

SEC quarterbacks could be key in helping the league end a 3-year championship drought

AP By Mark Long
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The Southeastern Conference is going through a championship drought, the kind of lull the football league last endured more than two decades ago.

Not only has the SEC watched a Big Ten team hoist the College Football Playoff trophy each of the last three years, the once-seemingly unmatched powerhouse hasn't even played in the title game since Georgia closed out the 2022 season with a crown.

Reason to panic? Cause for concern? It might be more of a head-scratching fluke than an eye-opening fade.

The last time the SEC went three consecutive years without a national title was 1999-2002, when Florida State, Oklahoma (then in the Big 12), Miami (then in the Big East) and Ohio State won the Bowl Championship Series. The SEC didn't make any of those title games, either.

But the league responded by winning 14 of the next 17 national championships, building a reputation as having the fastest players in the league and dominating in the trenches. Oh, and quarterbacks mattered (see: Tim Tebow, Cam Newton, Jalen Hurts, Joe Burrow and Mac Jones).

If the SEC is going to end its current skid, quarterback play surely will be key.

"Too often the storyline is always the quarterback, the quarterback, the quarterback," new Florida coach Jon Sumrall said. "Well, I'm pretty damn worried about who the right tackle is and who the left tackle is. Those decisions are as important, to be quite honest with you, because they're protecting the quarterback."

Nonetheless, here's a look at how the league stands at the all-important QB position following spring practice:

Nearly half the SEC has a returning starter at QB

Six teams have returning starters, including five of the top seven favorites to win the league. Oddsmakers list Arch Manning (plus-750) of Texas and Trinidad Chambliss (plus-900) of Ole Miss as two of top three preseason Heisman Trophy favorites.

Road losses at Ohio State, Florida and Georgia last year kept Manning and the Longhorns out of the College Football Playoff. But Manning was at his best down the stretch, with 15 touchdown passes, five

more rushing, two interceptions and seven wins in his final eight games.

Chambliss is back after winning a court battle to gain a sixth year of eligibility and he gives the Rebels a chance — even without coach Lane Kiffin — to get back to the CFP. The Ferris State transfer accounted for 30 touchdowns and just three interceptions in 2025.

"It's been crazy. It's been hectic," Chambliss said. "But I'm present now, and that's what matters."

Others returning starters: John Mateer (Oklahoma), Marcel Reed (Texas A&M), LaNorris Sellers (South Carolina) and Gunner Stockton (Georgia).

Several teams have big-name transfers taking over

Kiffin landed at LSU and then signed the top quarterback in the transfer portal, Arizona State's Sam Leavitt. Leavitt skipped most of spring while recovering from foot surgery but is expected to be full speed by training camp to help Kiffin revitalize the league's worst offense in 2025.

Auburn, Kentucky and Missouri also signed plug-and-play starters from the portal. New Auburn coach Alex Golesh brought Byrum Brown with him from South Florida, new Kentucky coach Will Stein turned to Notre Dame transfer Kenny Minchey and Missouri went with Ole Miss transfer Austin Simmons.

Simmons was the presumptive favorite to win the job before spring, and coach Eli Drinkwitz needed three weeks to make it official.

"The sooner we could name him the starter, the more our team could grow around him, rally around him, and his leadership attributes could really become prevalent to the team," Drinkwitz said.

Open competitions remain for everyone else

Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi State, Tennessee and Vanderbilt are varying degrees of unsettled under center.

At Alabama, Keelon Russell appears to have the edge over Austin Mack. At Arkansas, KJ Jackson got some experience late last season, but AJ Hill followed new coach Ryan Silverfield from Memphis and knows the offense. A similar scenario exists for Sumrall at Florida, with Georgia Tech transfer Aaron Philo following offensive coordinator Buster Faulkner to Gainesville. Philo seems to be ahead of returner Tramell Jones Jr., who flashed in the

team's spring game.

Other competitions: Kamario Taylor and Blake Shapen at Mississippi State; George MacIntyre and highly touted Faizon Brandon at Tennessee; and five-star signee Jared Curtis and veteran Blaze Berlowitz at Vanderbilt.

"I'm not going to make a quarterback decision, and my goal is for each of these guys to be positioned to compete at the highest level in the fall," Vandy coach Clark Lea said. "They've all had flashes of performance, and they all bring to the table things that can help us win. But we need to take the time to make sure we've seen this super clearly so that we best position our team to have success."

