

Projected Order to Finish

The top four ranked teams are based off of where I think they will finish before the playoff begins.

1. Florida State Seminoles

Last season I marked the Seminoles at thirteen and they exceeded my expectations as quarterback Jameis Winston took home the Heisman and the team took home the last Coaches' Trophy ever. The 2013 Seminoles outscored their opponents on an average score of 52-12 (highest ever!). Florida State's recruiting success over the years has been exposed with multiple All-Americans and many wins to go with it. The 2014 Seminoles will have big targets on their backs. The Noles kickoff the season with a neutral site meeting with Oklahoma State, but then get Clemson at home three weeks later (winner has won the ACC in the past three seasons). The trap-game in the schedule could come when Florida State travels to newcomer Louisville on a Thursday night. The schedule is a lot tougher than last season, but Florida State will be favored by double digits in every game due to the talent this team returns.

2. Oregon Ducks

Oregon has finished in the top ten in each of the past four years and I believe they make it five in 2014. Oregon returns Heisman frontrunner Marcus Mariota at quarterback, a loaded backfield, a sound offensive line, and five starters from a defense that ranked in the top fifteen in the country in scoring defense. Since 2010, the Ducks have been a game away from appearing in another national title. Last season, the Ducks lost Mariota versus Arizona and ended up losing the game and ending their chances for a national title along with Mariota's chances for the Heisman. Oregon's first big test comes versus Michigan State in Eugene. Oregon has a tough three game stretch in October starting with a Thursday night game versus Arizona, a road game at UCLA, and a homecoming game versus Washington. Oregon gets Stanford at home and should be favored. Oregon has a great shot making the inaugural playoff even if the Ducks slip up once during the season unless two SEC teams have stronger resumes.

3. Ohio State Buckeyes

The Buckeyes finally got their shot at a BCS title game but came up short in cash when purchasing their ticket versus Michigan State in the Big Ten championship game. The Buckeyes still had a strong season, even though dropping the final two games. Braxton Miller highlights a solid backfield and he will be throwing to a seasoned group of receivers. The offensive line will be the biggest question mark this season losing four starters from last season. The defensive personnel is loaded headlined by my number one rated defensive line. Ohio State has a favorable schedule, even though they draw Virginia Tech and Cincinnati out of conference and have road games at Penn State and Michigan State. Urban Meyer has yet to lose a regular season game coaching at Ohio State and I predict the trend will continue in 2014.

4. Auburn Tigers

Forty-fifth. I had the Tigers ranked forty-fifth in my preseason projected order to finish last season, which was surprisingly high compared to other publications. Head coach Gus Malzahn has brought the swagger back to The Plains and has the offense rolling. The 2013 rush offense ranked first in the country, but the Tigers do lose key player Tre Mason and solid run-blocker Greg Robinson. Auburn ranks second in my top backfields, ninth in receivers, second in offensive line, and eighth in defensive line. The team is no longer skinny at any position, which has been a big issue in years past. Nick Marshall is Malzahn's first returning starter at quarterback, so just imagine what kind of special season he can have. A big issue for Auburn will be battling their tough schedule with an early road game at Kansas State, then Mississippi State, Ole Miss, Georgia, and Alabama. This group is much stronger than last season's bunch, which is scary, but the Tigers' schedule is even scarier. The Tigers have favored well playing at Tuscaloosa over the years (despite the last two times) and that will, once again, determine the SEC West champion.

5. Alabama Crimson Tide

I called for Alabama to win their fourth national title in five years last season, but the Tide came up short after a once in a lifetime play versus Auburn followed by an embarrassing Sugar Bowl loss. The Tide will have to find a quick replacement for the Heisman runner up AJ McCarron. Whomever the quarterback is, most likely Jacob Coker, he will be surrounded by enough talent to exceed immediately with a strong running back unit and a great group of receiver led by Amari Cooper. The defense should be just fine with a couple of preseason All-Americans. The schedule shakes out well for the Tide with their first true road game coming at Ole Miss in week six. The Tide do face LSU on the road, but that's a game the Tide should have the upper hand. You may ask why I have Auburn over Alabama if I am so high on the Tide this season. Yes, Alabama has a top-notch group of runners, receivers, linebackers, and defensive secondary, but my big concern is how the Tide will play up front. The offensive line has some rebuilding to do along with parts of the defense. I will not be surprised to see both of the Alabama schools enter the Iron Bowl undefeated with a chance at the national semifinals.

