

What To Watch: Several Intriguing Ranked Matchups In Week 1



The 2024 college football season may provide as much intrigue as any in recent memory, as several teams will be fighting all season for a spot in the first-ever expanded 12-team College Football Playoff, many of those programs now belonging to a new conference following a wave of conference realignment in the offseason.

That intrigue starts today, with the full slate of Week 1 games beginning at noon, and a number of other high-profile matchups taking place on Sunday and Monday to close out Labor Day Weekend that are worth noting:

No. 8 Penn State At West Virginia (12 p.m., FOX)

The fun starts early in the noon slot, with No. 8 Penn State traveling west to Morgantown, Wva. to take on an upstart and upset-hungry Mountaineers squad.

Judging off Friday afternoon's live Pat McAfee Show broadcast from downtown Morgantown, it should be an electric atmosphere inside Milan Puskar Stadium on Saturday, and the Nittany Lions may have their hands full with a talented West Virginia team who received 17 AP Top 25 preseason votes.

The Mountaineers boast one of the nation's best running back tandems in CJ Donaldson and Jaheim White, who were both named to the preseason watch list for the Doak Walker Award, while quarterback Garrett Greene should be in store for a strong year after totaling over 3,000 total yards of total offense last season.

The Nittany Lions, however, should have one of the more talented teams in the Big Ten this year, led by an elite running back duo of their own in Nicolas Singleton and Kaytron Allen, while they are also looking for junior quarterback Drew Allar to take that next step in his development after an up-and-down season. **BSB Prediction: Penn State 21, West Virginia 17**

No. 1 Georgia vs. No. 14 Clemson (12 p.m., ABC)

Also in the noon slot on Saturday is a battle between two southern rivals in No. 14 Clemson and No. 1 Georgia, who will meet inside Atlanta's Mercedes Benz Stadium for their first matchup since the 2021 season.

The top-ranked Bulldogs come into the season as the unquestioned No. 1 team in the country with what could be the most talented roster in all of college football. That talent starts at the most important position in football with quarterback Carson Beck, who is looking to get his Heisman Trophy campaign started early after throwing for an SEC-leading 3,941 passing yards and 24 touchdowns last season.

The Bulldogs are also as formidable as ever on the defense, which is led by junior safety and preseason AP All-American Malaki Starks, one of four preseason All-Americans on Georgia this season.

Clemson should be an interesting first challenge for Kirby Smart's squad, though, as the Dabo Swinney-led Tigers are looking to return to national relevancy after a few off years. They can do that with a win against Georgia, which could only be done if they get strong quarterback play from junior quarterback Cade Klubnik. **BSB Prediction: Georgia 31, Clemson 13**

No. 7 Notre Dame at No. 20 Texas A&M (7:30 p.m., ABC)

Perhaps the most intriguing matchup of the entire weekend comes on Saturday night when No. 7 Notre Dame travels to the Lonestar State to take on No. 20 Texas A&M in what should be a rowdy crowd at Kyle Field.

The Fighting Irish, once again led by former Buckeye Marcus Freeman, said goodbye to one veteran transfer quarterback but hello to another, bringing in Duke transfer Riley Leonard to replace Sam Hartman. Leonard, who threw for 4,450 yards and 24 touchdowns with the Blue Devils, is set for another big year on what should be a loaded Notre Dame team. But he faces a stiff challenge on the road against his former head coach Mike Elko, who replaced Jimbo Fisher as Aggies' head coach over the offseason.

The Aggies' defense should be formidable this season, especially on the defensive line, which now includes Purdue transfer edge rusher Nic Scourton Jr.. But the Aggies could also pose a threat to the Irish on offense, which is led by sophomore quarterback Conner Weigman. **BSB Prediction: Notre Dame 23, Texas A&M 20**

No. 13 LSU vs No. 23 USC (7:30, ABC, Sunday Night)

Fans will have another great matchup to look forward to on Monday between two college football titans, who both should come into Las Vegas' Allegiant Stadium with some high-flying offenses.

The Trojans, despite losing first overall NFL Draft selection Caleb Williams, should still move the ball with ease this season under the guidance of new quarterback Miller Moss, who threw for 372 yards and a whopping six touchdowns in USC's Holiday Bowl win over Louisville. The Trojans' defense has been shaky under Lincoln Riley, however, but that could change with the addition of longtime college football and NFL assistant D'Anton Lynn as defensive coordinator.

Lynn's defense will be immediately tested by what should also be a potent Tigers offense, which features redshirt junior Garrett Nussmeier under center, who, like Moss, is replacing a former Heisman Trophy winner in Jayden Daniels. Nussmeier will have plenty of explosive weapons to throw to, including wide receivers Kyren Lacy and Liberty graduate transfer CJ Daniels. **BSB Prediction: LSU 41, USC 35**

Other Games To Watch:

- **Akron at No. 2 Ohio State (3:30 p.m., CBS)**
- **No. 19 Miami (Fla.) at Florida (3:30 p.m., ABC)**
- **Western Kentucky at No. 5 Alabama (7 p.m., ESPN)**
- **Fresno State at No. 9 Michigan (7:30 p.m., NBC)**
- **Boston College at No. 10 Notre Dame (7:30 p.m., ESPN)**