

ATLANTIC COAST CONFERENCE



COLLEGE FOOTBALL: 2025 Preview

5 GAMES TO WATCH



LSU AT CLEMSON

AUG. 30: Clemson will host LSU in a Top 10 matchup and a rematch of the 2019 National Championship. Cade Klubnik and Garrett Nussmeier are two of the top quarterbacks. Both will look to lead their team to victory in a Week One game that could have playoff implications.



NOTRE DAME AT MIAMI

AUG. 31: Another crucial meeting of two ranked teams in Week One. Another matchup with the potential to affect the playoffs. The Hurricanes will host the Fighting Irish with new QB Carson Beck at the helm; Beck won two national titles as a backup at Georgia.



CLEMSON AT GEORGIA TECH

SEPT. 13: The Yellow Jackets are projected to finish fourth in the ACC this year with quarterback Haynes King leading the way. Georgia Tech could make a major statement with an early-season upset of the Tigers in Atlanta.



MIAMI AT SMU

NOV. 1: The Mustangs finished second in the ACC in their first season in the conference. A win over Miami would go a long way toward the Mustangs punching their ticket to Charlotte for the ACC Championship Game for a second straight year.



NORTH CAROLINA AT NC STATE

NOV. 29: Bill Belichick's first year leading the Tar Heels will wrap up against the Wolfpack in Raleigh. Regardless of how the rest of the season goes, a win over rival N.C. State would help endear Belichick to the North Carolina fanbase.



ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

SMU quarterback Kevin Jennings passes the ball in the Atlantic Coast Conference championship game against Clemson on Dec. 7, 2024, in Charlotte, N.C. Both the Tigers and Mustangs made the College Football Playoff in 2024.

ACC CHARGING AHEAD

Coaches, high-profile QBs lead way in surging league

BY AMANDA FILIPCIC-GODSEY, CNHI SPORTS PENNSYLVANIA

College football continues to be reshaped by realignment, NIL and revenue-sharing. Meanwhile, the Big Ten and SEC keep pushing for more — more money, more teams, more playoff spots. It may be easy to overlook the ACC — but the conference keeps chugging along and will certainly be making headlines this fall.

Over the last 18 months, the conference became home to several former NFL coaches, starting with Bill O'Brien taking over at Boston College ahead of the 2024 season. His former boss in New England, Bill Belichick, shocked the sports world when he became head coach at North Carolina last December. In March, Ron Rivera was named the general manager at his alma mater, California, while Frank Reich was named the interim coach of the Golden Bears' rival, Stanford, by his former player and current Stanford GM Andrew Luck.

"Bill Belichick, one of the greatest coaches to ever coach the game," Pitt coach Pat Narduzzi said. "He adds a lot of flavor and excitement to the ACC. When you look at Bill Belichick coming to the Atlantic Coast Conference, it just tells you how attractive our conference is."

Commissioner Jim Phillips referred to the ACC as the "conference of quarterbacks" during the conference's media days in Charlotte in late July.

"The ACC, once again, stands out as the conference of quarterbacks, and the

numbers speak for themselves," Phillips said. "This year's group is as deep and talented as we've seen in years, with elite signal callers."

Seven ACC quarterbacks were named to the Davey O'Brien Award watchlist: Cade Klubnik (Clemson), Darian Mensah (Duke), Haynes King (Georgia Tech), Miller Moss (Louisville), Carson Beck (Miami), Kevin Jennings (SMU) and Chandler Morris (Virginia) all making the watchlist.

Klubnik has been named to Preseason All-America first teams by both the Walter Camp Foundation and Phil Steele, while earning second team Preseason All-America honors.

"It's not just about quarterbacks. This league is loaded with explosive playmakers on offense, game-changers on defense,

and we all know the value of special teams in this league," Phillips added.

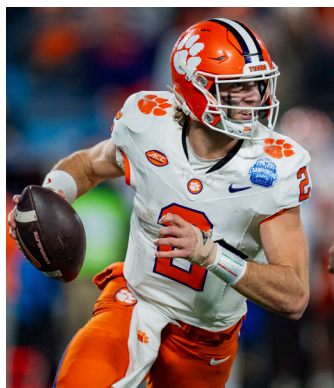
The ACC is well-represented at multiple positions on various preseason All-America teams, including Louisville running back Isaac Brown; Clemson defensive linemen Peter Woods and T.J. Parker; Pitt linebacker Kyle Louis and running back/all-purpose man Desmond Reid; and Miami offensive tackle Francis Mauigoa and kick returner Keelan Marion.

"When it comes to the ACC, there's no question our league has separated itself as one of the top three leagues in America. The data speaks for itself," SMU head coach Rhett Lashlee said. "Three leagues had multiple CFP participants this year. We were one of them."

PLAYERS TO WATCH

CADE KLUBNIK QB, Clemson

• Named ACC Preseason Player of the Year. Threw 36 touchdowns to just 6 interceptions in 2024.



ISAAC BROWN RB, Louisville

• The ACC's leading returning rusher (1,173 yards in 2024). He averaged 7.1 yards per carry last year.



ISAIAH NWOKOBIA S, SMU

• Racked up 100 tackles, three interceptions and six pass breakups for the Mustangs in their first year of ACC play.

TJ PARKER DE, Clemson

• The leading vote-getter for the All-ACC Preseason Team with 152 votes after notching 16.5 sacks in 2024.



KYLE LOUIS LB, Pittsburgh

• Defensive playmaker who led the Panthers in sacks, interceptions and tackles for loss.



STORIES TO FOLLOW

1 Can Clemson be a CFP contender?

Clemson returns most of its starters from last year, all of whom now have playoff experience. With Cade Klubnik and Antonio Williams (below) connecting on offense and T.J. Parker and Peter Woods holding it down on defense, the Tigers should be one of the best teams in the country.



2 Can Belichick work his magic at UNC?

North Carolina and Bill Belichick shocked the college football world when the two joined forces back in the spring. Can one of the greatest coaches the professional game has seen have success in his first ever college gig?

3 Will Miami finally get over hump?

Mario Cristobal's return to Miami has yet to result in an appearance in the ACC Championship Game. With Georgia transfer Carson Beck taking over at quarterback and strong units in the trenches, will the Hurricanes finally break through? They begin the season ranked No. 10 in the AP poll.

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

- Clemson
- SMU
- Louisville
- Georgia Tech
- Miami
- Duke
- Pittsburgh
- North Carolina
- Virginia Tech
- Boston College
- NC State
- Florida State
- Virginia
- Syracuse
- California
- Wake Forest
- Stanford

ACC Championship game matchup



Conference champion