6. Baylor Bears

The Bears have finished in the top five three straight seasons in total offense and have been wildly successful under Art Briles. Now just factor in a defense and you have a national title caliber team. That's the 2014 version of the Baylor Bears. Bryce Petty leads the offense having a nice 2013 with 4,200 passing yards and an awesome 32-3 ratio. The offense loses running back Lache Seastrunk, but Shock Linwood was a first team freshman All-American in 2013. The offensive line loses a few, but the projected five all played valuable minutes last season. The defensive line will be fun to watch with valuable experience returning. The back seven will need some work, but with the offense scoring 45-plus every game some pressure will be taken off. The Bears have tough road games at Texas and Oklahoma. The winner in the season finale versus Kansas State in Waco may determine the Big 12 champion.

7. Oklahoma Sooners

I have yet to buy into the preseason of hype of Oklahoma, but I still believe this is one of the stronger teams Bob Stoops has had in recent years. The Sooners seem to have finally settled in at quarterback with Trevor Knight. The Sooners had their best defense in four years last season. The Sooners had their best rushing defensive season in 2013 (224 per game) since 1991 (251)! The group loses Brennan Clay and Damian Williams and replacements Keith Ford and Alex Ross have not yet reached the caliber of those two. This Sooner team has a great schedule to make an appearance at the playoff with their only true road games coming at Tulsa, West Virginia, TCU, Iowa State, and Texas Tech (Texas Tech was the only bowl team in 2013).

8. Michigan State Spartans

Michigan State was somewhat of a surprise team in 2013 as they finished the season 13-1 after not being ranked in the top 25 in the preseason polls. Michigan State's only loss came to the Irish in South Bend, even though Sparty had better numbers in almost every category, but only got into the endzone once. Sparty, once again, has a tough non-conference road game playing Oregon in Eugene in the second week. The defense will need to grow up quick and that game will be the real answer to how strong this team can be. State returns 12 starters with the majority coming on the offense headlined by the improved Connor Cook at quarterback. The big showdown takes place in East Lansing this season on November 5th, but even after the Buckeyes Sparty has road games at Maryland and Penn State.

9. UCLA Bruins

UCLA is a fan favorite to contend with Oregon for the Pac-12 title. The Bruins have seen big strides since Jim Mora, Jr. took over in LA and he has his best team since being the coach. Quarterback Brett Hundley is a special player and is surrounded by a talented bunch on offense losing only one offensive lineman. The defense returns eight starters with freshman All-American Myles Jack. UCLA was kept out of the Pac-12 championship last season due to a harsh schedule drawing road games at Oregon and Stanford. This time around the Bruins get both at home along with USC. The schedule is in favor with UCLA and it is their Pac-12 to lose.

10. Georgia Bulldogs

I have picked Georgia to win the SEC East the past three seasons and the Dawgs have made trips to Atlanta twice during that span. I will call for Georgia to win the East for the fourth time in a row! Georgia will be overlooked this preseason mostly due to the loss of quarterback Aaron Murray. Hutson Mason has had some good experience and is surrounded by a talented team on both sides of the ball. Georgia once again opens with Clemson and South Carolina. Those two games, once again, will determine the fate of the Dawgs' season. Georgia gets the majority of their tougher opponents at home and will be more talented than every team they play on their schedule despite Auburn. The schedule shapes up nice and the team is loaded. Do not count Georgia out of playoff contention!



PJ Williams



Eric Striker



Kurtis Drummond



Hutson Mason

11. South Carolina Gamecocks

Steve Spurrier has led the Gamecocks to back-to-back-to-back 11-win seasons, which is the best in school history! Connor Shaw and Jadeveon Clowney depart, but there is enough talent in Columbia for another 11-win season.

12. USC Trojans

USC has been up and down in recent years, that is not news. USC is now under better leadership and Lane Kiffin recruited well enough for Steve Sarkisian to have immediate success in his first year. A 10-win season is not out of the question!

