee 38-35. That day is forever etched into the memory of every college football fan for what happened to RB Marcus Lattimore.

In the second quarter, two Tennessee Volunteer tacklers hit him from each side. With

one tackler draped around Lattimore's back, Eric Gordon drove his body into Lattimore's legs. Lattimore's right knee bent backwards and slammed against the turf. His knee bent in a direction knees are not supposed to bend and for the third time in as many seasons, Lattimore's season came to a premature conclusion.

Players from both teams stood surrounded the trainers who worked to immobilize Lattimore's leg in a show of concern and support for one of the nation's top rushers. Lattimore, 21, burst onto the national stage with his 1,197-yard, 17-touchdown freshman campaign. But after a strong start to the 2011 season, he tore a ligament in his left knee on Oct. 15 and missed the remainder of the season.

Despite his struggles in South Carolina's losses at LSU and Florida, Lattimore finished the season with 662 yards and 11 touchdowns on 143 carries. However, knowing that Lattimore was being carted off the field for the last time at Williams-Brice Stadium was one of the most gut wrenching sports experiences for any fan. Despite the play of Kenny Miles and Mike Davis filling in admirably, without Lattimore, the South Carolina running game just was not the same.

Instead of using his medical red-shirt to sit out this season and return to the field for the Gamecocks in 2014, Lattimore decide to turn pro and who could blame him. He joined a growing list of players working miracle rehabilitations during the past three years and was drafted by the San Francisco 49ers in the fourth round of April's NFL Draft.

On defense, the superior talented, Jadeveon Clowney, led the Gamecocks. The sophomore defensive end had an absolute monster season compiling an NCAA leading 13 sacks. Clowney is arguably the best player entering college football, and is certainly the most dynamic, game changing defensive player in the country. His presence strikes fear into opposing offenses. Just ask Michigan running back, Vincent Smith. That is, if he is capable of speech after Clowney destroyed him the Outback Bowl.

Luckily, for USC, Clowney needs to play one more season of college football before he is eligible for the NFL Draft. The offensive and defensive blue print to what may happen in 2013 was drawn up in 2012, as the Gamecocks enter the 2013 season as the No.5 ranked team in the country.

## **2013 OUTLOOK:**

### **Offense:**

This season, it is likely that Spurrier will return to the two-quarterback system that saw him have success at Florida in the 90's. Shaw, a senior entering 2013, started 11 games last season and junior Dylan Thompson started two in place of Shaw due to injuries. They each brought different aspects to the offensive game plan. Shaw has mobility outside the pocket and has shown the toughness to pick up yards when his team needs it. Besides his mobility, Shaw has demonstrated smart decision-making by

completing a school record 67.5 percent of his passes last season.

Thompson started two games a year ago and played in eight more, throwing for 910 yards, eight touchdowns and two interceptions. Thompson is more of a prototypical pocket passer and seems to have a better grasp on the old ball coach's offense. His biggest performance came in the final regular season game against in-state rival No. 12 Clemson, when he threw for 310 yards and three touchdowns to lead the Gamecocks to a 27-17 victory.

Thompson performed well while filling in during Shaw's injuries, including the game-winning pass to beat No. 19 Michigan 33-28 in the Outback Bowl. Shaw missed spring practice while recovering from foot surgery, allowing Thompson to take the majority of the snaps throughout practice and the spring game.

In the backfield, the Gamecocks will be counting on youth to prevail. Mike Davis, another highly touted Spurrier recruit will look to try to fill the void left by the departing Lattimore. Davis had 52 carries and 275 yards last season as a true freshman. Davis immensely improved on his pass blocking during the spring making him an even more rounded back heading into the season.

At wide receiver, South Carolina is counting on a trio of juniors to get the job done in 2013. Two sport star Bruce Ellington is expected to build on his 40-catch 600 yard season in 2012 while Nick Jones (197 yds.) and Damiere Byrd (366 yds.). Byrd is considered by many to be the fastest WR in the SEC. When he isn't playing football, Byrd is a sprinter on the track team. Nevertheless, Spurrier wants consistent production from this position, as a whole and all of them may be pushed for playing time by sophomores K.J Brent, Shamier Jeffrey and Shaq Roland, who was the highest rated recruit in South Carolina heading into 2012.

On the offensive line, every starter returns except center TJ Johnson. Juniors Corey Robinson and AJ Cann will line up on the left side while senior Roland Patrick and sophomore Brandon Shell cover the right. Freshman Cody Waldrop will start at center but he struggled with the snap during the spring, keep your eye on the situation Gamecock fans.

## **DEFENSE:**

Last season, The Gamecocks had 43 sacks in 13 games, tops in the SEC and tied for fifth in the nation. Sophomore Jadeveon Clowney led the way with a school record 13.0 sacks (second in the country) and Chaz Sutton has added 5.0, while 13 different also figured into the total. Clowney led the SEC with 13.0 sacks (1.18/game) and was second with 21.5 tackles for loss (1.95/game).

During a recent poll of over 100 SEC coaches and media members, Clowney was voted the best athlete, hardest hitter, best defensive player, best pass rusher and top NFL

recruit---almost unanimously. The rest of the defensive line is no slouch in Columbia. Senior Chaz Sutton is starting for the first time but he played a ton last season. A pair of juniors will play the tackle position. J.T. Surrat (6-2 311lbs) and Kelcey Quarles (6-4 293 lbs.) combined for 52 tackles and four sacks last season.

The problem with the SC defense is that Clowney is only one of 11 to play the game and the Gamecocks are missing their top four tacklers from the 2012 line backing corps. They likely will start Kaiwan Lewis at what they call the Mike spot.—the linebacker responsible for aligning the defenders before the snap. The two outside spots (Will & Spur) are still up for grabs when practice begins in August. Junior Sharod Golightly (yes that is his name) came out of spring practice ahead of redshirt freshman Jordan Diggs. At the “Will” spot another redshirt freshman, TJ Holloman played well and demonstrated a good understanding of what defensive coordinator Lorenzo Ward is looking for. But Ward is anxiously waiting on August when sophomore Cedric Cooper returns from injury to battle Holloman for the line backing spot.

While the loss DJ Swearinger may sting a little in the Gamecocks secondary, this unit is the best group on the defense this season. Expect cornerback Victor Hampton (40-tackles) to step up and takes charge of a group that Swearinger led by hitting hard and being vocal. Hampton possesses the type of physical skills to be an elite boundary corner much like Stephon Gilmore was in Columbia. He could be headed to play on Sunday next season if he produces on Saturday this fall. Cornerback Jimmy Legree and safety Brison Williams also return to help solidify this strong unit. Kadetrix Marcus has the actual unenviable task of replacing Swearinger, an ALL-SEC Safety.

The Gamecocks will not have the luxury of multiple tune up games against lesser SEC opponents in 2013 as they travel to Athens in week two to face the Bulldogs. As usual, the game has huge SEC Championship implications and may very well be the determining factor in who represents the East in Atlanta next year. This game will be huge.

## **SCHEDULE:**

August 31 NORTH CAROLINA

**September 7 at Georgia\***

September 14 VANDERBILT\*

September 28 at Central Florida

October 5 KENTUCKY\*

October 12 at Arkansas\*

October 19 at Tennessee\*

October 26 at Missouri\*

November 2 MISSISSIPPI STATE\*

**November 16 FLORIDA\***

November 23 COASTAL CAROLINA

**November 30 CLEMSON**

**\*KEY GAMES IN BOLD UNDERLINED**

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

While the Gamecocks 2013 tilt is by no means a cakewalk, it is much kinder than that of 2012. One has to believe that the Gamecocks will drop at least one SEC game, or will they. Not playing Alabama, Texas A&M, and replacing a road game against LSU with a home game against Mississippi State this season is a definite win-win.

They get Florida at home, where the Gamecocks are 25-3 over the past four seasons, and until Georgia beats South Carolina again, you have to like the Gamecocks chances. With that said, The Gamecocks will not have the luxury of multiple tune up games against the Little Sisters of the Poor lesser SEC opponents in 2013 as they travel to Athens in week two to face the Bulldogs. As usual, the game has huge SEC Championship implications and may very well be the determining factor in who represents the East in Atlanta next year. This game will be huge.

USC does not totally avoid the Tigers from Death Valley in 2013, they will host Clemson this season in the annual Battle of the Palmetto State or The Palmetto Bowl to wrap up the regular season. In that Game last season, Steve Spurrier registered his 65th career victory at USC, making him the school's winningest head coach. Clemson will be no push over this season as they start the season ranked one spot behind the Gamecocks in the AP poll at No.6.



## #8 - Clemson:

By Charlie Cason:

### 2012 SEASON RECAP:

The 2012 football season was kind to the Tigers, but they shoot for more this season. They finished 11-2 overall and 7-1 in ACC play. A loss to Florida State early in the year cost them a shot at another conference title and BCS berth, but they capped off the season with a thrilling last-second win over LSU in the Chick-fil-A Bowl. Tajh Boyd threw for 3,896 yards and 36 touchdowns last season, highlighted by a 426-yard performance in a 62-48 win against N.C. State. His leadership, combined with speed and talent, was a big reason why Clemson led the league in both scoring and total offense.



### 2013 OUTLOOK:

#### Offense:

Offensive coordinator Chad Morris is the architect and Tajh Boyd is the engineer of the Clemson offense. They feature an up-tempo, no-huddle offense that prides itself on its passing attack.

Their strengths include big-play ability, speed, and yards after contact. Sammy Watkins will be the leading receiver as a junior, and he averaged 12.4 yards per catch last season.

The only real weakness in the offense would be the running game. They must find a feature back that can fill the shoes of Andre Ellington. Tajh Boyd was second on the team in rushing last season, so senior Roderick McDowell will have to step up and shine.

Some key players to keep an eye on include: Boyd, Watkins, McDowell and also LT Brandon Thomas. Thomas is a returning All-ACC lineman and his leadership will be needed on the line in order to protect Boyd and create the big plays.

#### Defense:

The Tiger defense returns a unit that was much improved in 2012 under new coordinator Brent Venables. They do not have a star-studded defense, but they have

the experience and leadership that is needed to succeed. The players know the system, and they trust their coach.

The strength of the defense lies in the defensive line and linebackers. Their front seven will be sound, and it begins with DE Vic Beasley. He did not start one game in 2012, but managed to lead the team in sacks with eight. The linebackers should be solid and consistent. They return players that have big-game experience and excelled in the spring.

The weakness is the secondary. The loss of Rashard Hall is a major blow and his leadership will be missed. Overall, they lost three starters in the secondary and their potential star could be a sophomore.

The key players to watch are: DE Vic Beasley, S Travis Blanks, and LB Stephone Anthony. All three of these players will be the leaders of their positions and they will need to step up when it matters most.

## **SCHEDULE:**

Aug. 31 - GEORGIA  
Sept. 7 - SOUTH CAROLINA STATE  
Sept. 14 - OPEN  
Sept. 19 - at NC State  
Sept. 28 - WAKE FOREST  
Oct. 5 - at Syracuse  
Oct. 12 - BOSTON COLLEGE  
Oct. 19 - FLORIDA STATE  
Oct. 26 - at Maryland  
Nov. 2 - at Virginia  
Nov. 9 - OPEN  
Nov. 14 - GEORGIA TECH  
Nov. 23 - CITADEL  
Nov. 30 - at South Carolina

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

**August 31<sup>st</sup> vs Georgia—** Opening the season against a team that has national title thoughts...enough said. Hosting Georgia on Labor Day weekend is an incredible opportunity for the Tigers to prove they belong in the title talk. The young secondary better step up quick, as Aaron Murray has Heisman hopes of his own, and he brings a high-powered offense. Oh yeah, the Dawgs have a pretty good defense, too.

**September 19<sup>th</sup> at N.C. State**—The last three years between the Tigers and Wolfpack have been heated. The Tigers won a shootout in Death Valley last year, 62-48, and both teams are improved this season. The Wolfpack can contend for the Atlantic Division crown, and they could spoil Clemson's dreams early on.

**October 19<sup>th</sup> vs Florida State**—This game is always circled on the schedule. The last couple of years, this game has decided the division. The ACC champion could easily come from the Atlantic, and it's a good bet it will be the winner of this game. The Noles lost QB E.J. Manuel, but they do return a stellar defense. The fact that the game is being played in front of a rowdy crowd in Death Valley could be the deciding factor.

**November 30<sup>th</sup> at South Carolina**—Clemson can pride itself on being the best in their division and their league, but they have not been the best in their state. Steve Spurrier and the Gamecocks have owned the Tigers recently, winning the last four match-ups. Clemson travels to Columbia this year, but they have the experience and the passion to beat USC in Tajh Boyd's final season.

## #9 - FLORIDA:

By Alan Zlotorzynski:

### 2012 SEASON RECAP:

After a disappointing 7-6 first season, the expectations for the Florida Gators entering the 2012 season were that of a wait and see mode. Going into his second season as head coach in Gainesville, Will Muschamp's team seemed to be given the benefit of the doubt as they entered the year ranked No.23 by the AP. The ranking seemed to more out of respect for what the Gators had accomplished during Urban Meyers tenure than what many actually felt Florida could be capable of during Muschamp's sophomore season.



If Muschamp was going to have success, he would need to rely on his defense. That unit had the capacity to be one of the best in SEC, which, if you know SEC football-- also means the entire country. Led by Sharrif Floyd up front, Jon Bostic at LB and Matt Elam in the secondary, the Gators did not let the orange and blue faithful down, as they finished second in the SEC and fifth in the nation in total defense.

In fact, Muschamp's offense needed to be carried for portions of the season, as QB Jeff Driskel battled an ankle injury and inconsistency for much of the season. The Florida passing game resembled anything but---a Florida passing game. The Gators' 146.3 passing yards per game were their second lowest for a season since 1979.

However, much like the defense's punch'em in the mouth style, the offense grinded out wins and owned teams in time of possession during many pivotal second halves last season. RB Mike Gillislee rushed for 1,124 smash mouth yards and 11 total touchdowns to help lead the Gators to a final record of 11-2.

The Gators protected the “Swamp” and did not let LSU or South Carolina steal wins, as the Tigers and Gamecocks did two years before. In fact, the Gators won as many games in the SEC in 2012 (7) as they did the entire season during Muschamp’s first year in Gainesville.

Florida climbed as high as third in the polls but a Week Eight loss to the Georgia Bulldogs dropped the Gators to No. 8 and all but eliminated their chances of playing for the SEC Championship. That is life in the nation’s toughest conference. Instead of carrying their one loss record to the BCS National Championship game as they did in 2006 and 2008, where they won the title, Florida headed to New Orleans to play the Louisville Cardinals in the BCS Sugar Bowl.

Instead of the satisfaction of finishing with a 12-1 season record, New Orleans brought disappointment and confusion. Florida became part of the smallest crowd in Sugar Bowl history as the University Athletic Association lost over \$800k due to lack of ticket sales. And where the fans failed to show up, so did the team. The Gators started the game with a turnover and any hopes of a comeback were squashed early on as Louisville QB Teddy Bridgewater, an all but guaranteed Heisman finalist in 2014, picked the touted Florida defense apart on his way to bringing the Cardinal’s first BCS bowl win back to Louisville.

SEC Coach of the Year Will Muschamp apologized to fans after the game, as he was also disappointed with the team’s performance in New Orleans. Sugar Bowl notwithstanding, the Gators had a great rebound year, as they beat three top-10 opponents, for the second time in school history and recorded Florida’s first undefeated season at home since 2009.

## **2013 SEASON OUTLOOK:**

This season, expectations are high. Alabama is not on the schedule and fans are thirsty for Muschamp’s first win in Jacksonville over his alma mater, Georgia. The Gators have a stacked backfield and for the first time in his career in Gainesville, QB Jeff Driskel, enters the season as the clear-cut starter.

### **OFFENSE:**

Driskel’s mobility (413 rushing yards-4TD’s) helped the Gators offense tremendously last season but he will need to improve the passing game. Second year Offensive Coordinator Brent Pease liked Driskel’s efficiency last season (63.7 percent) but wants

more downfield completions and better yards per pass attempt (6.7 yards) for his potentially explosive backfield to take shape.

Wide receivers are an area of concern. Quinton Dunbar, Latroy Pittman and senior, Trey Burton do not strike fear into SEC secondaries, so Pease will need to get creative with Burton once again and his “slash” type of play. If any receiver will take the reins of this Gator’s offense, it will be the lengthy freshman, DeMarcus Robinson. With only one other Gator-esque threat at wide out for Florida, Robinson will need a good showing in 2013 to make much needed plays in the passing game. And if there is one attribute Driskel has to love about Robinson, it is his ability to make plays on poorly thrown balls. Along with tight end Kent Taylor, Robinson will be the go to guy on third downs and in the red zone.

One of the biggest question marks in the SEC is Andre Debose. Two years ago, Debose caught 40 passes and averaged 27 yards per catch, but last year had minimal impact. Debose has elite speed and great hands, but the word is that his work ethic leaves a lot to be desired. Debose is truly the wild card of this team because although they do not need him to win, solid productivity from Debose would make wins much more comfortable for the Gators.

In the backfield, Matt Jones established himself as the top running back option in the spring, distancing himself from junior Mack Brown and freshman Kelvin Taylor. A physical back at 6'2", 226 pounds, Jones can run through contact and could be an anchor for Florida’s ball control offense. Taylor, the son of Florida legend and NFL running back Fred Taylor, broke Emmitt Smith’s state career rushing record as a junior and is expected to become yet another eventual legend in the Gators backfield. A pure speed rusher, Taylor can blow past defenders and most games will be the fastest player on the field. However, Taylor still has not fully grasped Brent Pease’s offense and will start the season backing up starter Matt Jones.

One of the most optimistic developments during the offseason for the Gators’ offense could be the improvement of the line. With Maryland transfer Max Garcia at guard and tackle D.J. Humphries adding weight, the left side of the line could be especially improved. At 280, Humphries is the only projected starter weighing less than 300 pounds.

## **DEFENSE:**

Gone from the interior line are Sharrif Floyd and Omar Hunter. Senior Dominique Easley was moved from end to tackle after spring practice, though he could still play end if Leon Orr takes over at nose tackle. Jonathan Bullard will likely step up to replace

Easley at end, while at the “buck” end position, the Gators will likely go with Dante Fowler Jr.

This presents an interesting dilemma for Muschamp, who prefers to have is best on the field at all times. If Bullard is at the “buck” position, then Ronald Powell will step up to play one of the outside spots. Gone from the linebacking core are Jon Bostic and Jelani Jenkins. Hard-hitting Antonio Morrison is expected to replace Bostic while Michael Taylor is expected to join Powell on the other outside.

The safety position is young but depth in the Gators secondary is deep. Jaylen Watkins and Cody Riggs are expected to take over at safety. Watkins and Riggs have a combined 33 career starts, mainly at cornerback. Marcus Roberson is a solid cover corner while CB Loucheiz Purifoy, who had three forced fumbles and two blocked kicks last season, is the top playmaker. Brian Poole, a special team’s contributor as a true freshman, and incoming freshman Vernon Hargreaves III will be tough to ignore, even in a crowded backfield.

The Florida defense takes a back seat to no one in a defensive heavy conference. The Gators tend to utilize more nickel back sets and they remain strong against both the pass and the run. Nevertheless, they will need to grow up in a hurry, returning just four starters.

#### **KEY PLAYER NOTE: Loucheiz Purifoy**

Purifoy also spent time this spring at wide receiver and although he is raw, showed a great ability to be a stout playmaker for the Gators on both sides of the ball. Could he be the next “Prime Time” player in the Sunshine state?

Purifoy is the only Gators wide receiver and cornerback listed on Phil Steele’s preseason All-SEC Team. Although it is the fourth team, Purifoy has the talent to land on the first team at either position if he keeps his head screwed on straight.

#### **SCHEDULE:**

On the surface, playing any SEC schedule that does not include Alabama seems to be a win-win. Sorry Gator fans but if you really want the Tide as bad as you think you do, then beating Georgia, Will Muschamp’s alma mater, would be a good place to start to get back to the SEC Championship Game, where Saban and the Tide will likely be waiting.

Aug. 31 - Toledo

**Sept. 7 - at Miami FL**



Sept. 21 - Tennessee  
Sept. 28 - at Kentucky  
Oct. 5 - Arkansas  
**Oct. 12 - at Louisiana State**  
Oct. 19 - at Missouri  
**Nov. 2 - vs. Georgia @Jacksonville, FL**  
Nov. 9 - Vanderbilt  
**Nov. 16 - at South Carolina**  
Nov. 23 - Georgia Southern  
Nov. 30 - Florida State

**(Key Games in Bold)**

### **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

In order for the “World’s largest outdoor cocktail party” to matter, at least on the field in Jacksonville, the Gators will have to beat the Mad Hatter in the Bayou first. However, even before that, a tough matchup with the Miami Hurricanes awaits the Gators in Week 2 in south Florida.

This is a manageable schedule but the Gators are going to have to be a solid road team with games at LSU and South Carolina. The good news is the worst 28-day stretch of Florida's schedule, from November 2 to November 30, still features four games in the state of Florida.

The Gators defense does get a stiff test right out of the gate against a good Toledo offense. I like the Gators to beat the Missouri Tigers on the road and head to Jacksonville undefeated at 7-0. I do not see this as the year Muschamp lowers the “Boom” on his former school and I do not expect a win in the land of Spurrier.

That leaves the Gators as a two loss SEC team and likely third in the East. However, the formula for getting to a BCS Championship Game is a great defense, a great running game and protecting the football. This squad does all three very well, so do not be surprised if the Gators are in the hunt, or at the very least, playing Alabama the first Saturday in December in Atlanta.

## #10 - FLORIDA STATE:

By Alan Zlotorzynski:

### 2012 RECAP:

The rise of the Florida State Seminoles program back into national prominence is by no means complete, but third year head coach Jimbo Fisher and his Seminoles certainly made strides in 2012. The reigning Atlantic Coast Conference and Orange Bowl Champions set another school record as 11 Florida State players were selected in the 2013 NFL Draft.

