

Tagline Sports 2022 College Football Preseason Preview

College football is back again! Just eight months removed from a huge shakeup of the college football world, with Georgia capturing the National Championship, Group of Five Cincinnati & Michigan making the playoffs, and the last year of expected normalcy in the sport, we return with shaky grounds and a very uncertain (but hopeful) future. With conference realignment starting next season, the 2022 College Football Season is the last chance at a season of what we know... but also brings in perhaps the most intriguing season in recent history. With the final year of many "extra year of eligibility" coming up this year, and young players finally getting a full year under their belt, the fusion of talent and age comes together in what will present itself as a great year for both up and coming programs and perennial champions. The SEC looks to be one of the closest years in a long time while the ACC looks to rebound with a very strong QB class. Meanwhile, the Big Ten tries to shake up the table again with more improving programs while the Big 12 and Pac-12 look to get back to the big boy table with squads that are ready for a playoff run. And will the Group of Five be able to build off last season's success with Cincinnati and find themselves back in the hunt once again? The 2022 College Football Season presents itself with many questions and few answers this preseason. Tagline Sports takes you on a season preview – ranking the prospective best teams in the nation, taking a look at potential conference winners and previews, and a look at the most anticipated games of the upcoming season.

PRESEASON TOP 25

- | Rk | School |
|----|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Alabama Crimson Tide |
| 2 | Ohio State Buckeyes |
| 3 | Utah Utes |
| 4 | Georgia Bulldogs |
| 5 | Baylor Bears |
| 6 | NC State Wolfpack |
| 7 | Oklahoma St Cowboys |
| 8 | Clemson Tigers |
| 9 | Kentucky Wildcats |
| 10 | Texas A&M Aggies |
| 11 | Pittsburgh Panthers |
| 12 | Arkansas Razorbacks |
| 13 | Wake Forest Demon Deacons |
| 14 | Notre Dame Fighting Irish |
| 15 | Oklahoma Sooners |
| 16 | Purdue Boilermakers |
| 17 | BYU Cougars |
| 18 | Ole Miss Rebels |
| 19 | Oregon Ducks |
| 20 | Tennessee Volunteers |
| 21 | Coastal Carolina Chanticleers |
| 22 | Houston Cougars |
| 23 | USC Trojans |
| 24 | Michigan Wolverines |
| 25 | Cincinnati Bearcats |

Alabama, Ohio State, and Utah return a lot of talent and will be three of the most dominant schools to deal with throughout the year. Georgia looks to follow up its Championship season with another successful year with depth at all positions. Big 12 darlings Baylor and Oklahoma State aim to continue their upward trend, while ACC hopefully NC State and perennial contender Clemson try to put the conference back on the map. And the two up and coming SEC programs round out the Top 10 as Kentucky and Texas A&M look to find their way into the playoff hunt.

SCHOOLS ON THE RISE

Utah Utes

Maybe calling this program on the rise is an insult, but the Utes have finally found themselves in the right spot coming off their first Pac-12 title and Rose Bowl appearance. Now, they get a highly awaited matchup with Florida to open the season in the Swamp, national attention, and perhaps a smooth path to the Pac-12 title game again with the changing format. A dangerous defense led by CB Clark Phillips and an offense that won't let up led by QB Cam Rising will be a one-two punch that no one will want to go against.

NC State Wolfpack

Dave Doeren has spent years building up this Wolfpack squad and with QB Devin Leary this looks to be the year. Hopes are high after a win last year over Clemson as well as a combination of many dominant wins... but also close losses. The schedule isn't easy, especially with a trip into Death Valley, but get around that, and the sky is the limit for this team that keeps a ton of talent. This is a group that is built to sustain, with a strong offense and a veteran defense – year's of taking little steps forward will finally provide the success they've been looking for.

Pittsburgh Panthers

Keeping things in the ACC – Pitt may have to find a way to keep up the momentum without Kenny Pickett and Jordan Addison, but they return pretty much everyone else and get Kedon Slovis in to start. With the expectation of a more balance offense and a schedule that leans to be easy (but with revenge games on the slate at Western Michigan and at Miami), this can be a continued move forward for a Pitt team that is trying to take over a constantly shifting ACC.

