

SBC Football Season Set to Begin

Written by John McElwain
Monday, 26 August 2013 19:54

A tie atop the preseason coaches poll between two instate rivals? The two-time defending conference champions? A team that has been there before and others looking to get their for the first time? The league newcomers?

So, who will win the Sun Belt Conference football championship?

The 2013 football season starts this week and while there aren't any conference games on the schedule, there is plenty of non-conference football to whet the appetite of college football fans around the Sun Belt. South Alabama played its inaugural season in the Sun Belt a year ago and now the Jaguars are in their first year as full-fledged FBS member that can compete for the chance to go to a bowl game. The Jags open the season at home against Southern Utah Thursday night on ESPN3.

League newcomers Georgia State will also host an ESPN3 affair with Samford coming to the Georgia Dome. Saturday offers a full schedule of football as six games will be contested – five of which will be available for viewing on either an ESPN or Fox affiliated exposure.

Last season the Sun Belt pulled off a number of early season upsets and the first week of football provides several opportunities for that to happen again. WKU will once again play Kentucky – a team which it beat last year in Lexington. Louisiana-Lafayette will play an Arkansas team that fell to Louisiana-Monroe last season. And speaking of the Warhawks, they will bring their upset-minded game plan to Oklahoma.

Elsewhere around the league, two-time defending champion Arkansas State Red Wolves open the season at home against Arkansas Pine-Bluff. Five-time SBC champion Troy will host in-state rival UAB, while Texas State heads to Hattiesburg to face Southern Miss. The Bobcats are making their debut in the Sun Belt season.

Upcoming Schedule

August 29

Southern Utah at South Alabama - 6:30 p.m. (ESPN3)

August 30

Samford at Georgia State - 6 p.m. (ESPN3)

August 31

Louisiana-Lafayette at Arkansas - 3 p.m. (Fox Sports Network)

Louisiana-Monroe at Oklahoma - 6 p.m. (Fox Sports Network PPV)

UAB at Troy - 6 p.m. (ESPN3)

^ Kentucky vs. Western Kentucky (ESPNews) - 6 p.m.

Arkansas Pine-Bluff at Arkansas State - 6 p.m. (ESPN3)

Texas State at Southern Miss - 6 p.m.

All times Central (CT) and subject to change

^ Game to be played at LP Field in Nashville, Tenn.

Around the Sun Belt Conference

Sun Belt Success in 2012

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There is no question that the Sun Belt Conference is a league on the rise in football. After all, the conference finished with its most non-conference wins in league history in 2012 and also sent a record four teams to bowl games. The conference also finished the 2012 season with its best ever average computer ranking – finishing ahead of Conference USA and the Mountain West. The league also had two wins over top-25 ranked opponents and Louisiana-Lafayette and Arkansas State won their respective bowl games. All four Sun Belt Conference institutions that went to bowl games in 2012 return for the 2013 season.

Sun Belt Conference Bowl Games

The Sun Belt Conference maintains tie-ins with the GoDaddy Bowl and the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl and come 2014, the Sun Belt will also send a team to the newly formed Camellia Bowl. A team from the Sun Belt Conference has played in the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl since its inception in 2001. The SBC has won four consecutive R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl games and six out of the last seven. The GoDaddy bowl, meanwhile, has a four-year agreement in place with the Sun Belt Conference and Mid-American Conference to provide teams for the game. The Camellia Bowl will match-up the Sun Belt Conference against the Mid-American Conference (MAC) beginning in December 2014. The game will be played yearly at the Cramton Bowl in Montgomery, Ala., before the Christmas holiday and be televised nationally on ESPN or ESPN2.

Sun Belt Sends Four to Bowl Games

For the first time in the Sun Belt Conference's 12 years of football the league sent four teams to postseason bowl games. Louisiana-Lafayette played in the R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl , WKU headed to the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl, Louisiana-Monroe traveled west to the AdvoCare V100 Independence Bowl and league champion Arkansas State returned to the GoDaddy.com Bowl.