Fisher had his Noles ranked as high as No.3 last season, but after losing badly to cross-state rival Florida in late November, they dropped to No. 12. They would eventually finish ranked in the top 10 in both major polls for the first time since the 2000 season.

During the 2012 season, Florida State won its first ACC title since 2005 and advanced to their first BCS Bowl since that season as well. They won 10 regular season games for the first time since 2003 and won their first BCS Bowl game since the 2000 Sugar Bowl. They defeated an outmatched Northern Illinois team in the Orange Bowl 31-10 last New Year's Day.

The team also tied the school record for most games won in a single season. The Seminoles appeared headed for the No. 1 spot for the first time since 2000 but a disappointing one point loss at NC State in Week 6 derailed any title hopes.

On offense, the Seminoles were led by Senior QB EJ Manuel, who was the first QB selected in April's NFL Draft when the Buffalo Bills selected him No. 16 in the first round. During his senior season, he threw for the second most yards in team history with 3,392, trailing only Chris Weinke's Heisman Trophy winning season, in which Weinke threw for 4,167 yards. Manuel went 25-6 as a starter, won the first BCS bowl for



Florida State since 2000 and won five out of six games against intrastate rivals Miami and Florida. Manuel led the offense to its most prolific season in team history, clearly surpassing the 1999 National Championship squad with 6,591 yards.

In the backfield, FSU had three running backs rush for more than 600 yards. Chris Thompson, DeVonta Freeman and James Wilder Jr. all combined to rush for 1,987 yards and 24 rushing touchdowns. Led by Rashad Green (741 rec yards), the Seminoles also had three WR's with more than 500 receiving yards.

Jimbo Fisher credits his time with Alabama head coach Nick Saban as one of the top influences of his coaching career and you can clearly see Saban's influence with the way Fisher recruits for his defense. Last season, FSU produced a trio of NFL starters in ends Bjoern Werner and Tank Carradine, as well as CB Xavier Rhodes. Werner (Indianapolis) and Rhodes (Minnesota) were both selected in the first round with the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> picks overall. Carradine was not far behind. The NFC Champion San Francisco 49ers selected him with the 40<sup>th</sup> overall pick in the second round.

## **2013 OUTLOOK:**

With success comes change and the Seminoles enter the 2013 season with plenty of change on the field and on the sidelines.

Florida State returns six starters on offense and just four on defense. Both the offense and defense will need to cope with the losses of talented players at pivotal positions. This could be a challenging fourth year for Fisher. The good news is that the ACC seems to weaken each year and the Seminoles may be able to mature in time to play in the ACC Championship.

Not only will Fisher need to cope with loss of key position players but also he will have to cope with the loss of the majority of his staff. After the season, FSU lost six coaches with the biggest occurring when defensive coordinator Mark Stoops opted to take the job as head coach at Kentucky. D.J. Eliot left his position as defensive ends coach to assist Stoops at Kentucky as defensive coordinator. Eddie Gran, who served as running backs coach and special team's coordinator, as well as associate head coach, also left the staff to serve as offensive coordinator at Cincinnati. Offensive coordinator James Coley left Florida State to take the same position 500 miles south in Miami. Greg Hudson, an assistant head coach left his position to become the defensive coordinator at Purdue. Quarterbacks coach Dameyune Craig left Florida State to return to Auburn, his Alma matter.

Fisher compensated by hiring former Alabama assistant coach, Jeremy Pruitt, who joined the Florida State staff as the new defensive coordinator. Former Tennessee assistant coach Sal Sunseri was hired as defensive ends coach. Former Minnesota head coach Tim Brewster was hired as tight ends coach. Former South Carolina assistant coach Jimmy Graham was hired as running backs coach and former Georgia Tech defensive coordinator was hired as linebackers coach and special teams coordinator. Randy Sanders was hired as quarterbacks coach.

If you were able to keep up with all of that (and many thanks to Wikipedia and others), you are ahead of the game. Normally, a few coaching decisions would not be so newsworthy for a team preview unless it is the head coach but this is simply too many changes to ignore. Indeed, the ability of Fisher to quickly mold these guys into a cohesive, effective coaching staff is going to be a major factor in determining how successful the Seminoles will be this year.

## **OFFENSE:**

On the field, the loss of Manuel at QB opens up a serious question mark at the position. However, many are relying on the fact that redshirt freshman Jameis Winston is the next big thing in Tallahassee. He is a multi-sport athlete. While competing for the starting quarterback position during spring football, Winston also played in a part-time capacity for the Seminoles' eighth-ranked baseball team.

According to a recent article in the USA Today, FSU football coach Jimbo Fisher described it as, "testing the waters." The redshirt freshman was the star of the FSU football team's spring game and oh by the way, he started in right field in baseball and comes out of the bullpen to pitch. Fisher is supportive of Winston's endeavors even if Seminole football fans wish he would just pick one sport---FOOTBALL---and excel.

Former Seminoles great Charlie Ward, who won the Heisman Trophy and led FSU to the 1993 National Championship while also starting on the basketball team did it, Fisher pointed out. "Charlie did it. Deion (Sanders) did it," Fisher said. "Sammie Smith did it. In the history, there have been a lot of guys that have done it. Florida State has had quite a number of them. And he (Winston) continues to do it very well."

Not long after making those comparisons, however, Fisher acknowledged that he is concerned about fans coming into the 2013 season with unrealistic expectations. As good as Winston looked in the spring game, when he completed 12 of 15 passes for 205 yards and two touchdowns, that essentially was an intrasquad scrimmage at home.

How impressive was Winston in the spring? Enough so that junior quarterback Clint Trickett, who entered the spring atop the depth chart, announced he was transferring to West Virginia just four days after the Seminoles' spring game.

As high as Fisher is on Winston, he has not named him the starter. Winston, who was rated by many as the nations' No. 1 quarterback coming out of Hueytown (Ala.) High School near Birmingham, still will have to fight off challenges from sophomore Jacob Coker and redshirt freshman Sean Maguire.

The backfield returns two of the three runners that eclipsed the 600-yard mark in 2012. Junior tailbacks Devonta Freeman finished with 660 yards and eight touchdowns last season, while James Wilder Jr. had 635 yards and 11 scores. Led by junior Rashad Greene, Kenny Shaw and Kelvin Benjamin, the wide receiver group is deep and talented. All had at least 27 receptions last fall, but the play at the quarterback position will obviously depend on how their seasons turn out.

With four starters returning, FSU will have one of the best offensive lines in the ACC. The lone new starter is still a veteran in junior Bobby Hart, who has plenty of experience. They are not deep up front, so this group will have to stay healthy.

## **DEFENSE:**

The hiring of Jeremy Pruitt away from Alabama to be the Noles new defensive coordinator is a move that will benefit the Seminoles for at least the next three years. Fisher hired Pruitt with the hopes of molding his unit into one of the best in the nation, which is the way it used to be in Tallahassee.

The linebackers will lead a talented group in the ACC. Seniors Christian Jones (Preseason All-ACC) and Telvin Smith lead a deep and talented group. Despite the loss of Xavier Rhodes, FSU is deep and talented in their secondary. Senior Lamarcus Joyner is coming off an All-ACC season at safety but worked primarily at cornerback in spring drills. Senior Terrence Brooks led FSU's defensive backs in tackles last season, and juniors Tyler Hunter and Karlos Williams are poised to become stars for Pruitt.

Alabama's defense was one of the best in the nation at creating big plays and turnovers on defense. Pruitt certainly has the secondary in Tallahassee to replicate that kind of success.

Pruitt's biggest challenges will be replacing four starters on the defensive line. However, new tackles Timmy Jernigan and Demonte McAllister had better statistical seasons than the starters they are replacing. Jernigan is a preseason All-ACC selection.

It is understood if you would expect there to be a drop off at defensive end. After all, the Seminoles are trying to replace two top 40 selections in the draft. With that said, offensive lines will not want to go to sleep on sophomores Georgio Newberry and Mario Edwards, as well as senior Dan Hicks. With the talent the Noles have behind the defensive line, it is likely the three will have time to mature.

## **SCHEDULE:**

Sept. 2: at Pittsburgh  
Sept. 14: Nevada  
Sept. 21: Bethune-Cookman  
Sept. 28: at Boston College  
Oct. 5: Maryland  
**Oct. 19: at Clemson**  
Oct. 26: NC State  
Nov. 2: Miami  
Nov. 9: at Wake Forest  
Nov. 16: Syracuse  
Nov. 23: Idaho  
**Nov. 30: at Florida**

## **Schedule Overview:**

Conference realignment is making predicting seasons and schedules tougher and tougher to do. The ACC is the poster child of this theory. Figuring out who is a contender and who isn't has become increasingly more difficult---and that is OK.

It is simple for Florida State; they need to be undefeated when they travel to Death Valley to play Clemson in their sixth game of the season. They must beat Clemson if they want to return to a BCS Bowl, but with the way the Tigers are looking this year, that will not be easy. The Noles won the ACC Atlantic last season because they put up 49 points on the Tigers in Tallahassee. Clemson will look to return the favor in Death Valley this year.

If Florida State manages to get past Clemson, they may still have to beat the Gators in the Swamp. Florida embarrassed FSU last season in Tallahassee, so this does not figure to be an easy chore either. While the game against the Gators may not have ACC implications, it could have BCS implications.

FSU must also avoid the annual---oops, we did not mean to lose that game--contest. Last year, it was a 17-16 loss at NC State, and it almost cost the Noles. The potential to trip up could actually occur at home this year when the, "lucky to not be on the death penalty" Miami Hurricanes visit on November 2. The Canes could be a dangerous team this season.

Outside of that, the Noles should get past a year that could potentially create a lot of hiccups and growing pains for Jimbo Fisher. The good news is the Seminoles are getting back into national talk each season, the bad news is---they still need more time to be revered as the Gators are in the mighty SEC.



## #11 - Boise State:

By Steve Shoup:

### 2012 Recap:



The Broncos season didn't go according to plan as they lost their season opener to Michigan State, which given their soft conference schedule all but destroyed their BCS Bowl chances. For the past four years the Broncos scheduled a week one contest versus a top opponent from a big conference to boost their BCS rankings and to get national recognition.

In the past the Broncos have knocked off Oregon, Virginia Tech and Georgia, but in 2012 their plan didn't work. Michigan State took the week one game and it significantly hurt Boise State. The harsh reality of how weak their conference schedule was became a huge liability.

The Broncos then lost a second game to San Diego State later in the season, which led to the Broncos finishing the lowest in the rankings (18 in AP) since going unranked in 2007. Boise State had to settle for a Maaco Bowl victory over California to close out their season. Boise State did end up with a share of the conference title, but it was hardly the season they were hoping for.

It wasn't just bad luck in losing to Michigan State (and later San Diego State) that hurt the Broncos season, but the significant decline of their offensive production. The Broncos the last three seasons finished tied for 1st, 2nd and 5th in scoring average, putting up at least 42 points a game, but last year they fell to 55th with just over 30 points per game.

Their rushing offense had been no worse than 40th the last three years fell to 56th this past year. Their biggest drop though came from their passing attack, which was 11th in 2011 and 5th in 2010, fell all the way down to 71st this past year. Had Boise State played a big time conference schedule, they surely would have had their worst record in years due to that offensive production.

While the offense struggled the defense remained strong. They finished with the 8th best scoring defense and 12th best in terms of yards allowed. The Broncos defense only allowed four teams to score more than 17 points in a game, and no team ever scored as many as 30. While some of that can be attributed to the level of their

conference play, this defense would have been good regardless of who they played. Had the offense been just a little bit better, this defense could have led the Broncos to a BCS Bowl appearance.

## **2013 OUTLOOK:**

### **Offense:**

Though it was a rough year for the Broncos offensively, it is expected that they can turn it around this year. Boise State returns just six offensive starters, but most of their key back-ups are back and they are all expected to improve significantly this year. That improvement starts with senior quarterback Joe Southwick. It was a rough first year as a starter for Southwick, but he showed the promise to be able to handle the position for the Broncos. In his second year as a starter, it is expected that he takes his game to the next level and help get Boise State's passing attack back into the top 25.

Southwick's top target should be receiver Matt Miller who led the team in yards catches and touchdowns last season. Miller was 2nd team all-Mountain West last year and figures to get first team consideration this year. Sophomores Shane Williams-Rhodes (WR) and Holden Huff (TE), give the Broncos a pair of excellent breakout candidates. Both Williams-Rhodes and Huff performed well last year in limited opportunities. Now a year older both players are expected to play a bigger role in the Broncos offense this season, and should give Southwick the weapons he needs to be effective.

Sophomore Jay Ajayi is the team's leading returning rusher, after rushing for 548 yards and 5 touchdowns on just 82 carries. He figures to take over the feature role this year and should be in line for over 200 carries. Ajayi has big play ability and should continue the Broncos four year run of 1,000 yard rushers. He will have to run behind an offensive line that is returning only two starters, but that doesn't figure to be too much of an issue with the potential of a couple of likely replacements.

### **Defense:**

The Defense is returning seven starters but is expected to take a bit of a dip this season as they will be without a couple of their key guys. How much of a drop-off is unknown at this point, but it is likely they will fall out of the top 25 in scoring and yards allowed.

Defensive end Demarcus Lawrence led the Broncos with 9.5 sacks last season, and figures to once again be the focal point of the Broncos defensive plan. Boise State will

need to find ways to get him favorable match-ups where he can make big plays behind the line of scrimmage and force bad passes. He was supposed to team back up with Sam Ukwuachu, who had 4.5 sacks as a freshman, but Ukwuachu was kicked off the team this spring. The Broncos will use a combination of players opposite Lawrence to get the most out of him.

The Broncos defensive tackles, linebackers and safeties all figure to be strong this season, but serious questions remain at cornerback, where they lost senior Jamar Taylor to the NFL. Bryan Douglas is back, but he's returning from an ACL injury and it is unclear how healthy he'll be by the time the season rolls around. If some young corners step up this defense shouldn't be too bad, but if they don't it could lead to a couple disappointing losses.

## **Schedule:**

@ Washington

Tennessee-Martin

Air Force

@ Fresno State

Southern Miss

@ Utah State

Nevada

BYU

@ Colorado State

Wyoming

@ San Diego State

New Mexico

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

For the first time in years the Broncos don't have a ranked non-conference opponent on their schedule. California is a solid team, and ironically who the Broncos beat in their Bowl game, but they aren't going to do a lot for Boise State's BCS prestige. Though they aren't ranked they are a solid club and do represent one of the tougher challenges for the Broncos this season. With a weaker conference this becomes a must win game for the Broncos, and it is on the road. Boise State should be favored, but it will be a good test to start the season.

Next on the marquee game docket is the Broncos toughest competition for the conference, Fresno State. The Bulldogs were part of the 3-way tie for the conference lead last season, and return an experienced quarterback Derek Carr who was the MWC offensive player of the year. Making matters worse it's a road game and early in the season, which could mean that the Broncos aren't fully up to speed heading into that game.

The final two games to watch are home versus Nevada and away against San Diego State. Nevada figures to be an improved team this year and could get back into the mix for the Conference Title. The Wildcats have an innovative offense that has given the Broncos problems in the past. If the defense isn't fully ready they could have some problems with Nevada. San Diego State beat the Broncos on the blue turf last season, and could have a better opportunity this year when they play at home. Boise State is probably pretty easily the favorite in this match-up, but it is another road game and the Aztecs should be dangerous this year.

## #12 - LOUISVILLE:

**By Derrick Battle:**

### 2012 Recap:

In three seasons as the Louisville Cardinals head coach, Charlie Strong has methodically put together a robust program.

The Cardinals finished last season 11-2 and won a share of the American Athletic Conference Championship (formerly named the Big East Conference). As they close a chapter with the conference to join the ACC next season, Louisville hopes to go out on top.

Strong hopes that his team can build off of their 33-23 Sugar Bowl victory against Florida.

Junior quarterback Teddy Bridgewater had an excellent season throwing for 3,718 yards, 27 touchdowns and eight interceptions. Due to his high performance on the field, Bridgewater has been garnered a Heisman Trophy candidate for the upcoming season as well as one of the top quarterback

prospect for next May NFL Draft. His top target, first-team All-American Athletic selection junior receiver DeVante Parker also returns. Parker had 40 catches for 744 yards and ten touchdowns.



### 2013 Season Outlook:

#### Offense:

The offense only returns five starters, although Bridgewater had a great year he was hurt toward the end of the season. Along with Parker, junior wide out Eli Rogers who is the leading receiver in catches (46 receptions) for the Cardinals will also need to have another great year.

Bridgewater has been in early talks as a Heisman contender and will compete against

current Heisman Texas A&M quarterback Johnny Manziel. The Miami, Fla. Product is the and reigning AAC Offensively Player of the Year looks to put up even better numbers as he tries to lead the Cardinals to their first national championship.

However, better play from the offensive line will be key in the success of Bridgewater as well as the Cardinals, last season they gave up 2.4 sacks per game. Left tackle Alex Kupper and Mario Benavides are gone from the unit. With three returning to the offensive line it will be crucial for them to keep Bridgewater upright for a successful season instead of on the turf. Junior right tackle Jamon Brown returns after starting in 13 games a season ago. Sophomore Abraham Garcia is a favorite to replace Kupper while the center position might not be determined until the fall.

Although running back Jeremy Wright left early for the NFL Draft, the Cardinals will rely on senior Senorise Perry and junior Dominique Brown. Wright led the Cardinals with 824 yards and 10 touchdowns. He also played a critical part in the passing game with 41 receptions for 325 yards. Perry rushed for 705 yards and 11 touchdowns before tearing his ACL in 2012. Brown was redshirted last season, but ran for 533 yards in 2011. A third running back, sophomore Corvin Lamb may also have an opportunity if Perry is not healthy enough to play when the season begins.

## **Defense:**

The defensive secondary was ranked 16th in the NCAA against the pass. Replacing cornerback Adrian Bushell will be a difficult task for the Cardinals secondary. Bushell was named to back-to-back first-team All-Big East. In two season Bushell started 23 games, recorded two interceptions and 105 tackles. In 2012 he led Louisville with 14 pass deflections. Junior Andrew Johnson or redshirt freshman Devontre Parnell will look to battle in replacing Bushell. Johnson played in 12 games last season and chipped in with 26 tackles and recorded his first interception in the Sugar Bowl. While losing Bushell hurts the cornerback position All-Big East safeties Calvin Pryor and Hakeem Smith will help defend the deep parts of the field. Junior cornerback Terrell Floyd will also play a pivotal role in the secondary. Floyd led Louisville with three interceptions, one of which was returned for a touchdown.

Other than Bushell the Cardinals return most of their starters from a year ago. Louisville should have one of the best front sevens in the AAC, which is led by linebacker Preston Brown and defensive end Marcus Smith. Brown led the Cardinals with 109 tackles and defensive end Smith led the team with seven tackles for loss.

## **SCHEDULE:**

Aug. 31 Ohio  
Sept. 7 Eastern Kentucky  
Sept. 14 at Kentucky

Sept. 21 FIU  
Sept. 28 Bye Week  
Oct. 5 at Temple  
Oct. 10 Rutgers  
Oct. 18 UCF  
Oct. 26 at South Florida  
Nov. 2 Bye Week  
Nov. 8 at Connecticut  
Nov. 16 Houston  
Nov. 23 Memphis  
Nov. 30 Bye Week  
Dec. 5 at Cincinnati

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

Louisville has a conference schedule that they can easily blow by. Key non-conference games against Ohio and Kentucky may be speed bumps, but the Cardinals are more talented. The Ohio Bobcats won nine games last season. However, with quarterback Tyler Tettleton gone offensively the Bobcats may not have enough firepower.

A game against in-state rival Kentucky will always be an emotion and physical game. In the season -opener last year, Louisville defeated Kentucky 32-14. The Cardinals hope to defeat their rival for the third straight time since 2004-2006.

Louisville host key game against new conference opponent University of Central Florida and Rutgers. They play their season finale at Cincinnati. Last season the Cardinals were able to get past both Rutgers and Cincinnati by three points.

## #13 - Notre Dame:

By Tyler Fenwick:

### 2012 Recap:

Notre Dame had a season of mixed emotions in 2012. At least, that's what it feels like. A perfect regular season, capped off by an embarrassment in the BCS title game. All through the season, there was that "luck of the Irish" feeling go around. It seems like they had to pull it out late in about every game they played last season. But the true story of the season was defense.

Yes, Everett Golson had a fantastic season, and we'll talk about him in a minute. But this Notre Dame defense was phenomenal, only giving up 12 points per game and simply refusing to let teams to convert on third down.

That's what stood out to me the most. And to show you just how good this defense was, here's a list of teams from last season who did not score a touchdown against Notre Dame.



1. Michigan
2. Michigan St.
3. Miami
4. Boston College
5. Wake Forest

Five teams. That's almost half the schedule that did not manage to put the ball in the endzone against that Notre Dame defense. That's crazy to think about. And, of course, the leader of that defense was linebacker

Manti Te'o. As a Heisman candidate, Te'o made all the necessary plays and had some astonishing moments in his senior season, including three interceptions against Michigan and a critical pick against Oklahoma. He was a special player at Notre Dame and will be missed dearly there.

Everett Golson burst onto the scene right away for Brian Kelly. All we knew of Golson entering the season, was his incredible athletic ability and a reliable arm. I'd say that pretty well matches was the freshman did in 2012. At times, experienced backup



Tommy Rees had to step in and take the game into his own hands. He played the whole second half in a defensive battle against Michigan and coming up big again in a 3-overtime victory against Pittsburgh. The way I saw it all season, Everett Golson was the child who got all the attention and, contrary to most children, did very well himself. Rees was like the older brother who stepped in every now and then to fix things up.