Purdue Boilermakers

If any school is to shake things up this season, it's the boys from West Lafayette. Aidan O'Connell may very well be the third best quarterback in the country and leads a veteran offense through a schedule that will allow them to make noise. Opening on a Thursday night against Penn State is the perfect showcase of their talents. The Purdue defense will be their kryptonite, but you only need so much when you have a high powered offense.

SCHOOLS ON THE DECLINE

Michigan Wolverines

Losing pretty much all of the stars of this Wolverines defense will provide a huge hit to a team that was built on defense. The offense led by Cade McNamara and Ronnie Bell will need to find the late season magic they found last year to overcome the numerous defensive holes they have. Luckily, the schedule leaves a lot of wiggle room – one of the easiest in the country – which is likely to only feature matchups against 2 or 3 ranked teams at most.

Cincinnati Bearcats

This will be Luke Fickell's toughest test as a Cincinnati's head coach – finding a way to not let the momentum stop. Losing nine of their top players, including Sauce Gardner and Desmond Ridder, to the NFL Draft will take huge toll on their offensive and defensive strength, and they get no easy start to figure things out, with an opener against the Razorbacks. While success should be had this year, the Bearcats will be taking a huge step back and will need to retool ahead of their move to the Big 12.

Michigan State Spartans

Another group losing a ton, the Spartans were one of the nation's slowest performing teams when the ball wasn't in Kenneth Walker III's hands. Payton Thorne was a mess when needing to lead the offense and will need to find ways to score against the continuing to strengthened defenses in the Big Ten. After overachieving last year, it looks for Mel Tucker to finally see his squad take a step back.

Iowa State Cyclones

Take away Hall, Purdy, and Kolar and this Cyclones squad just isn't the same. Matt Campbell has done a great job building and keeping consistency with Iowa State over his last six seasons there, but this will be his ultimate test. Recruiting has been near the bottom of the Big 12 the last few seasons and transfers just aren't bringing in enough talent to match up with the loss. For a group with so much promise the last few years, this looks to be another underperforming year... and with trips to Iowa, Texas, Oklahoma State, and TCU this year, a bowl trip might be a stretch for this group that has made five straight.

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CONFERENCE STANDINGS PREDICTIONS

ACC		Big Ten		Big 12		Pac-12		SEC	
<i>NC State over Pittsburgh</i>		<i>Purdue over Ohio State</i>		<i>Baylor over Kansas State</i>		<i>Utah over UCLA</i>		<i>Alabama over Kentucky</i>	
A1 st	NC State	E1 st	Ohio State	1 st	Baylor	1 st	Utah	E1 st	Kentucky
A2 nd	Clemson	E2 nd	Penn State	2 nd	Kansas State	2 nd	UCLA	E2 nd	Tennessee
A3 rd	Louisville	E3 rd	Maryland	3 rd	Oklahoma State	3 rd	Oregon	E3 rd	Georgia
A4 th	Wake Forest	E4 th	Michigan	4 th	Oklahoma	4 th	Oregon State	E4 th	South Carolina
A5 th	Boston College	E5 th	Rutgers	5 th	Texas Tech	5 th	USC	E5 th	Florida
A6 th	Florida State	E6 th	Michigan State	6 th	Texas	6 th	Arizona State	E6 th	Missouri
A7 th	Syracuse	E7 th	Indiana	7 th	West Virginia	7 th	Washington State	E7 th	Vanderbilt
C1 st	Pittsburgh	W1 st	Purdue	8 th	Kansas	8 th	California	W1 st	Alabama
C2 nd	Virginia	W2 nd	Minnesota	9 th	TCU	9 th	Stanford	W2 nd	Arkansas
C3 rd	Miami (FL)	W3 rd	Wisconsin	10 th	Iowa State	10 th	Colorado	W3 rd	Texas A&M
C4 th	North Carolina	W4 th	Nebraska			11 th	Washington	W4 th	Mississippi State
C5 th	Virginia Tech	W5 th	Illinois			12 th	Arizona	W5 th	Ole Miss
C6 th	Duke	W6 th	Northwestern					W6 th	LSU
C7 th	Georgia Tech	W7 th	Iowa					W7 th	Auburn
The American		C-USA		MAC		Mountain West		Sun Belt	
<i>Houston over SMU</i>		<i>UTSA over Charlotte</i>		<i>C. Mich. over Miami (OH)</i>		<i>Fresno St. over Air Force</i>		<i>Coastal over Texas State</i>	
1 st	Houston	1 st	UTSA	E1 st	Miami (OH)	M1 st	Air Force	E1 st	Coastal Carolina
2 nd	SMU	2 nd	Charlotte	E2 nd	Ketn State	M2 nd	Utah State	E2 nd	Appalachian State
3 rd	East Carolina	3 rd	FAU	E3 rd	Ohio	M3 rd	Boise State	E3 rd	Marshall
4 th	Cincinnati	4 th	North Texas	E4 th	Buffalo	M4 th	Colorado State	E4 th	Georgia State
5 th	UCF	5 th	UAB	E5 th	Akron	M5 th	Wyoming	E5 th	James Madison
6 th	Navy	6 th	Western Kentucky	E6 th	Bowling Green	M6 th	New Mexico	E6 th	Old Dominion
7 th	Memphis	7 th	Louisiana Tech	W1 st	Central Michigan	W1 st	Fresno State	E7 th	Georgia Southern
8 th	Tulsa	8 th	Middle Tennessee	W2 nd	Toledo	W2 nd	San Diego State	W1 st	Texas State
9 th	Temple	9 th	UTEP	W3 rd	Northern Illinois	W3 rd	Nevada	W2 nd	South Alabama
10 th	USF	10 th	Rice	W4 th	Western Michigan	W4 th	San Jose State	W3 rd	Louisiana
11 th	Tulane	11 th	FIU	W5 th	Eastern Michigan	W5 th	Nevada	W4 th	Troy
				W6 th	Ball State	W6 th	Hawaii	W5 th	Arkansas State
								W6 th	Southern Miss
								W7 th	UL- Monroe

