

# Pac-12 to operate as 2-team conference

Agreement with Mountain West to provide 6-game football schedule in 2024

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Oregon State, Washington State and the Mountain West announced a football scheduling agreement Friday for the 2024 season that gives the two remaining Pac-12 schools six opponents each and positions them to operate as a two-team conference for at least a year.

All 12 Mountain West schools will be involved and Oregon State and Washington State will each play three home games and three road games against conference members, which are Air Force, Boise State, Colorado State, San Diego State, Wyoming, Nevada, UNLV, San Jose State, Utah State, Fresno State and New Mexico.

Oregon State and Washington State will pay about \$14 million to the Mountain

West next year as part of the agreement. Washington State athletic director Pat Chun confirmed.

"We are still focused on rebuilding the Pac-12, and continue to prioritize the student-athlete experience at Oregon State," Oregon State athletic director Scott Barnes said.

Barnes said a full football schedule will be released soon and will include five Power Five opponents, six from the Mountain West and one FCS school. For its part, the Mountain West will play a seven-game conference schedule and the games against Oregon State and Washington State will not count in the league standings.

Washington State athletic director Pat Chun said the Cougars have 11 of their 12 games filled now on their schedule and hope to have

the final game solidified in the coming weeks.

"This is a unique and unprecedented opportunity for Oregon State and Washington State to play against highly competitive Mountain West football programs in 2024," Mountain West Commissioner Gloria Nevarez. She said the agreement expands the conference's footprint and strengthens its nonconference schedules.

Oregon State and Washington State are trying to plot a path forward after the Pac-12 was torn apart by conference realignment. Ten Pac-12 schools are joining new Power Five leagues in 2024.

There has been speculation about a combination of some kind between the two remaining schools and the Mountain West, including scheduling agreements in other sports, as the sides explore options.

Oregon State and Washington State, however, want to rebuild the Pac-12 and NCAA rules allow for a

conference to be as small as two schools for a two-year period. Chun said the Cougars will continue to use the Pac-12 marks and logo on its field and uniforms next season. He also reiterated that this is only a one-year agreement with the Mountain West to provide non-conference games.

"It's definitely a partnership that allows the two schools to get to know Commissioner Nevarez and the Mountain West Conference a little bit better," Chun said. "But the reality is the amount of instability in the FBS and in all conferences is a real issue for college athletics and we're going to make sure that we position ourselves in the most strategic manner going forward."

The Pacific Northwest schools are currently in a legal battle with the Pac-12 and the 10 departing schools to determine who runs the conference and has control over potentially hundreds of millions of dollars in assets.

It is unclear how the additional games could impact the Mountain West's television agreement with Fox and CBS, which runs through the 2025 football season. The Pac-12 has no television contract in place beyond this season. The league's failure to land a deal competitive with other Power Five conferences was a primary factor in the breakup of the Pac-12.

The departures started in 2022 when Southern California and UCLA announced they would join the Big Ten in 2024. The pace picked up this fall.

Oregon State and Washington State sued the Pac-12 and departing members in September, claiming those schools relinquished a right to be on the conference board of directors and vote on league matters when they announced they were leaving.

The exiting schools say they should still be able to vote until they officially leave in August 2024. Cur-

rently, any decisions made in the Pac-12 have to be by unanimous consent of all 12 members.

A judge ruled last month in favor of Oregon State and Washington State, but the conference and departing schools have appealed to the Washington Supreme Court and the lower's court ruling has been put on hold.

The departing schools hailed the football announcement.

"The unanimous support for this agreement from all 12 current Pac-12 members demonstrates that OSU and WSU can successfully plan for their future while all members continue to have a say in Pac-12 decisions impacting the current athletics year," the schools said in a statement. "The nine-figure annual revenues the Pac-12 was already contracted to receive in the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 athletics years will support this agreement and any other future plans for the conference."

# Georgia has shot to be best team ever

ATLANTA — The Georgia Bulldogs are already in rarefied territory.

With three more victories, the Bulldogs will have every right to call themselves the greatest team in college football history.

The top-ranked team hasn't lost a game in 727 days.

On Saturday, Georgia will go for its 30th win in a row against Nick Saban and No. 8 Alabama in the Southeastern Conference championship game.

While coach Kirby Smart insists that his two-time reigning national champs keep their feet planted firmly in the present, it's impossible not to reflect just a bit on Georgia's stunning perfection over the last two years.

"I definitely do just take some time to just try and sit back and appreciate it," defensive back Kamari Lassiter said this week. "It's hard to sometimes just take a second and just slow down when games are coming at you so fast, with practices and all the media and everything flying around."

"But sometimes," he added, "just being able to sit down and think for myself personally over the last few years that I've been able to be a part of a really good program and a program that's taught me a lot of things, not just about football but about life."



PAUL NEWBERRY

Columnist

Georgia is trying to become just the ninth major program in college football history to win as many as 30 consecutive games. It's certainly never been tougher to put together such a run in this era of increased parity, longer seasons, expanded

playoffs and supersized conferences, not to mention having to navigate the transfer portal and name, image and likeness rules.