ASU Claims Second Consecutive Outright Sun Belt Title With 45-0 Win over Middle Tennessee

The Arkansas State football team claimed its second straight Sun Belt Conference championship with a 45-0 victory over Middle Tennessee in front of a Liberty Bank Stadium record crowd of 31,243. The Red Wolves capped off a 9-3 regular season with a victory over a Middle Tennessee team that was receiving votes in the USA Today Coaches Top 25 Poll. A-State completed its Sun Belt title run with seven straight victories to finish 7-1 in the league. Arkansas State, which has never finished ranked among the top 25 teams in the nation as an FBS member, is receiving votes in both major polls and is listed No. 34 and No. 37 in latest CBSSports.com 124 and BCS rankings, respectively.

Harsin Named Arkansas State Head Coach

Arkansas State Director of Athletics Terry Mohajir announced at a press conference that Bryan Harsin, a 13-year coaching veteran at the NCAA FBS level who has coached in 10 bowl games as either an assistant or offensive coordinator, has been named the Red Wolves' 29th

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all-time head football coach. Harsin, a finalist for the 2009 Broyles Award recognizing the top assistant coach in the country, has been associated with two nationally-prominent programs during his rise to A-State's head coach. Working closely with Chris Petersen at Boise State and Mack Brown at Texas, two of the most well-respected coaches in the country, Harsin spent the last seven seasons as an offensive coordinator with the Broncos and Longhorns. Harsin served the last two seasons as Texas' co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach after spending the previous 10 on the Boise State staff, including the last five as offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach as well. During his tenure at both schools, he guided offenses that consistently ranked among the nation's best in almost every statistical category.

Bobby Petrino Named 18th Head Coach in WKU Football History

Western Kentucky University has named Bobby Petrino its 18th head football coach in school history, WKU Director of Athletics Todd Stewart announced. Petrino brings a wealth of coaching experience and success to WKU, owning a 75-26 career record as a collegiate head coach, with seven bowl game appearances, including appearances in the 2011 BCS Sugar Bowl with the University of Arkansas and the 2007 BCS Orange Bowl with the University of Louisville. In his eight seasons as a collegiate head coach with Louisville and Arkansas, Petrino led his teams to a bowl game in seven of the eight years, including four 10-win seasons, leading both the Cardinals and the Razorbacks to their first BCS bowl games in school history. Petrino guided Arkansas and Louisville to top-10 finishes nationally three different times, including finishing the 2006 and the 2011 seasons ranked fifth in the Associated Press poll.

WKU, ULM Top SEC Foes

ULM defeated then #8 ranked Arkansas on September 8 and WKU followed up with a win over Kentucky on September 15. The two wins against SEC programs were the first for both institutions, it also marked the first time that Sun Belt Conference has had wins against the SEC in back-to-back weeks. ULM's win over Arkansas also marked the first time that a Sun Belt Conference team has defeated a top-ten ranked opponent.

Bowl Game Winning Percentage

Over the last five years the Sun Belt Conference ranks sixth out of the 11 FBS conferences in postseason bowl game winning percentage. In fact, the Sun Belt Conference ranks ahead of noted "BCS AQ" leagues – the ACC, Pac-12 and the Big Ten

Cajuns Top Pirates in R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl

Jemarlous Moten made two key defensive plays in the fourth quarter and Brett Baer landed a pair of field goals in the waning minutes to help the Louisiana Ragin' Cajuns repeat as R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl champions with a 43-34 victory over East Carolina before the bowl's record crowd of 48,828 at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. Terrance Broadway, who completed 21-of-32 passes for 316 yards and a touchdown and had 15 rushes for 108 yards, was named New Orleans Bowl MVP.

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Red Wolves Best #25 Kent State for GoDaddy.com Bowl Championship

Arkansas State's offense was held in check after piling up big numbers this season. It was the defense that led the Red Wolves to a breakthrough victory. Ryan Aplin threw for 213 yards and a touchdown, J.D. McKissic caught 11 passes for 113 yards and Arkansas State edged No. 25 Kent State 17-13 to win the GoDaddy.com Bowl. Arkansas State's usually prolific offense struggled against Kent State, but the consistent Aplin-to-McKissic connection and a stingy defense was enough to help the Red Wolves (10-3) to their first bowl win since joining the Football Bowl Subdivision in 1992.