Of course, now the big story for Notre Dame is the expulsion of Everett Golson from the university. I won't get into that here, but Coach Kelly has already said that if Everett can get back into the University of Notre Dame, he would be welcomed back to the football, which could possibly happen in 2014. Until then, Tommy Rees is the starter.

## **2013 Outlook:**

### **Offense:**

Tommy Rees will be stepping in for Everett Golson this season. And before any Notre Dame fans go into a complete panic, remember how lucky you are to have a backup like Tommy Rees, ready at a moment's notice.

Tommy Rees has three years of good experience for the Irish. He was the starter during his sophomore season and has started a total of 18 games at Notre Dame. So he isn't a guy who will need to get his feet wet. In his career, Rees has thrown for 4,413 yards, completed 57.6 percent of his passes and thrown for 34 touchdowns and 24 interceptions. They aren't ideal numbers, but I bet they're better than any other plan B across America.

I'm not expecting Tommy Rees to come out and be Superman for this Notre Dame team. That's not even who he is as a player. But I can see Rees getting close to that 3,000 yard mark, completing around 60 percent of his passes and just be able to orchestrate the offense as a whole. If anything needs serious attention, it's the turnovers. Last season, Rees only threw two interceptions, which isn't bad, even when you consider how much he actually played. But when Rees started twelve games in 2011, he threw 14 interceptions.

The running back situation at Notre Dame isn't a very pretty one. Junior George Atkinson will take over as the starter for the Irish. As a sophomore last season, Atkinson appeared in 12 games, running for 361 yards and averaging exactly seven yards per carry. So it's not all bad news. Atkinson has had some experience in the past and, most importantly, has proven he can be a reliable back.

Atkinson will probably run for anywhere from 800-1,000 yards this season. If he gets over that thousand yard mark, I would honestly be surprised. But this isn't a bad option for the Irish. He'll do fine.

Wide receivers could be another problem. Tight end Tyler Eifert left for the NFL, which

was a huge hit to this Notre Dame passing attack. The Irish are lacking a serious threat at wide receiver right now, but there is a little stability. Junior DaVaris Daniels made three starts last season—31 receptions, 490 yards—and will have to step into a primary role, meaning another 300-400 yards on top of last year's total. Senior Daniel Smith made four starts last season—seven receptions, 47 yards—and will probably be stepping into a secondary role behind Daniels.

The offensive line returns three starters from a year ago: senior Zack Martin, senior Chris Watt and junior Christian Lombard. The front won't be exceptionally good this season, but it certainly won't be bad. Helping create a running game for Notre Dame will be huge this year.

### **Defense:**

The Irish will continue to win with their defense. Although Manti Te'o is now gone, which isn't as big of a deal as everyone is making it out to be, this defense is full of tremendous talent at every level.

The meat of this defense is on the line. This is one of the best defensive lines in America. Senior Louis Nix will anchor the defensive line at defensive tackle. Nix flirted with the NFL for a bit but decided to stick around South Bend for his senior season. Joining Nix will be Stephon Tuitt and Sheldon Day.

Stopping the run was a huge part of Notre Dame's success last season, and that will continue in 2013. This is an incredibly talented group of kids up front for the Irish, and I really don't think they'll miss a beat from last year.

As I've already mentioned, it will obviously not be the same at linebacker without Manti Te'o, but his departure is being overhyped. This linebacking core is still very capable of making big plays, both in the run and pass game. Notre Dame has many play makers throughout this defense, so there is no need to worry about a Te'o-less defense.

Cornerbacks Keivarae Russell and Bennett Jackson both return as starters from a year ago and look to continue their excellence in the pass coverage. Last season, Notre Dame allowed fewer than one touchdown per game. That's a really good statistic to just show you how dominant this defense really was.

### **SCHEDULE:**

vs Temple  
**@ Michigan**  
@ Purdue  
vs Michigan State  
**vs Oklahoma**

vs Arizona State  
**vs USC**  
@ Air Force  
vs Navy  
@ Pittsburgh  
vs BYU  
**@ Stanford**

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

Well right away, you can see Notre Dame's non-conference slate is—oh wait...

Sorry, that was my attempt at humor. Heading to Ann Arbor in week two will be a very tough challenge for the Irish. A lot of times, this game happens in week three or, sometimes, even week four. The early meeting might not give us a very accurate gauge of where either team is. Going to West Lafayette won't be easy. The Boilermakers will have a good defense; it's the offense that offers them trouble. But if both can get going, look out.

Then we see a stretch of four straight home games for Notre Dame. And these are the teams you want to be playing at home. Michigan State isn't back to being a huge threat, but that's always a fun game to watch because of the rivalry. But Oklahoma, Arizona State and USC are all going to be tough games for the Irish to win. Best case scenario, I think Notre Dame takes two of those three.

The next week, Air Force's rushing attack might cause the Irish a few problems here and there. But it's nothing these guys haven't seen before. And Air Force does not have a strong enough defense to stop Tommy Rees and the offense. Going to Pittsburgh will be interesting because of the fun affair those two had last year in South Bend.

The final home game of the year comes against BYU, which I think the Irish should win. Then it's all about going on the road to Stanford. Frankly, I don't see Notre Dame winning this game. Granted, the Irish do have a very good defense, Stanford's defense will be able to limit the Irish to be one-dimensional and go on to win a low scoring game.

## #14 - TEXAS:

By Derrick Battle:

### 2013 Season Overview:

Since their loss in the BCS National Championship game against Alabama in 2009, the Texas Longhorns have compiled a 22-16 record. With the talent they have brought in through recruiting, Longhorn fans have grown impatience as they wait on another Championship run.

This season is critical for Head Coach Mack Brown. With the success of winning the National Championship in 2005 and two Big 12 conference titles, all of that can be swept under the rug with another disappointing year. The past three seasons have left bittersweet fans in Austin sour reliving their past accomplishments.



#### Offense:

Texas finished last season off on a good note defeating Oregon State 31-27. Hopeful to build off of their 9-4 record, Texas returned 10 starters from last season. Junior quarterback David Ash is projected as No. 1 on the depth chart, but junior Case McCoy is close behind.

Ash had a quiet season throwing for 2,699 yards, 19 touchdowns and eight interceptions. Although Ash numbers look good, he will need to produce more and make clutch plays during the season for the Longhorns to have a successful season. In the Longhorns spring game, Ash was solid completing 17-24 for 192 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions.

With seasoned skill receivers led by senior Mike Davis and junior Jaxson Shipley the Longhorns passing attack will be lethal to opponents. Davis and Shipley combined for 116 receptions for 1,676 yards and 13 touchdowns.

Texas will also have a deep running attack led by sophomore running back Jonathan Gray. Gray led the ground game with 149 carries for 701 yards and three touchdowns. Malcolm Brown and Joe Bergeron will also play a role in the running game. Bergeron was the Longhorns goal line specialist scoring 16 touchdowns. Brown who has good

size (6'0" 223 lbs.) is a great change of pace back and will come in while Gray is fatigue.

### **Defense:**

The Longhorns defense returns nine starters from a year ago. While their defense loss safety Kenny Vaccaro and defensive end Alex Okafor to the NFL, the Longhorns have plenty of depth to fill the void. Vaccaro led Texas with 107 tackles last season and five pass break ups. On the line Okafor led the Longhorn in sacks recording 12.5. Senior linebacker Jordan Hicks and senior defensive end Jackson Jeffcoat are healthy and will have a big role in leading the Longhorns front seven. Both Hicks and Jeffcoat were injured in the first four games of the year and missed the rest of the season. With these two players back Texas will look to improve its 88th ranked rushing defense from last season. Although he went down with an injury, Jeffcoat is the Longhorns returning sack leader. They also bring back linebacker Steve Edmond who was second in tackles with 103.

With the 88th ranked rushing defense Texas uncharacteristically allowed 29.2 points per game and 29 rushing touchdowns. Their secondary was also ranked 36th against the pass. With Vaccaro gone defensive backs Quandre Diggs and Adrian Phillips and Carrington Byndom hope to improve in the secondary. Diggs led the Longhorns with four interceptions last season. Phillips is the second leading tackler returning with 72 tackles and two pass break ups

### **SCHEDULE:**

Aug. 31 New Mexico State  
Sept. 7 at BYU  
Sept. 14 Ole Miss  
Sept. 21 Kansas State  
Oct. 5 at Iowa State  
Oct. 12 Oklahoma (game played in Dallas)  
Oct. 26 at TCU  
Nov. 2 Kansas  
Nov. 9 at West Virginia  
Nov. 16 Oklahoma State  
Nov. 28 Texas Tech  
Dec. 7 at Baylor

### **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

With a large amount of experience players returning and a top 25 recruiting class, Texas may be an early favorite to run the table in 2013. Games against BYU, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, TCU and Texas Tech will be key games to watch throughout the year.

Highlighted games will be at West Virginia, against TCU and Kansas State. These three teams the Longhorns fell short to in conference play which dashed their hopes to make an appearance in the Big 12 title game.

Emphasis will be placed on the game against the Sooners who mulled the Longhorns, 62-21 in Dallas last season. The Longhorns will key in heavily on Sooners running backs Damien Williams. Williams shredded the Texas defense with 22 carries for 167 yards and a touchdown. Oklahoma also had 677 yards of total offense in the rout. The Longhorns have lost three straight games to Oklahoma. The past two seasons, the Sooners have put up 117 points to the Longhorns 38.

## **#15 - Michigan:**

**By Tyler Fenwick:**

### **2012 Recap:**

Michigan went into the 2012 season with some very high expectations, following an 11 win season that was capped off with a win against Virginia Tech in the Sugar Bowl. And the vibe that surrounded Ann Arbor was almost magical. Denard Robinson was playing in his final season as a Wolverine; head coach Brady Hoke brought in a very solid recruiting class; and everyone was excited to see the improvements on defense.

The Wolverines opened up their season with a highly-anticipated game against (2)Alabama. But that game went south quickly, and it turned out to just be a beating on national television—not the ideal way to start the season. Three weeks later, the Wolverines traveled to South Bend, where they arguably had their worst game of the season. The offense could only muster up six points against the stingy Notre Dame defense, and Denard Robinson threw four interceptions.

Through the next three games, the Wolverines went on to beat Purdue, Illinois and, most importantly, Michigan State. Knocking off the Spartans was the biggest triumph of the season.

A week later, Michigan had a chance to go to Nebraska and take the lead in the Legends division, but the Cornhuskers simply outplayed the Wolverines and took the game by a score of 23-9.

In the final regular season game of the season, Michigan marched into Columbus with aspirations of knocking off the undefeated Buckeyes. But Ohio State, led by Braxton Miller, held off the Wolverines late, winning 26-21 and capping off their perfect season with a win over Michigan. In the Outback Bowl, Jadeveon Clowney and South Carolina proved to be just a little too much for the Wolverines, hanging on late and winning 33-28. That was the end to an 8-5 season.

### **2013 Outlook:**

#### **Offense:**

This Wolverine offense will look a little different from what we're used to seeing. With Denard Robinson out and Devin Gardner in, the passing game will be a huge strength for the Wolverines this season. We got a little sneak peek of what that might look like for

the last couple game in 2012, and Wolverine fans should be excited for what's to come. There will be a lot more precision in the passing game and some better decision making, too. If Fitzgerald Toussaint can come back like he was last year before his injury, the running game also looks to be in good shape. Plus, there's a lot of depth at running back.



Elliot Mealer and Patrick Omameh will be sincerely missed on the offensive line. That will be a point of concern for the Wolverines this season. Protecting Gardner could be a huge problem at times, but the fact that Taylor Lewan decided to come to Michigan makes a huge difference up front. Without Lewan, the offensive line would have been left in crumbs, needing rebuilt. So there is that positive note. The Wolverines will have to rely on guys like Mike Schofield and Kyle Kalis, who have little experience.

Michigan will most definitely miss Roy Roundtree lining up out wide, but not all is lost at the wide receiver position. This is actually a very good group of receivers for Devin Gardner to work with. Jeremy Gallon will be the leader in 2013. Last season, Gallon had almost 900 receiving yards. I fully expect him to get over the century mark this year. Alongside Gallon, Drew Dileo emerged as a very good receiver in some late games last year, sort of teasing us with he's capable of. I'm looking to see if he can unleash all of that for this season. Jeremy Jackson will be seeing more opportunities this season. Jackson has a lot of upside to his game, and he'll be looking to make an impact for his senior season. At the tight end position, Devin Funchess is the man to keep your eye on. He started the 2012 season very strong, but he then faded out as conference play hit, and we never got to see the play-maker from the beginning of the season. Hopefully, he'll be able to add some consistency to his game this season.

## **Defense:**

Since Brady Hoke and Greg Mattison have been working with this defense, we've seen a totally different defensive squad. They're playing good, aggressive football and keeping the Wolverines in games when the offense can't get thing going. That's a complete 180 degree shift from a few years ago.

There are some big names missing from this year's team, but with the returning talent and freshmen coming in, I don't believe it's reason to doubt. Linebacker Jake Ryan is a star in the making for this Wolverine defense. As a redshirt sophomore last season, Ryan made a name for himself in the Big Ten with 56 tackles, 16 of them being behind



the line of scrimmage. Junior Brennen Breyer will most likely be the guy to step up on the defensive line. Although he hasn't had huge numbers in the past, the Wolverines will need him to be that guy this season.

## **SCHEDULE:**

vs Central Michigan

**vs Notre Dame**

vs Akron

@ Connecticut

vs Minnesota

@ Penn State

vs Indiana

**@ Michigan State**

**vs Nebraska**

@ Northwestern

@ Iowa

**vs Ohio State**

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

Michigan doesn't open up with an incredibly tough non-conference schedule, but this certainly isn't a season where we'll be bored with everything until conference play starts. Right away, Central Michigan is a worthy opponent. That will be a good chance to see what Michigan will be showing Notre Dame the next week. It's huge that that game is in Ann Arbor. Going on the road to Connecticut might be a tricky game. The Huskies have a very good defense and can move the ball down the field.

Michigan opens up its conference season at home against Minnesota. Last season was a blowout win for the Wolverines, and I wouldn't expect something too far from that this time around. Going to Happy Valley—that will be a fun game to watch. We know about Penn State's relentless defense. Whether or not they can get their quarterback situation solved is yet to be seen. Indiana could offer the Wolverines a huge challenge on defense. I'm expecting the Hoosiers to have one of the top three offenses in the Big Ten this season. Michigan State (away) will be a huge game this season. 2012's version was a last second victory for the Wolverines, which snapped a streak of four consecutive Spartan victories. The next week is another headline game at home against Nebraska. This game could decide who wins the Legends Division.

Back-to-back weeks on the road against Northwestern and Iowa should be two wins for the Wolverines. But if one of these teams were to test Michigan, it would be Northwestern and that strike-fast offense. Finally, the Wolverines get Ohio State at home, a game we always look forward to. The obvious challenge will be stopping Braxton Miller and that lethal, Buckeye offense.

## #16 - Oklahoma State:

**By Steve Shoup:**

### 2012 Recap:

The Oklahoma State Cowboys knew 2012 was going to be a bit of a rebuilding year as they had lost their star quarterback, receivers, free safety and a number of other starters. I doubt though they thought they would finish the regular season with 5 losses. Despite the losses, Oklahoma State still managed to finish 4th in the conference, and was bowl eligible. The Cowboys dismantled Purdue in the Heart of Texas Bowl to close their season out on a good note.

Most surprising about last season was perhaps where the team succeeded and struggled. Despite the loss of key offensive players, particularly in the passing game, the Cowboys finished 7th in the country in passing and were 3rd in scoring. Defensively though they didn't fare as well finishing 64th in points allowed.

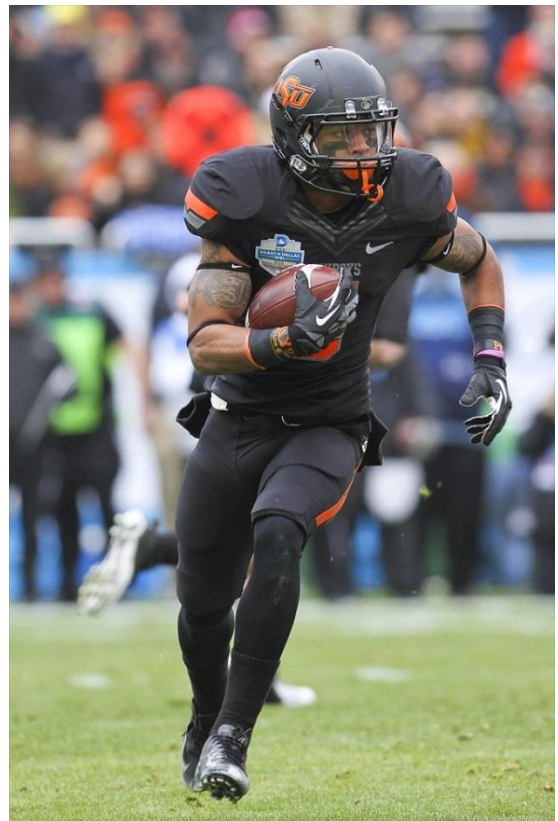
The wide open passing offense was going to produce some numbers without question, but the fact that they managed to achieve a top 10 ranking, despite relying on three different starting quarterbacks, was quite impressive. Had they chosen the best one earlier in the season, they might have cracked the top 5 in passing offense. With the quarterbacks being relatively effective, it allowed a couple young receivers to emerge last season, and build for their 2013 campaign.

### 2013 Outlook:

#### Offense:

With Wes Lunt transferring to Illinois, it is now a two-man quarterback race, between the young gun J.W. Walsh and the unlikely veteran Clint Chelf. Chelf was not expected to enter the quarterback discussion at all. Lunt was the hot freshman prospect and Walsh was a redshirt freshman who was actually a higher rated recruit than Lunt.

Chelf was recruited in 2009, and had spent much of his career as a competent back-up to Brandon Weeden. Though he'd been around the longest, he wasn't thought of as a legitimate starting option, and initially that rung true. He was thrust into action in the Kansas



State game and saw quality snaps the rest of the season. Though he doesn't have the biggest arm, you could see that he had a good command of the offense, and despite facing some of the toughest competition, managed nearly 1,600 yards and 15 TD's to 6 INT's. Walsh figures to battle him for the starting job this year and for good reason. Walsh led all three quarterbacks with a 66.9% completion rating and 9.6 yards per attempt, all while throwing 13 TD's to just 3 INT's.

Whoever wins the starting job they will have some serious weapons to throw the ball to. Josh Stewart is one of the best receivers in the Big 12 and looks to build upon a year where he had over 100 catches and 1,200 yards. Tracy Moore was granted a Medical redshirt and figures to have a big year. The most interesting guy to watch could be TE Blake Jackson. Jackson, a junior college transfer, averaged over 20 yards a catch and had over 600 yards for the Cowboys last year. He's expected to make big strides and could be in line for between 800-1,000 yards this season.

The running game which finished 21st in the nation last year figures to dip some this season. Not only did star runner Joseph Randle leave for the NFL, but only two offensive linemen return as starters this year. Senior running back Jeremy Smith has been solid in spot duty, but it will be tough to fill the shoes of Randle who had over 3,000 yards in his career.

### **Defense:**

Though this area was a challenge at times last year, there is an expectation it will improve this year with 7 starters returning. Among those figuring to make a big impact this year is Calvin Barrett, who as a junior college transfer last year, quickly became the Cowboys best defensive lineman and earned All-Big 12 recognition. The expectation is he will further improve this year and be one of the most dominant forces in the conference.

On the back-end of the Cowboys defense are a pair of guys with star potential in corner Justin Gilbert (who is also a deadly return man), and safety Daytawion Lowe. Gilbert has big play ability and though his play has been streaky at times he can run with anybody and frequently take away other team's star receivers. While he didn't have an interception last year, he had 5 in 2011 so you know he has ball skills.

Joining Gilbert in the secondary is Lowe, who is the hard hitting enforcer of the secondary. Lowe is very effective at coming up to stop the run, while also showing great range in the secondary. His ball skills aren't as good as his hitting ability, but he should be good for a couple interceptions this year.

If some of the younger guys step up along the defensive line, and Gilbert plays more consistently this year, this Cowboys defense figures to turn it around this season. They likely won't be a top 10 or even top 20 unit, but they should be top 50 and perhaps even higher.

## **Schedule:**

vs Mississippi State

@ UTSA

Lamar

@ WVU

Kansas State

TCU

@ Iowa State

@ Texas Tech

Kansas

@ Texas

Baylor

Oklahoma

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

It figures to be a tough and competitive Big 12 this year and Oklahoma State will have their work cut out for them. They do have Kansas State, TCU, Baylor and Oklahoma at home so they have a legitimate chance of sweeping that group (or at worst going 3-1). Other than their rivalry game against Oklahoma though, those home games don't represent the key games to the Cowboys season. Even Oklahoma could be down this year and it could be argued that one of the other games will be more meaningful, but it is always important to win that rivalry game if Oklahoma State can.

The first really important game for the Cowboys is their week 1 out of conference match-up with Mississippi State. Though it won't help Oklahoma State win the Big 12, it will have a big impact on rankings and potential bowl games. Though the Bulldogs aren't a premier SEC team, they are a pretty good team and it would be a feather in Oklahoma State's cap if they could get a win in that one. Also, it is probably their

toughest test until they go to Texas, which means they could possibly be undefeated at that time. When they get to Texas it could be a game that decides the conference, as the Longhorns figure to be an early favorite.

One game to watch that not many people are talking about is Texas Tech. The Red Raiders have proven to be a dangerous team in the past to leaders in the conference, and with new head coach Kliff Kingsbury, they could be a team to watch going forward. While it is doubtful they will compete for the conference crown, this definitely could be a trap game for Oklahoma State. If the Cowboys are undefeated (or have just one loss) at this time, they might be looking ahead to some of their bigger games coming up, and not worry about Texas Tech.

