

ALABAMA 3-PPEAT

By RALPH RUSSO | AP COLLEGE FOOTBALL WRITER

Alabama will start its quest for a repeat national championship with a rare three-peat.

The Crimson Tide is just the second team to be No. 1 in the preseason AP media poll for three straight seasons.

The defending national champions received 42 out of 61 first-place votes to outpoint Clemson in the voting. The Tigers received 18 first-place votes. Georgia is No. 3 and Wisconsin is fourth. The Badgers received one first-place vote. Ohio State is No. 5.

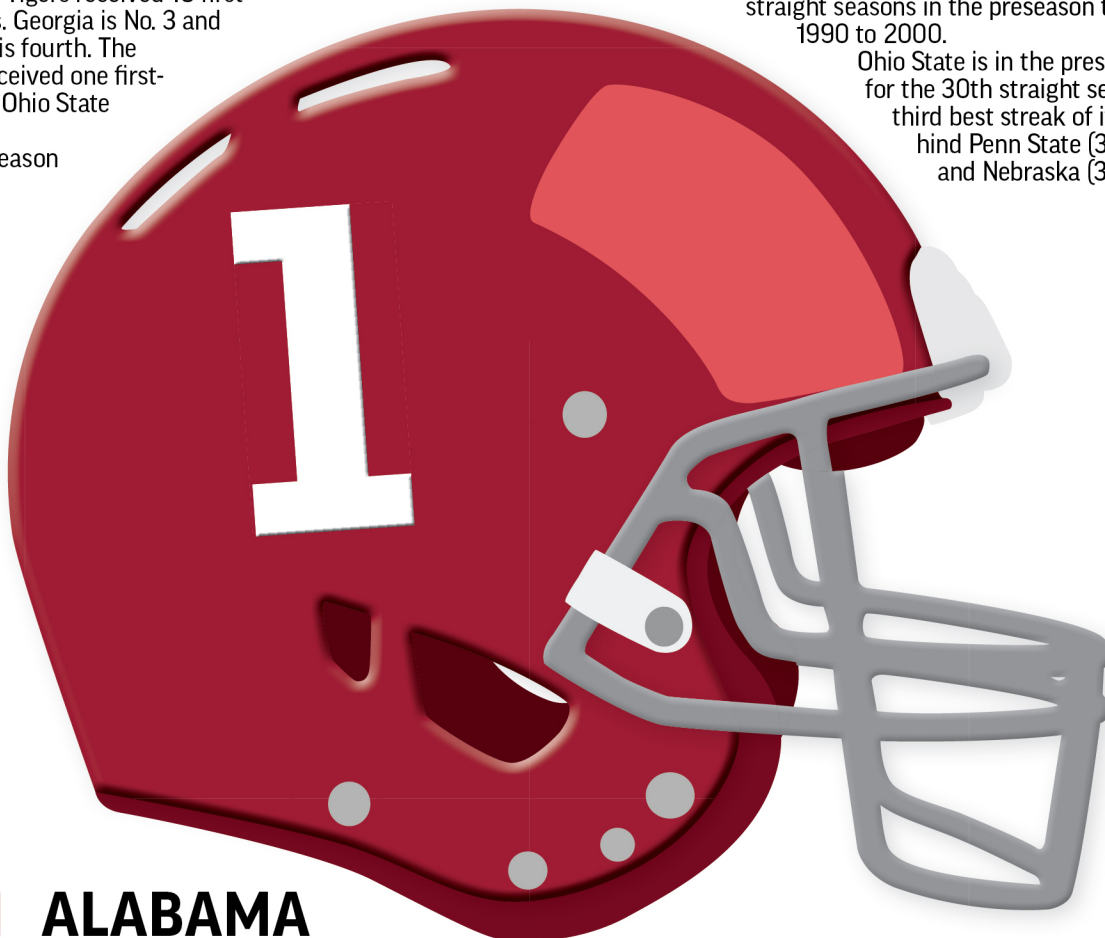
The preseason

AP poll started in 1950 and since then only Oklahoma from 1985 to 1987 had started No. 1 in three straight years. Until now.

Ring up another milestone for coach Nick Saban's Tide dynasty. Alabama has won five national championship since 2009 and now has been No. 1 to start the season five times under Saban. Last season was the first time, though, that Saban's team has started and finished the season No. 1.

This is the 10th straight season the Crimson Tide is preseason top five, one off Florida State's record of 11 straight seasons in the preseason top five from 1990 to 2000.

Ohio State is in the preseason poll for the 30th straight season, the third best streak of its kind behind Penn State (34 straight) and Nebraska (33).