Andrews Joins Sanders in Elite

WKU junior running back Antonio Andrews finished the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl with 119 rushing yards — his 10th 100-yard game of the season. That tied a WKU single season record set by Bobby Rainey in 2011. Andrews also set a new WKU single-season rushing record with 1,728 yards. That broke the previous mark of 1,695 set by Rainey in 2011. Andrews finished with 184 all-purpose yards, giving him 3,161 for the season. He joins Oklahoma State's Barry Sanders as the only two players in FBS history to eclipse 3,000 all-purpose yards in a season. Sanders set an NCAA record with 3,250 during the 1988 season.

Sun Belt Membership

The Sun Belt Conference will contest the 2013 football season with eight members – Arkansas State, Georgia State, Louisiana-Lafayette, Louisiana-Monroe, South Alabama, Texas State, Troy and Western Kentucky University. UALR and UT Arlington compete as non-football members. Come the 2014 season, the Sun Belt will have four new members in the league as Appalachian State and Georgia Southern were added as all-sports members and Idaho and New Mexico State have been added as football playing members. Both Appalachian State and Georgia Southern bring with them highly successfully football programs and each team will begin the process of transitioning to the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) immediately. The 2014 Sun Belt football season will mark the debut of both in the league schedule and standings. Additionally, both the Mountaineers and Eagles will be able to compete for the league championship in football for the 2014 season. Both teams will first be eligible to compete in a spot for a postseason bowl game come the 2015 season. Idaho and New Mexico State are familiar partners of the Sun Belt Conference, having been football members from the league's inaugural year of football in 2001 through the 2004 season. Both members played an integral part of forming the Sun Belt Conference for football and now add strength to the league. Both teams will be immediately eligible to compete for the Sun Belt football championship and also for a spot in postseason bowl games.

Team News and Notes

Arkansas State Red Wolves

Arkansas State, the back-to-back Sun Belt Conference champions, reported for fall camp Aug. 1 and is now set to open its 2013 campaign against in-state rival UAPB this Saturday at Liberty Bank Stadium in an ESPN3-televised game . . . Bryan Harsin has taken over the reins to the A-State football program after being named the Red Wolves' 29th head coach on Dec. 12,

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2012. He is a 13-year coaching veteran at the NCAA FBS level who has coached in 10 bowl games as either an assistant or offensive coordinator . . . Harsin was ranked as the sixth best hire in the nation among 26 new coaches at the time, according to CBSsports.com . . . Arkansas State placed a league-high seven players on the 2013 Preseason All-Sun Belt Conference Team . . . The Red Wolves were picked third in the preseason coaches poll announced as part of the league's annual Media Day . . . Arkansas State will kick off its 99th season of football on holding a 426-457-37 record since the inaugural 1911 season and has played in nine bowl games. A-State did not field a football team from 1942-44 due to World War II. ASU also didn't have a team in 1918 as World War I was ending . . . Arkansas State ended the 2012 season receiving votes in the final major polls, including 28 in the Associated Press Top 25 Poll and 13 in the USA Today Coaches Top 25 Poll. Both totals placed the Red Wolves 32nd in the nation. A-State also received one point in the initial 2013 USA Today Coaches Poll . . . Arkansas State claimed its second consecutive outright Sun Belt Conference championship in 2012. ASU has won nine conference championships all-time . . . Arkansas State secured back-to-back winning seasons in 2011 and 2012 for the first time since 1986-87. ASU won 10 games in both 2011 and 2012, and its 19 combined regular-season victories were its most ever over a two-year span -- topping its 18 in 1974 and 1975 . . . With a 5-1 home mark last season, Arkansas State secured its eighth consecutive winning record at Liberty Bank Stadium dating back to 2005. ASU is now 36-8 at Liberty Bank Stadium since the 2005 season and has won 11 of its last 12 home games. The Red Wolves actual on-field record all-time at Liberty Bank Stadium is 128-71-1 since it opened in 1974.