## #17 - LSU:

By Alan Zlotorzynski:

### 2012 SEASON RECAP:

Last season, Les Miles and his Tigers were the preseason No.1 for the first time since 1959 but following the suspension of Honey Badger, Tyrann Mathieu, a re-vote was taken and the Tigers dropped to third, behind USC and Alabama.

Dropping to third in the preseason poles did not matter because it was tough not to be optimistic of another return trip to the BSC National Championship game. With an NFL-caliber defensive line and virtually the same returning starters on the offensive line blocking for a five-deep backfield, the Bayou Bengals felt good about their chances in the SEC West. Not to mention, Miles finally had a quarterback that could stretch the defense in Zach Mettenberger.

LSU would climb as high as No.2 in the AP Poll but behind a stagnant offense to start the season and playing in the tough SEC West, the Tigers would finish the year ranked No. 14 with a record of 10-3 (6-2 SEC). LSU started the season 5-0 but with narrow wins over Auburn and little known Towson State, they entered their Week Six matchup with rival Florida, uncertain of their status in the nation's toughest conference.



The Tigers would lose a 10-6 defensive struggle to the Gators but rebound to beat No.3 South Carolina the following week. LSU then took out Johnny Football and the Aggies before losing yet again to No.1 Alabama. The loss to the Crimson Tide sealed the deal of not returning to the National Championship Game for Miles' team.

The Tigers finished conference play with wins over Mississippi State and Mississippi and then they beat Arkansas 20-13 to lock up a berth in the Chick-Fil-A Bowl, where they failed to hold an 11-point fourth quarter lead, as the Clemson Tigers from the ACC beat them on a last second field goal.

Despite winning 10 or more games for the third consecutive season and sixth time in Miles' nine-year tenure in the Bayou, the loss to Clemson capped a season that was considered a mild disappointment, considering the expectations that surrounded the Tigers before the season began.

## **2013 OUTLOOK:**

For the first time in a few seasons, Miles and the Tigers enter the 2013 campaign with a lot more questions than answers. Like every school, LSU lost its normal crop of seniors from last year's team but where the Tigers have been decimated, is the departure of 10 underclassmen to the NFL Draft. Most of those come from the defensive side of the football.

LSU has just 12 starters returning (8 O, 4 D) so it's not just defense that has some work to do.

### **OFFENSE:**

This season, LSU quarterback Zach Mettenberger returns for his second year as a starter after he failed to live up to lofty and tough expectations. Mettenberger, who passed for 2,609 yards with just 12 touchdowns and seven interceptions last season, has a year under his belt and many of the problems that plagued him last season should improve this season. Mettenberger should benefit greatly from the arrival of new offensive coordinator Cam Cameron. The man that endured almost five full seasons worth of agitation developing Baltimore Ravens quarterback Joe Flacco now takes his turn with the LSU offense, which finished 10<sup>th</sup> in the SEC and 85<sup>th</sup> nationally.

Cameron will help the senior with holding onto the ball in the pocket too long and overthrowing open receivers, both issues he suffered from in 2012. Cameron's knack for the big play and throwing the ball downfield, as evidenced in what the Ravens offense did on plays of 20 or more yards, will be a welcome change at LSU. The Tigers ranked 94<sup>th</sup> nationally in passing last season with 200.5 yards per game. During the spring game, Mettenberger showed signs of improvement as he completed 12 of 19 passes for 236 yards and two touchdowns.

Entering the 2012 season, all the talk in the conference centered on the four-headed monster at running back for the Tigers. Spencer Ware, Michael Ford, Alfred Blue and Kenny Hilliard, but the one guy who outplayed them all, at the most crucial times, was freshman Jeremy Hill.

The Tigers four running backs combined to rush for 1,493 yards and 12 rushing touchdowns. The freshman Hill, developed into one of the top three running backs in the SEC. He rushed for 755 yards and 12 touchdowns by himself.

However, his status remains uncertain, as his off the field troubles continue to plague him. Hill was arrested for simple battery at a bar fight, and Les Miles suspended Hill indefinitely, saying he'll wait until the legal side plays out before making any additional comments. Hill was already on active supervised probation for two years after pleading guilty in January 2012 after his arrest for engaging in a sexual act with a 14-year-old girl while in high school. A condition of the probation was to refrain from all criminal conduct.

The LSU backfield could still be OK as Bleu and Hilliard return. Junior transfer Quantavius Leslie could also emerge as another home run threat for Miles and Cameron.

At wide receiver, the Tigers return a virtually intact unit. With solid size and speed, this group is typical of how Miles recruits at this position. Like their quarterback, the play of Odell Beckham and Jarvis Landry needs to be more consistent if the offense as a whole is going to take the "next step". They need to limit their drops, improve their route running and get better separation at the line of scrimmage against very physical SEC secondaries. The same goes for seniors Kadron Boone and James Wright. Freshman Travin Dural could push all of the vets for reps.

With the departure of Josh Dworaczyk, Chris Faulk and center P.J. Lonergan, LSU's offensive line was a concern going into spring practice. However, with four veterans up front and a talented group of promising recruits, LSU's offensive line performed just fine. There is a major question mark at center where Elliott Porter takes over for three-year starter P.J. Lonergan. The right side should be safe with Trai Turner and Vadal Alexander back at guard and tackle, respectively. On the left side, La'el Collins, arguably the best of the upfront bunch, shifts back to his old high school position of left tackle.

Last season, the offensive line was bad during the three losses, as Mettenberger was sacked 13 times. In the 10 wins, he was sacked just 19 times total.

## **DEFENSE:**

This is definitely a good news bad news scenario for John Chavis, who enters his fifth season as the Tigers' defensive coordinator. The bad news is, of course, the loss of all four up front starters from last year's defense. Barkevious Mingo, Sam Montgomery, and Bennie Logan all left a year early but the good news is----- Jermauria Rasco, Anthony "Freak" Johnson, Ego Ferguson and Danielle Hunter — may be more athletic and potentially more explosive in terms of generating a pass rush than the recently departed group.

However, the heart and soul of the LSU defense was departed linebacker Kevin Minter. With his play, Minter took away the middle of the field from many teams but as they always seem to do, LSU has adequate replacements there as well. A talented six-man 2012 linebacker recruiting class helps fill the gaps along with one of the state's best



prep players, Kendell Beckwith. Senior Lamin Barrow should also step into a leadership role after playing a solid No.2 man to Minter with 104 tackles in 12'.

The loss of Honey Badger last season should help pay dividends this season for the LSU secondary, as last season cornerbacks Jalen Mills and Jalen Collins were forced into action as true freshmen. While they showed flashes of a bright future, they have to get better across the board for the secondary to improve after a late-season fade cost the Tigers wins against Alabama and Clemson.

The two Jalen's should improve and with the safety spots in good hands, with senior Craig Loston (if he can stay healthy) and junior Ronald Martin, the LSU secondary could be as formidable as some of the ones that featured top NFL draft picks.

**\*KEY PLAYER NOTE\*:** Defensive lineman Anthony "Freak" Johnson is a 5 Star recruit who as a part time player last season, Johnson was 11<sup>th</sup> on the team with 30 total tackles but was third in tackles-for-loss with 10, among them three sacks. This season the 6-foot-4, 304-pound junior is also expected to be showcasing abilities for Sunday's in 2014.

LSU Coach Les Miles is expecting more than an increase in on-field productions. He is looking for Johnson to bear a large share of the leadership from the defensive side and he hasn't thus far been disappointed. Johnson has graded out with a championship effort in workouts a majority of the time.

## **SCHEDULE:**

Aug. 31: TCU (Arlington)

Sept. 7: UAB

Sept. 14: Kent State

Sept. 21: Auburn

**Sept. 28: at Georgia**

Oct. 5: at Mississippi State

**Oct. 12: Florida**

Oct. 19: at Ole Miss

Oct. 26: Furman

Nov. 2: Bye Week

**Nov. 9: at Alabama**

Nov. 16: Bye Week

**Nov. 23: Texas A&M**

Nov. 30: Arkansas

**(Key Games in Bold)**

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

The Tigers should be 4-0 when they travel to play Georgia, who should be favored for a return trip to the SEC Championship Game. While many will point to the Alabama game as the most important on Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>, the Tigers and Bulldogs have not met during the regular season since 2009. If LSU has any chance of winning the SEC, they simply cannot lose this game.

The Tigers get the Gators at home this year. In last season's matchup, they led in Florida 6-0 at the half before Florida outrushed them 176-42 and outscored them 10-0 in the second half. Of course, if they get past the Dawgs and Gators, all eyes turn to Tuscaloosa in early November. That Alabama game and the next one against Texas A&M will likely be critical in determining if LSU returns to Atlanta to play in the SEC Championship Game or once again in the Chick-Fil-A Bowl. The Tigers will travel to Alabama and then host A&M after bye weeks but both the Crimson Tide and Aggies will also be coming off bye weeks as well.

With three losses by a combined 13 points last season, the Tigers were closer than many think to a return trip to the SEC Championship Game and perhaps BCS title games. However—in five wins by a combined 22 points, they were close to finishing 7-5, as well.

This is LSU and Les Miles and the SEC. That means at the least, this is a nine-win team and at most---well---in the SEC anything can and usually does happen.

Under Miles in the last 10 years, the LSU Tigers began the season twice not ranked in the AP top 11. They went 13-1 and 11-2 and won a National Championship. They start this season ranked No.12.

## #18 - Nebraska Preview:

By Tyler Fenwick:

### 2012 Recap:



Nebraska spent most of the 2012 season in a race with Michigan to win the Legends Division and get a chance to play in the second ever Big Ten Championship game. After a head-to-head win over the Wolverines on October 27<sup>th</sup>, the Cornhuskers did not look back, only losing one of their next five.

Of course, we all know how the Big Ten Championship game went for Nebraska. It was a truly ugly affair with Wisconsin, which resulted in an 8 win team representing the conference in the Rose Bowl. The Badgers finished third in the Leaders Division, but because of the postseason bans for Ohio State and Penn State, Wisconsin found themselves competing for the Big Ten title. And they embarrassed Nebraska, 70-31. In that game, Nebraska gave up an astounding 539 rushing yards. Unfortunately, that's how many people will remember the 2012 Nebraska Cornhuskers.

Leading the way for the Cornhuskers offense was quarterback Taylor Martinez. During his junior season, Martinez was able to improve on his passing game from 2011, throwing for 2,871 yards and completing 62 percent of his passes. Both those numbers are significantly better than his previous two years, giving Nebraska fans a lot to look forward to this season.

Running back Ameer Abdullah had a brilliant season for Nebraska in 2012, rushing for 1,137 yards on 226 attempts and scoring eight touchdowns. Last season's performance has Abdullah's name being mentioned when talking about dark horse candidates who could find themselves in the Heisman race. I'm not saying I'm completely sold on that, but it is a testimony to how much of an impact he has on this offense.

Defensively, the Cornhuskers did not live up to tradition. We're used to seeing a great squad on that side of the ball for Nebraska. They didn't do particularly bad in either the pass or run defense. But opposing teams were able to score almost 30 points per game, which is very uncharacteristic for a Nebraska defense.

Safety Daimion Stafford led the team with 51 solo tackles, but he's now a member of the Tennessee Titans. It will be tough to replace that kind of production, but there are some promising secondary defenders ready to step in this season.

Cornerback Josh Mitchell started eight games last year and showed he can be a reliable defender. He was only a sophomore in 2012, so that means he still has a good amount of time to keep improving. With a defense that really struggled last season, I like to find young guys like Mitchell who have loads of potential for the future.

## **2013 Outlook:**

Nebraska has a ways to go on defense, but if they can improve there and keep teams from scoring as much as they did last season, it could help take this team to the next level. Taylor Martinez and the Cornhusker offense will be primed for a big season, especially if Martinez can continue to improve his passing.

### **Offense:**

This is an offense that will be ranked among the top in the Big Ten. The combination of Taylor Martinez and Ameer Abdullah has the potential to be lethal. Nebraska has play makers all over the place on offense.

Senior Taylor Martinez will probably still be a runner first this season, even with the improvements he's been able to make with his arm. It's just who he is as a football player, and I think that's where Nebraska will find the most success. Of course injury is always a concern for these dual threat problems, and Martinez only weighs 210 pounds. You'd like to see more weight on a guy who takes so many hits, but that would obviously take away from his speed.

This season, I expect Martinez to have the same kind of passing numbers—nearing 3,000 yards, completing above 60 percent of his passes—but he'll have to cut back on the interceptions. He threw 12 of them last season, which won't cut it. Rushing, Martinez will probably stick around the same place he was last year, just over 1,000 yards. Nebraska really doesn't need him to do any more than that.

Junior Ameer Abdullah is running back on the rise. Last season, Abdullah was part of the explosive Nebraska offense and earned second team All-Big Ten honors from the coaches of the conference for his breakout efforts. He rushed for 1,137 yards last season and looks to continue to improve on that.

My expectations for Ameer Abdullah are pretty lofty for 2013 because I think he's turning into one of the better running backs in the conference. I'm thinking Abdullah will be rushing for just south of 1,500 yards.

Another big strength for this offense will be the wide receivers. Returning starters Kenny Bell and Quincy Enunwa will be huge parts of this offense. Last year, Bell caught 50 passes for 863 yards; Enunwa caught 42 passes for 470 yards. So they aren't astounding numbers. But the fact that they're both returning to the same quarterback means a lot for the passing game.

I wouldn't be surprised to see Kenny Bell easily get over that thousand yard mark, being the primary target for Taylor Martinez. Quincy Enunwa has been a short-yardage wide receiver his whole career, so his numbers won't pop. He'll probably get his total yards above 500 this season, but it won't be a significant spike.

The offensive line returns three starters from a year ago: tackle Brent Qvale, tackle Jeremiah Sirles and guard Spencer Long. This will be a huge reason Abdullah is able to have another breakout season. The offensive line for Nebraska is traditionally a good one, and 2013 doesn't look to stray from that.

### **Defense:**

This simply isn't the Back Shirt team we're used to seeing. Nebraska's defense isn't trouncing all; teams have been scoring with seeming ease, and I'm not seeing any stand-out, play making guys to really take over. Quite frankly, if Nebraska isn't competing in the Legends Division by the end, the defense will be to blame.

Last season, teams scored almost 30 points per game against Nebraska. In the four games the Cornhuskers lost last year, they did not give up fewer than 30 points. And unfortunately for Nebraska fans, I'm not expecting anything much better than that this season.

The defensive front is a huge question mark for this defense. They lost a couple starters from a year ago and will have to rely on some unproven players up there. Fortunately, both Jason Ankrah and Thad Randle are returning as seniors up there. The two combined for 47 total tackles last season. They'll need to be the anchors of this defensive front.

Nebraska's pass defense didn't take as big of a hit, but there are still some empty spots back there. However, cornerbacks Josh Mitchell and Andrew Green will both return as starters. And even though it doesn't look like the sun is shining in the secondary, these two are solid defenders in the pass game and will provide a boost to the rest of the secondary.

## **SCHEDULE:**

vs Wyoming  
vs Southern Miss  
vs UCLA  
vs SDSU  
vs Illinois  
@ Purdue  
@ Minnesota  
**vs Northwestern**  
**@ Michigan**  
vs Michigan State  
@ Penn State  
vs Iowa

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

Nebraska's non-conference schedule doesn't look to be too demanding, although UCLA will be better than they have been in recent years. That's the only game I can see Nebraska possibly losing before the conference season. Odds are, the Cornhuskers will go into their game against Illinois undefeated.

That will be a hard game for Nebraska to win. Illinois will have a very good offense, and I don't think Nebraska's defense will be able to stop Nathan Scheelhaase. Going to Purdue and Minnesota also won't be easy. The Boilermakers have a steady defense and could be tricky if they figure it out on offense. Minnesota will be a very balanced team on both sides of the ball.

Back-to-back weeks against Northwestern and Michigan will be the most important part of the season. Personally, I think Nebraska is the second best team in the conference, behind Michigan. And Northwestern is third. So these two weeks will mean a lot for the Legends Division.

I'm expecting Nebraska to be able to handle Michigan State, who will be having another down year. Going to Penn State won't be the easiest; it's definitely a toss-up game. It just depends on whether or not Penn State can find a reliable quarterback, likely a true freshman. The season wraps up with a home game against Iowa, which shouldn't be too much of a struggle for Nebraska.

## #19 - TCU:

By Steve Shoup:

### 2012 Recap:

TCU hadn't been expecting to play in the Big 12 conference in 2012 (in fact they were set to be heading to the Big East), but conference realignment made it possible. They started out the year with high hopes to compete in the Big 12, and early on it looked like they might be able to.

The Horned Frogs started out 4-0 behind veteran quarterback Casey Pachall (and 1-0 in the conference), but a substance abuse issue forced him to miss the rest of the season, and TCU's hopes faltered.

Freshman Trevone Boykin took over and though he was solid for the most part, he predictably struggled against some of the Horned Frogs best opponents. TCU won just three more regular season games, and finished 7th in the conference. They were still bowl eligible and faced Michigan State in the Buffalo Wild Wings Bowl, but lost a close game 17-16.



Pachall wasn't the only big loss the Horned Frogs had to endure last year as 2011 leading rusher Waymon James was lost for the season after only 17 carries. James was averaging over 9 yards per carry in those rushes and was expected to be a big playmaker on offense. Without both their star quarterback and running back, TCU's offense was just 68th in points last season and out of the top 50 in most major categories.

Their defense was still great, finishing 30th in points allowed and 16th in yards allowed, despite playing in the high octane Big 12. Had the offense not faltered in some games and left the defense in some bad situations, those numbers would have even been higher.

## **2013 Outlook:**

### **Offense:**

The Horned Frogs are getting Pachall back this season, and if he doesn't suffer a relapse, there is good reason to believe that he could be one of the best quarterbacks in the conference. He completed 66% of his passes last season and averaged over 9 yards an attempt. Most impressive though was his 10-1 TD-INT ratio.

Pachall doesn't have a big arm, but he's a smart, efficient quarterback who isn't afraid to buy time with his legs. He should be in line for a big season this year as the team will likely put more of an emphasis on the passing game now that he's returned. If he falters Boykin is a good back-up option to have and he should be more improved with a year under his belt, but he's likely not at Pachall's level at this point.

The rushing attack should be much stronger with James returning this season. He's a homerun hitter who can pick up big chunks of yards at a time. James is a smart runner, who finds his lanes and gets the most out of every carry. He will need that combination of vision and breakaway ability given that there are some concerns along TCU's offensive line. They do return three starters, but the replacements are untested and there is not much depth in case of injury.

### **Defense:**

The Horned Frogs return 9 defensive starters this year and figure to once again have a top unit, both in the conference and nationally. The loss of defensive end Stansley Maponga does hurt, but they return his fellow pass rusher Devonte Fields, who was named the AP Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year last season.

Fields is a dynamic pass rusher and should help ensure TCU's pass rush is still very strong this season. Playing in the Big 12 with these major passing offenses it is essential that they put consistent pressure on the quarterback. If they can, they should be a threat to slow down any offense.

The other thing that helps slow down these wide open passing offenses is a strong secondary. This is another area where TCU really shines as they return all four starters including All-American Jason Verrett, who is one of the true shutdown corners in the nation. Last season Verrett had 6 interceptions and 22 passes defended. He will likely see those numbers drop as quarterbacks would be wise to avoid him this season. Safety Sam Carter is another guy to watch this season as he's developing into an All-Big 12 type of player.



## **Schedule:**

vs. LSU

SE Louisiana

@ Texas Tech

SMU

@ Oklahoma

Kansas

@ Oklahoma State

Texas

West Virginia

@ Iowa State

@ Kansas State

Baylor

## **Schedule Overview:**

TCU has a bold non-conference schedule with games against LSU and SMU. While LSU seems like a fool's errand, it is a game the Horned Frogs can steal. The Tigers are breaking in a lot of new starters and still have some real questions on offense. It's a neutral site game, but it's at Cowboys Stadium so the crowd will likely lean towards TCU. SMU is not on LSU's level, but that could be a tough game as well.

Though it is good to see TCU play a bold schedule, they do take a real risk here. Those two early games could knock them out of the top 25, and put their bowl eligibility at risk before they get to the meat of their schedule. If they win one or both (particularly LSU), it could set TCU on a path to the top of the rankings and secure them a major bowl bid, including possibly a BCS game, provided they lose no more than one other game the rest of the way.

Their marquee games are in two sets of back-to-back games. The first set is against expected conference power houses Oklahoma State (on the road) and Texas. Neither

one of these games will be easy, but if Casey Pachall is back and that defense keeps playing like it can, the Horned Frogs could win both. If they do that, then their next set of marquee games, at Kansas State and home versus Baylor to close out the season, take on even more importance. Though both teams are expected to be a step below TCU this year, a lot of that has to do with the fact that they are breaking in new quarterbacks. By the end of the year though, those quarterbacks could be much improved and a threat to upset TCU.

## **#20 - Wisconsin:**

**By Tyler Fenwick:**

### **2012 Recap:**

When I think of Wisconsin football, I think of hard-nose, stuff-it-down-your-throat football. It's a classic style of play that most programs have abandoned, but the Badgers continue to use it to their advantage.

Although it wasn't an idea season for the Badgers, finishing third in the Leaders Division with a 7-5 record, they still go a chance to play in the Big Ten Championship game because of the postseason bans on Ohio State and Penn State. And something amazing happened; Wisconsin absolutely destroyed Nebraska in that game and went to the Rose Bowl with an 8-5 record—unheard of. In the Rose Bowl, Wisconsin competed strongly with Stanford, losing 20-14.

The main focus heading into the 2012 season was replacing Russell Wilson, who gave them one year after incredible play after transferring from NC State. The man Wisconsin initially turned to was Danny O'Brien. But after O'Brien could not produce, the Badgers turned to redshirt freshman Joel Stave. And Stave was doing a fine job, completing almost 60 percent of his passes and not turning the ball over, until he went down with an injury on October 27<sup>th</sup> in a game against Michigan State. In seven games, Stave threw for 1,104 yards and six touchdowns.

