

SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE

COLLEGE FOOTBALL: 2025 Preview



5 GAMES TO WATCH



ALABAMA AT GEORGIA

SEPT. 27: Kalen DeBoer's Crimson Tide face a hostile road trip to Athens, where Kirby Smart's Bulldogs remain the gold standard. This early heavyweight clash could shape the entire SEC championship picture.



TEXAS AT FLORIDA

OCT. 4: In his first true SEC road test, Arch Manning leads Texas into The Swamp, a venue where playoff hopes often drown — just ask the Ole Miss Rebels. Florida's young defense will be eager to shake the Longhorns early and rattle the nation's most-hyped QB.



ALABAMA AT SOUTH CAROLINA

OCT. 25: The Gamecocks smell opportunity against a still-retooling Alabama squad. Williams-Brice Stadium is never quiet, and with Shane Beamer's squad rising, the Tide can't afford to look past this October trap, especially with Lanorris Sellers back behind center.



LSU AT ALABAMA

NOV. 8: LSU's explosive offense meets Alabama's renewed defensive identity in another chapter of this storied rivalry. Expect fireworks, drama and College Football Playoff implications as these two battle deep into the SEC gauntlet.



TEXAS AT GEORGIA

NOV. 15: Manning heads into Sanford Stadium for what could be the game of the year. Can the high-flying Longhorns dethrone the Bulldogs in Athens, or will Georgia remind Texas once again who really runs the SEC with a third victory over Steve Sarkisian in two years?



ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

Oklahoma running back Jovantae Barnes (2) looks for running room as Texas linebacker Lione Lefau (18) makes the stop in the first half of a game in Dallas on Oct. 12, 2024.

TEXAS-SIZED EXPECTATIONS

'Horns favored over traditional SEC powers

BY KEVIN GREEN, CNHI SPORTS OKLAHOMA

The SEC enters 2025 as a collision of pedigree, parity and new expectations, and sitting atop the chaos is Texas. In their second season in the Southeastern Conference, the Longhorns were voted pre-season favorite in the SEC media poll, ahead of perennial powers like Georgia and Alabama.

Texas' debut season was a wild success with a run to the SEC Championship Game and College Football Playoff victories over the ACC and Big 12 champions.

Leading the charge in 2025 is Arch Manning, who steps into his first full season as starting quarterback.

Despite seeing limited action last season behind Quinn Ewers, the sophomore is already drawing Heisman whispers and national attention, with fans buzzing about

his arm strength, accuracy and growing athletic presence.

Meanwhile, the Longhorns return a stout veteran defense anchored by standouts like Michael Taaffe, Anthony Hill Jr. and Lione Lefau, all garnering preseason accolades.

"This is a new year, new faces, new team and, obviously, expectations are high for our program," Texas coach Steve Sarkisian said at SEC media days. "I'm not naive to that. I don't put my head in

the sand, and expectations are very high.

"But I also say we're the University of Texas, and the standard is the standard here, and that's competing for championships year in and year out."

Georgia, Alabama and LSU remain elite threats in a deep field, with the Bulldogs riding the steady hand of Kirby Smart, considered by some to be the nation's top coach after multiple national titles and conference championships.

The Crimson Tide — now in their second season under Kalen DeBoer — are reshaping themselves post-Nick Saban, while the likes of LSU and South Carolina continue to flash offensive firepower with top-tier quarterback talent.

Oklahoma, pegged 10th in the preseason poll, is looking

to rebound under Brent Venables after a disappointing 6-7 campaign in 2024, it's first in the SEC a year ago.

With incoming transfers like quarterback John Mateer (Washington State) and running back Jaydn Ott (Cal) leading a resurgent offense under new offensive coordinator Ben Arbuckle, who coached Mateer at WSU, analysts are bullish about the Sooners' potential. However, expectations are understandably tempered by concerns over their brutal slate that includes seven preseason-ranked opponents, four on the road.

With championship odds favoring Texas and several others with a realistic shot at conference glory and beyond, 2025 SEC football will be at its most compelling.

STORIES TO FOLLOW

1 Pressure on Kalen DeBoer

Kalen DeBoer is entering his second year at Alabama following a 9-4 season. Despite the fanbase's patience, concerns are rising due to the team failing to reach 10 wins for the first time since 2007. The back-loaded schedule adds to the pressure. Any losses outside of powerhouse Georgia could jeopardize the team's playoff chances and potentially end DeBoer's tenure.

2 Venables on the hot seat at Oklahoma

Brent Venables has had one good season at Oklahoma and two poor ones. The Sooners' recent struggles include a 10-10 record since beating Texas in 2023, but the program has made necessary investments in the transfer portal and with new coaching hires. A loss to Michigan on Sept. 6 at home could make the SEC schedule even more daunting.

3 DJ Lagway's health key for Gators

Florida's success hinges on quarterback DJ Lagway's health. The Gators went 8-5 last year, winning their final four games against notable opponents, but Lagway's health is crucial. If he is fit, the team is a top-10 contender, having gone 6-1 last year



DJ LAGWAY QB, Florida

PLAYERS TO WATCH



ANTHONY HILL LB, Texas

• Recorded more than 100 tackles, 16.5 tackles for loss and 8 sacks for the Longhorns in 2024.



ARCH MANNING QB, Texas

• Despite Manning's limited experience, his athletic abilities, strong arm and accuracy are undeniable. Manning's presence significantly changes the offensive dynamics.



KAYDN PROCTOR OT, Alabama

• Top offensive lineman at Alabama, Proctor has displayed consistent excellence since joining the team in 2023. Proctor is recognized for his exceptional pass protection and dominance in the run game.

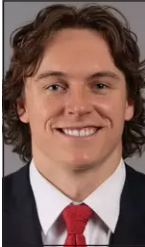


RYAN WILLIAMS WR, Alabama

• All-SEC player at 17 years old. He has dynamic speed, outstanding body control and exceptional spatial awareness.

JOHN MATEER QB, Oklahoma

• The junior transfer from Washington State impressed with his dual-threat abilities, averaging 262 yards passing and 69 yards rushing per game last year.



PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

- Texas
- LSU
- Georgia
- Alabama
- South Carolina
- Florida
- Oklahoma
- Ole Miss
- Auburn
- Missouri
- Tennessee
- Texas A&M
- Arkansas
- Vanderbilt
- Kentucky
- Mississippi State

SEC Championship game matchup



Conference champion



Photos: The Associated Press/Indiana Athletics/Ohio State Athletics • Content: Kevin Green/CNHI • Page design: William Bowman/CNHI

GRIDIRON Guide

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or email [gm@duncanbanner.com](mailto:gm@duncanbanner.com)

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