Georgia State Panthers

Head coach Trent Miles makes his debut on the Georgia State sidelines as the Panthers open the 2013 season by hosting Samford at the Georgia Dome. Miles takes the reins of the GSU program after a remarkable rebuilding job in five seasons as the head man at his alma mater, Indiana State.

Top returnees for the 2013 Panthers include wide receivers Albert Wilson and Danny Williams and left tackle Ulrick John on offense and defensive linemen Theo Agnew and Terrance Woodard and linebacker Joseph Peterson on defense. Wilson is the Panthers' most versatile weapon as a receiver and return specialist with nearly 4,000 all-purpose yards in his career. The GSU special teams feature standout punter Matt Hubbard, an allconference selection in 2012 who has averaged nearly 43 yards per kick in his first two seasons.

Miles is not expected to name a starting quarterback before game time as sophomore returnees Ronnie Bell and Ben McLane and junior college transfer Clay Chastain competed for the job throughout the preseason. McLane started nine games a year ago and passed for 1,592 yards and 10 touchdowns, while Bell contributed 522 yards passing and three touchdowns in two starts, but they combined to throw 21 interceptions.

Georgia State's game against Samford is its first contest as an FBS program as the Panthers make the jump this season to the Sun Belt Conference. The move to FBS is a two-year transition which began in 2012, when the Panthers played an FCS and CAA schedule. Georgia State, which began playing football in 2010, will be fully eligible for the Sun Belt title and postseason bowl games in 2014.

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Louisiana-Lafayette Ragin' Cajuns

After almost a month of preseason drills, the Louisiana Ragin' Cajuns football team will open the 2013 season by travelling to Fayetteville, Ark. to take on Arkansas on Saturday, Aug. 31 beginning at 3:00 p.m. CDT in Donald W. Reynolds Razorback Stadium on the Arkansas campus. . . the contest marks the beginning of the 112th season of intercollegiate football at Louisiana-Lafayette with the Cajuns going for their 500th win in program history (499-521-34 all-time record). . . this will be the fifth game against Arkansas with the Razorbacks claiming the first four contests, each of which was played in Fayetteville. . . the Cajuns return 14 starters from the 2012 team that tied the school record for the second straight year with nine wins and won the New Orleans Bowl title. . . seven starters are back from the offense that set school records for points (461), first downs (268) and total offense (5,914). . . the Cajuns carry a modest four-game win streak into the contest.

The Cajuns will open their 112th season in intercollegiate football against Arkansas on Saturday. The Cajuns own a 53-54-4 record in season openers. The Cajuns will be attempting to reverse a bad stretch as they have gone just 4-18 in openers since 1991. The Cajuns have faced Arkansas just once in an opener, dropping a 38-17 decision in 1998.

Three Cajuns were named to the 2013 Preseason All-Sun Belt Conference team, which was determined by a vote of head coaches and select media throughout the conference. Senior center Andre Huval was the only member of the offense to receive the honor while linebacker Justin Anderson and defensive lineman Christian Ringo represented the defense.

Building on consecutive 9-4 records and New Orleans Bowl titles, the Ragin' Cajuns have been selected as the co-favorites to win the SBC this season in a preseason poll of the league's head coaches. The Cajuns received four first place votes and 57 points total to share the favorite role with Louisiana-Monroe, who received two first place votes.

Louisiana-Monroe Warhawks

When ULM lines up against Oklahoma Saturday night, it will mark the sixth straight season that the Warhawks have opened the season against a ranked foe... The streak began in 2008 when ULM faced No. 10 Auburn... Since then, ULM has opened seasons with: No. 2 Texas (2009), No. 14 Arkansas (2010), No. 5 Florida State (2011), and No. 8 Arkansas (2012).

Saturday's game marks just the ninth time since joining the NCAA ranks in 1975 that ULM has played a game in the month of August... The Warhawks are 4-4 in the month of August. After lining up against the Sooners, the Warhawks will have faced eight of the current 10 members of the Big 12 Conference... The only schools ULM has not faced are Texas Tech and West Virginia.