The man who took over for Stave was redshirt junior, dual-threat quarterback Curt Phillips, who has been granted a sixth year of eligibility by the NCAA. Phillips stepped in and picked up right where Stave left off, throwing for 540 yards and rushing for 99 yards in seven games, including the Rose Bowl.

Doing the heavy work on the ground for Wisconsin was Montee Ball, one of the best players in the Big Ten through his four years. His highlight game of the season came against Nebraska in the Big Ten Championship, where he ran for 202 yards and scored three touchdowns. Ball also became the only player in NCAA history to score a touchdown in three different Rose Bowl games when he pounded one into the endzone against Stanford.

Defensively, the Badgers were among the best in the nation, allowing fewer than 20 points per game. Doing particularly well against the run, Wisconsin was relentless on defense, slowing down even the best of attacks. Fans should be very excited to be returning all the keys to last year's defensive line. They'll be even better this season.

And of course, the big storyline this offseason was the departure of Bret Bielema to

Arkansas. Replacing Bielema will be former Utah State head coach Gary Anderson. Anderson believes in running before passing, which fits perfectly with the Wisconsin culture.

## 2013 Outlook:

The defensive front will be a huge plus for Wisconsin this season; there won't be too many teams who will be able to successfully run the ball. There are plenty of options at quarterback for new coach Gary Anderson, but the real issue will be finding stability at that position.

### Offense:

Gary Anderson had an immediate problem to face when he stepped on campus as the new head coach: quarterback. And Anderson addressed it quickly. He set off by acquiring Junior College quarterback Tanner McEvoy. He'll have three years of eligibility for the Badgers. McEvoy joins a crowded group of quarterbacks, all looking to get that starting job.



Here's how the depth chart could look for the Badgers at quarterback.

1. Tanner McEvoy (sophomore)
  2. Joel Stave (RS sophomore)
  3. Curt Phillips (RS senior)
  4. Bart Houston (RS freshman)
  5. Chase Knox (RS freshman)
- \* Danny O'Brien left the program in June.

The difference in number five to number one is not very big. Realistically, I'd expect this to turn into a three horse race (McEvoy, Stave, Phillips) soon. Houston and Knox will be very good quarterbacks for Wisconsin, but they're definitely a step below the rest. The reason I choose Tanner McEvoy is because he's a bigger weapon than the rest. At 6'6", 215 pounds, McEvoy can tuck it and run effectively. In eight games at Arizona Western College, McEvoy threw for 1,813 yards, completing 68.1 percent of his throws. He also ran for 252 yards. His coach compared him to Collin Klein of Kansas State.

I think McEvoy will come in as the starter and do his job for the Badgers. It won't be flashy; he won't win any awards. But Wisconsin just needs someone who can step in and manage the game, which is what McEvoy is capable of doing.

Senior James White will be stepping in for Montee Ball. And while Ball will be missed, James White is the same kind of running back who's capable of putting up the same kind of numbers. He's seen significant action all three years at Wisconsin, running for 2,571 yards. Last season, he pounded out 806 yards and 12 touchdowns, appearing in all 14 games. I'm very excited for this kid. The backfield is now his, and he'll be making the most of it. Plus, he fits in great with Anderson's "run-first" mentality.

Coupling with James White, the offensive line will be a huge asset to the Badgers running game. Guards Ryan Groy and Kyle Costigan and tackle Rob Havenstein all return from a year ago. This is going to be a great offensive line that will allow the running game to explode.

And yet another strength for the Badgers this season will be wide receivers. Wisconsin returns every single pass catcher from a year ago. Redshirt senior Jared Abbrederis caught 49 balls for 837 yards last season, while redshirt sophomore Jordan Fredrick caught 17 passes for 196 yards. They'll be the core of the receivers. And also look for guys like Chase Hammond and Kenzel Doe to step in.

## **Defense:**

The Badger defense will be very strong up front, as always. But the secondary lost three starters from last year, which leaves a couple question marks in the pass defense. However, Anderson and his staff went on the recruiting trail and snagged five defensive backs, three of whom could be seeing significant playing time this season.

One man who does return for that secondary is redshirt senior free safety Dezmen Southward. Last season, Southward recorded 44 solo tackles, two interceptions and five pass break-ups. Southward redshirted his first year in 2009 but has seen action in every game since then.

As I mentioned, the defensive front for Wisconsin will be stellar. The Badgers return their whole defensive line from a year ago, which was excellent in shutting down some of the best backs in the Big Ten. The core of this Badger front will be tackles Beau Allen and Ethan Hemer. There's no way this front digresses from a year ago; the only direction is up.

## **SCHEDULE:**

vs Massachusetts  
vs Tennessee Tech

@ Arizona State  
vs Purdue  
**@ Ohio State**  
vs Northwestern  
@ Illinois  
@ Iowa  
vs BYU  
**vs Indiana**  
@ Minnesota  
**vs Penn State**

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

Arizona State is obviously the team that stands out in the non-conference slate. The Sun Devils went 8-5 last year and have a pretty good offensive attack. Opening up the conference season with a home game against Purdue shouldn't be too daunting, but at the same time, we're not entirely sure what to expect from the Boilermakers this season. Going on the road to Ohio State will be a huge game. In my opinion, Wisconsin can battle it out with the Buckeyes in the Leaders Division, and this would be a huge win to pick up.

Northwestern will be an improved team from last year with a good offense and solid defense. Wisconsin can't sleep on this one. Then back-to-back weeks on the road against Illinois and Iowa should be two wins, but you never can tell on the road like that. A non-conference game against BYU could be interesting. The Cougars have an incredible defense, although they won't be able to score.

I highlighted Indiana as a key game for Wisconsin because the Hoosiers are about to have a tremendous offensive season. They'll be able to score with most any team in the conference. Going to Minnesota could possibly be a trap game, but that's only if the Gophers can establish an offense. Wrapping up the season with a game against Penn State could be huge if the Badgers still find themselves in contention with Ohio State at that point.

## **#21 - Oregon State:**

**By Steve Shoup:**

### **2012 Recap:**

The Beavers were coming off a 3-6 conference record (3-9 overall), and 9th place finish in the brand new Pac-12 heading into 2012. Head Coach Mike Riley turned it around though with an impressive 9-4 record, and a 3rd place finish in the conference. Oregon State won their first six games, including upsets over ranked Wisconsin and eventual Pac-12 South Champion, UCLA in their first two games of the season.

The Beavers did struggle versus their other ranked opponents losing to Stanford, Oregon in the "Civil War" game and Texas in the Alamo Bowl, but it was an impressive season nonetheless. The Beavers finished in the top 20 in both the Coaches and AP poll, which marked the first time they finished the season ranked since 2008.

Oregon State combined a good passing offense with a quality defense to turn things around last year. Perhaps most impressive was their passing attack, which finished 19th in yards, given that they split the quarterback duties between Sean Mannion and Cody Vaz. Mannion entered the year as the starter, but when a knee injury sidelined him midseason, Cody Vaz entered into the picture.

Though Mannion came back, it was clear that he no longer had a lock on the job. Despite the quarterback battle the Beavers passing attack thrived, and receivers Markus Wheaton and Brandin Cooks became one of the most dangerous duos in the country. Oregon State's rushing attack wasn't great, but the tandem of Freshman Storm Woods and Sophomore Terron Ward, were effective for the most part, combining for over 1,350 yards and 19 TD's.

Defensively the Beavers allowed just three teams to score more than 30 points on them all season, and they did a great job of forcing turnovers.

Though they weren't able to finish the season as they started and had some disappointing losses, it was a strong year for the program and the Beavers proved that they could compete in the tough Northern Division of the Pac-12. While they didn't beat either of their two top opponents (Oregon and Stanford) in the division, they definitely made it a little tougher on them. Although the Beavers lost a couple key players including Wheaton and star cornerback Jordan Poyer, they do return 15 of their starters for this season.

## 2013 Outlook:

All eyes will be on the quarterback battle this year as the decision isn't expected to be made until right before the season. If the Beavers can get consistent quality quarterback play they could be a serious threat in the Pac-12 this year and should be looking at an 8-10 win record, and another top 25 finish.



### Offense:

The toughest decision Coach Mike Riley has to make this year is who will line-up under center. Both Sean Mannion and Cody Vaz have made strong cases and either could probably succeed for the Beavers, but one is likely the better option and the one that gives them the chance to really surprise people this year.

Mannion has more starting experience and had the higher completion percentage (64.5%) last year, while averaging more yards per game. Vaz though was better at protecting the ball, throwing just three interceptions to Mannion's 13. Ball security will be the key for Mannion as he had three games with 3 or more interceptions, including 4 apiece in key losses against Washington and Oregon.

Now the Oregon game would have been a tough win regardless of the interceptions, but the Washington game was unacceptable. That was a game the Beavers needed to win and should have won. Had they won that game at the very least it would have put them in a better bowl and given them their first 10 win season since 2006.

Mannion is probably the favorite heading into the season, but Vaz shouldn't be counted out. Regardless of who wins, the other quarterback has to be on the ready, because at the first sign of trouble, Riley will look to make a change.

The Beavers have an impressive group of skill position guys led by wide receiver Brandin Cooks and running back Storm Woods. Cooks was the 2nd receiver behind Markus Wheaton, yet he proved himself to be a very capable target racking up over 1,100 yards. Cooks is a quick shifty receiver, who can make defenders miss and turn short gains into long ones. He averaged over 17 yards per catch last season and had



12 catches of 25 yards or more. He is considered a 2nd team All-Conference pick and has the potential for a really special year.

Woods had a strong freshman year nearly topping the 1,000 yard mark despite missing a game and splitting carries some due to a knee injury. If he can stay healthy and develop a little bit he can be a quality feature back for this team and help balance this offense.

In addition to Cooks and Woods, the Beavers have a number of other good offensive weapons. Running back Terron Ward is a quality number two running back, with big play ability. Tight end Connor Hamlett, and receivers Kevin Cummings and Richard Mullaney, round out a quality receiving corps for the Beavers quarterbacks to throw to.

While none will replace Markus Wheaton on their own, collectively they should do a good job of giving the quarterback additional targets to throw to. The Beavers also return four starters along their offensive line and figure to be better this season with both their run and pass blocking.

### **Defense:**

The Beavers defense remains a strength of this team, as they return seven starters including 3/4 of their defensive backfield. This is a defense that finished 30th in the FBS in yards allowed per game, and 22nd in points allowed per game. The Beavers defense had 31 takeaways a year ago, though it is now without star corner Jordan Poyer who led the team with 7 interceptions.

The Beavers do return star defensive end Scott Crichton who led the team with 9 sacks. He's not only a potential All-Conference candidate, but could be a sleeper for one of the top two All-American teams. He's a really talented edge rusher who causes havoc for opposing offensive tackles. In addition to his 9 sacks, Crichton paced the team with 17.5 tackles for a loss. He gets strong penetration and does well at chasing down the ball carrier. Oregon State doesn't have any other top defensive linemen, but they have some quality veteran depth here, which should give them a lot of solid play to go along with Crichton. If junior Dylan Wynn can step up, this could be a very strong unit.

In the back seven the Beavers return 5 starters, including linebackers Michael Doctor and D.J. Alexander as well as cornerback Rashaad Reynolds. Doctor led the team in tackles last season with 81, and figures to do the same again. He's got great speed and with Alexander, they cover a lot of ground making it hard for running backs to get big gains. Reynolds is one of the best corners in the Pac-12, though he will now have to do it alone without the support of Poyer. He has a lot of potential and should be the Beavers primary cover guy this season.

While it could be tough for Oregon State to match their defensive output from a year ago, they still have enough talent to do so. The key will be the defensive line, and if anyone can step up to complement Scott Crichton. It's the thinnest unit on the defense,

but the potential is there for it to be good. If the line can get consistent pressure and stop the run, it will make the talent in the back seven that much better in terms of play-making.

## **Schedule:**

Eastern Washington

Hawaii

@Utah

@San Diego State

Colorado

@Washington State

@California

Stanford

USC

@Arizona State

Washington

@Oregon

## **Schedule Overview:**

The Beavers have a fairly easy non-conference schedule that they should not only sweep, but which should also give them good competition to get their quarterback situation correct. In fact their first seven weeks are fairly easy and it would be a shock if the Beavers were to lose any of those games.

The good news with that is they can work out any kinks, the bad news is their final five weeks are pretty brutal. Their five toughest games, including battles against Stanford, USC and Oregon are in that stretch. In addition they face an always dangerous Washington team that knocked them off last year and a road game against a quality

Arizona State squad.

The good news is (if there is any) that three of those games (Stanford, USC and Washington) are at home. First up is Stanford a team who not only has a strong case to win the Pac-12, but could end up in the mix for the National Championship. Stanford is a good team without a doubt, but the Beavers gave them some problems last year and could again this season if they can show a more balanced attack. The key is stopping the Stanford pass rush, which led the nation in sacks last year. If Oregon State can give their quarterback enough time, they could have a chance to win this game.

USC represents another tough challenge as on paper they are the superior team. Last year though this team imploded and that is with guys like Matt Barkley, Robert Woods and T.J. McDonald leading the team. With veterans like that moved on to the NFL, it is questionable if there will be better leadership for the Trojans. The key here will be creating a hostile environment for USC's young quarterback - both from a crowd perspective and with DE Scott Crichton bringing the pressure.

After a road game against Arizona State, the Beavers face a Washington team that upset them a year ago. Washington has a good rushing attack and a high upside quarterback in Keith Price, who will likely be much improved from a year ago. Stopping them is a must for Oregon State, but this defense has the talent to do just that.

As it has been the case most years of late, Oregon State's toughest challenge will come against their in-state rivals in the annual Civil War Game. The Oregon Ducks have owned the series recently and once again possess one of the premier teams in the nation. While Oregon State has at times played them tough, even when Oregon was expected to dominate, this year it won't be any easier as the matchup is on the road. It's next to impossible to really stop the Oregon offense, so the key is to just try and contain them enough to give yourself a shot. The Beavers will have to be prepared for a shootout, and limit turnovers this year to have a chance.

## #22 - Mississippi:

**By Steve Shoup:**

### 2012 Recap:

Ole Miss went just 3-5 in the SEC last year, but considering they were 1-15 in their two previous seasons combined, I would say that record is reason to celebrate. The Rebels finished the year 7-6 after a Bowl win over Pittsburgh. Though that hardly was an impressive total in the SEC, they are a team that looks to be on the rise. They lost to most of the big SEC powers that they faced (Alabama, Texas A&M, LSU, Georgia and Vanderbilt), but the way they played them is perhaps promising of things to come.

While Georgia handled them pretty easily, they lost to Vanderbilt by just a point, Texas A&M by a field goal and LSU by a touchdown. Though Alabama won by 19 points, it was actually the third lowest margin of victory for Alabama behind the Georgia and LSU results.

Though there weren't many signature wins for the Rebels last year, the one that sticks out is their final regular season game. Ole Miss was just 5-6, and needed a win to be bowl eligible. Standing in their way was cross state rivals Mississippi State, who came in ranked 25th in the country and already had 8 wins racked up.

With a win over Ole Miss and a bowl win, the Bulldogs were looking at a chance for their first 10 win season since 1999. The Rebels though quickly dashed Mississippi State's hopes, as they won 41-24. Ole Miss out rushed the Bulldogs by 200 yards, and their defense held Mississippi State to just one 3rd down conversion on 13 tries.

First year coach Hugh Freeze quickly began to turn around this program with a strong initial recruiting class and an approach that transformed a team with one of the nation's weaker offenses and defenses into one that ranked in the top 50 in most major categories. The turnaround on offense was the most impressive as they were ranked in the top 50 in both total rushing and passing categories, despite not returning a starting



quarterback or running back. The team took to Freeze's high octane offense, and it allowed Ole Miss to put pressure on some of the best defenses in the country.

## **2013 Outlook:**

The Rebels are a fairly young team overall, and new coach Hugh Freeze will get to utilize a number of players that he recruited these past two years. In 2012 Freeze bolstered a strong class with a number of junior college transfers including quarterback Bo Wallace.

This year Freeze landed the top defensive end, offensive tackle and wide receiver according to ESPN. With two strong recruiting classes, the Rebels are a team on the rise and one that could surprise their SEC foes this season.

### **Offense:**

Bo Wallace took the reins of the Hugh Freeze offense from day one and didn't look back. He threw for nearly 3,000 yards and 22 touchdowns. Wallace added 390 yards and eight more touchdowns on the ground, proving himself to be a capable dual threat quarterback. Though Wallace's interceptions were too high, it was an impressive transition from East Mississippi Community College to playing in the SEC.

With a year under his belt and an expanded knowledge of the offense, he's a good bet to make some serious improvements this year. Further helping his case is the fact that the Rebels have invested heavily in their recruiting to find both weapons and protection for Wallace.

Perhaps the best advantage Wallace has is a player that Freeze's coaching staff didn't recruit. Running back Jeff Scott has been with the program since 2010, and finally got the chance to be the feature back last season. He ran for nearly 850 yards in under 200 carries, while adding another 177 in receiving yards.

Joining him in the backfield are talented sophomores Jaylan Walton and I'Tavius Mathers. All three backs could be pushed by freshman Mark Dodson, Jr., who enrolled early and flashed in spring drills. A strong capable group of runners will give Wallace the balance on offense he needs to find the lanes to throw the ball.

When Wallace does throw the ball he should have an impressive group of weapons to get the ball too. Junior Donte Moncrief led the team in receptions, yards and touchdowns, and should only get better from here. He's a good combination of size and speed and can cause match-up problems for defenders. Fellow starting receiver, junior Vince Sanders is back as well. Joining the mix this year will be the top freshman receiver recruit Laquon Treadwell, who is expected to make an immediate impact for Ole Miss. Overall it is an impressive and talented group and should give Wallace little reason to complain.

Another thing that Wallace can be happy about is the protection that he will have in front of him. The Rebels return four out of five starters and have built up an impressive amount of depth in these past two recruiting classes. Joining the mix this year are the first and third rated offensive tackles, Laremy Tunsil and Austin Golston. Tunsil is expected to compete for playing time early and may push one of the starting tackles to guard. It is one of the deepest offensive lines in the SEC, and it has the potential to challenge to be one of the best as well.

### **Defense:**

Last year the Rebels defense ranked 4th in the nation in tackles for a loss (7.9 per game) and 11th in sacks (2.9 per game). They've now added the top recruit at any position, defensive end Robert Nkemdiche and top junior college defensive tackle Lavon Hooks to the mix. This could end up being the most dominate pass rush in the SEC and potentially the entire FBS. Nkemdiche is expected to hit the ground running and should make a major impact from day one.

Joining Robert Nkemdiche in the front seven, is his brother sophomore linebacker Denzel Nkemdiche, who led the team in tackles last year. Denzel isn't the feared pass rusher of his younger brother, but he makes plenty of big plays in his own right. He is expected to be the leader of this defense that returns a total of 10 starters. The Rebels secondary isn't as strong as their front seven, but there is a lot of high upside potential in this group and they could really surprise this season, particularly if quarterbacks are running for their lives.

### **Schedule:**

@ Vanderbilt

SE Missouri State

@ Texas

@ Alabama

@ Auburn

Texas A&M

LSU

Idaho

Arkansas

Troy

Missouri

@ Mississippi State

## **Schedule Overview:**

Some might be surprised that neither Texas A&M or the defending National Champion Crimson Tide aren't considered a key games, but the reality is they are long-shot wins for the Rebels. If they win them great, but if they are to lose them it won't really change the outcome of their season. The four games that will really define their season are Vanderbilt, Texas, LSU and Mississippi State. Unfortunately three of those four (all but LSU) are on the road. Ole Miss can be bowl eligible without winning any of those games (if they sweep the remaining six), but it would mean they aren't improving on their last season.

Vanderbilt to start is going to be an interesting game to watch. Mississippi will be challenged on the road early, but it is a game they should be capable of winning. Vanderbilt is breaking in a new quarterback and running back, and the Rebels should be better prepared.

Texas obviously doesn't have any conference implications, but a win over what could be the best team from the Big 12, would go a long way in helping Ole Miss get ranked and find their way to a better bowl game. It's on the road, but depending on how some of the freshmen perform, Mississippi could be the better team.

Many will probably consider LSU in the same category as Alabama and Texas A&M, but LSU could be a little down this year. They have to deal with a number of key losses, particularly from their impressive defense. If the Tigers offense doesn't pick up the slack this year, they could be a poachable target for the Rebels at home.

Unlike last year, Ole Miss shouldn't need to beat their cross state rival to be bowl eligible. But that game could decide how the SEC standings shape up and it will likely impact the bowl choices for each team. Also, the game could impact whether or not the Rebels finish the season ranked, which would be a good positive step for them.

## #23 - Northwestern:

By Steve Shoup:

### 2012 Recap:

If someone asked before last season what three Big 10 teams would end the year with 10 or more wins, Ohio State and Nebraska would have likely been on most people's list. Northwestern (10-3) probably wouldn't have made the cut for most people. Though they appeared to be a team on the rise they were not traditionally thought of as a powerhouse.

What's most shocking about the Wildcats season is the fact that they were able to do so well out of conference. Including their bowl game, Northwestern beat an 8-5 Syracuse team, an 8-5 Mississippi State team and a 9-4 Vanderbilt squad. Beating Syracuse is one thing, but the other two wins versus a pair of quality SEC teams (and pretty easy wins at that) is pretty impressive. Perhaps the most shocking thing is just how close Northwestern was to an undefeated season. Their three losses last season all could have easily gone the other way.

Nebraska beat Northwestern 29-28 after battling back from a double-digit 4th quarter deficit. Northwestern though had a chance to win it on a last minute 50 yard field goal that was just outside the goal post. Michigan won 38-31, but needed a last second field goal to send it into Overtime to begin with. While the Penn State score of 39-28 looks lopsided, with 10 minutes left in the 4th quarter Northwestern held an 11 point lead.



