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PRESEASON TOP 25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. GEORGIA

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

2. OHIO STATE

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

3. OREGON

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

4. TEXAS

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

5. ALABAMA

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

6. MISSISSIPPI

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

7. NOTRE DAME

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

8. PENN STATE

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

9. FLORIDA STATE

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

10. MICHIGAN

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

11. LSU

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

12. OKLAHOMA

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

13. UTAH

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

14. MIAMI

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

15. TEXAS A&M

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

16. CLEMSON

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

17. TENNESSEE

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

18. MISSOURI

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

19. OKLAHOMA STATE

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

20. KANSAS STATE

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

21. LOUISVILLE

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

22. IOWA

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

23. IOWA STATE

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

24. USC

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

25. WISCONSIN

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

VSIN HEISMAN TROPHY

BEST BETS

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

DYLAN RAIOLA (500-1)

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

ROCCO BECHT (1000-1)

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

MITCH MOSS

JALEN MILROE (15-1)

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

MILLER MOSS (60-1)

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

2017: Baker Mayfield (1st)

2018: Kyle Murray (1st)

2019: Jalen Hurts (2nd)

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

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

2022: Caleb Williams (1st)

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

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



Brady Cook

TIM MURRAY

KJ JEFFERSON (100-1)

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

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

DUSTIN SWEDLSON

JAXSON DART (15-1)

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

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

What does that tell us? Two things:

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

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

AVERY JOHNSON (25-1)

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

BRADY COOK (40-1)

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

JOE CERAULO

JAXSON DART (15-1)

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

KYRON DRONES (100-1)

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

KJ JEFFERSON (100-1)

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

STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

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

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CLEMSON TIGERS

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

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

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

OFFENSE

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

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

DEFENSE

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

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

OUTLOOK

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

2024 SCHEDULE

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

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

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

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 9 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

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

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

+350

MAKE PLAYOFF

+200

CFP CHAMPION

40-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 9.5**



SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS

2023 Record: 5-7 SU & 6-6 ATS
Head Coach: Shane Beamer (4th)

Shane Beamer looked like he was going to be the guy to turn South Carolina around. The Gamecocks went 7-6 in his first year at the helm. They then followed it up with an 8-5 season in 2022. However, South Carolina slipped to 5-7 in 2023, and things are looking rather bleak heading into 2024.

The Gamecocks have some real talent and athleticism at two important offensive positions in quarterback LaNorris Sellers and running back Rocket Sanders. But Sellers is a first-year starter who will experience some growing pains, and he doesn't have much to throw to. And this defense was a mess in 2023, making it hard to believe in the group in 2024.

OFFENSE

People were pretty harsh on Spencer Rattler last season, despite the fact that he was often making chicken salad out of chicken poo. The Gamecocks had one of the worst offensive lines in the SEC, with injuries playing a major part in that. And they were not able to run the football, so Rattler was often in terrible situations. With Rattler now in the NFL, I wouldn't be surprised if this is the worst offensive team in the SEC.

Sellers definitely has a lot of upside and Sanders is one of the most electric running backs in college football. But I'm not a big believer in the Gamecocks receivers. They're going to really miss Antwane Wells Jr. And I don't think Sanders is going to have a lot of running room. Beamer is confident that his offensive line will be better in 2024, but I don't see it improving to a middle-of-the-pack SEC level.

DEFENSE

The Gamecocks are bringing back six starters from last year's defense, including linebacker Debo Williams. South Carolina also has a pretty reliable secondary, and there is some young talent that can inject a little life into the pass rush. However, the Gamecocks are pretty weak along the defensive line and they play five defensive backs at a time. So, they're going to get absolutely shredded on the ground against some of the better SEC offenses.

This defense could also spend a lot of time on the field with how mediocre the offense looks. That might lead to a higher points per game allowed than last year's 26.3.

OUTLOOK

South Carolina will probably pick up a big home win at some point in the season, and I have a feeling it'll come against Missouri on November 16th. But the Gamecocks will probably lose four of their five road games, and I don't see enough surefire home wins on the schedule to expect six victories.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	vs OLD DOMINION	-17	32
9/7	at KENTUCKY	4.5	50.5
9/14	LSU	8.5	61
9/21	AKRON	-29	23.5
10/5	OLE MISS	8	60.5
10/12	at ALABAMA	19	65
10/19	at OKLAHOMA	13.5	60
11/2	TEXAS A&M	6	58.5
11/9	at VANDERBILT	-10.5	37
11/16	MISSOURI	7	59.5
11/23	WOFFORD	-43.5	9.5
11/30	at CLEMSON	12	58.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 47.63
#22 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3/0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 15 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 8