The contest against the Sooners is the first trip to the state of Oklahoma for the Warhawks since the 1999 season when they defeated Tulsa, 37-34, in the season finale (Nov. 13)... All-time it is just the fourth trip to the state for ULM (at Tulsa, 1977; at Oklahoma State, 1997).

A total of seven Warhawks earned preseason recognition from either the Sun Belt Conference or a preseason watch list (Josh Allen, OL; Kolton Browning, QB; Kentarius Caldwell, NT; Je'Ron Hamm, WR; Justin Manton, K / P; Tavares Maye, WR; Isaiah Newsome, S).

Four different Warhawks enter their final season in a ULM uniform with 30 or more career starts (Kolton Browning, 36; Isaiah Newsome, 31; Josh Allen, 30; Tavares Maye, 30).

Kolton Browning enters his senior season at the top of the charts with 60 career touchdown passes... He is tied with Steven Jyles (2002-05) with 76 total career touchdowns... Browning

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meanwhile ranks in the top 10 in seven other categories including the number two spot in passing yards, passing attempts, pass completions, total yards of offense and plays.

South Alabama Jaguars

The Jaguars open their fifth season of competition — and first eligible for a Sun Belt Conference championship — Thursday against Southern Utah at Ladd-Peebles Stadium ... It marks the fifth consecutive year that the Jaguars will begin the campaign at home; USA is 3-1 in openers after falling in the final seconds to Texas-San Antonio, 33-31, last fall ... The Jags will start on a Thursday night for the second time in three seasons — they defeated West Alabama, 20-0, to begin the 2011 campaign — although last year's opener was moved from Thursday to Saturday due to Tropical Storm Isaac ... USA is 1-1 all-time against current members of the Big Sky Conference — the Jaguars defeated UC Davis on the road, 24-17, on Oct. 23, 2010, for their first-ever victory over an NCAA Division I school but ended the '11 season with a loss to Cal Poly ... DE Alex Page enters 2013 coming off a year in which he set career highs with 64 tackles, 11½ stops behind the line of scrimmage and six sacks, earning second-team all-Sun Belt honors for the performance. With Melvin Meggs sidelined to begin the season, Page's 27 career starts are the most of any Jaguar expected to be active in the opener against SUU ... Page and TE Wes Saxton were the only two Jags to be named preseason first-team all-league by three preseason publications — Phil Steele, Lindy's and Athlon — with the two also named first-team all-conference at the league annual media day in July. Saxton ended last fall with catches in five straight games, including collecting at least three receptions in four of those outings ... Senior Ross Metheny won the battle in preseason camp to enter the year as the Jaguars' starting quarterback, holding off both Brandon Bridge and Trey Fetner. After transferring from Virginia just before fall practice started a year ago, Metheny didn't become the starter until USA opened Sun Belt play against Troy the fifth week of the season; he would go on to set school season records with 189 completions, 2,148 yards and 12 touchdowns ... Senior ILB Enrique Williams was one of two Jags to record at least 100 tackles in 2012, posting a career-best 105 to rank among the top 10 in the conference in the category. With 239 stops in his first four years, Williams needs just seven more to overtake Jake Johnson to become the program's all-time leading tackler ... The Jags enter this fall with the top two running backs on the depth chart newcomers to the program. Jay Jones — who enrolled in school in January and took part in spring drills — was a National Junior College Athletic Association Freshman All-American in 2010 after gaining 920 yards at Northwest Mississippi C.C., while Cris Dinham ranked fifth in the NJCAA with 126.5 yards per contest a year ago at Independence (Kan.) C.C.

Texas State Bobcats

Texas State will open its season against a Conference USA opponent for the third time in the last four years when the Bobcats travel to Southern Miss. The Bobcats also opened the 2010 and 2012 seasons at Houston. Last season, Texas State upset Houston 30-13 in its first game as a member of the FBS member.

Texas State will be looking to win its second straight season-opening game against a Conference USA opponent when the Bobcats travel to Southern Miss on Saturday. The Bobcats are 3-1 in season-openers under head coach Dennis Franchione following last year's 30-13 victory at Houston.