Despite the three heartbreaking losses Northwestern shouldn't hang their head, because they had a great all-around season. And while it is disappointing they couldn't close out those games, their defense is one that took them far last year. They finished top 50 in the nation in yards allowed and top 30 in points allowed. That combined with their 19<sup>th</sup> ranked rushing attack provided the foundation for the Wildcats successful season...



## **2013 Outlook:**

### **Offense:**

Most of the Wildcats skill position guys return, including both quarterbacks Kain Colter and Trevor Siemian, who both share the position. Colter is a dual(tri) threat quarterback who is the heart and soul of this team. In addition to his 872 passing yards, Colter ran for 891 yards and added 169 receiving yards. He's an efficient quarterback who does well in the short area, but he lacks the arm to stretch the field much at all.

That is where Siemian comes in. He led the team with 1,300 yards passing and hit more of the longer passes. Unfortunately he lacks touch and his completion percentage suffered last year (59%). He needs to be a more consistent thrower this season if he wants a larger share of the passing offense.

At running back, the Wildcats found a star in Venric Mark, who had over 1,300 yards rushing and 12 touchdowns. He's a home run threat every time he touches the ball, adding a touchdown receiving and two more on punt returns last season. Mark figures to be once again the focal point of their rushing attack as he teams up with Cain for a dominant one-two punch. Both quarterbacks should look to find ways to throw the ball more to Mark this season to take advantage of his open field ability.

Northwestern doesn't have any star receivers or tight ends, but they have a number of guys with experience who will make plays if given the opportunity. Though not a major strength, it is a group of players that is more than capable of supporting their quarterbacks.

The biggest question on offense is the offensive line which only returns two starters. If they can hold up, this rushing attack should again be top 20 in the nation.

### **Defense:**

Northwestern returns 7 defensive starters from a unit that surprised many with how they finished last year. The strength of this defense is their pass rush led by Trevor Scott who led the team in sacks and tackles for a loss last season. He could look to take his game to the next level this year and could be a first team Big Ten player. Scott is at his best rushing the passer, but he's also a stout run defender and should help lead in that area as well.

The Wildcats linebackers and defensive backs have a lot of potential and speed, but need to play with more consistency this season. They at times faltered late in games giving up some big plays. If Northwestern can cut down on those, they will do a better job at closing out games in 2013.

## **Schedule:**

@ California  
Syracuse  
Western Michigan  
Maine  
Ohio State  
@ Wisconsin  
Minnesota  
@ Iowa  
@ Nebraska  
Michigan  
Michigan State  
@ Illinois

## **Schedule Overview:**

The Wildcats non-conference schedule isn't as strong this year. Which on one hand should make it more likely they go 4-0, but also means that it won't benefit them as much in terms of rankings. Their big games are in two sets of two, each with a home and away game.

First up is Ohio State at home. This won't be an easy game by any stretch of the imagination, but it is at home and if they have any chance of upsetting the Buckeyes, the location will play a key factor. That game is followed by a road game at Wisconsin. The Badgers are a bit of an unknown team at this time. They could make a run at the top of the conference, or they could end up a second tier team. Either way, this game will be a tough road test early on for Northwestern.

In the next group Northwestern will face their top two opponents in the Legends Division, Nebraska and Michigan. The Nebraska game is on the road November 2<sup>nd</sup> and that figures to be a tough matchup going against the Cornhuskers' standout senior quarterback Taylor Martinez. After a bye week, the Wildcats play Michigan at home. But the Wolverines are very much a team on the rise with their own legitimate aspirations for a Big 10 crown. Winning both of these games is a must if Northwestern wants a spot in the Big 10 Title game and a chance for a Rose Bowl appearance.

## #24 - Fresno State:

**By Steve Shoup:**

### 2012 Recap:

The first year of the Tim DeRuyter Era was a major success as the Bulldogs reversed their 2011 4-9 record to 9-4 this past season. In their first year in the Mountain West Conference, Fresno State won a share of the title, while seeing their quarterback Derek Carr win Offensive player of the year, their safety Phillip Thomas win Defensive Player of the year and Freshman receiver Davante Adams win Freshman of the year. Not bad for a team that wasn't expected to make much of an impact in the new conference early on.



Two of the Bulldogs three regular season losses were against non-conference foe Oregon, and long time rival Boise State (Tulsa was the 3rd loss), both of whom were ranked when they faced the Bulldogs. With the exception of those games, Fresno State breezed through their season winning all 9 of their games by at least 12 points (and most by far more than that). They accepted an invite to the Hawaii Bowl, where they lost to SMU 10-43 after their offensive line fell apart. Despite the bad bowl loss it couldn't diminish the overall success of their season. One that saw them finish 12th in the nation in passing yards per game, and 17th in scoring per game. Defensively, the Bulldogs saw a lot of improvement finishing 22nd in yards allowed and 37th in points allowed. They built an attacking defense that finished 9th in the nation in sacks, which helped them finish 3rd in nation in interceptions.

### 2013 OUTLOOK:

#### Offense:

The Bulldogs return one of the better quarterbacks in college football with Derek Carr. Carr threw for 4,100 yards last season to go along with 37 touchdowns and established himself among the NCAA's best. Now as a senior Carr is looking to improve those numbers, and he very well could. Carr displays very advanced accuracy and decision

making and the team will likely lean more on him this season. The Bulldogs lost their top running back Robbie Rouse and should as a result throw the ball more in 2013.

When Carr is throwing the ball expect him to target Devante Adams, early and often. Adams as a freshman caught 102 passes for 1,312 yards and 14 touchdowns last year. Adams should easily match if not exceed those numbers this season and figures to be the focal point of the offense. Isaiah Burse and Josh Harper round out the top three pass catchers for the Bulldogs and both figure to improve upon their numbers from last season, where they combined for almost 1,200 yards and 10 TDs.

The running game could be a bit more tricky this year as there is no clear cut starting option. It will likely lead to a platoon situation between Marteze Waller and Josh Quezada. Both look to be capable backs and should see plenty of playing time. Quezada is better suited for the Bulldogs passing offense, but Waller possesses greater big play ability. The offensive line returns just two starters, but one of them, LT Austin Wentworth was an All-Conference selection.

## **Defense:**

The Bulldogs reshaped their defense to an attacking 3-4 style last year and it paid off handsomely. They were constantly pressuring the quarterback and it resulted in a number of big plays including 38 sacks and 22 interceptions. Though they lost All-American Phillip Thomas and return just six starters, the defense shouldn't see much of a drop-off this year. The Bulldogs used a lot of depth last season rotating players, particularly defensive linemen heavily. The Bulldogs front seven will have some new faces, but overall they are pretty experienced and should continue to generate a lot of pressure on the quarterback.

Unfortunately Phillip Thomas isn't the only key secondary member who won't contribute this season as corner Sean Alston who had 5 interceptions will likely miss the year due to injury. That leaves safety Derron Smith as the leader in the secondary. Smith had 6 interceptions last year and should once again be a ball hawk in the defense. He possesses great range and should make plenty of plays in both the pass and run game, and will be a key cog in keeping this defense among the nations better units.

## **SCHEDULE:**

Rutgers

Cal Poly

@ Colorado

Boise State

@ Hawaii

@ Idaho

UNLV

@ San Diego State

Nevada

New Mexico

@ San Jose State

## **SCHEDULE OVERVIEW:**

Fresno State has a very favorable schedule this year and could be poised for a 10 win regular season. Their non-conference games aren't too challenging and two of their three toughest conference games are at home. Rutgers marks the first big game for Fresno State. They are likely to open the season ranked in the bottom of the top 25. To keep that ranking they absolutely have to win a game versus a bigger known school like Rutgers. Next up is the biggest game of their year, Boise State who they have at home this season. The Broncos typically give the Bulldogs plenty of problems, but their defense could be a down a little bit this year, which could lead to Derek Carr having a big game and getting the win here.

Even if they were to lose to Boise State, it is crucial they don't take any more conference losses, which is why the back-to-back games versus San Diego State and Nevada are so important. San Diego State shared in the MWC Title last season and they figure to be a solid team once again. The game is on the road which could make it tougher as well. Nevada is a team that is projected to rise this year in the MWC and represents the last real challenge for the Bulldogs.

Even if they don't win the MWC, a 10 win regular season would be a big step for this team. To do so they can't do worse than splitting these four games, but ideally they would win 3 of 4.

## #25 - Oklahoma:

**By Steve Shoup:**

### 2012 Recap:

Though they went 8-1 in the conference and 10-2 in the regular season, it would be hard to not categorize the Sooners season as a disappointment. Their only conference loss was to the conference Champs, Kansas State and their non-conference loss was to eventual National Title Game participant Notre Dame, but Oklahoma was considered the better team heading into both of those matchups and the games were at home.



Oklahoma had expected to run away with the Big 12, in what was considered a down year for the conference. They believed that senior quarterback Landry Jones would give them the edge for the title and a chance for a Championship game appearance.

The two losses knocked them out of the BCS Bowls, but they did earn a Cotton Bowl bid, where former

conference rival Texas A&M dismantled them. The Texas A&M game opened some eyes to the fact that perhaps Oklahoma wasn't as strong a team as people had thought. Their final four wins on the season, were all by 8 points or less, and in three of those games (plus the Bowl game) their defense allowed 34 points or more. What was once the strength for the Sooners had turned into a liability.

### 2013 Outlook:

#### Offense:

The Sooners will be without Landry Jones and are likely to turn their offense over to Blake Bell. Bell has been used the past two years as a goal line threat, and has 24 rushing touchdowns in just over 100 attempts so far in his career. The question remains though how he can develop as a passer.

Bell has fewer passing attempts (20) so far in his career than rushing touchdowns. Even more problematic is Bell has never really been utilized to drive a team the length of the field. Much of his rushing and passing attempts have come inside the 10 yard-line. While it might be impressive what he accomplished in those limited touches, things could be quite different when he needs to lead a team 80 yards.

Luckily Bell will have some help in the backfield as senior running back Damien Williams has big play ability and with enough touches should get All-Conference consideration. Also in the backfield (at least some of the time) is FB/TE hybrid Trey Millard. Millard averaged 6 yards per carry in his 33 rushes and over 11 yards per catch in his 30 receptions last season. He could be more effective if the Sooners go to more of an option style attack to cater to Bell's strengths.

Four starters return for the Sooners along their offensive line, though their lone loss of left tackle Lane Johnson is a pretty big hole to replace. Center Gabe Ikard should lead the unit and he has All-American potential.

### **Defense:**

The Sooners could have some problems on defense as they return just four starters, including just one defensive back. Luckily that defensive back is star corner Aaron Colvin. Colvin has All-American potential and should be able to take away any receiver he faces this year.

After Colvin there are a number of highly recruited players, but no one whom Oklahoma can really count on. The Sooners finished out of the top 50 in scoring defense last year and it is likely they will fall farther this season. With facing so many high powered offenses, the Sooners defense could end up putting a lot of pressure on the offense this season.

### **Schedule:**

UL Monroe

West Virginia

Tulsa

@ Notre Dame

TCU

vs. Texas

@ Kansas

Texas Tech

@ Baylor

Iowa State

@ Kansas State

@ Oklahoma State

### **Schedule Overview:**

Make no mistake this is a poor schedule for the Sooners. Much of the Big 12 is expected to be improved this year, and close wins by the Sooners last year may turn out to be losses this year. Making matters worse, Oklahoma's road schedule is particularly tough. Not only do they face Notre Dame in South Bend and travel to cross state rival Oklahoma State, but they have other tough teams like Baylor and Kansas State on the road. While Oklahoma is expected to be better than Baylor or KSU, playing them on the road could be a different matter for a young team. Notre Dame and Oklahoma State should both be the early favorite in those road games and Oklahoma will need to play flawlessly if they want to turn around that prediction.

In addition to the tough road schedule, Oklahoma will need to knock off a TCU team that appears to have the makings to put together a run in the Big 12. As always the Red River Rivalry game against Texas will prove to be an important challenge for the Sooners. In recent years they have won the game easily, but that is not expected to be the case this season, as Texas appears to be on the rise, while Oklahoma is rebuilding.





2013 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PRESEASON GUIDE

# **AWARD SEASON WATCH LIST**

# AWARD SEASON WATCH LIST:

**By Tyler Fenwick:**

First and foremost, football is a team sport. Let's not get anyone confused with that. But as we pound on the "we" part of the game, there's also a nice, cozy spot for individual accolades. Trophies such as the Heisman and Maxwell and Walter Camp hop into the driver's seat of college football for a little while. And here are some names you should remember for when that time comes.

## **Heisman Memorial Trophy:**

### **1. Jadeveon Clowney (DE, South Carolina)**

The last defensive player we saw win the Heisman was Charles Woodson in 1997, the same year Michigan took a share of the national title.

There's a little bit of irony here because, as I'm sure everyone has seen by now, Jadeveon Clowney absolutely destroyed

Michigan running back, Vincent Smith, in the Outback Bowl. That hit launched the campaign we're talking about today with Clowney.



Becoming one of the most well-rounded defensive ends in the game, Clowney most definitely has all the tools and necessary ability to win the Heisman Trophy. He's explosive, hard-hitting and has a tremendously high football IQ. You know how people will say it's an "honor" or a "privilege" to watch Miguel Cabrera play baseball? It's the same way with Jadeveon Clowney; you have to appreciate what you're seeing before it's gone.

Clowney is my number one candidate for the Heisman right now because of the electricity he brings to the South Carolina defense and the impact he has on the game. Everyone loves excitement; that's the biggest reason Manti Te'o was invited to New York last year. It's the same reason Jadeveon Clowney will follow in his footsteps.

## 2. Braxton Miller (QB, Ohio State)

Braxton Miller should have been more in the discussion for the Heisman last year, in my opinion. The things that kid did for Ohio State were unbelievable. His 2012 numbers look something like this: 2,039 yards, 58.3 completion percentage, 15 touchdowns and only six interceptions.

Urban Meyer has the Buckeyes rolling in the right direction, and there is no question that Braxton Miller is his guy. He has a whole arsenal of things he can do with the young man, as opposed to Miller's first year as a starter, which was just a lot of running and some questionable throwing. He's an incredibly electric player at the quarterback position, probably the best in the country. And here's a different angle towards the case of Braxton Miller: Denard Robinson is no longer at Michigan, meaning the quarterback buzz can now shift in Miller's direction.

I'm expecting Braxton Miller to really go lights out in 2013. His strongest cases will be made against Wisconsin, Penn State and Michigan. If he does not win the Heisman, I would expect to see him win the Maxwell Award.

## 3. Johnny Manziel (QB, Texas A&M)

Here, I'll wait on you to yell at me for putting Johnny Football all the way down at the three spot.

Done? Okay.

The reason I do this is because of that sophomore slump that always seems to creep up on players. Believe it or not, Johnny Manziel is not an impenetrable force. He's a young player who's still learning the



ins and outs of the game. Quite frankly, I think I might be out on a limb by saying he'll even be in the Heisman conversation late in the season. Manziel is a great quarterback, and I believe he'll win this thing one more time before he goes pro, but it won't be in 2013. Teams have seen him once, have a little more of an idea as to how to deal with the kid, and I'm sure most SEC defenses will be able to act accordingly.

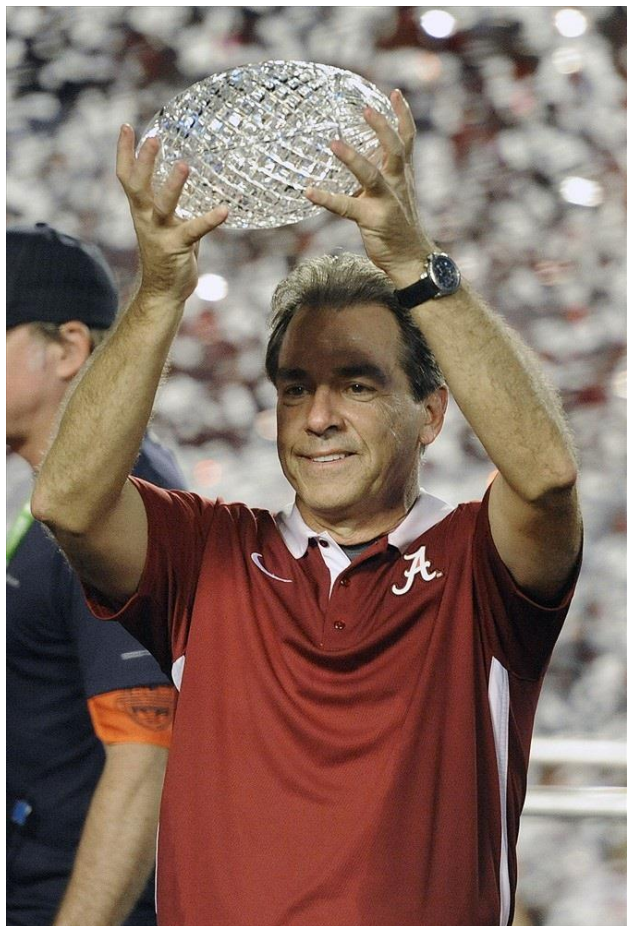
*Other notable candidates: Devin Gardner (QB, Michigan), TJ Yeldon (RB, Alabama), AJ McCarron (QB, Georgia), Teddy Bridgewater (QB, Louisville).*



## **Coach of the Year:**

### **1. Nick Saban (Alabama)**

I once read that Nick Saban is the best coach in college football because “it’s Nick Saban.” I’ll try to solidify the argument a little beyond that, but I think you get the point. Nick Saban has done nothing short of amazing at Alabama. The Crimson Tide have



won back-to-back National Championships under Saban, going 25-2 in that span. Overall, Saban has a record of 68-13 at Alabama.

I firmly believe Nick Saban is the best coach in college football, and I don’t see a clean way to deny it.

### **2. Brian Kelly (Notre Dame)**

Brian Kelly is doing a fantastic job at Notre Dame. He has built up his program to be a consistent contender at the national level, and he holds his players to a certain standard of responsibility, both on and off the field.

I think it will be interesting to hear the way Kelly responds to questions from the media as the season approaches because of that whooping they took at the hands of Alabama in the National Championship Game. To me, it will go a

long way in determining how serious a contender he is for this award because it will reveal a lot of character, some of which I’m sure we have yet to see. But if all goes well and Notre Dame can muster up another successful season, I better be seeing Brian Kelly’s name when they discuss this award.

### **3. Brady Hoke (Michigan)**

The reason I throw Brady Hoke’s name into the mix is because of what he’ll be able to do with this Michigan football team, now that he has the ideal personnel for his scheme. Before, there were a lot of guys Hoke didn’t actually recruit, so it was a large puzzle that the coaching staff had to stuff together. This season, though, we’re starting to see

something more like what Hoke will continue to have at Michigan. And when Hoke gets who he wants, he's a very successful coach.

I think Michigan will have enough success this season to lift their brand back into the national spotlight, exposing Brady Hoke and his staff and ultimately getting him the necessary attention to compete for this award. I don't think Hoke deserves to be placed higher than number three, especially right now, but he'll be a real contender by the end.

## **Doak Walker Award (Best Running Back):**

### **1. TJ Yeldon (Alabama)**

I'm a huge TJ Yeldon fan. He does all the right things for the Crimson Tide and has the build to become an unstoppable force in the SEC. He's an all-purpose back that can be extremely useful in any situation, more than just capable of getting the job done.

Alabama loves to keep a balanced attack, so a lack of opportunity won't be a problem for Yeldon. It'll just be a matter of being able to convert when his number is called, something I'm very confident he'll be doing a lot of this year.

### **2. Ameer Abdullah (Nebraska)**

Ameer Abdullah was a silent producer in 2012. He didn't receive a whole lot of attention at Nebraska, even though he rushed for over 1,100 yards and eight touchdowns. Although his running threat is coupled with that of quarterback Taylor Martinez, I believe Abdullah will get more of what he deserves this season. I don't see Nebraska using Martinez **QUITE** as much as they have in the past because of how reliable Abdullah has become. As a result of that, he'll get plenty of chances to prove what he has to the rest of the country.

I'd expect Abdullah to tack on another 100-200 yards to his year total and get into double digit touchdowns for the season. With that, he should definitely eclipse the line that separates the relative from the attention-grabbing.



### **3. John Hubert (Kansas State)**

John Hubert has been mightily overlooked during his time with Kansas State for a couple reasons. One of them is because he's a smaller back. Hubert only stands 5'7" and weighs 191 pounds. Plus, he had to take a backseat to Collin Klein last year. As you know, Klein had a tremendous, Heisman caliber season in 2012, which really casted a shadow over John Hubert.

Last year, as the secondary threat, Hubert ran for 947 yards and scored 15 rushing touchdowns. That was good enough for 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively in the Big 12 in those categories. And now that Collin Klein is no longer in the picture, I completely expect Hubert to become the primary threat for this offense and really boost those numbers into something the media cannot ignore two years in a row.

### **Chuck Bednarik Award (Defensive Player of the Year):**

#### **1. Jadeveon Clowney (DE, South Carolina)**

Jadeveon Clowney has a really good chance to rack up a lot of awards this season. The Heisman is obviously number one, but being named the best defensive player in the country wouldn't be a bad thing to have to your name, either. He is, by far, the best defensive lineman in the game today and has the greatest impact for his defense. He's such an exciting player to watch, and I have no doubt in my mind that he will win this award, along with many others.

#### **2. Alex Carter (CB, Stanford)**

Alex Carter probably isn't a name most people will recognize. He plays in the PAC 12, where offense easily trumps defense and most defensive efforts are casually ignored, anyway. Carter had himself a very solid season in 2012—46 tackles and three tackles for loss—and really stood out amongst the rest of that Stanford defense.

Now it's time for him to take that next step and become a big deal on the national stage, something I think he's capable of doing. Alex Carter was blessed with size at the cornerback position; he's able to match up with some of the best wide receivers in the PAC 12 because of that size and athleticism, which makes him a very versatile weapon on defense.