13. Stanford Cardinal

Stanford has been to four straight BCS bowl games and have been strong contenders for the Pac-12. This season Stanford draws the toughest schedule in the Pac-12 with road games at Oregon and UCLA, but has enough talent to push for another top ten finish.

14. Kansas State Wildcats

Kansas State is one of my top sleeper teams in 2014. Bill Snyder has done a great job at rebuilding this team after stepping away for a few years. Tyler Lockett is a game-changer and Jake Waters has potential. K-State has a tougher schedule than the other Big 12 contenders, but we all know what Bill Snyder can do!

15. LSU Tigers

I like the talent of the Tigers' roster this season. The offense looks nice even without a seasoned quarterback. The defense will be just fine, even after one of their worst defensive seasons in years. LSU is still strong and will always be one of my favorites from here on out to make the playoff every season.

16. Wisconsin Badgers

Gary Anderson had a great first year inheriting a great team. The Badgers went 9-4 and had a strong team offensively and defensively. The Badgers kick off with LSU at a neutral site and do not draw any really harsh road trips. Wisconsin will be in Indianapolis in December.

17. Clemson Tigers

Clemson underachieved last season, even though winning in the Orange Bowl over Ohio State. Clemson has either increased or tied their season win total since 2010, but I don't see Clemson topping their 11-wins from 2013.

18. Cincinnati Bearcats

A cushy schedule with a talented team gets Cincinnati the nod in the AAC. The Bearcats have tough non-conference road trips but could sweep the AAC with UCF not on the 2014 schedule.

19. Mississippi Rebels

Ole Miss has a more manageable schedule out of the SEC West schools, it's still tough, and 15 returning starters. Bo Wallace needs to be consistent for this team to become true contenders for an SEC West title. The talent is there now.

20. Texas Longhorns

The Longhorns were my fifth ranked team in the preseason edition last season, but underachieved again but had injuries and staff issues to cover it up. Strong will make this team relevant again but needs some time to get settled.

21. Louisville Cardinals

Even with the losses of Charlie Strong, Teddy Bridgewater, and others, this is still a strong team. The schedule isn't bad in their first year as members of the ACC.

22. Notre Dame Fighting Irish

Notre Dame is a hard team to judge every preseason. The schedule looks tough upfront, but sometimes falters later on. This schedule should be the toughest in 2014, but the same was said when the Irish ended up in the title game in 2012.

23. Marshall Thundering Herd

Marshall is my number one ranked non-AQ team and rightly so. Rakeem Cato is the best quarterback nobody talks about. Marshall plays in a very weak C-USA and draw Miami (OH), Rhode Island, Ohio, and Akron out of conference. You do the math. You can pencil them in for a perfect season.

24. Florida Gators

Mostly due to the large amount of starters going down, the Gators fell to a gross 4-8 in 2013. New offensive coordinator Kurt Roper was a great hire and should help improve the offense. Florida gets UGA at a neutral site and South Carolina at home. Not saying it's going to happen, but the Gators may end up in Atlanta.

25. UCF Black Knights

UCF was a big surprise last season with the big armed Blake Bortles. The post-Bortles era begins with a trip to Dublin versus Penn State. Even with losses Blake Bortles and Storm Johnson, head coach George O'Leary has his best all-around team yet since taking over in 2004.

26. TCU Horned Frogs

TCU is one of my Top Shock Teams this seasons mostly due to the strong defense that will stand out in the Big 12. Even with road games at Baylor and Texas the schedule is okay and Gary Patterson has his best team since entering the Big 12.

27. Houston Cougars

Houston is another surprise team in 2013. The Cougars are coming off an 8-5 season only losing four games by a total of 20 points. Houston has a legitimate shot at an AAC title, but end with road games at SMU and Cincinnati.

28. North Carolina Tar Heels

The Heels finished 7-6 last season, but had opportunities to have double-digit wins. Quarterback Marquise Williams can be a special player and is supported by a great offensive cast. Key road games at Clemson, Miami, and Duke will determine the fate of the Heels' season.

29. Washington Huskies

Washington was fortunate to fill the vacancy left by Sarkisian with the hot commodity of Chris Petersen of Boise State. Petersen inherits a great team with 14 returning starters. A tough division could put them out of 10 wins.