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Texas State is in its 107th season and enters the Southern Miss game with an all-time record of 495-416-26. The Bobcats began playing football in 1904 when they posted a 5-1 record. Texas State did not play football in 1942, 1945 and 1946.

Texas State will be playing in its third conference with one season as an independent in the last four years in 2013. The Bobcats joined the Sun Belt Conference in 2013 after playing in the WAC in 2012, playing as an FCS Independent in 2011 and in the Southland Conference in 2010.

Texas State is playing in its sixth athletics conference overall in 2013. The Bobcats have won 13 football conference championships during their history and were members of the Texas Intercollegiate Athletic Association in the 1920's, the Lone Star Conference from 1931-83, the Gulf Star Conference in 1984-86 and the Southland Conference in 1987-2010.

Texas State head football coach Dennis Franchione enters the 2013 season needing just three victories to reach the 200-win plateau in his career. Franchione has a 197-115-2 career record entering Saturday's game at Southern Miss. He ranks fifth among active NCAA Division I FBS coaches with 197 career victories.

Troy Trojans

Five games last season Troy surpassed the 500-yard mark of total offense. Troy torched Tennessee to the tune of 721 yards and racked up 597 yards against Navy ... Eighteen 300-yard passing games by Corey Robinson in his career; every other quarterback in the Sun Belt has a combined 10 ... Eight rushing touchdowns by Deon Anthony despite just 82 carries; TD every 10.3 carries was fifth best ratio among quarterbacks in the NCAA last season (min. eight TDs) ... Twelve straight field goals made by Will Scott to close out the 2012 season which tied the Troy record ... Fourteen former Trojans on NFL rosters which is tied for the most in the Sun Belt, including four who played in a Super Bowl ... Seventeen career touchdown receptions by Eric Thomas, which leads all active players in the Sun Belt and is seven shy of tying T.Y. Hilton for the Sun Belt record ... 35.8 percent opponents percentage converting third downs last season. Troy led all Sun Belt teams in third-down defense ... 169 career victories by Troy head coach Larry Blakeney, which is the fourth most all-time in the state of Alabama ... 10,258 career passing yards by Corey Robinson, which leads all active players in the NCAA and is just 476 yards shy of the Sun Belt career mark held by Ryan Aplin ... Troy head coach Larry Blakeney has 169 career victories in his 22 seasons at Troy; the other seven head coaches in the Sun Belt have COMBINED for 83 victories at their current school ... The Trojans are 94-18-1 at home under head coach Larry Blakeney ... Troy has played in more bowl games than any other Sun Belt Conference school. Troy's five bowl trips are two more than the next closest school ... In two games against SEC teams last season, Troy averaged 646.5 yards of total offense (721 at Tennessee and 572 vs. Mississippi State) ... Corey Robinson is just the third four-year starter at quarterback in Troy history; Mike Turk (1984-87) & Brock Nutter (1998-01) ... Troy is 69-5 under Larry Blakeney when scoring at least 35 points ... Troy is 21-1 in home openers under Larry Blakeney and have not lost a non-conference home opener. The Trojans have won 25 of their last 26 home openers and are 66-25-2 all-time in such games ... Troy has the highest all-time winning percentage in Sun Belt games in league history; 45-22, .671. New Mexico State (who rejoins the league in 2014) is second with a .577 winning percentage ... Troy holds the top two spots in the Sun Belt record book for total offense per game. The Trojans averaged 498.8 yards per game in 2012 and 485.7 yards per game in 2009 ... Quarterback Corey Robinson

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already holds Troy career records for passing attempts, completions, passing yards and total offense; he holds the single-season record for passing attempts and single-game records for passing yards and completions ... Larry Blakeney is one of just two active coaches in the NCAA to coach on the field that is currently named for him; Kansas State's Bill Snyder is the other

WKU Hilltoppers

WKU enters its 94th season of football and celebrates its 100-year anniversary of the birth of the program at the University, under first-year head coach Bobby Petrino, who became the school's 18th head coach on Dec. 10, 2012.