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.1	80	26.8	65
YARDS PER POINT	14.3	65	15.2	45
PLAYS PER GAME	67.6	79		
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:49	116		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	31.0%	118	43.4%	110
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	344.4	93	406.5	90
YARDS PER PLAY	5.1	88	5.5	67
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.9	115		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	83.2	128	160.5	80
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	2.8	128	4.1	59
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34	38		
COMPLETION %	67.1%	14	61.5%	80
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	261.2	40	245.9	91
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.7	48	7.4	74
TURNOVERS	1.1	33	1.4	65

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
120-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
20-1

CFP CHAMPION
400-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 5.5**

NORTH CAROLINA TAR HEELS

2023 Record: 8-5 SU & 6-7 ATS
Head Coach: Mack Brown (6th)

Replacing the No. 3 overall draft pick would be difficult in the old days of college football, but a team like North Carolina can just enter the transfer portal, spend some money, and get a proven starting QB. That's precisely what the Tar Heels did to bring in former Texas A&M and LSU QB Max Johnson after the Patriots took Drake Maye in the 2024 NFL Draft.

The Tar Heels, who haven't won a bowl game since 2019 and haven't won double-digit games since 2015 under Larry Fedora, will run it back with a lot of returning production on both sides of the ball. This is a team that has seemed destined for more in recent seasons and has found a way to watch it all go up in smoke late in the year.

OFFENSE

Johnson walks into a pretty good situation. RB Omarion Hampton rushed for 1,504 yards and had 15 touchdowns last season. WR Tez Walker is a notable loss, but over 1,000 yards of returning production are back at the position and TE Bryson Nesbit is in the running to be among the first tight ends drafted next April. Johnson is also well-versed in learning new offenses, as he's done it a lot in his career.

He had a 27/6 TD/INT ratio at LSU in 2021 before transferring to Texas A&M, where he played in 12 games over two seasons. He has a 47/12 TD/INT ratio and has thrown for nearly 6,000 yards. The offense ranked 13th in yards per play and 20th with 34.5 points per game. Even with the loss of Maye, those may be repeatable numbers.

DEFENSE

So, as always, it seems to come down to the defense. This season, the Tar Heels have a new DC in Geoff Collins, whose coordinator stops include Mississippi State and Florida. He's also been a head coach at Temple and Georgia Tech. After a year off, Collins inherits a defense that hasn't lived up to its talent level, but is improving.

The Tar Heels were 65th in yards per play allowed last season with 5.6 and finished 109th in total yardage allowed. At least that was an improvement from finishing 114th in YPP in 2022. The defense also went from 14 takeaways in '22 to 22 in '23, so the upward trend was taking place in Gene Chizik's second year.

OUTLOOK

The schedule is very kind to UNC this season. They play at Minnesota in the opener and don't have a game with over 200 miles of travel after that until November 2 at Florida State. If Collins can rehab the defense, this is a team with a very high ceiling. They avoid Clemson and Louisville and don't have a tough road schedule at all. My numbers say 7.74 wins, but I like the Over on this one.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	at MINNESOTA	-1	44.5
9/7	CHARLOTTE	-21	30.5
9/14	NC CENTRAL	-35.5	15.5
9/21	JAMES MADISON	-9	42.5
9/28	at DUKE	-4	42.5
10/5	PITTSBURGH	-9	42
10/12	GEORGIA TECH	-5	46
10/26	at VIRGINIA	-5.5	40
11/2	at FLORIDA STATE	15	60.5
11/16	WAKE FOREST	-11.5	40
11/23	at BOSTON COLLEGE	-3.5	42.5
11/30	NC STATE	-0.5	51.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 40.99
#66 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 2.9/0.1
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 12 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 5
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	32.5	24	29	79
YARDS PER POINT	14.9	78	14.3	64
PLAYS PER GAME	77.7	6		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:06	86		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	48.3%	9	38.2%	56
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	482.7	7	414.2	99
YARDS PER PLAY	6.2	22	5.7	75
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.8	32		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	185.8	25	168.3	93
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.8	28	4.4	76
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36	25		
COMPLETION %	62.7%	46	61.7%	83
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	296.9	13	245.9	92
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.2	24	7.5	79
TURNOVERS	1.4	68	1.4	58