Prioritize Your Family's Safety this Summer

Jackson, Miss.- With fun in the sun on everyone's bucket list this summer, the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) is urging you to put safeguards in place that ensure your health and safety remain a priority.

Protect yourself and your loved ones by following these Summer Safety tips that cover everything from mosquitoes to drowning prevention to hydration, and everything in between.

●Protect yourself from heat stroke by drinking plenty of fluids, especially water, and avoiding alcoholic and caffeinated drinks. Body temperature can rise to 106 degrees within 10 minutes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1,220 people in the United States

die from extreme heat annually.

●Avoid mosquito-borne illnesses by using a repellent such as DEET, covering your arms and legs when outside, staying away from mosquito-prone areas in the mornings and evenings, and removing sources of standing water around your home.

●Wear sunscreen rated SPF-15 or higher with UVA and UVB protection. Serious sunburns can double the risk of developing malignant melanoma. Unprotected skin can be harmed by UV rays in as little as 15 minutes. When in the sun, cover up with loose-fitting clothing and a wide-brim hat, and seek shade during midday hours.

●Stay safe around water by following these tips: Never swim alone, con-

stantly watch children, learn CPR, avoid drinking alcohol, install a fence around pools and remove toys. You should also know your local weather conditions and forecasts.

●Keep foods chilled when outside to reduce foodborne illnesses. Don't let foods sit out for more than two hours (one hour if temp is higher than 90 degrees).

●Never leave babies or toddlers in hot cars.

●Check on older, vulnerable adults.

For more Summer Safety tips, click <https://msdh.ms.gov/summer>

Stay up to date on news on the MSDH Healthy Mobile App, on our website www.msdh.ms.gov, and on social media: facebook.com/healthymys, twitter.com/msdh and [Instagram.com/healthymys](https://instagram.com/healthymys)

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

FreeDailyCrosswords.com

ACROSS

- 1) Goodly sums
- 6) Splittable bit
- 10) Talk trash about
- 14) "Time is money," e.g.
- 15) Cryptologist's interest
- 16) Golden Rule word
- 17) Herb used in perfumes
- 19) Amphitheater section
- 20) "Chocolate" dog, for short
- 21) Announced
- 22) Drunk as a skunk
- 24) Like pizza for breakfast, typically
- 25) Hoppy brew
- 26) Hitchhiker on a shark
- 29) More astute
- 30) EGBDF part
- 31) Burgundy or claret
- 32) Go head over heels
- 36) Pal of Sawyer
- 37) Plateaued, with "out"
- 38) ___ deck (part of a cruise ship)
- 39) Assault from Moe
- 40) American composer Charles
- 41) Attach, as a corsage
- 42) More forgiving
- 44) Classic Volkswagen
- 45) Used an aerosol can
- 48) Gives no stars to
- 49) Did away with
- 50) Jerome who composed "Ol' Man River"
- 51) Tiny ammo
- 54) Crow's home
- 55) Bike accessory
- 58) Fuss over, with "on"
- 59) One who's off-base
- 60) Trump ex Maples
- 61) Go toe-to-toe
- 62) Catches on to
- 63) Landscaper's gadget

DOWN

- 1) Grow wearisome
- 2) Mental spark
- 3) Dish with mint jelly
- 4) Psyche part
- 5) ESP part
- 6) Nasty-smelling
- 7) Wart-giver of folklore
- 8) Takes too much, briefly
- 9) Contacted on Facebook, say
- 10) Nervous feeling
- 11) "America" singer in "West Side Story"
- 12) Bethlehem product, once
- 13) Nomadic tribe
- 18) Big bash
- 23) World Cup cheer
- 24) Dr. Scholl's product
- 25) Glaziers' units
- 26) Sports "zebras"
- 27) What Mr. Hyde personified
- 28) Suvani of "American Beauty"
- 29) Philly hoopster
- 31) Signaled "hi" or "bye"
- 33) Dryer buildup
- 34) Fan favorite
- 35) Dixie bread
- 37) A little of this, a little of that
- 41) Mark Twain or Dr. Seuss
- 43) Sailor's assent
- 44) Country dance locale
- 45) Fires off
- 46) Hospital prep area
- 47) Dreadlocks sporter, for short
- 48) Bursts of laughter
- 50) Two-by-four flaw
- 51) North Sea hazard
- 52) Seat at a hoedown
- 53) Milky Way part
- 56) Blow away
- 57) Bummed out

YELLOW FARE

By Fred Piscop

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