

AROUND THE LEAGUE • BY CONFERENCE

Red River and Georgia-Alabama land on the same Saturday, and the SEC plus Big 12 race math starts to harden inside Week 6.

1 SEC regular-season game matching AP top-10 heavyweights: **UGA at ALA**

1 neutral-site rivalry with CFP seeding weight: **TEX vs OU**

5 Power-conference races with a live unbeaten-or-one-loss leader this week

2 ACC titles-or-bust swings: **FSU at LOU** (Fri) and **WAK at NCS**

1 Big Ten statement slot: **USC at PSU**

4 Mountain West and American matchups with CFP Group-of-5 access implications

TALKING POINTS

- Georgia-Alabama is the last regular-season game on the schedule between two programs ranked inside the AP top 8; the loser likely exits the SEC title-game driver's seat and lands in the at-large pool come December.
- Texas-Oklahoma in Dallas doubles as the Big 12's CFP knockout game: winner stays in the top-4 conversation, loser needs chaos in the back half of the conference schedule.
- Ryan Day's Ohio State hosts Maryland in a game where the Buckeye offense should be able to test whether the Terps' front seven is a real Big Ten defense or a September mirage.
- Manny Diaz takes Duke into Athens and then to Atlanta in consecutive weeks, a rare ACC scheduling gauntlet that will either validate or expose the Blue Devils' defensive front.
- The Mountain West's access-bowl math tightens Saturday with Boise State at Fresno State and San Diego State at Oregon State factoring into the Group-of-5 New Year's Six pecking order.

SEC

- **UGA at ALA** is the headliner: Kirby Smart vs Kalen DeBoer, with the winner owning the inside track to Atlanta and the loser playing catch-up in the at-large pool.
- **TEX vs OU** in Dallas is the Big 12's version of the same game, only this one is a neutral-site rivalry with a CFP elimination feel.
- **MIS at VAN** is quietly the SEC's most interesting line: Clark Lea's Commodores, Pete Golding's Rebels, and a West race that no one projected in August.
- **LSU at UK** is a trap game for Lane Kiffin's Tigers if the Wildcats can control tempo with the run game.
- **SC at FLA** and **TEN at ARK** are the two conference games most likely to determine which SEC coach is on the hottest seat entering November.

Big 12

- **TEX vs OU** is the conference's CFP lever; both teams know the loser likely needs to run the table to reach Arlington.
- **ISU at BYU** (Fri) gives Kalani Sitake a chance to stack a ranked win in Provo before the Cougars hit the back half of the schedule.
- **HOU at KSU** and **UCF at OKS** are the Big 12's crossover exam games, with Willie Fritz and Scott Frost both looking for a statement road result.
- **ARI at WVU** is a Rich Rodriguez home game against a Pac-12 visitor; the Mountaineers' run game should be a load.

ACC

- **FSU at LOU** (Fri night) is the ACC's marquee league game: Mike Norvell vs Jeff Brohm, with the winner keeping pace with the Clemson/Miami tier.
- **WAK at NCS** tests Dave Doeren's defense against a Wake offense that has been quietly efficient through September.
- **SYR at UVA** is a Fran Brown vs Tony Elliott matchup that decides which ACC program stays in the top-25 conversation.
- **DUK at GT** is Brent Key's best chance to hand Manny Diaz a second straight ACC loss.
- **UNC at PIT** is a Bill Belichick vs Pat Narduzzi chess match, with the Panthers' defensive front likely deciding the game.

Big Ten

- **USC at PSU** is the conference's national-TV swing: Lincoln Riley vs Matt Campbell, with the winner emerging as the top challenger to Ohio State in the East.
- **UMD at OSU** is Ryan Day's tune-up before the back half; Maryland gets a measuring-stick game against a top-3 defense.
- **IOW at UW** (Fri night) is Kirk Ferentz vs Jedd Fisch with real Big Ten title-game tiebreaker value.
- **IND at NEB** is Curt Cignetti vs Matt Rhule, a game with more CFP at-large meaning than the casual fan realizes.
- **ILL at MSU** and **MIN at PUR** are the conference's flex games, both capable of producing a top-25 upset.