30. Louisiana Ragin' Cajuns

Tough non-conference road games at Mississippi and Boise State, but the rest of the schedule calls for a 10-win season and domination of the weak Sun Belt conference. Mark Hudspeth should continue his nine-win season trend.

31. Northwestern Wildcats

Northwestern was a favorite in the 2013 preseason, but couldn't manage to get over the hump with no upset victories. The team returns 17 starters and should see some major improvement especially on defense (27ppg 424 yards).

32. Boise State Broncos

This may be the lowest I have ever ranked Boise State. Depth will not be an issue in 2014 and the win total from 2013 should increase due to the weaker play of the Mountain West as a whole.

33. Virginia Tech Hokies

The Hokies lost three conference in 2013 by a total of 13 points. Virginia Tech faces four bowl teams on the road and has to break in a first year quarterback. The Hokies still have a shot at double digit wins and a berth in the ACC title game.

34. Michigan Wolverines

I am not confident in Michigan making it to a high-tier bowl game, especially facing Notre Dame, Rutgers, Michigan State, Northwestern, and Ohio State all on the road. The offensive numbers were very poor in 2013 and I don't see much improvement there. Michigan may have to pull an upset to get to eight wins.

35. Bowling Green Falcons

I am going for my fourth year in a row in picking the top team in the MAC right (before title game). Bowling Green has key offensive players back, but break in a new coach. Even with only 12 starters back, BGSU is my pick to win the MAC.

36. Nebraska Cornhuskers

The trend continued as the 2013 Nebraska team went, once again, 9-4 after being a favorite, again, to win the division. It's not that 9-4 is a bad showing, it's that there is no foreshadowing of getting better. Stats aside, the defense has been the problem game-by-game. Nebraska needs to create turnovers to become relevant again.

37. Miami Hurricanes

Miami was supposed to be in the ACC title game and were on their way going 7-0 entering the FSU game. Miami then lost three straight and then got blownout in the bowl. The defense has playmakers and needs to improve. Duke Johnson is a special player.

38. Arizona State Sun Devils

In 2012 ASU went 0-3 versus Top 25 opponents, ut improved in 2013 going 3-1 in the regular season. Tough road games at USC, Washington, Oregon State, and Arizona will keep them out of contention for a Pac-12 title game.

39. Penn State Nittany Lions

Not many saw Penn State winning eight games in 2012. And not many saw them winning seven in 2013 with a difficult. James Franklin always gets his team to overachieve and I expect that trend to continue with a possible nine-win season.

40. BYU Cougars

This Cougar team consists of a talented group. The schedule is just fine even with trips to Texas, UCF, and Boise State. Yes, Notre Dame is ranked higher, but BYU could finish with the best record among the Independents.

41. Maryland Terps

A harsh 2012 season for Maryland as they pretty much had to have quarterback tryouts throughout the season. CJ Brown still battled injuries in 2013 with only five starts. If a healthy quarterback, Maryland should be one of the most improved teams in the country, not just by the record.

42. Arizona Wildcats

Arizona could be a surprise team in 2013 with 13 returning starters and a talented receiving group. Jesse Scroggins is one of my sleepers for Heisman and great talent surrounds him. Tough road games may keep them out of title game.

43. Oregon State Beavers

Another mid-tier Pac-12 team that has the potential to make some noise. Oregon State went 6-1 last season before losing the final five of the regular season. They should improve upon last year's seven wins.

44. Texas Tech Red Raiders

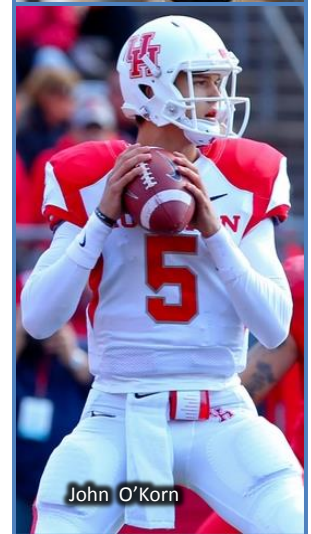
Tech went 7-0 before facing the heart of the Big 12 then went 1-5 to finish out the year. A powerful offense could get Tech over the hump in 2014.



Tyler Lockett



La'el Collins



John O'Korn



Ryan Switzer

Check out my blog for any changes in my rankings up to the start of the season!