Making the streak even more impressive, Smart's Bulldogs have done it while playing in the SEC — the best conference in the land.

"It's phenomenal what he's been able to accomplish at Georgia," said Alabama coach Nick Saban, Smart's former boss and now chief rival. "I mean, to win as many games in a row, win a couple championships, have another chance to do it again a third time, I mean, that's phenomenal."

No team in The Associated Press poll era — which dates back to 1936 — has managed to claim three straight national championships. If the Bulldogs can complete the threepart, they would have a pretty compelling argument that no program

has ever done it better.

But, before we get ahead of ourselves, let's marvel at all that has happened since Georgia's last loss — to Alabama, of all teams, in the SEC championship game on Dec. 4, 2021.

Here's a few nuggets about the streak:

- **THE BULLDOGS** have outscored their 29 opponents by a cumulative 1,158 to 432. That's an average margin of more than 25 points per game.

- **GEORGIA HAS** trailed in the fourth quarter only three times, most notably in last season's Peach Bowl semifinal game against Ohio State. The Dawgs rallied from a two-touchdown deficit and survived a last-second field goal attempt to win a 42-41 thriller.

- **THE ONLY OTHER** contest decided by less than a touchdown also came last season, when Georgia bounced back for a 26-22 victory at Missouri. No other win has been closer than a touchdown; in fact, just five had margins in the single digits.

- **THE BULLDOGS** are 9-0 against ranked teams, with only two of those wins decided by fewer than 10 points.

"It's phenomenal however many games — what is it, 29? I don't even know for sure," Saban marveled. "We've won 19 games in a row here twice. I know how hard that was. It's hard to sustain."

Smart's skills in recruiting, player development and motivation are unquestioned, but his greatest trait as a coach — and this is certainly something he learned from his extensive time working at Saban's side — is being able to instill a laser focus on what's important that very day, that very hour, that very minute, to his players.

"It's never been about a streak or anything like that," Lassiter said. "It's always just been about being in the moment, just trying to win that moment."

Smart gave a hint of that single-mindedness when someone had the nerve to ask about the impact of losing assistant Fran Brown, one of the nation's top recruiters, who just this week was appointed the new head coach at Syracuse.

"We've been really focused on Alabama. That's all we're really thinking about," Smart shot back. "Those decisions that you're talking about, they're not important. They have no relevance whatsoever to this game. Our focus and energy is on this game."

Saban surely saw a bit of himself when Smart worked on his staff for more than a decade, moving up to become Alabama's defensive coordinator before he returned to his alma mater as head coach in 2016.

"I kind of knew that he had great leadership quali-

ties," Saban said. "That's why we made him coordinator. When he was a coordinator, he did a great job of managing that side of the ball. I knew he'd be an outstanding head coach someday."

The last school to win as many as 30 games in a row was Miami, which put together a 34-game run from 2000-02. At the top of the heap is Oklahoma, which claimed 47 straight victories from 1953-57.

It's worth noting that the Bulldogs came into the 2021 SEC championship game with a 16-game winning streak, which means they've won 45 of their last 46 games. If not for one bad quarter against the Crimson Tide — who scored 24 points in the second period of their 41-24 triumph — Georgia would've been going for its 47th consecutive victory Saturday.

The Bulldogs could still take down Oklahoma's record, but they'd have to win out this season, put together another 15-0 campaign in 2024 and win their opener in '25.

That sounds like a bit of a reach, but it's really not necessary to stamp this team as the top dog ever.

Three more wins would be enough.

**PAUL NEWBERRY** is the national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Write to him at [pnewberry@ap.org](mailto:pnewberry@ap.org).

# Nadal announces his return

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MADRID — Rafael Nadal will return to playing at the Brisbane International in Australia in January, the 22-time Grand Slam champion said Friday.

"After a year of not competing, it is time to come back," Nadal said in a video posted on social media. "It will be in Brisbane in the first week of January. See you there."

The 37-year-old Spaniard has not played on tour since last January, when he hurt his hip flexor during a loss in the second round of the Australian Open.

In May, a little more than a week before the start of the French Open, Nadal announced that he would miss the tournament he's won a record 14 times and wasn't exactly sure when he might return to play.

Nadal had said then that he hoped to compete in 2024, which he expected to be his final season.

"You never know how things will turn out," Nadal said at a news conference at the time, "but my intention is that next year will be my last year."

He wound up having arthroscopic surgery in June in Barcelona.

# No. 5 Kansas beats No. 4 UConn 69-65

Kevin McCullar Jr. scores 21 points

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Kevin McCullar Jr. scored 21 points, including back-to-back 3-pointers that gave Kansas the lead down the stretch, and the fifth-ranked Jayhawks held on to beat No. 4 UConn 69-65 on Friday night in a showdown of the past two national champions.