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

30-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

40-1

CFP CHAMPION

400-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 7.5**



NC STATE WOLFPACK

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

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

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

OFFENSE

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

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

DEFENSE

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

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

OUTLOOK

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

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	W CAROLINA	-29.5	25
9/7	vs TENNESSEE	6.5	57.5
9/14	LOUISIANA TECH	-31.5	23.5
9/21	at CLEMSON	10	58.5
9/28	NORTHERN ILLINOIS	-20.5	33.5
10/5	WAKE FOREST	-14.5	40
10/12	SYRACUSE	-10.5	44.5
10/19	at CALIFORNIA	-0.5	48
11/2	STANFORD	-15	39.5
11/9	DUKE	-12.5	42.5
11/21	at GEORGIA TECH	-3.5	46
11/30	at NORTH CAROLINA	0.5	48.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 41.38
#65 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3/0.4
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 12 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.7	74	21.9	29
YARDS PER POINT	13.7	45	15.7	35
PLAYS PER GAME	66.9	86		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:53	18		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.4%	73	28.9%	5
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	337.9	95	343.9	34
YARDS PER PLAY	5	90	5.3	47
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.1	66		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	150	70	125	32
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	68	4.2	62
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.9	86		
COMPLETION %	56.8%	99	56.4%	17
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	187.9	101	218.9	47
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.5	96	6.6	21
TURNOVERS	1.3	45	1.9	8

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+700

MAKE PLAYOFF
+470

CFP CHAMPION
150-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 8.5**

WAKE FOREST DEMON DEACONS

2023 Record: 4-8 SU & 4-8 ATS
Head Coach: Dave Clawson (11th)

Dave Clawson's job probably isn't in immediate danger in Winston-Salem, but last season's 4-8 showing was the worst since he went 3-9 in consecutive years in 2014 and 2015 at the start of his tenure. This is a Wake Forest team that was 11-3 and finished in the top 15 in the polls just two years ago. But, it all fell apart last season and the Deacs missed a bowl for the first time since that 2015 season.

Clawson is now 63-61 at Wake Forest and runs the risk of falling below .500 with a team that doesn't look up to snuff this season.

OFFENSE

Life without Sam Hartman proved to be difficult. Three quarterbacks combined on a 14/11 TD/INT ratio last season for the Demon Deacons and now they'll turn to Hank Bachmeier, who spent last season at Louisiana Tech after four seasons with Boise State. Bachmeier has a 51/21 TD/INT ratio and a 63% completion rate in his college career. He is not mobile at all, though, and Wake has some huge questions on the offensive line.

The QBs were sacked 49 combined times last season and the running game provided very little punch with just 3.3 yards per carry. The same faces are back in the backfield, but leading receiver Jahmal Banks is now at Nebraska. Bachmeier represents an upgrade at QB, but the skill positions have not been upgraded at all.

DEFENSE

The offense managed fewer than five yards per play and the defense allowed 5.84, so the Deacs had one of the worst yards per play differentials in the Power Five ranks. They also had one of the worst sack differentials at -26 and also finished -6 in turnover margin with only 16 takeaways.

In Year 3 under former Charlotte head coach Brad Lambert, this defense really needs to show more teeth. To reinvigorate the defense, transfers were brought in to surround the returning starters, so there is more experience, but that doesn't necessarily translate to more talent or production.

OUTLOOK

Wake Forest is favored in five games for me, but two of those games are -1 and -1.5, so they could certainly go either way. And, frankly, I'd lean against them going the other way. Bachmeier is way more experienced and Clawson has had success with experienced QBs, but there are a lot of other deficiencies on this roster. I have them at 5.01 wins, but that feels optimistic. With plus money on the Under, that's the way I'd lean.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/29	N CAROLINA A&T	-38.5	5
9/7	VIRGINIA	-3.5	40
9/14	OLE MISS	17	60.5
9/28	LOUISIANA	-4	39
10/5	at NC STATE	14.5	51.5
10/12	CLEMSON	15	58.5
10/19	at CONNECTICUT	-10.5	27
10/26	at STATEANFORD	1	39.5
11/8	CALIFORNIA	4.5	48
11/16	at NORTH CAROLINA	11.5	48.5
11/23	at MIAMI FL	19	57
11/30	DUKE	-1.5	42.5

SCHEDULE STRENGTH 41.98
#63 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS 3.4/0
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18.7	117	28.1	73
YARDS PER POINT	17	114	14.2	68
PLAYS PER GAME	69.8	53		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:45	94		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	33.1%	113	43.0%	105
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	318.7	105	398.8	79
YARDS PER PLAY	4.6	117	5.9	92
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	39.4	28		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	133.4	88	158.9	74
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.4	111	4.3	67
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.5	112		
COMPLETION %	60.1%	72	62.0%	88
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	185.4	102	239.9	82
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7	74	8.3	114
TURNOVERS	1.8	113	1.3	87

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
150-1

CFP CHAMPION
800-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 4.5**



EAST CAROLINA PIRATES

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

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

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

OFFENSE

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

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

DEFENSE

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

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

OUTLOOK

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

2024 SCHEDULE

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

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

31.22
#127 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.8/0.2**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 14 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 7
DEFENSIVE: 7

2023 STATS AND RANKS

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

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
18-1

MAKE PLAYOFF
80-1

CFP CHAMPION
3000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION OVER 6

Mountaineers

APPALACHIAN STATE MOUNTAINEERS

2023 Record: 9-5 SU & 6-7-1 ATS
Head Coach: Shawn Clark (5th)

One of the most consistent Group of Five programs resides in picturesque Boone, North Carolina. App State joined the FBS ranks in 2014 and has not had a losing season. The 2022 Mountaineers went 6-6 and the 2014 version went 7-5. Otherwise, this is a program that has won at least nine games every other season and has also found a whole lot of bowl game success with a 7-1 record.