Mountain West / Pac-12

- **BSU at FRE** is the Mountain West's game of the year candidate: Spencer Danielson vs Matt Entz with access-bowl stakes.
- **SDS at ORS** pits Sean Lewis against a Pac-12 opponent on the road, a real resume test for the Aztecs.
- **WSU at USU** (Fri) and **HAW at ASU** round out the Pac-12's crossover weekend.
- **UCL at ORE** is the Pac-12's marquee conference game: Bob Chesney vs Dan Lanning in Autzen.

American / Sun Belt / Conference USA (G5 access race)

- **USF at UTS** (Thu) is the American's Thursday showcase: Brian Hartline vs Jeff Traylor, with USF's undefeated start on the line.
- **TUL at ARM** and **TLS at NAV** are the American's service-academy tests this week.
- **JMU at GAS** is Billy Napier vs Clay Helton, a Sun Belt game with real New Year's Six access implications if either team runs the table.
- **SHS at LIB** (Thu) is Jamey Chadwell's chance to keep the Flames unbeaten in the C-USA race.
- **KEN at WMU** and **BUF at TOL** are the MAC crossover games that will start sorting the conference's bowl picture.

UGA

5-0

PREVIEW

5-0

ALA

SEC title-game driver's seat and a top-4 CFP seed for the winner; the loser joins the at-large pool.

The game will likely come down to whether Kirby Smart can force Kalen DeBoer's offense into third-and-long situations in the second half.

RECAP

UGA's run game vs ALA's front seven is the matchup that will decide who gets to play with a lead in the fourth quarter.

STORYLINE

Winner controls the SEC East-West crossover math and the inside track to Atlanta; loser likely needs the other to drop two conference games to reach the title game.

STORYLINE

The loser is squarely in the at-large pool and needs help from the Big Ten and Big 12 to climb back into a top-4 seed.

KEY DECISION

Watch the first two Alabama possessions after halftime: if DeBoer comes out throwing on early downs, it signals he trusts his line against the Georgia front.

TEAM METRICS

Both defenses rank in the national top 10 in yards per play allowed; expect a low-possession game with a narrow total.

NEWS

Monitor late-week injury reports on both quarterbacks; a change under center would shift the line meaningfully.

TEX

5-0

PREVIEW

5-0

OU

Neutral-site Red River game with Big 12 CFP elimination stakes for the loser.

This one will be decided in the trenches: whoever runs the ball better in the second half walks out of Dallas with the Big 12's best CFP case.

RECAP

Watch the Texas receivers against Oklahoma's secondary: if the Longhorns win the 50-50 balls early, the Sooners will have to abandon the run.

STORYLINE

Texas-Oklahoma in Dallas is effectively a CFP play-in: winner stays in the top-4 conversation, loser needs chaos in the Big 12 to climb back.

STORYLINE

Loser likely needs to run the table and get help from the SEC and Big Ten to stay in the at-large pool.

KEY DECISION

Steve Sarkisian's red-zone play-calling vs Brent Venables' third-down defense is the single biggest lever in this game.

TEAM METRICS

Oklahoma's defensive front has been the Big 12's best against the run; Texas will test that with inside zone and play-action off it.

NEWS

Monitor the status of both starting running backs; either absence would change the offensive game plan materially.

LAST 3	Both programs enter on three-game win streaks with top-10 scoring margins; the tiebreaker this time will be turnover margin.
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LAST 3	Both teams are 3-0 in their last three with top-15 scoring offenses; the tiebreaker will be which QB protects the ball.
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blitz

USC 4-1	PREVIEW PREVIEW	4-1 PSU
Big Ten East statement game with top-25 ranking on the line for the winner.		
The team that wins the line of scrimmage in the third quarter will leave with the inside track to a New Year's Six bowl.		
RECAP	USC's skill talent vs Penn State's secondary is the matchup to watch; if the Trojans win early downs, the Nittany Lions will have to blitz.	
STORYLINE	USC at Penn State is the Big Ten's national-TV swing game: winner stays in the top-10 conversation and the loser drops into the at-large scrum.	
STORYLINE	The winner stays in the Big Ten title-game picture; the loser joins the at-large pool with Indiana, Nebraska, and the Big 12 runner-up.	
KEY DECISION	Lincoln Riley vs Matt Campbell in the fourth quarter: watch which coach trusts his kicker vs which goes for it on fourth-and-short in plus territory.	
TEAM METRICS	Penn State's run defense has been the Big Ten's most improved unit this season; USC's inside zone will be tested.	
NEWS	Monitor the status of the Penn State quarterback room; a change under center would shift the spread meaningfully.	
LAST 3	Both teams are 2-1 in their last three with one loss each; the tiebreaker will be which offense avoids the empty possession.	