The Hilltoppers are 55-33-5 all-time in season openers, and winning the first game has proven to be a good omen for the rest of the season. In 46 of the 55 years WKU has opened with a win, the team has gone on to finish .500 or better.

In season openers, Petrino is 8-0, including a 4-0 mark against Kentucky while at Louisville. Petrino's Cardinals also never trailed against the Wildcats. In all, Petrino is 4-1 all-time against UK.

With the UK game and another SEC opponent the following week in Tennessee, the Hilltoppers will face two teams from the SEC for the third time in program history and fourth time overall. It also marks the ninth consecutive season the Hilltoppers have played a team from the SEC, dating back to the 2005 season when WKU faced Auburn. Since 2005, WKU has faced Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, LSU and Alabama.

All totaled, Petrino and his staff have accumulated over 186 years of collegiate coaching experience to go along with 13 BCS bowl game appearances and 63 career bowl games appearances.

Saturday marks the end of a four-game series agreement between WKU and UK, which began in 2010. After winning the first two games of the series, in Lexington (2010) and in Nashville (2011), the Wildcats fell to the Hilltoppers 32-31 in overtime last year in Lexington.

Last year, Antonio Andrews threw a pass back to quarterback Kawaun Jakes in the first overtime period on a two-point conversion play to give the Tops a 32-31 (OT) victory, their first victory over an SEC opponent and over a BCS automatic qualifier-conference team.

Appalachian State Mountaineers (Coming in 2014)

A new era begins for Appalachian State football on Saturday when the 12th-ranked Mountaineers over the 2013 season at No. 20 Montana.

Most notably, Saturday's season-opener marks the debut for Appalachian State head coach Scott Satterfield. Satterfield was named Appalachian's 20th head coach Dec. 14, 2012.

Satterfield replaces legendary head coach Jerry Moore, whose 24-year run at the helm of the Mountaineers came to an end following the 2012 campaign.

Saturday's game also marks the beginning of the end of an era for Appalachian State football, as the Mountaineers open their final season in NCAA Division I FCS. On March 27, 2013, Appalachian officially accepted an invitation to join the NCAA Division I FBS Sun Belt Conference on July 1, 2014.

Saturday's game also wraps up perhaps the most anticipated regular-season series in FCS history, when Appalachian and Montana play the final game of a home-and-home series. The series began last Sept. 8 in Boone, N.C., when Appalachian scored its first-ever win over

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Montana with a 35-27 triumph in front of 30,856 at jam-packed Kidd Brewer Stadium. Despite last year's victory over the Griz, the Mountaineers still trail in the all-time series versus Montana, 2-1. Montana has won both previous meetings played in Missoula, Mont.

Both of the previous App State-Montana matchups played at Washington-Grizzly Stadium came in the semifinals of the NCAA Division I-AA/FCS playoffs. The Griz topped the Apps in overtime, 19-16, in the 2000 national semifinals and eeked out a heart-stopping 24-17 victory in the 2009 semis. Appalachian State and Montana have combined to win five NCAA Division I-AA/FCS national championships, make 10 I-AA/FCS championship-game appearances and earn 40 I-AA/FCS postseason berths.

Appalachian State is opening the season versus an FCS opponent for only the fifth time in the last 20 seasons. Appalachian has not lost an opener to an FCS opponent since a 22-10 loss at North Carolina A&T in 1993.

Georgia Southern Eagles (Coming in 2014)

Georgia Southern opens its 2013 season with local opponent Savannah State in the 400th game in program history. The Eagles and Tigers meet for the 10th time with the first meeting in 1983, the only game not played at Paulson Stadium.

The Eagles have a 9-0 advantage in the series with the last meeting in 2010. That game, Coach Jeff Monken's head coaching debut, resulted in a 48-3 victory for Georgia Southern. Tiger Coach Earnest Wilson III was hired in June and will make his collegiate head coaching debut against the ninth-ranked Eagles.

The Eagles return seven starters on offense and seven on defense and are led offensively by a pair of hard-running backs in senior quarterback Jerick McKinnon and junior running back Dominique Swope. McKinnon recorded the third-best single-season rushing total in program history with 1,817 yards in 2012 while Swope posted the first back-to-back 1,000-yard seasons for the Eagles since 2002-03.

