

What To Watch: New Conference Rivalries Sprout In Week 4



(Photo Courtesy of Getty Images)

After an “improvement week,” Ohio State returns to action Saturday afternoon to host Marshall in what should be another convincing nonconference win for the Buckeyes. The matchup against the Thundering Herd should provide little intrigue, but outside of Columbus there are some interesting matchups that Buckeye fans will need to keep an eye on during Week 4:

No. 11 USC @ No. 18 Michigan (3:30, CBS)

Ohio State fans will not need to look far after its game against Marshall, as perhaps the most intriguing matchup of Week 4 is about 160 miles north to Ann Arbor, where No. 18 Michigan will host No. 11 USC in the teams’ first matchup as Big Ten foes.

Beyond this being a matchup between two of the more historic programs in all of college football, the game also provides an opportunity for fans to see how Sherrone Moore and the reigning national champion Wolverines will respond on a national scale after getting blown out at home against Texas two weeks prior. Michigan does look somewhat different this time around, as it named Alex Orji the starting quarterback over Davis Warren after the former walk-on threw three interceptions last week.

Orji does provide another element to his game with his legs, but he will also need to show he can throw to prevent the Trojans improved defense from stacking the box against the run similarly to what the Longhorns did. USC does have a revamped defense under the leadership of longtime NFL and college assistant D’Anton Lynn, ranking 18th in scoring defense at 10.0 points per game leading up to the contest, but the Trojans’ bread and butter still lies within their offense.

Lincoln Riley’s offense has not missed a beat after the departure of now Chicago Bears quarterback Caleb Williams, as the unit has put up 27 and 48 points in its first two games. This is largely due to the efforts of first-year starting quarterback Mason Miller, who quickly entered the national spotlight after throwing for 378 passing yards and a touchdown in USC’s Week 1 win over LSU in Las Vegas. USC’s explosive offense, which is also led by standout pass catchers Lake McRee and Kyron Hudson, may prove to be too much for a young Wolverines defense. **BSB Prediction: USC 31, Michigan 17**

No. 12 Utah @ No. 14 Oklahoma State (4 p.m., FOX)

Michigan and USC are not the only top-20 matchup on Saturday. No. 12 Utah travels to No. 14 Oklahoma State in what is now a Big 12 game, no matter how strange that sounds. The Utes and Cowboys, who last faced off in 1945, are both led by veteran quarterbacks in seventh-years Cam Rising and Alan Bowman, who have a combined age of 49. To put that in perspective, last week's Sunday Night Football game between the Houston Texans and Chicago Bears had a combined starting quarterback age of just 44 with C.J. Stroud and Williams under center.

Rising is set to return to action after being sidelined last week after injuring his hand while running into a water cooler, and that should be a welcome site for a Utes offense that has shown its explosiveness with or without him, averaging 36.7 points per game, good for 30th in the nation. He'll face off against a Cowboys defense that allowed just 10 points to Tulsa last week.

Bowman, on the other hand, has gotten off to a strong start in 2024, completing 75 of his first 112 passes for 967 passing yards and eight touchdowns to two interceptions through three games. The Pokes have had no problem throwing the ball, but they will need more production out of star running back Ollie Gordon II if they want to win this top-15 matchup. Gordon has averaged just 3.5 yards per carry this season, totaling 216 yards and four touchdowns on 62 totes. **BSB Prediction: Utah 35, Oklahoma State 31**

No. 6 Tennessee @ No. 15 Oklahoma (7:30 p.m., ABC)

The best matchup of Week 4 comes in the primetime slot, where No. 6 Tennessee travels to Norman, Okla., to take on the 15th-ranked Sooners in what is now a bout between two SEC schools.

Oklahoma and head coach Brent Venables will have their hands full in their SEC debut Saturday night, as the Volunteers are coming in with what is currently the top scoring offense in the country at a resounding 63.7 points per game. Tennessee's offense starts with star redshirt freshman quarterback Nico Iamaleava, who has burst onto the college football scene by throwing for an impressive 698 yards and six touchdowns to two interceptions along with another 102 rushing yards and a score.

Iamaleava is not alone on offense, however, as the Volunteers have four pass catchers who have more than 100 yards receiving, along with a running back in Dylan Sampson who has rushed for nine touchdowns in three games on 45 carries, including four in one half last week in their 71-0 rout of Kent State.

Venables' defense should provide more resistance than Tennessee's first three opponents, as they have allowed 34 points through three games for a 11.3-yard average, and they should also have a raucous Gaylord Stadium crowd to provide some extra juice. But in order for the Sooners to win their inaugural SEC game they will need to match Tennessee's scoring. Oklahoma's offense has yet to take full flight so far this season — they had just an uncharacteristic 16-point outing against Houston in Week 2 — but starting quarterback Arnold Jackson has been solid, throwing for 484 yards and seven touchdowns to two interceptions. **BSB Prediction: Tennessee 42, Oklahoma 30**

Michigan State @ Boston College (8 p.m., ACC Network)

This matchup isn't quite as enticing as the first three mentioned, but it's listed because it will surely be an emotional one. Boston College is set for its 11th annual "Red Bandanna Game" against the Spartans, which honors BC alum and lacrosse player Welles Crowther, who tragically lost his life after saving at least a dozen lives in the South Tower of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2011 while wearing a red

bandana around his nose and mouth to protect him from smoke.

Boston College will hope to use what should be an energized and emotional Alumni Stadium crowd to get its third win of the season after falling to No. 7 Missouri last week. The Eagles, led by first-year head coach and former Buckeye offensive coordinator Bill O'Brien, fell out of the top-25 rankings after the defeat, but they could get back on their feet with a strong performance from quarterback Thomas Castellanos and running backs Treshaun Ward and Kye Robichaux, who have all helped the team rank 32nd in the nation in rushing offense at 204.7 rushing yards per game.

Michigan State, on the other hand, is also led by a first-year head coach in former Oregon State leader Jonathan Smith, who has led the Spartans to a 3-0 record, their fastest start since 2021. The Spartans have a primetime date with Ohio State looming next week, but they could continue to create some momentum for Big Ten play with what would be an upset win Saturday night. Oregon State transfer quarterback Jordan Chiles and first-year wideout Nick Marsh have both impressed for the Spartans on offense so far this season. **BSB Prediction: Boston College 17, Michigan State 10**

Other Games To Watch:

- NC State @ No. 21 Clemson (noon, ABC)
- UCLA @ No. 16 LSU (3:30 p.m., ABC)
- Rutgers @ Virginia Tech (3:30 p.m., ACC Network)
- Louisiana Monroe @ No. 1 Texas (8 p.m., ESPN+)
- No. 13 Kansas State @ BYU (10:30 p.m., ESPN)