Some believed that the one-year blip in '22 was a sign that the tide might have been turning for the team that plays at the highest elevation east of the Mississippi, but last year's team won six of the last seven games after getting off to an uncharacteristically slow start. Instead, we just have the usual high expectations for Shawn Clark's crew, including a fifth appearance in the Sun Belt Championship Game.

OFFENSE

This is always a good team on both sides of the ball. Joey Aguilar has only spent one season with the program and is already the fifth-most productive passer with 3,757 yards. He set the single-season passing record for the Mountaineers and is back for more with all of his top targets from last season on the roster. Aguilar is one of five career App State passers with at least 30 TD tosses after racking up 33 last season.

Leading rusher Nate Noel took his talents to the SEC, but Kanye Roberts was more productive on a per-carry basis with 5.7 yards per pop and actually led the team with seven touchdowns. The Mountaineers are always stout in the trenches, as Clark served as an offensive line coach from 2003-19 before getting the head coaching gig at his alma mater where, you guessed it, he played offensive line.

DEFENSE

This is a big season for second-year DC Scot Sloan. The Mountaineers were gashed on the ground last season to the tune of 4.98 yards per carry and over 178 yards per contest. They finished 117th in YPC and allowed 28 rushing scores. By effectively slowing down the opponents' passing game, App State was 75th in yards per play allowed, but that was their worst showing in FBS history.

In fact, it was the first time that the Mountaineers finished outside the top 50 in YPP. The closest they came was 48th in 2022. So, it is entirely possible that the defensive well may be running a little dry, but Sloan, who was on staff from 2010-17, returns most of the front seven. Whether or not that is good or bad remains to be seen. App State did lose two guys with 100+ tackles.

OUTLOOK

A road tilt with Clemson in Week 2 should shed a little light on how the defense and the offense look, but the crossover games are against South Alabama and Louisiana, so the Mountaineers avoid Troy and Texas State. I will say that I think 7-5 would be an extremely bad year for this team, so there's some push protection at 8-4 and 9-3 is way likelier than 7-5.

2024 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	ESTIMATED LINE	OPPONENT'S POWER RATING
8/31	E TENN STATE	-42	7
9/7	at CLEMSON	15.5	58.5
9/14	at EAST CAROLINA	-8.5	34.5
9/19	SOUTH ALABAMA	-12	36.5
9/28	LIBERTY	-2.5	46
10/5	at MARSHALL	-9	35
10/12	at LOUISIANA	-3.5	39
10/26	GEORGIA STATE	-17	31.5
11/2	OLD DOMINION	-16.5	32
11/7	at COASTAL CAROLINA	-10	33.5
11/23	JAMES MADISON	-6	42.5
11/30	at GEORGIA SOUTHERN	-9.5	33

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **35.97**
#87 TOUGHEST OF 134

FIELD RATINGS **2.8/0.3**
(HOME/ROAD)

RETURNING 11 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 5 (RETURNING QB)
DEFENSIVE: 6

2023 STATS AND RANKS

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	32.3	26	27.2	68
YARDS PER POINT	13.9	52	14	76
PLAYS PER GAME	73.7	23		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:40	50		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	42.9%	33	39.6%	72
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	449.8	15	380.3	60
YARDS PER PLAY	6.1	27	5.6	71
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.8	46		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	174.2	37	181.6	111
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.6	36	5	113
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.5	33		
COMPLETION %	63.0%	41	60.6%	60
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	275.6	25	198.7	27
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8	36	6.9	38
TURNOVERS	1.7	104	1.7	27

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE
+300

MAKE PLAYOFF
14-1

CFP CHAMPION
1000-1

WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
OVER 8



CHARLOTTE 49ERS

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

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

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

OFFENSE

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

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

DEFENSE

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

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

OUTLOOK

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

2024 SCHEDULE

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

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

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

RETURNING 11 STARTERS

OFFENSIVE: 6
DEFENSIVE: 5

2023 STATS AND RANKS

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

2024 ODDS

CONFERENCE

80-1

MAKE PLAYOFF

300-1

CFP CHAMPION

5000-1

**WIN TOTAL PREDICTION
UNDER 3.5**