FSU 4-1	PREVIEW PREVIEW	4-1 LOU
ACC Friday-night showcase with the winner staying in the conference title-game race.		
The game will likely be decided by which offense wins the third-down battle in the second half.		
RECAP	FSU's receivers vs Louisville's secondary is the matchup to watch; if the Seminoles win the 50-50 balls, the Cardinals will have to blitz.	
STORYLINE	FSU at Louisville is the ACC's marquee Friday game: Mike Norvell vs Jeff Brohm, with the winner keeping pace with Clemson and Miami.	
STORYLINE	The winner stays in the ACC title-game driver's seat; the loser likely needs help from Clemson and Miami to climb back.	
KEY DECISION	Watch Brohm's fourth-down decisions in the second quarter; he has been aggressive in plus territory this season and it has paid off.	
TEAM METRICS	Louisville's offense has been the ACC's most efficient through September; FSU's front seven will be tested.	
NEWS	Monitor the status of the Louisville offensive line; a change up front would shift the line meaningfully.	
LAST 3	Both teams are 2-1 in their last three; the tiebreaker will be which defense forces the first empty possession of the second half.	

ISU 4-1	PREVIEW PREVIEW	4-1 BYU
Big 12 Friday-night game with CFP at-large implications for the winner.		
The team that wins the turnover battle in the fourth quarter will likely walk out of Provo with a top-15 resume win.		
RECAP	BYU's receivers vs Iowa State's secondary is the matchup to watch; if the Cougars win the 50-50 balls, the Cyclones will have to blitz.	
STORYLINE	Iowa State at BYU is the Big 12's Friday night showcase: Kalani Sitake's Cougars get a ranked visitor in Provo with CFP at-large stakes.	
STORYLINE	The winner stays in the Big 12 title-game picture; the loser joins the at-large pool with the Big 12 runner-up and the SEC runner-up.	
KEY DECISION	Watch Sitake's fourth-down decisions in the second quarter; he has been aggressive in plus territory this season and it has paid off.	
TEAM METRICS	BYU's defense has been the Big 12's most improved unit this season; Iowa State's run game will be tested.	
NEWS	Monitor the status of both starting quarterbacks; either absence would change the offensive game plan materially.	
LAST 3	Both teams are 3-0 in their last three with top-20 scoring margins; the tiebreaker will be which QB protects the ball.	

BSU 4-1	PREVIEW PREVIEW	4-1 FRE
Mountain West access-bowl game with the Group-of-5 New Year's Six berth on the line.		
The team that runs the ball better in the fourth quarter will leave with the inside track to the Mountain West title game.		
RECAP	Boise State's run game vs Fresno State's front seven is the matchup to watch; if the Broncos win early downs, the Bulldogs will have to blitz.	
STORYLINE	Boise State at Fresno State is the Mountain West's game of the year candidate: Spencer Danielson vs Matt Entz with access-bowl stakes.	
STORYLINE	The winner stays in the Mountain West title-game driver's seat; the loser joins the at-large pool with the Pac-12 runner-up.	
KEY DECISION	Watch Spencer Danielson's fourth-down decisions in the second quarter; he has been aggressive in plus territory this season and it has paid off.	
TEAM METRICS	Fresno State's offense has been the Mountain West's most efficient through September; Boise State's front seven will be tested.	
NEWS	Monitor the status of the Boise State offensive line; a change up front would shift the line meaningfully.	
LAST 3	Both teams are 3-0 in their last three with top-20 scoring margins; the tiebreaker will be which QB protects the ball.	