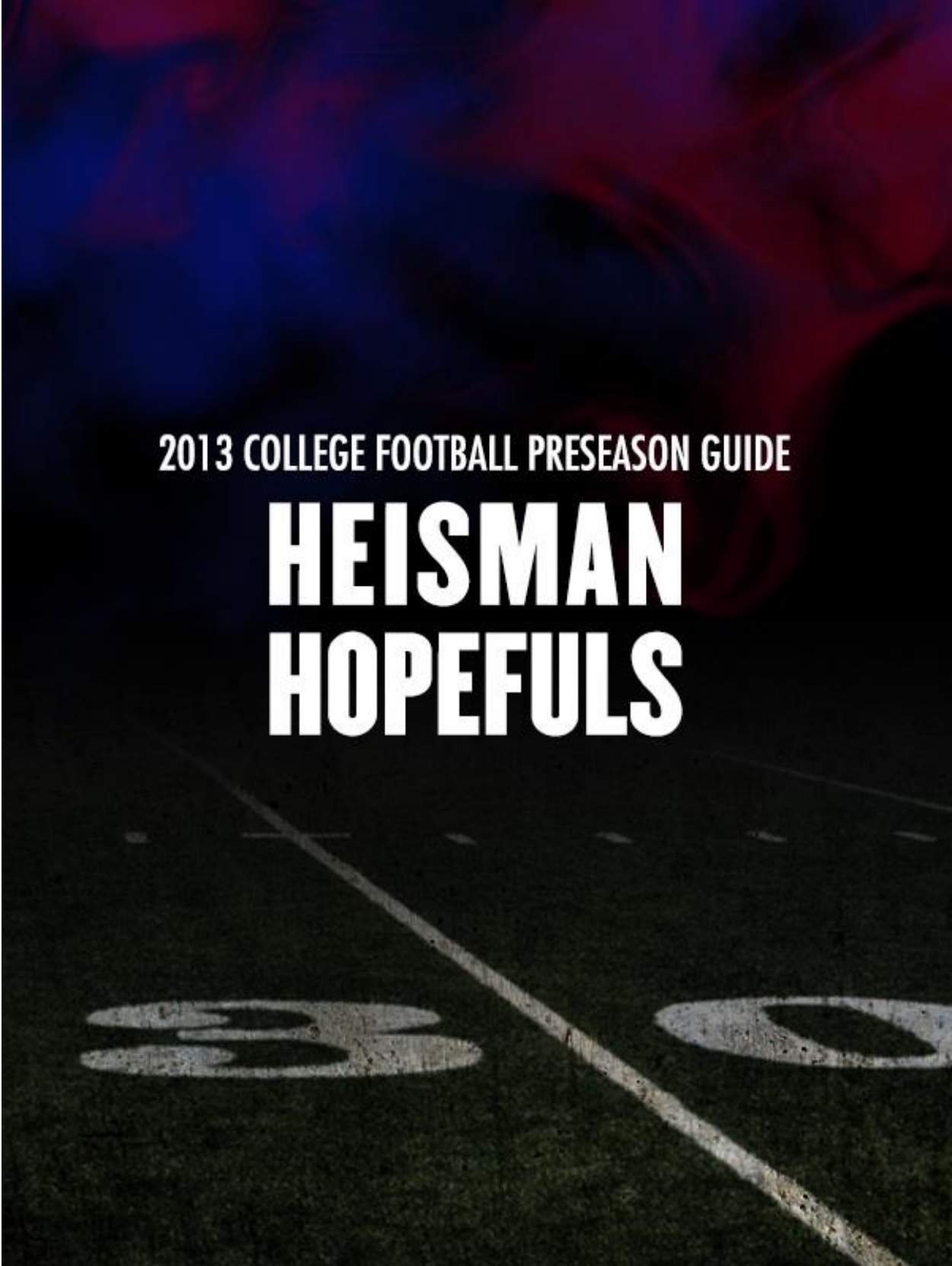


### **3. Jordan Jenkins (LB, Georgia)**

Jordan Jenkins is primed for a breakout year on defense for the Bulldogs. Georgia lost a few, key players on defense from this last season, so it's making a lot of room for growth from guys like Jenkins.

Last year, as a freshman, Jenkins recorded 31 tackles, five sacks and forced a fumble. It was a very nice way to start a college career, especially considering the level at which Georgia played as a whole last season. Jordan Jenkins's biggest contribution to the Bulldog defense will be providing pressure off the edge. If he can do that effectively, this defense will benefit heavily, and much of the props will be handed to Jenkins.





2013 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PRESEASON GUIDE

# HEISMAN HOPEFULS



Fanspeak put odds on the 2013 Heisman Trophy Winner. Who do you think it will be?

## ODDS FOR 2013 HEISMAN TROPHY RACE



QB Johnny Manziel



QB AJ McCarron



QB Marcus Mariota



QB Braxton Miller



The Field



RB Todd Gurley



QB Tajh Boyd



RB De'Anthony Thomas



QB Brett Hundley



DE Jadeveon Clowney



WR Marquis Lee



QB Teddy Bridgewater



## **TOP 10 NFL PLAYERS WHO WERE HEISMAN TROPHY WINNERS:**

**By Bill Shoup:**

Speaking of Heisman Trophy winners, let's take a look back at some of the most successful ones that went on to be NFL stars. So for this exercise, we're not giving consideration to who might win it this year. Instead, we're taking a look at past Heisman Trophy winners and ranking them based on how successful they were in their pro football careers.

It turned out that this was not an easy category to rank. The Heisman Trophy has been awarded every year since 1935. Of course, many of the early winners never went on to a pro football career or if they did, they had relatively short careers. A lot of them actually found that they could earn more money in other lines of work. Pretty unlikely that we would see that sort of thing happen today!

Now there were some Heisman winners from back in the 1940s, 50s and 60s who had some pretty distinguished pro careers. But it needs to be recognized that, for the most part, they played in a different era. The NFL was still pretty much a run-oriented league and in truth, both the run game and the passing game back then lacked the creativity and explosiveness that we see today. So to a large extent, comparing guys from that era with the more recent Heisman winners is kind of like comparing apples to oranges.

So, in order to do this fairly, we had to consider and compare more than just statistics. We took into consideration when the guy played and looked at his numbers in the context of how the game was generally being played at that time. Additionally, we gave some weight to the accolades that a player received throughout his career, since that is an indicator of the success he had in comparison to others during the particular time frame in which they played.

Now, I do have a final qualifier. The nice thing about being the author of a list such as this, is that I have some flexibility in making up the rules. As a result, I am taking the position that to the extent that there are any candidates for this list who happen to be a narcissistic, murderous, thug with a felony record, then they are automatically excluded from this list, no matter how outstanding their pro career was. Such a player can be on your list. But he's not going to be on mine!

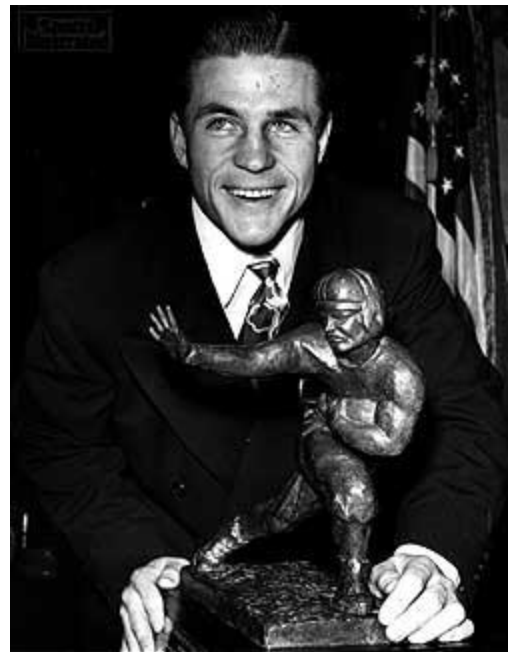
**There, now that I feel better, let's get going.**

### **#10 – Doak Walker – RB**

Walker played college ball at SMU, and won the Heisman in 1948, his junior year. Walker only played in the NFL for six years, all of them with the Detroit Lions. But, he was a 5-time Pro Bowler and he was voted to the All-Pro team four times.

Walker is one of those guys who does not have the gaudy numbers. He only rushed for a little over 1,500 yards in his career, but he did have some relatively impressive receiving numbers, catching 152 balls for over 2,500 yards. He also was a very accomplished place kicker for the Lions.

During his time in Detroit, Walker helped lead the Lions to two NFL championships and he was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1986.



### **#9 – Billy Sims – RB**

Sims, out of the University of Oklahoma, won the Heisman Trophy in 1978. Like our #10 selection, he also went on to have a very short but extremely productive career with the Detroit Lions. His career actually ended prematurely and abruptly when he suffered a very severe knee injury midway through the 1984 season, his fifth season with the Lions.

In his first two seasons with the Lions, Sims rushed for over 1,300 yards and over 1,400 yards respectively. In 1983, he also rushed for a little over 1,000 yards. In the nine-game, strike-shortened, 1982 season, Sims rushed for 639 yards. Likewise, in the eight games before his knee injury in 1984, Sims rushed for 687 yards. Clearly, in both of those abbreviated seasons, Sims was on pace for 1000+ yard seasons. Additionally, Sims had some very solid numbers catching the ball out of the backfield.

Sims was a 3-time Pro Bowler and he helped lead the Lions to the playoffs in 1982 and 1983. Some may question the selection of Sims, given his relatively short time in the NFL. But we think his numbers compare favorably to most of the potential candidates for this list and therefore he is deserving of this #9 ranking.

### **#8 – Paul Hornung – RB**

Known as the “Golden Boy”, Hornung had a stellar nine-year career in the NFL, all with the Green Bay Packers. As a halfback/quarterback at Notre Dame, Hornung won the Heisman Trophy in 1956.

Hornung was a 2-time Pro Bowler and he was voted to the All-Pro team twice. While Hornung’s numbers are far from eye-popping, it must be remembered that for the bulk of his career he shared the rushing duties with fellow Hall of Famer, Jim Taylor, in that Packers power running game of the 60’s. During Hornung’s time with Green Bay, the Packers won four League Championships.

Although Hornung had a very respectable 4.2 yards per carry average for his career, he was known as one of the best short yardage backs in the game. In 1960 he led the league in touchdowns scored with 15. For much of his career he was also the Packers placekicker. His placekicking success combined with his touchdown-making ability,

resulted in him leading the league in scoring three times.



the league in that category twice. Amazingly, he has returned 11 of those picks for touchdowns and he is currently the active leader in that category.

### **#7 – Charles Woodson – CB**

Woodson, the cornerback/punt returner out of Michigan, won the Heisman in 1997. He is the only predominantly defensive player to win the award.

Woodson, the only active NFL player to make this list, is about to enter his 16<sup>th</sup> season in the league. The first eight years were spent in Oakland and for the past seven years he has played for Green Bay. He recently signed a one-year contract to return to the Raiders this year.

Long known as one of the toughest cornerbacks in the league, Woodson has 55 interceptions for his career, and led

Throughout his career, Woodson has had a knack for being a game changer by getting that turnover at just the right time. But he is also very solid in the run support game as well. In his rookie year in 1998, Woodson won the Defensive Rookie of the Year Award and in 2009 he won the NFL Defensive Player of the Year Award. Woodson is an 8-time Pro Bowler and he was voted to the All-Pro Team three times.

#### **#6 – Tim Brown – WR**

Brown, the 1987 Heisman Trophy winner out of Notre Dame, had an illustrious 17 year career in the NFL. The first 16 years were spent with the Raiders and then he wrapped up his career with a one year stint in Tampa Bay.

Brown, a 9-time Pro-Bowler, led the league in receptions in 1997 with 104. For his career, Brown has 1,094 receptions and nearly 15,000 receiving yards. His career receptions and receiving yards totals each are good enough for 5th place on the all-time list. In addition, his 100 career touchdown receptions puts him in 7th place on the all-time list in that category.

For a number of years, Brown was the Raiders punt returner and in 1994, he led the league with 487 punt return yards. His 3,320 career punt return yards places him 5th all-time in that category.

Brown only served as the Raiders primary kick returner in his rookie year (1988), but he led the league that year in the number of returns (41), return yards (1,048), touchdowns (1), and yards per return (26.8). That same year, Brown also led the league in all-purpose yards (2,317). Brown's 19,679 career all-purpose yards put him in 5th place all-time in that category.

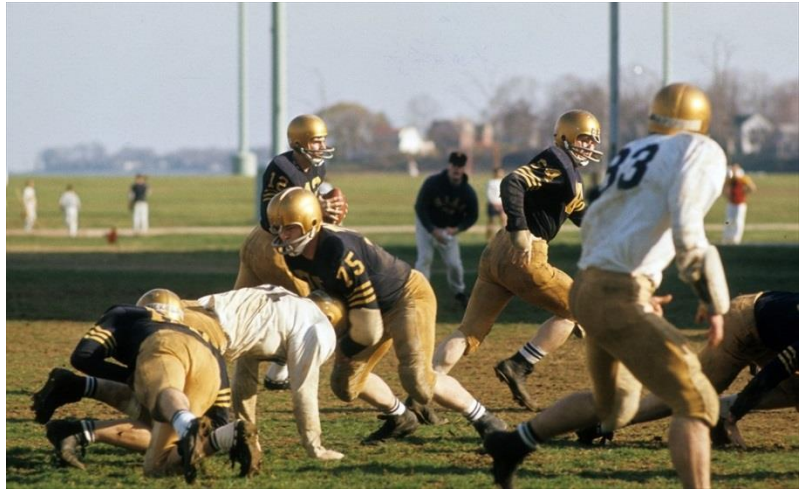
#### **#5 – Roger Staubach – QB**

The 1963 Heisman Trophy winner, Staubach had to delay his entry into professional football due to his military commitment after graduation from the Naval Academy. As a result, he came to the NFL in 1969 as a 27-year-old rookie.



Staubach had an 11 year NFL career, all with the Dallas Cowboys. His overall career numbers were solid but not spectacular. He threw for a total of 22,700 yards and 153 touchdown passes in his career. He did lead the league in 1973 in touchdown passes thrown with 23.

Staubach is one of those guys where you have to look beyond the numbers in order to understand his true value. Known as “Roger the Dodger” because of his exceptional scrambling ability, Staubach had a knack for being able to extend plays and extend drives. Staubach was also known as “Captain Comeback” because of his uncanny ability to lead his team back late in ballgames to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.



In eight of his 11 seasons, Staubach led the Cowboys into the playoffs. And on four of those occasions, he led Dallas to a Super Bowl, where they beat the Dolphins once and the Broncos once and lost twice to the Steelers. Overall he had an outstanding 11-6 record as a starting quarterback in playoff games.

Staubach also had a remarkable 85 – 29 regular-season record as a starting quarterback and he was a 6-time Pro Bowler. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1985.

#### **#4 – Earl Campbell – RB**

Campbell, the bruising running back out of the University of Texas, won the Heisman Trophy in 1977. He went on to have an eight-year, Hall of Fame NFL career, most notably with the Houston Oilers.

Campbell vaulted onto the scene in the NFL by leading the league in rushing in each of his first three seasons, totaling just over 5,000 yards in those three years. In addition, in his second and third seasons in the NFL he led the league in rushing touchdowns scored with 19 and 13 respectively.

For his career, Campbell rushed for just over 9,400 yards and he scored 74 rushing touchdowns. In five of his eight seasons, Campbell rushed for at least 1,300 yards and in the strike-shortened 1982 season, he was on pace to have another 1,000 yard year.

Campbell was a 5-time Pro Bowler and he helped lead the Oilers into the playoffs three times. He was voted to the All-Pro team three times and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1991.

### **#3 – Tony Dorsett – RB**

Dorsett, out of the University of Pittsburgh, was the 1976 Heisman Trophy winner. He played 12 years in the NFL, the first 11 of which were spent with Dallas. He finished his career after his 1988 season with the Broncos.

While Dorsett never led the league in rushing, throughout his career, he was the model of durability and consistency. In eight of his first nine years, Dorsett ran for over 1,000 yards with a high water mark of 1,646 yards in 1981. The one year in that span that he didn't top 1,000 yards was the 1982 strike-shortened season when he would have been on pace to rush for over 1,300 yards that year.

For his career, Dorsett rushed for a total of 12,739 yards which places him 8th on the all-time career list in that category. Dorsett was also highly productive catching the ball out of the backfield, accumulating 3,554 receiving yards in his career. Dorsett's 16,293 yards from scrimmage for his career places him 10th on the all-time list in that category.

Dorsett helped lead the Cowboys to eight playoff appearances, two of which culminated in a Super Bowl berth. He was a 4-time Pro Bowler and was voted to the All-Pro team once. Dorsett was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1994.



## **#2 – Marcus Allen – RB**

Allen, the USC running back, won the Heisman Trophy in 1981. He had a 16-year, Hall of Fame career in the NFL. His first 11 years were spent with the Raiders and the last five years he spent playing for the Kansas City Chiefs.

In his rookie year in 1982, Allen won the NFL's Offensive Rookie of the Year Award. He ran for 697 yards in that nine-game, strike-shortened, 1982 season and he led the league that year with 11 rushing touchdowns. Allen rushed for over 1,000 yards in each of the next three seasons, leading the league in 1985 with 1,759 rushing yards.

Over the course of his career, Allen rushed for a total of 12,243 yards, a figure that places him 12th on the all-time list in that category. Allen also scored a total of 145 touchdowns in his career putting him 6th on the all-time list in that category. With his total of 5,411 receiving yards, Alan amassed a total of 17,654 yards from scrimmage in his career, good enough for 7th on the all-time list.

Allen helped lead his Raiders to six playoff appearances and he helped to do the same for the Chiefs four times. His performance in the 1983 playoffs for the Raiders was quite memorable. In the Divisional Playoff game against the Steelers, he ran for 121 yards on 13 carries. He followed that up the next week in the AFC Championship Game against the Seahawks by rushing for 154 yards on 25 carries. And then two weeks later, he helped deliver a Super Bowl title to the Raiders by rushing for 191 yards on 20 carries against the Redskins.

Allen was a 6-time Pro Bowler and he was voted to the All-Pro team twice. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2003.

**And now, the number one NFL player who was a Heisman Trophy winner ...**



## #1 – Barry Sanders – RB

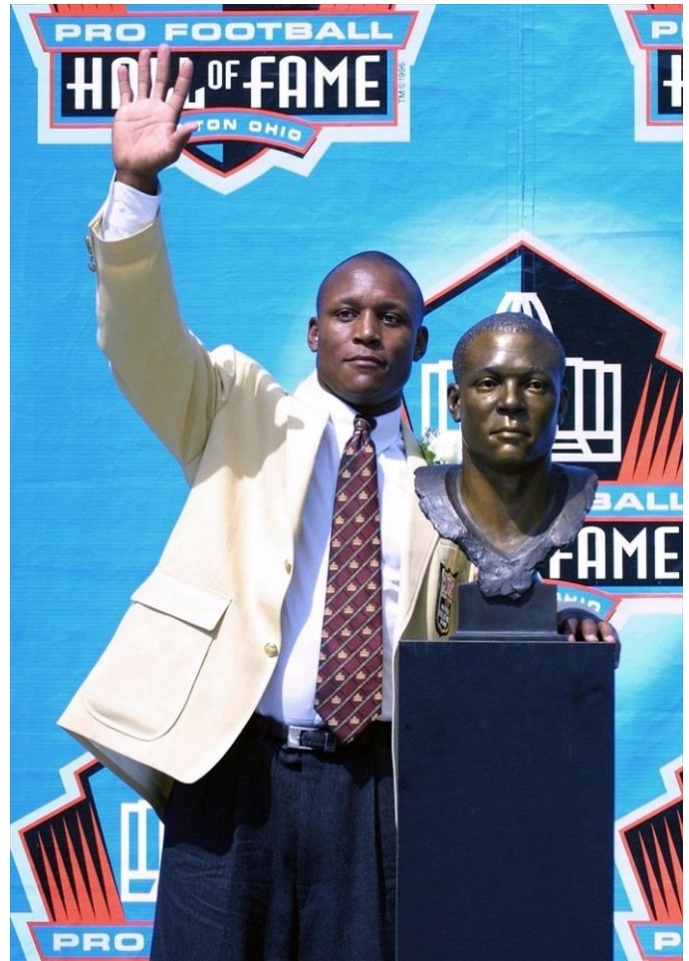
Oklahoma State's running back, Barry Sanders, won the Heisman Trophy in 1988. While ranking some of the other players on this list got to be a bit difficult, putting Sanders in the number one spot was an easy choice.

Sanders played his entire 10 year NFL career with the Detroit Lions. In each of those 10 years, Sanders rushed for at least 1,100 yards and he led the league in rushing four times. Indeed, in five of his seasons, Sanders rushed for over 1,500 yards, four of those coming in consecutive seasons.

Sanders won the Offensive Rookie of the Year Award in 1989, the Offensive Player of the Year Award in 1994 and he was the NFL's Co-MVP in 1997 with Brett Favre. In that 1997 season, Sanders rushed for 2,053 yards and scored 11 rushing touchdowns. He also caught 33 passes for 305 yards and 3 touchdowns.

For his career, Sanders averaged over 1,500 rushing yards per season, gaining a total of 15,269 yards. He also gained nearly 3,000 yards receiving in his career. His career rushing yards total puts Sanders 3rd on the all-time list in that category. Additionally, his 99.8 career rushing yards per game average has him 2nd on that all-time list. He is 6th on the all-time list for total yards from scrimmage in a career with his 18,190 yards. Sanders has 99 career rushing touchdowns which places him 9th on the all-time list in that category.

Sanders was a 10-time Pro Bowler and he was voted to the All-Pro team six times. During his time in Detroit, Sanders helped lead the Lions to the playoffs five times. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2004.



