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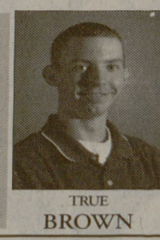
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Let the guessing begin

When you take a look at the preseason college football polls, remember one thing: Predicting the future never has been an easy job.



TRUE BROWN

Most of us do not know what our plans are for Thursday night, let alone 16 weeks from now. So, with football season quickly approaching, take a look at both the Associated Press and the USA Today-ESPN Coaches' rankings to see what the experts have to say.

Both polls agree on the top four teams. The University of Florida is the consensus No. 1, followed by Miami, defending national champion University of Oklahoma and Nebraska. But the story is not that simple.

In the AP poll, second-ranked Miami received 60-plus percent more first-place votes than Florida. And in both polls, each team in the top four received at least four first-place votes. Clearly, there is not a solid favorite.

In both rankings, the Big

12 features four teams in the top 25 and promises to be one of the tougher conferences in the nation. OU, Nebraska and the University of Texas all received first-place votes and look to be contenders for a national title. Kansas State also will be a force, coming in as high as No. 11.

UT may have the best shot at a national title, as they will avoid both Nebraska and Kansas State in the regular season. Whichever team is left standing after the Big 12 Championship game will have to be considered for a spot in the Rose Bowl.

After a lackluster 7-5 record last season, Texas A&M failed to make the top 25 in either poll. The Aggies are ranked No. 34 by the AP and No. 32 by USA Today-ESPN.

Last season, A&M spent a majority of the season out of the top 25 before peaking at No. 21 in the AP poll in November.

The University of Alabama is ranked again. After entering last season at No. 3 in both polls and touted as a national title contender, the Crimson Tide finished the year with a 3-8 record and a label as

one of the biggest disappointments of 2000.

The biggest jump up the charts belongs to Florida. The Gators, a preseason No. 1 this year, finished last season No. 11 in the USA Today-ESPN rankings after losing two of their final three games.

The biggest drop-off belongs to the Washington Huskies, who finished last season at No. 3 with an 11-1 record and enter this season ranked No. 15 by the AP.

For what it is worth, last year's preseason polls showed very little similarity to the final rankings. Ten of the top-25 teams in the AP poll finished the season unranked, and none of the top 25 started and finished the season in the same position.

The coaches' poll did not fare any better, with just one team staying in the same position and nine teams finishing the season unranked after being a preseason top 25.

What will happen with the rankings this year? The answer: No one knows, but you can bet it will be unpredictable.

True Brown is a sophomore agricultural journalism major.

AP PRESEASON POLL

1. Florida (20)
2. Miami (33)
3. Oklahoma (10)
4. Nebraska (4)
5. Texas (5)
6. Florida St
7. Oregon
8. Tennessee
9. Virginia State
10. Georgia Tech
11. Oregon St
12. Michigan
13. Kansas St
14. LSU
15. Washington
16. Northwestern
17. UCLA
18. Notre Dame
19. Clemson
20. Mississippi St
21. South Carolina
22. Wisconsin
23. Ohio St
24. Colorado St
25. Alabama

Comets knocked out of WNBA playoffs

HOUSTON (AP) — The Houston Comets were forced to admit that it was the end of a beautiful run. Still, as they left the WNBA playoffs for the first time without a championship, their pride was still shining.

"It has been a wonderful four years. We've won four championships, but I've never been prouder of a team," Comets coach Van Chancellor said.

"I thought we played extremely hard all year. You could throw one (performance) in the Atlantic Ocean at times, but we played as hard as I've ever seen."

And so, there will be a new WNBA champion for the first time in league history as the Los Angeles Sparks—eliminated by the Comets the past two years—sent Houston home a loser this time, 70-58 Monday night.

The Sparks took the first round of the WNBA playoff series 2-0 and will advance to the Western Conference finals while the Comets experience an early off-season.

"They (Sparks) were better this season," Comets forward Tammy Jackson said. "When they get to four championships, they can start talking."

The Comets played the season without Sheryl Swoopes and Cynthia Cooper, two of the key players in the Comets' four-year domination of the league. Cooper retired to coach at Phoenix and Swoopes had a season-ending knee injury before the first game.

"We lost two Olympians, the whole season has been an adjustment," guard Coquese Washington said. "The Sparks are a great team. They're more formidable in the post with (Latasha) Byars."

The Comets could not overcome the Sparks in either of the playoff games. They fought to a 59-59 tie in the closing minutes of Game 1, but Lisa Leslie hit two of her 19 points in the final six seconds clinching it for the Sparks.

In Game 2, with leading scorers Tina Thompson and Janeth Arcain slowed by injuries, the Comets managed a 54-52 lead with 5:58 to play. But Tamecka Dixon tied it and Leslie had another big game with 28 points and 18 rebounds.

It's been a wonderful four years. We've won four championships, but I've never been prouder of a team.

— Van Chancellor
Comets head coach

"Our injuries were unfortunate, but you can't say it would've been different with all our players," rookie Amanda Lassiter said. "We played hard and that's all you can do."

"The Sparks became a deeper and more confident team this season. They should be the favorite to win the championship," Arcain wished for a bit more rest in the second half of Monday's elimination game.

"My knee hurt when we started the second half," Arcain said. "When Lisa (Thompson) on the floor, coach (Janeth), you can go. I couldn't. But I will because I stood to fight."

In the first half, I did the best I could to help the team but they (Sparks) played so well."

The Comets started the season by losing their opening game to the Sparks and then reeled off 12 victories in their next 13 games, including nine in a row, for a 12-2 record.

Then, the demise started. The Comets finished out the season 7-11 and limped into the playoffs as the fourth seed team. They ranked 12th among 16 teams in scoring, field goal percentage and three-point percentage.

"We had so much adversity," Arcain said. "A lot of things happened to the Comets this season. We couldn't pass that. We lost so much."

Chancellor is convinced the Sparks are the favorites to replace the Comets.

"I'd be stupid if I said anything else, got to play them again next year," Chancellor said.

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