JMU 4-1	PREVIEW PREVIEW	4-1 GAS
Sun Belt East game with Group-of-5 New Year's Six access implications for the winner.		
The team that wins the turnover battle in the fourth quarter will likely walk out of Statesboro with a resume win.		
RECAP	James Madison's receivers vs Georgia Southern's secondary is the matchup to watch; if the Dukes win the 50-50 balls, the Eagles will have to blitz.	
STORYLINE	James Madison at Georgia Southern is the Sun Belt's marquee game: Billy Napier vs Clay Helton with New Year's Six access stakes.	
STORYLINE	The winner stays in the Sun Belt title-game driver's seat; the loser joins the at-large pool with the American runner-up.	
KEY DECISION	Watch Clay Helton's fourth-down decisions in the second quarter; he has been aggressive in plus territory this season and it has paid off.	
TEAM METRICS	Georgia Southern's offense has been the Sun Belt's most efficient through September; James Madison's front seven will be tested.	
NEWS	Monitor the status of both starting quarterbacks; either absence would change the offensive game plan materially.	
LAST 3	Both teams are 3-0 in their last three with top-25 scoring margins; the tiebreaker will be which QB protects the ball.	

USF 5-0	PREVIEW PREVIEW	4-1 UTS
American Athletic Thursday-night showcase with the conference title-game race on the line.		
The game will likely be decided by which offense wins the third-down battle in the second half.		
RECAP	USF's receivers vs UTSA's secondary is the matchup to watch; if the Bulls win the 50-50 balls, the Roadrunners will have to blitz.	
STORYLINE	USF at UTSA is the American's Thursday showcase: Brian Hartline vs Jeff Traylor, with USF's undefeated start on the line.	
STORYLINE	The winner stays in the American title-game driver's seat; the loser joins the at-large pool with the Conference USA leader.	
KEY DECISION	Watch Traylor's fourth-down decisions in the second quarter; he has been aggressive in plus territory this season and it has paid off.	
TEAM METRICS	UTSA's offense has been the American's most efficient through September; USF's front seven will be tested.	
NEWS	Monitor the status of the USF offensive line; a change up front would shift the line meaningfully.	
LAST 3	Both teams are 3-0 in their last three with top-25 scoring margins; the tiebreaker will be which QB protects the ball.	

SHS 3-2	PREVIEW PREVIEW	5-0 LIB
Conference USA Thursday game with Liberty's undefeated start and CFP access case on the line.		
The game will likely be decided by whether Sam Houston can force Jamey Chadwell's offense into third-and-long situations in the second half.		
RECAP	Liberty's run game vs Sam Houston's front seven is the matchup to watch; if the Flames win early downs, the Bearkats will have to blitz.	
STORYLINE	Sam Houston at Liberty is the C-USA Thursday showcase: Jamey Chadwell's Flames get a conference test with CFP access stakes.	
STORYLINE	The winner stays in the C-USA title-game driver's seat; the loser joins the at-large pool with the American runner-up.	
KEY DECISION	Watch Chadwell's fourth-down decisions in the second quarter; he has been aggressive in plus territory this season and it has paid off.	
TEAM METRICS	Liberty's offense has been the C-USA's most efficient through September; Sam Houston's front seven will be tested.	
NEWS	Monitor the status of the Liberty offensive line; a change up front would shift the line meaningfully.	
LAST 3	Liberty is 3-0 in its last three with a top-10 scoring margin; Sam Houston is 1-2 in its last three.	

IOW 4-1	PREVIEW PREVIEW	4-1 UW
Big Ten Friday-night crossover with conference title-game tiebreaker value.		
The team that wins the line of scrimmage in the third quarter will leave with the inside track to a New Year's Six bowl.		
RECAP	Iowa's run game vs Washington's front seven is the matchup to watch; if the Hawkeyes win early downs, the Huskies will have to blitz.	
STORYLINE	Iowa at Washington is the Big Ten's Friday night showcase: Kirk Ferentz vs Jedd Fisch with real tiebreaker stakes.	
STORYLINE	The winner stays in the Big Ten title-game picture; the loser joins the at-large pool with the Big 12 runner-up.	
KEY DECISION	Watch Fisch's fourth-down decisions in the second quarter; he has been aggressive in plus territory this season and it has paid off.	
TEAM METRICS	Washington's offense has been the Big Ten's most improved unit this season; Iowa's front seven will be tested.	
NEWS	Monitor the status of the Iowa offensive line; a change up front would shift the line meaningfully.	
LAST 3	Both teams are 2-1 in their last three; the tiebreaker will be which defense forces the first empty possession of the second half.	