Although Sanders' career ended rather abruptly with his retirement after the completion of the 1998 season, the body of work he compiled in his 10 years in the league is clearly remarkable. And while there have been a number of great NFL players who were Heisman Trophy winners, none of them put together the kind of career that Sanders did. We believe that what Sanders accomplished in his 10 year career is most deserving of the #1 ranking on this list.



2013 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PRESEASON GUIDE

# **PRESEASON ALL-AMERICAN TEAM**

# All-American Teams Predictions:

**By Steve Shoup:**

## Quarterback:

1<sup>st</sup>: Johnny Manziel, Texas A&M

2<sup>nd</sup>: A.J. McCarron, Alabama

3<sup>rd</sup>: Braxton Miller, Ohio State

4<sup>th</sup>: Marcus Mariota, Oregon



## Running Backs:

1<sup>st</sup>: Todd Gurley, Georgia, Ka'Deem Carey, Arizona

2<sup>nd</sup>: T.J. Yeldon, Alabama, De'Anthony Thomas, Oregon

3<sup>rd</sup>: Duke Johnson, Miami, Lache Seastrunk, Baylor

4<sup>th</sup>: Bishop Sankey, Washington, Venric Mark, Northwestern



## Wide Receiver:

1<sup>st</sup>: Marqise Lee, USC, Jordan Matthews, Vanderbilt

2<sup>nd</sup>: Sammy Watkins, Clemson, Amari Cooper, Alabama

3<sup>rd</sup>: Mike Evans, Texas A&M, Cody Hoffman, BYU

4<sup>th</sup>: Stefon Diggs, Maryland, Brandin Cooks, Oregon State



## **Tight End:**

1<sup>st</sup>: Austin Seferian-Jenkins, Washington

2<sup>nd</sup>: Eric Ebron, North Carolina

3<sup>rd</sup>: Arthur Lynch, Georgia

4<sup>th</sup>: Chris Coyle, Arizona State

## **Offensive Tackles:**

1<sup>st</sup>: Taylor Lewan, Michigan, Jake Matthews, Texas A&M

2<sup>nd</sup>: Antonio Richardson, Tennessee, Zack Martin, Notre Dame

3<sup>rd</sup>: James Hurst, North Carolina, Cyrus Kouandjio, Alabama

4<sup>th</sup>: Morgan Moses, Virginia, John Theus, Georgia



## **Offensive Guards:**

1<sup>st</sup>: David Yankey, Stanford, Cyril Richardson, Baylor

2<sup>nd</sup>: Gabe Jackson, Mississippi St., Andrew Norwell, Ohio State

3<sup>rd</sup>: Tre Jackson, Florida State, Anthony Steen, Alabama

4<sup>th</sup>: Spencer Long, Nebraska, Xavier Su'a-Filo, UCLA



## **Center:**

1<sup>st</sup>: B.J. Finney, Kansas State

2<sup>nd</sup>: Hroniss Grasu, Oregon

3<sup>rd</sup>: Gabe Ikard, Oklahoma

4<sup>th</sup>: Travis Swanson, Arkansas

### **All-Purpose:**

1<sup>st</sup>: Jordan Lynch, Northern Illinois

2<sup>nd</sup>: Dri Archer, Kent State

3<sup>rd</sup>: Kain Colter, Northwestern

4<sup>th</sup>: Charles Sims, West Virginia

### **Defensive End:**

1<sup>st</sup>: Jadeveon Clowney, South Carolina, Stephon Tuitt, Notre Dame

2<sup>nd</sup>: Scott Crichton, Oregon State, Aaron Lynch, South Florida

3<sup>rd</sup>: Morgan Breslin, USC, Devonte Fields, TCU

4<sup>th</sup>: Kareem Martin, North Carolina, Jackson Jeffcoat, Texas

### **Defensive Tackles:**

1<sup>st</sup>: Louis Nix, Notre Dame, Will Sutton, Arizona State

2<sup>nd</sup>: Anthony Johnson, LSU, Dominique Easley, Florida

3<sup>rd</sup>: Timmy Jernigan, Florida State, Aaron Donald, Pittsburgh

4<sup>th</sup>: Calvin Barnett, Oklahoma State, Daniel McCullers, Tennessee

### **Linebackers:**

1<sup>st</sup>: Anthony Barr, UCLA, C.J. Mosley, Alabama, Kyle Van Noy, BYU



2<sup>nd</sup> Ryan Shazier, Ohio State, Trent Murphy, Stanford, Chris Borland, Wisconsin

3<sup>rd</sup>: A.J. Johnson, Tennessee, Shayne Skov, Stanford, Max Bullough, Michigan State

4<sup>th</sup>: Adrian Hubbard, Alabama, Christian Jones, Florida State, Yawin Smallwood, UConn

### **Cornerbacks:**

1<sup>st</sup>: Bradley Roby, Ohio State, Aaron Colvin, Oklahoma

2<sup>nd</sup>: Ifo Ekpre-Olomu, Oregon, Jason Verrett, TCU

3<sup>rd</sup>: Quandre Diggs, Texas, Loucheiz Purifoy, Florida

4<sup>th</sup>: Bennett Jackson, Notre Dame, Andre Hal, Vanderbilt

### **Safeties:**

1<sup>st</sup>: Ed Reynolds, Stanford, Ha Ha Clinton-Dix, Alabama

2<sup>nd</sup>: Ty Zimmerman, Kansas State, Craig Loston, LSU

3<sup>rd</sup>: Jordan Richards, Stanford, Lamarcus Joyner, Florida State

4<sup>th</sup>: Hakeem Smith, Louisville, C.J. Barnett, Ohio State





2013 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PRESEASON GUIDE

# BCS BOWL PREDICTIONS



# 2013 BOWL PREDICTIONS

## BCS TITLE GAME

#1 Alabama **VS.** #2 Ohio State

This one is simple as it is number 1 versus number 2, and currently that is Alabama and Ohio State. While both teams will have some tough tests, they are both capable of going undefeated. Even one loss by either one might not knock them off.

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## SUGAR BOWL

#3 Texas A&M **VS.** #8 Clemson

With Alabama in the NC game the Sugar Bowl will turn to the next best thing: Texas A&M. With their other selection the Sugar Bowl could look to the explosive Clemson offense. Texas A&M's season could be decided early when they face Alabama. If they survive that contest they should be a favorite for the National Championship game. If they lose they still could have an outside shot depending on what other schools do. Clemson may not win the ACC, but could actually be higher ranked than Florida State, given their tougher non-conference schedule. This gives the Sugar Bowl a great top 10 match-up.

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## ROSE BOWL

#4 Oregon **VS.** #15 Michigan

With Oregon winning the Pac-12 their Rose Bowl spot would be locked up, unless they get to go to the National Championship game. Michigan I have winning the Legends Division and will take Ohio State's Rose Bowl spot with them in the NC game. It's not the most ideal match-up from a talent standpoint, but that is two very strong fanbases.

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## ORANGE BOWL

#10 Florida State **VS.** #5 Georgia

Florida State is my ACC conference favorite right now, though their toughest competition will come from within their own division. Taking an at large spot are the Georgia Bulldogs, who could once again come so close to a National Title game appearance only to have their dreams dashed in the SEC Title game.

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## FIESTA BOWL

#14 Texas **VS.** #11 Boise State

Despite Texas not really a top team, the Fiesta Bowl is saddled with the Big 12 winner, and it is likely to be the Longhorns. Though the Fiesta Bowl could look at Stanford or possibly Florida, Boise State could get the nod here. They should have no more than 1 loss, and are only this low due to an easier schedule.



2013 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PRESEASON GUIDE

# FEATURE ARTICLES

## Same Faces, New Places:

**By Tyler Fenwick:**

It happens every year. Coaches jump school to school until they land the highest dollar or profile. For some fans, the departure of a coach is reason to celebrate with loved ones. For others, some sobbing into a pillow usually makes things a little better.

No matter how you feel, we can't avoid the fact. So before I lose your attention, here are the three biggest coaching moves for the upcoming 2013 season.

Rank	Team	In	Out
1	Arkansas	Brett Bielema	John L. Smith
2	Purdue	Darrell Hazell	Danny Hope
3	NC State	Dave Doeren	Tom O'Brien



### **Dave Doeren:**

NC State going ahead and firing six-year coach Tom O'Brien was an incredibly bold move by the athletic department. O'Brien had led the Wolfpack to two bowl wins in his final three years as a coach, after a bumpy start to his tenure with the program. The firing was a clear sign from the athletic department that they want to be competing for conference

championships, something O'Brien was not doing.

So they go out on a limb and snag a very young head coach by the name of Dave Doeren. He's been in the coaching business since 1995, but he's only spent the last two seasons as a head coach with the Northern Illinois Huskies. In those two seasons, he took his team to back-to-back MAC Championship game wins, and, in 2012, the Huskies became the first MAC school to play in a BCS bowl. Doeren did not coach in that game, however, because of the NC State hiring.

Personally, I love this move. It's just what this football program needs—a young guy with a clean track record who knows how to win. Actually, it doesn't just stop at knowing how to win. Doeren is used to winning; he expects to win. The attitude and energy he will bring to NC State won't be matched in the ACC. Plus, I don't believe this will be a case of "give it a couple years." NC State has the talent right now, and he knows how to utilize every last ounce of it.

## **Darrell Hazell:**

My second biggest coaching move for the 2013 season is found in West Lafayette. Purdue has just been sitting in the cellar of the Big Ten lately, and they were relying heavily on Danny Hope to get them out. But after some false hope here and there and some misfortune with injuries, Morgan Burke (AD) decided to let go of his coach of four years. In those four years under Hope's leadership, the Boilermakers were only able to break .500 once (7-6 in 2011). That was the same year Purdue got its only bowl win during his reign. Overall, Hope finished with a record of 22-27 at Purdue.

Similar to the NC State situation, Purdue's athletic department went out and hired a man who only has two years of experience as a head coach. Purdue also casted their rod into the MAC, catching Kent State coach Darrell Hazell. Hazell, 49, has experience as a position coach with West Virginia, a wide receivers coach with Rutgers and an assistant coach to Jim Tressel at Ohio State. That's where Kent State found him for his first head coaching job. Hazell went 16-10 with the Golden Eagles. In 2012, he took his team to the GoDaddy.com Bowl and was named Conference Coach of the Year by his fellow coaches in the MAC.

This is incredibly risky for Purdue, in my opinion. I know it may sound like I'm contradicting myself after reading the above about NC State, but Dave Doeren is a more established winner. That is what matters when you're coming up from a smaller conference like the MAC. But I can also most definitely see what Purdue is doing here. They need a spark to bring that program back to life in the Big Ten. And what better time to do it than when the conference is already slacking as a whole? The firing of Danny Hope was completely necessary. The risk-reward with Darrell Hazell is a little





shaky, but he's an offensive-minded coach who, when given the right weapons, can make some noise in the Big Ten.

## **Brett Bielema:**

My biggest hire this offseason is Arkansas getting Brett Bielema from the Wisconsin Badgers. This move had me shocked. Everything seemed to be pointing towards Bielema being perfectly fine with his job in Madison. Especially after locking down a Rose Bowl bid by blowing out Nebraska in the Big Ten Championship Game, I thought for sure he would be staying put. But I guess looks can be deceiving. Instead, the Razorbacks needed someone to replace the nightmare that was John L. Smith, and that someone was Brett Bielema.



Bielema is a firm believer in the traditional, power house style of football. He utilized the talent of guys like Montee Ball (RB) and Scott Tolzien (QB) to shove the ball down the throat of the defense. This style of play will translate well to the SEC, where everything is rough and hard-nosed. Bielema will feel right at home, no doubt.

I think the best part about this hire is how it has the chance to restore meaning and legacy to the program. When John L. Smith took over for the Razorbacks last season, the expectations were very high. The AP polls positioned Arkansas as a Top Ten team in the preseason, and it didn't look like they'd be skipping a beat during the transition. As it turns out, there was a beat missed. Actually, there were many beats missed. Arkansas was embarrassed in 2012, which directly lead to the firing of Smith. But Bielema has a

certain pride and standard about him. He won't accept failure on or off the field, and I think that will go miles in restoring what the program once had.

# Five Impact Freshmen to Watch:

**By Tyler Fenwick:**

The 2013 college football season is inching closer. One of the best parts about a new season on the gridiron is seeing some of the most highly-touted recruits in the nation finally suit up for their teams. Long-awaited, much-anticipated, let's take a look at the top five impact freshmen to keep your eye on this season.

## 5. Laquon Treadwell (WR) – Ole Miss

For a while, it looked like Laquon Treadwell would be joining Brady Hoke and Michigan to really complement the growing offense in Ann Arbor. But the tide turned, and Treadwell ended up committing to the Rebels of Ole Miss.

Ole Miss found a good amount of success through the air last season. Bo Wallace is a young, developing quarterback for the Rebels, who could really use a threat like Treadwell out wide. That's why I can easily picture Treadwell making a huge impact for this offense.

At 6'3", Laquon Treadwell will be able to go up against any secondary in the country. He has good ball skills and is able to really work his height to his advantage. The only thing lacking from Treadwell's game at this point is his lack of speed. He won't be a guy Ole Miss will want to screen for or dump it off short to see what he can do with the ball. For now, his primary threat is just down the field.



## 4. Kenny Bigelow (DT) – USC

Kenny Bigelow might be the best lineman (offensive or defensive) in the 2013 class. His size is tremendous; he has very powerful legs; and he has good pursuit skills. Last year, the USC defense gave up nearly 25 points per game, and they were not able to consistently stop the run. Bigelow is a kid who will be able to go in right away and help improve that number.

He has many dimensions to his game, multiple schemes to get by the blockers and into the backfield in a hurry. That, coupled with his size and strength, is what has this coaching staff very excited for him to be out there.

Personally, I wouldn't be too shocked if the numbers weren't there right away for Bigelow, but his presence will most certainly be felt by opposing quarterbacks and running backs. It's the impact that will be weighted, not necessarily the production.

### **3. Thomas Tyner (RB) – Oregon**



Thomas Tyner will only end up being the next great thing in Oregon. Chip Kelly is obviously gone, off with the Eagles in the NFL, but the Ducks are continuing to look for guys who can pop in that explosive offense.

The first thing I notice about Thomas Tyner is how quickly he can shoot through an opening. He's a very sizeable kid, but it

doesn't take much of a gap from the offensive line for him to get through and into the second level. Although his speed won't necessarily blow you away, he's quick to react to the defense and adjust in the backfield, which really makes up for any lack of speed.

I'm expecting Tyner to get some very good, quality minutes for Oregon as a freshman because he's too good to not be utilized. He's a big athlete who can really help the Ducks in every facet of the offense, whether it be first and ten or third and one.

### **2. Jaylon Smith (LB) – Notre Dame**

Although he isn't quite my top impact freshman, I'm most excited to see Jaylon Smith play at Notre Dame this season. Most likely, we'll be seeing the 6'3" athlete at outside linebacker, but that won't define the young man. He has a whole array of talents that will be put on display for the Irish because of his natural athletic ability.



With his incredible athleticism, superb ball skills and a brain for the game—Smith could mean a world of a difference for a Notre Dame team that has been under some recent stress with the Everett Golson situation. And with Manti Te'o moving on to the NFL, there's some buzz to be made up for at the linebacker position, something Smith will definitely bring.

## 1. Vernon Hargreaves (CB) – Florida

Vernon Hargreaves is an incredible athlete at the cornerback position, one of the most anticipated players on the defensive side of the ball for this class. Personally, I think we'll begin to talk about Hargreaves as one of the best corners in the game once October rolls around and we begin conference play. The SEC has some very good quarterbacks that will test the young man.

The very first thing that pops out about Hargreaves is his pure football instinct. The kid is a natural, which will make his transition to the college level a little smoother than most. It makes him exciting to watch, and I doubt we'll be seeing too many freshman mistakes because he keeps a frame of mind that won't allow him to be eaten alive by the more experienced, veteran players at this level.



Looking at the Florida Gators, this is a defense that had a tremendous season in 2012, stopping offenses and holding them to under 15 points per game. I fully expect Hargreaves to amplify that kind of defense even more in 2013. He has the speed, instinct and ball skill you love to see at the cornerback position.

There you have it: the top five freshmen you should keep your eye on in the 2013 season.

## 5 Breakout Players to Watch:

**By Tyler Fenwick:**

He sits the bench most of the 2012 season, learning from the starter in front of him and not receiving any recognition for his role on the team. But come 2013, a wide open chance opens up for everyone, and the tide turns. Names that were once buried spring up and become the roots of common household talk. I'm talking about players who rise from the reserves to become a key piece to the puzzle.

Okay, that was a very overly-dramatic way of introducing five players you should keep your eye on—players who probably aren't used to receiving the attention routinely given to the stars but who may be getting just that this year. In no particular order, I present to you five breakout players to watch.

### 1. Devin Gardner (QB) – Michigan

Coming out of high school, Devin Gardner was one of the most highly-recruited dual threat quarterbacks in the nation. Size, speed and arm strength were all tremendous for the 6'4" athlete, and you could tell from just one snap of the ball that he was a gamer. But there was a slight problem: Denard Robinson. Yes, "Shoelace."



Gardner was sort of buried under the stats and electricity of number 16 for his first few years with the Wolverines. But when a damaged nerve prevented Robinson from finishing the 2012 season, Gardner—who was converted to wide receiver that season—went back to his position of origin and started directing the Wolverine offense. And the young man was more than impressive. In fact, he

made such an impression on the coaching staff that when Denard Robinson was healthy enough to play, they just used him as a running back or slot receiver and left Gardner at quarterback.

The biggest reason I'm telling you to keep your eye on Devin Gardner is because he's a student of the game. He absorbs information so quickly, and it directly translates to his play on the field. Decision making became quicker, and his throws became more crisp. He just loves to take it all in, learn, then go back out and continue to compete.

Through five games last season as a quarterback (one of which was a bowl game against South Carolina), Gardner completed 59% of his passes for just over 1,200 yards. Not too bad, right? This coming season, the quarterback position (barring any injury) is Gardner's. He has a solid group of wide receivers to work with, and Michigan is planning on being able to run the ball more effectively from the running back position than they have in previous years, which will open up the options for Gardner through the air.

## **2. Jordan Jenkins (LB) – Georgia**

Jordan Jenkins will only be a sophomore this season, but you would not be able to tell if you saw the kid play. As a freshman in 2012, Jenkins ended up second on the team in sacks from the outside linebacker position and blew the doors of opportunity wide open.

With a full year of experience under his belt, it's plausible to think Jenkins could take yet another leap in his game. The SEC features some of the best offensive linemen in the country, but Jenkins has such great pursuit skills that it doesn't even seem to faze the kid. The expectations surrounding Bulldogs nation include getting a monstrous year from Jenkins, which could go a long way in determining how Georgia finishes in the SEC. Yeah, he'll be that important.

The impact he has for the defense is tremendous. He was really just one step away from being a star last year, but it certainly looks as though all the necessary tools are there for Jenkins to completely break out and become something of a beast on the field.

Finally, we can just look at the track record of Todd Grantham's defenses and see that this type of linebacker is primed to become an incredibly bright spot on this squad.

### 3. Johnathan Gray (RB) – Texas

The Longhorns were ecstatic when Johnathan Gray arrived on campus. And why wouldn't they be? He combined for over 7,000 yards during his final two years of high school and was consequently ranked the number one running back in the nation. In Gray's first year at Texas, the numbers weren't flashy—701 yards and three touchdowns. But you can see the bubble just waiting to burst.



Anticipation is a huge part of Gray's game. Before the hole even opens, he's making a hard cut towards the spot and proceeds to make his presence felt in the second level of the defense. There is obviously no way of telling how impactful this is, in terms of numbers, but as you can imagine, it comes up huge during third down situations or late in games. And I love how it's just pure instinct. You can't teach this stuff.

At 5'11", 195 pounds, Gray has the necessary build to be a consistent back for the Longhorns, which is exactly what they want and need, given the quarterback situation that looks to be in shambles. With that said, I can imagine Gray getting many opportunities to do damage for Texas and probably double all of his major numbers from 2012.

### 4. Mario Edwards (DE) – Florida State

Nobody really expected Mario Edwards to play for the Seminoles in 2012. He arrived on campus out of shape and seemingly not completely ready to compete at the college level, even though he was considered to be one of the best defensive linemen in that class. But after an injury to starter Brandon Jenkins, the coaching staff really had no other choice than to play Edwards as a freshman.

As a freshman, Edwards didn't really do anything spectacular to make him stand out. Other than getting into much better shape, he simply did his job and got a pleasant surprise with a year of learning in those in-game situations.



It's really no secret that Edwards has an amazing talent; he has the speed, the strength, the quickness. It's just a matter of bringing it all together on the football field this season, which is exactly what I expect him to do.

## 5. Blake Bell (QB) – Oklahoma

Blake Bell is a serious player to watch out for in the Big 12 this season. He's spent his last two years backing up the incredible Landry Jones, studying under one of the best in the business at Oklahoma. Bell saw minimal action last year, only attempting 16 passes and barely exceeding 100 yards. But with Jones now gone, Bell looks to be the guy.



In fact, the expectations are already starting to take shape. Some (including Chris Huston of HeismanPundit.com) are considering Bell to be a dark horse contender for the Heisman trophy. Why?

At 6'6", 263 pounds, Blake Bell could be classified as a freak of nature, unstoppable, nicknamed the "Belldozer." Bell's biggest contribution to the Sooners has been on the ground. During his first two years, he's already rushed for 24 touchdowns. He's just a powerful man. And now he's getting the chance to lead the Sooners with his arm. And as it turns out, that part of his game is pretty good, too. He'll be able to pick apart a defense, using both his legs and arm. That's why the early Heisman talk has surfaced; he'll be exciting. Exciting and good.

# CREDITS:

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**THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR WRITERS AND EDITORS** – Alan Zlotorzynski, Tyler Fenwick, Charlie Cason, Derrick Battle, Bill Shoup, and of course Steve Shoup!

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**Happy College Football Season!**