



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 Liona 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

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 Liona 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 pre-season 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 pre-season 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.

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.



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



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.



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.



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.

GRIDIRON Guide



Loaded with photos, rosters, schedules and breakdowns of **SEVEN** local high schools and their bands, cheerleaders, pom squads and color guards. Covering Duncan, Marlow, Comanche, Velma, Empire, Central and Bray.

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Participation Deadline: August 8th
Gridiron Guide Publishes: August 30th

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Full color is included in pricing. Magazine is distributed in The Duncan Banner and in local businesses.

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