MIS 4-1	PREVIEW PREVIEW	5-0 VAN
SEC West race game: Vanderbilt's undefeated start vs Ole Miss on the road in the conference standings.		

TEN 4-1	PREVIEW PREVIEW	4-1 ARK
SEC crossover game with coach-hot-seat implications for the loser.		

LSU

4-1

PREVIEW

PREVIEW

3-2

UK

SEC crossover game with the loser dropping into the conference's middle tier.

The team that wins the line of scrimmage in the third quarter will leave with the inside track to a New Year's Six bowl.

RECAP

LSU's receivers vs Kentucky's secondary is the matchup to watch; if the Tigers win the 50-50 balls, the Wildcats will have to blitz.

STORYLINE

LSU at Kentucky is the SEC's trap game: Lane Kiffin vs Will Stein, with the Wildcats capable of controlling tempo with the run game.

STORYLINE

The winner stays in the SEC bowl picture; the loser joins the at-large pool with the ACC runner-up.

KEY DECISION

Watch Kiffin's fourth-down decisions in the second quarter; he has been aggressive in plus territory this season and it has paid off.

TEAM METRICS

Kentucky's offense has been the SEC's most inefficient through September; LSU's front seven will be tested.

NEWS

Monitor the status of the LSU offensive line; a change up front would shift the line meaningfully.

LAST 3

LSU is 3-0 in its last three; Kentucky is 1-2 in its last three.

SC

4-1

PREVIEW

PREVIEW

4-1

FLA

SEC East game with coach-hot-seat implications for the loser.

The game will likely be decided by whether Shane Beamer's offense can force Jon Sumrall's defense into third-and-long situations in the second half.

RECAP

Tennessee's receivers vs Arkansas's secondary is the matchup to watch; if the Volunteers win the 50-50 balls, the Razorbacks will have to blitz.

STORYLINE

Tennessee at Arkansas is the SEC's hottest-seat game: Josh Heupel vs Ryan Silverfield, with the loser facing real November pressure.

STORYLINE

The winner stays in the SEC bowl picture; the loser joins the at-large pool with the ACC runner-up.

KEY DECISION

Watch Silverfield's fourth-down decisions in the second quarter; he has been aggressive in plus territory this season and it has paid off.

TEAM METRICS

Arkansas's offense has been the SEC's most inefficient through September; Tennessee's front seven will be tested.

NEWS

Monitor the status of both starting quarterbacks; either absence would change the offensive game plan materially.

LAST 3

Both teams are 2-1 in their last three; the tiebreaker will be which defense forces the first empty possession of the second half.

WAK

4-1

PREVIEW

PREVIEW

4-1

NCS

ACC crossover game with the winner staying in the conference title-game race.

The team that wins the turnover battle in the fourth quarter will likely walk out of Raleigh with a resume win.

RECAP

Wake Forest's receivers vs NC State's secondary is the matchup to watch; if the Demon Deacons win the 50-50 balls, the Wolfpack will have to blitz.

STORYLINE

Wake Forest at NC State is the ACC's most interesting crossover: Jake Dickert vs Dave Doeren with real tiebreaker stakes.

STORYLINE

The winner stays in the ACC title-game picture; the loser joins the at-large pool with the SEC runner-up.

KEY DECISION

Watch Doeren's fourth-down decisions in the second quarter; he has been aggressive in plus territory this season and it has paid off.

WAK

4-1

PREVIEW

PREVIEW

4-1

NCS

ACC crossover game with the winner staying in the conference title-game race.

The team that wins the turnover battle in the fourth quarter will likely walk out of Raleigh with a resume win.

TEAM METRICS

NC State's defense has been the ACC's most improved unit this season; Wake Forest's run game will be tested.

NEWS

Monitor the status of the Wake Forest offensive line; a change up front would shift the line meaningfully.

LAST 3

Both teams are 2-1 in their last three; the tiebreaker will be which defense forces the first empty possession of the second half.

3/3