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF PREVIEW

Playoff Predictions

- (1) Alabama Crimson Tide
- (2) Utah Utes
- (3) Baylor Bears
- (4) NC State Wolfpack

The College Football Playoff will find itself in familiar territory yet foreign grounds this year. As we've see the College Football Landscape change shape the last few years, so has the quest for the top. With a nearly brand new CFP grouping last season, with two suprisers in Michigan and Cincinnati, another surprise could be in store this year.

The Crimson Tide, led by Bryce Young and Will Anderson, will be the most difficult team to play week in and week out (when are they not). This may be one of their toughest schedules in years, with road trips to Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, LSU, and Ole Miss,

and a mid-season tilt against Texas A&M, but the talent on this team just makes it a force to be reckoned with. Hard to see a home loss on the schedule and even an in-conference loss will be tough. Expect this Alabama group to roll into the playoffs unscathed.

Kyle Whittingham has been one of the top coaches and most underrated coaches in college football since he took over Utah 17 seasons ago. He has taken the Utes to great heights, including a Pac-12 Championship and Rose Bowl Game appearance last season. QB Cameron Rising leads an army of top caliber talent through a challenging but doable schedule that will put them near the top. A championship is in reach if they can run the table in the Pac-12.

Baylor looked very different with Blake Shapen under center last year, and led a strong offense to a win in the Big 12 Championship Game. This group had a strong kick on offense that should lead them to season success. The schedule on hand is managable with most of their tough tests at home. And their defense continues to get better, led by DT Siaki Ika.

NC State will be the shocker here, but will take a bit of luck and a nice ACC schedule to the plate and try to knock down the door to the playoffs. QB Devin Leary was able to build himself into a college QB last year in his first full season of starting, after a redshirt year and an injury lost year. This development was key in helping him evolve into the quarterback that he has been

trying to become. NC State will be better with him this year, and Dave Doeren has built a talented and hungry team around him. Carter-Finley will be rocking in a way unlike any other, and if they can find a way past Clemson in Death Valley on October 1st, this group will be punching their ticket ot the CFP.

Championship Game

(1) Alabama Crimson Tide vs Utah Utes (2)
It will be an East vs West test in SoFi Stadium come January, as the SEC and the Pac-12 face off. These teams have all the makings of champions and will continue to find success throughout the year. But unfortunately for the Utes, the size of Alabama will get to them and the Crimson Tide will take home another National Title.