The Jayhawks (7-1) had a chance to wrap up the game in the final minute, when the Huskies (7-1) were forced to foul, but KJ Adams Jr. and Dajuan Harris Jr. were only able to make one of their four free throws.

The defending champion Huskies raced down the floor, and Cam Spencer got a good look at a potential go-ahead 3-pointer, but the shot came up short and Adams grabbed the rebound. He was fouled, and this time he made both free throws with 2.4 seconds left to clinch the win.

Hunter Dickinson had 15 points and nine rebounds, and Adams finished with 18 points, helping the Jayhawks snap the Huskies' remarkable streak of 24 consecutive nonconference wins by double digits.

Tristen Newton hit a career-high six 3s and scored 31 points for the Huskies, but he got little help from the rest of the offense. Donovan Clingan, who banged with fellow 7-footer Dickinson all night, was held to eight points and seven boards.

Kansas students began camping for the game more than two days early, and in only the second regular-season nonconference matchup of the past two national champions since at least 2000, their Jayhawks threatened to turn it into a rout.

They raced to a 16-5 lead by the time the game was five minutes old, ratcheting up what already was a deafening roar inside old Allen Fieldhouse. And every time the Huskies — or more accurately, Newton — made a 3-pointer to cut into the lead, the Jayhawks were able to get into transition against one of the nation's top scoring teams for another easy basket.

Kansas had chances to deliver a knockout blow, leading by as many as 12 with the ball, but couldn't quite land it. Newton took advantage, scoring the final five points of the first half to trim the Jayhawks' lead to 38-31 at the break.

UConn kept coming, scoring the first five points of the second half, setting up the heavyweight matchup

everyone expected.

The Huskies took their first lead when Newton beat the shot clock with a 3-pointer with 10 ½ minutes to go, then he drilled another one on their next trip down the floor. Kansas answered when Adams got a floater to go in the lane, then McCullar hit back-to-back 3s and Dickinson one of his own to give the Jayhawks a 61-54 lead with less than four minutes to go.

Alex Karaban gave the Huskies hope with a 3-pointer shortly before fouling out, and then he watched from the bench as two of college basketball's titans went shot-for-shot over the final cou-

ple of minutes.

**HURT HUSKIES**

UConn played again without five-star prospect Stephon Castle, who had missed the last five games with a knee injury but was hoping to be back for the Jayhawks. Then their backcourt took another hit when Spencer came up limping in the first half, though he returned to play the rest of the game.

**UP NEXT**

UConn plays No. 17 North Carolina on Tuesday night in New York.

Kansas plays the University of Missouri-Kansas City on Tuesday night.

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EPA PUBLIC NOTICE

Second Five-Year Review Started  
Newton County Mine Tailings  
NPL Superfund Site  
Newton County, Missouri  
December 2023

**EPA Region 7**  
Iowa, Kansas,  
Missouri, Nebraska  
and Nine Tribal Nations

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 7 has started the Second Five-Year Review for the Newton County Mine Tailings National Priorities List (NPL) Superfund Site. Learn about the NPL at: [www.epa.gov/superfund/superfund-national-priorities-list-npl](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/superfund-national-priorities-list-npl).

Five-Year Reviews are required by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), commonly known as Superfund, when hazardous substances remain on-site above levels that permit unrestricted use and unlimited exposure. Five-Year Reviews provide an opportunity to evaluate the site remedy to determine whether it remains protective of human health and the environment. This Five-Year Review Report should be completed by November 2024.

Lead is the main contaminant of concern at this site. It is a toxic metal that is harmful if inhaled or ingested and can pose serious health risks, particularly to children under 7 years old, as well as pregnant women and nursing mothers.

Site project information is available to the public at web repositories, including the First Five-Year Review (in the Administrative Record). To view cleanup documents, please visit EPA's Site Profile page at: [www.epa.gov/superfund/newtoncountymine](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/newtoncountymine) (see Site Documents & Data). If you do not have internet access, you can view these documents online at this location: **Neosho Public Library**, 201 W. Spring Street, Neosho, MO 64850; 417-451-4231.

For more information and site maps, see EPA's Fact Sheet at: [www.epa.gov/mo/newton-county-mine-tailings-national-priorities-list-npl-superfund-site-newton-county-missouri-8](http://www.epa.gov/mo/newton-county-mine-tailings-national-priorities-list-npl-superfund-site-newton-county-missouri-8).

**Free Lead Testing and Cleanup Opportunity!** If you would like to have your residential yard (soils) and/or private, domestic drinking water well tested for potential lead contamination, please contact EPA today! Lead testing and remediation (cleanup) are performed by EPA at no cost! Call EPA's sampling contractor, Tetra Tech, at 417-385-8487. Contact EPA toll-free at 1-800-223-0425 or by email at [r7-tsmd@epa.gov](mailto:r7-tsmd@epa.gov).

If you have questions about the site, please contact **Elizabeth Kramer**, EPA Community Involvement Coordinator, at [kramer.elizabeth@epa.gov](mailto:kramer.elizabeth@epa.gov) or 913-551-7186.

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