On defense, senior linebacker Kyle Oehlbeck is the top returning tackler while senior defensive end Javon Mention tying for the team lead in sacks and finishing second with tackles for loss in 2012.

Georgia Southern has won 16 of its last 17 games at Paulson Stadium with Monken 3-0 in home and season openers in his career. The Eagles are 21-10 all-time in season openers and 15-2 in home openers. For the 2013 opener, Georgia Southern Athletics will recognize its conference champions with a "Night of Champions," pairing teams that won titles during the 2012-13 season with previous title teams.

Idaho Vandals (Coming in 2014)

Paul Petrino's head coaching career begin in earnest Saturday when he leads the Vandals against North Texas. While it is his first head coaching job, it is not Petrino's first stint at Idaho. His coaching career began at Carroll College (his alma mater, 1989). From Carroll, he went to Idaho where he coached running back, receivers and special teams from 1992-94. From Idaho it was on to Utah State (1995-97), Louisville (1998-99), Southern Mississippi (2000-02), Louisville (2003-06), Atlanta Falcons (2007), Arkansas (2008-09), Illinois (2010-11) and Arkansas (2012).

Dan McCarney is in his third season at North Texas and his 15th as a head coach. He is 9-15

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with the Mean Green and 65-100 overall. An Iowa graduate, he previously coached at Iowa (1977-89), Wisconsin (1990-94), Iowa State (1995-2006), South Florida (2007) and Florida (2008-10).

Idaho is playing the 2013 season as an FBS independent before rejoining the Sun Belt Conference in 2014. The Vandals have been independent previously – 1893-1907 and 1959-62. There are five other independent FBS programs – Army, BYU, Navy, New Mexico State and Notre Dame.

The Vandals and Mean Green first played in 1996 when both were members of the Big West Conference. Their annual rivalry continued through 2004, which includes five seasons when both were in the Sun Belt Conference. UNT leads the series 5-4, which includes the most recent game – 51-29 at Denton. Idaho has won twice at UNT – 1998 (41-23) and 16-14 (2000).

New Mexico State Aggies (Coming in 2014)

The New Mexico State Aggies (0-0) will open their 2013 season against No. 15 Texas Longhorns, Saturday, August 31 at Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium, in Austin, Texas. Kickoff is set for 6 p.m. (MT). This will be the fifth meeting between the two schools, all of which have been played in Austin and won by the Longhorns. The last time these two teams met on the gridiron, was on August 31, 2003, as Texas won 66-7.

The game will be televised on the Longhorn Network and ESPN3.com.

Texas posted a 9-4 record in 2012 which ended with a thrilling 31-27 victory over No. 15/14 Oregon State in the Valero Alamo Bowl. The Longhorns ended the year ranked No. 19 in the Associated Press poll and 18th in the USA Today Coaches poll. It marked the 14th winning season in Mack Brown's 15 as head coach of Texas. Brown has led his teams to winning records in 22 of the last 23 seasons.

Texas welcomes back starters at 19 positions, including 10 on offense and nine on defense. There are 16 offensive players who started a game in 2012 back for the 2013 campaign while the defense includes 18 players with at least one start last season.

Mack Brown, who is in his 16th season at Texas, is just the fourth coach in the 120 years of Texas football to lead the team for at least a decade and just the second coach to win 100 games while at the school. Texas was selected fourth by media representative who cover the Big 12 Conference in the conference's preseason poll, behind Oklahoma State, Oklahoma and TCU.

The Aggies season opener with the Longhorns will mark the fifth meeting between the two schools and the fourth time that the two schools have met in a season opener. Texas holds a 4-0 record against NM State, as the first meeting between the two schools was on Sept. 7, 1994, as Texas won 41-7. All four previous games have been played in Austin, Texas, as the Longhorns have averaged 53.5 points per game in those contests. The last meeting in the series was also on August 31 in 2003. Texas won that game 66-7. NM State's best showing against Texas came in 1998, as the Aggies put up 33 points on the Longhorns, falling to a final score of 66-33.