

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN

Aggies and Tigers and 'Noles, oh my: Thank goodness college football is finally here

First weekend to bring out marquee matchups, exciting storylines

The first weekend of major college football has traditionally lacked the excitement that the rest of the season provides. Many top-ranked teams scheduled lower-tier Division I, or I-AA, opponents as a way to fine-tune their skills before beginning conference play.

This trend is no longer the norm. Several factors have led power programs to schedule more challenging opponents for the first game, including the lure of television contracts, the importance of strength of schedule in the BCS and fans' desire to see their teams play top-notch competition.

The following is a look at some of the more intriguing matchups for week one in college football.

1) Texas A&M at Clemson, Saturday

The Aggies are heading to Death Valley after handing Clemson a 26-7 whipping last year in College Station. The Tigers will be looking for some payback, and with what coach Tommy Bowden is calling one of his most-talented teams, this will be a critical test of the Tigers' potential success this season.

Texas A&M senior quarterback Reggie McNeal ran

a 4.28 40-yard dash in the spring, and he is considered by many to be a dark-horse candidate for the Heisman Trophy.

Clemson begins the 2006 campaign with new coordinators on offense and defense. Offensive coordinator Rob Spence brings his version of the spread offense to the Tigers.

The new system promises to use talented senior quarterback Charlie Whitehurst, who had a bit of a junior slump last year. Clemson's success will likely depend on how easily Whitehurst can pick up the new offense.

Containing A&M's McNeal will fall largely on senior cornerback Tye Hill. Hill is the reigning ACC 100 meter track champion, and he will need every bit of that speed to chase down McNeal if he decides to scramble.

Prediction: (Upset Special) Clemson 31, Texas A&M 24

2) Boise State at Georgia, Saturday

The Broncos were riding a 22-game winning streak before falling to Louisville in the Liberty Bowl last year. Boise State has one of the most prolific offenses and is in search of a little respect.

A new era of Georgia football is about to begin — an era without David Pollack and David Greene, not to mention the four other Bulldogs drafted by the NFL.

Athletic quarterback D.J. Shockley will finally get his chance to be the full-time starter, and senior guard Max Jean-Gilles is arguably the

most-talented offensive lineman in the SEC.

Prediction: Georgia 42 Boise State 38

3) Virginia Tech at N.C. State, Sunday

Virginia Tech looked impressive last year, even in a loss to eventual national champion Southern Cal. The Hokies won the ACC in their first year in the league. The one game in which Virginia Tech played poorly last year was

against N.C. State, losing 16-17 at home. Hokie quarterback Brian Randall was sacked 10 times in the game.

Virginia Tech's starting quarterback this year is Marcus Vick, younger brother of NFL star Mike Vick. Vick is back after sitting out a year because of off-the-field issues. The Virginia Tech coaching staff has said the younger Vick has all the same athletic abilities as his older brother.

N.C. State is coming off a season of contradictions. The Pack had the No. 1 defense in the country last year and defeated eventual ACC champion Virginia Tech but finished with a losing record.

The key to this game will be Vick's play-making ability and the protection his offensive line can give him. The entire defensive line that helped record the 10 sacks from last year's game is back for N.C. State. Defensive ends Manny Lawson and Mario Williams are the best defensive-end tandem in the country and are likely first-round draft picks. The Virginia Tech offensive line coach is having nightmares preparing for this game.

Prediction: Virginia Tech 24, N.C. State 14

Miami at Florida State, Monday

These teams play each other almost as often as the Red Sox and the Yankees. Because of the ACC realignment and the addition of Miami, the FSU Miami rivalry was moved to the first game of the season.

After playing in the middle of the season in 2003, Miami and FSU played a rematch in the Orange Bowl at the end of the year and then opened the year in 2004. That made three games in less than 12 months.

The NFL is loaded with players who played for one of these schools, and several will be seen roaming the sideline during the game, a testament to the talent-rich football state of Florida. The winner of this game has gone on to play for the national championship 13 out of the last 21 years.

Green's Heisman Watch List

1. **Matt Leinart**
Southern California
Quarterback
2. **Vince Young**
Texas
Quarterback
3. **Reggie Bush**
Southern California
Runningback
4. **Adrian Peterson**
Oklahoma
Runningback
5. **Mike Hart**
Michigan
Runningback

Graphic illustration by Laura-Joyce Gough/ THE GAMECOCK

Bobby Bowden's grimaces and his "dadgums" are alone enough to make this game entertaining. Miami's Devon Hester is a game-breaker, and FSU will pay dearly if they choose to kick the ball into his hands. The Noles had a tough preseason, losing their returning quarterback Wyatt Sexton and All-ACC corner Antonio Cromartie to season-ending injuries.

Prediction: Florida State 17 Miami 16

Other notable games: Pittsburgh vs. Notre Dame, Saturday — Charlie Weis against Dave Wannstedt. Sounds like an NFL matchup.

Prediction: Notre Dame 31, Pittsburgh 21

Florida vs. Wyoming, Saturday — The Urban Meyer era begins against a very tough Wyoming team.

Prediction: Florida 21, Wyoming 10

Green's Top 10 College Football Picks

1. *Southern California*
2. *Michigan*
3. *Texas*
4. *Virginia Tech*
5. *Tennessee*
6. *Ohio State*
7. *Florida*
8. *Oklahoma*
9. *Miami*
10. *LSU*

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The 2005 Gamecock football season will provide many exciting moments for University of South Carolina students. The football season is also a time when University of South Carolina students have the opportunity to express team spirit and sportsmanship to other fans at the stadium and on the worldwide television networks. Please review the SEC Fans' Code of Conduct.



SEC Fans' Code of Conduct

SEC Bylaw 10.5 - Sportsmanship

Coaches and student-athletes of a member institution, as well as individuals employed by or associated with that institution, including alumni, fans, patrons and boosters, shall conduct themselves with honesty and good sportsmanship. Their behavior shall at all times reflect the high standards of honor and dignity that characterize participation in the collegiate setting. For intercollegiate athletics to promote the character development of participants, to enhance the integrity of higher education and to promote civility in society, coaches, student-athletes and all others associated with these athletics programs and events should adhere to such fundamental values as respect, fairness, civility, honesty and responsibility. These values should be manifest not only in athletics participation but also in the broad spectrum of activities affecting the athletics program.

In the spirit of sportsmanship, SEC fans shall:

Conduct themselves in a manner that represents their university, the Southeastern Conference and the NCAA with honor, dignity and respect

Demonstrate the qualities of civility and sportsmanship at all times

Not use vulgar, abusive, racist, sexist, demeaning or intimidating language at any time

Support the players, coaches and officials in a positive manner

Treat the visiting team, coaches and fans with courtesy and respect at all times

Not engage in cheers that are vulgar, crass or demeaning

Refrain from throwing objects onto the field for any reason

Not become inebriated or belligerent

Refrain from entering the playing field at any times, including after the game

Be a positive role model for those around them by treating others with courtesy and respect

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