NO. 1 ALABAMA

COACH: Nick Saban
CONFERENCE: SEC
2017 RECORD: 13-1
2017 FINISH: No. 1
CRITICAL GAMES: @ LSU, Nov. 3; Mississippi State, Nov. 10; Auburn, Nov. 24.

OUTLOOK: The Tide have played in the last three College Football Playoff championship games, winning two. The quarterback competition between championship game hero Tua Tagovailoa and Jalen Hurts, who has led the team to the national title game

as the starter in each of his first two seasons, has drawn much attention. Either way, the Tide should be explosive offensively. There is rebuilding to do in the secondary, with all new starters. DE Raekwon Davis is the next first-round draft pick up front.



NO. 2 CLEMSON
COACH: Dabo Swinney
CONFERENCE: ACC
2017 RECORD: 12-2
2017 FINISH: No. 4
CRITICAL GAMES: @ Texas A&M, Sept. 8; @ Florida State, Oct. 27; South Carolina, Nov. 24.
OUTLOOK: Clemson looks for its fourth straight playoff appearance, led by the most-celebrated defensive line in the country with Christian Wilkins, Clelin Ferrell, Dexter Lawrence and Austin Bryant. On offense, QB Kelly Bryant played well last season, but highly touted freshman Trevor Lawrence is threatening to take the job.



NO. 3 GEORGIA
COACH: Kirby Smart
CONFERENCE: SEC
2017 RECORD: 13-2
2017 FINISH: No. 2
CRITICAL GAMES: @ South Carolina, Sept. 8; @ LSU, Oct. 13; Florida in Jacksonville, Fla., Oct. 27.
OUTLOOK: The Bulldogs have to replace a bunch of productive seniors off last year's SEC championship team, including RBs Sony Michel and Nick Chubb, but there is plenty of talent for Smart to reload. QB Jake Fromm has maybe the deepest group of receivers in the SEC, led by Terry Godwin. CB Deandre Baker is a star in the secondary.



NO. 4 WISCONSIN
COACH: Paul Chryst
CONFERENCE: Big Ten
2017 RECORD: 13-1
2017 FINISH: No. 7
CRITICAL GAMES: @ Iowa, Sept. 23; @ Michigan, Oct. 13; @ Penn State, Nov. 10.
OUTLOOK: The Badgers are looking to breakthrough after losing the last two Big Ten championship games. RB Jonathan Taylor, a Heisman Trophy contender, operates behind maybe the best offensive line in the country. LB T.J. Edwards and S D'Cota Dixon leads a defense that has been consistently stingy in recent years.



NO. 5 OHIO STATE
COACH: Urban Meyer
CONFERENCE: Big Ten
2017 RECORD: 12-2
2017 FINISH: No. 5
CRITICAL GAMES: TCU at Arlington, Texas, Sept. 15; @ No. 10 Penn State, Sept. 29; No. 14 Michigan, Nov. 24.
OUTLOOK: DE Nick Bosa, brother of NFL star Joey Bosa, is the star of what should be a stellar defensive line. RB J.K. Dobbins ran for 1,403 yards as a freshman last season, and teams with Mike Weber to form one of the best combinations in the Big Ten. Buckeyes fans hope new starting QB Dwayne Haskins can stretch defenses with his strong arm.

ALSO RECEIVING CONSIDERATION:

South Carolina, Florida, Utah, Oklahoma State, Florida Atlantic, Arizona, North Carolina State, Texas A&M, Boston College, Northwestern, Kansas State, Iowa State, Houston, Memphis, Troy, Iowa, Kentucky, Arkansas State and Fresno State.

NO. 6 WASHINGTON

COACH: CHRIS PETERSEN
CONFERENCE: PAC-12
2017 RECORD: 10-3
2017 FINISH: NO. 16
KEY GAMES:
Auburn at Atlanta, Sept. 1
@ Oregon, Oct. 13
Stanford, Nov. 3

NO. 7 OKLAHOMA

COACH: LINCOLN RILEY
CONFERENCE: BIG 12
2017 RECORD: 12-2
2017 FINISH: NO. 3
KEY GAMES:
Texas at Dallas, Oct. 6
@ TCU, Oct. 20
@ West Virginia, Nov. 23

NO. 8 MIAMI

COACH: MARK RICHT
CONFERENCE: ACC
2017 RECORD: 10-3
2017 FINISH: NO. 13
KEY GAMES:
LSU at Arlington, Texas, Sept. 2
Florida State, Oct. 6
@ Virginia Tech, Nov. 17

NO. 9 AUBURN

COACH: GUS MALZAHN
CONFERENCE: SEC
2017 RECORD: 10-4
2017 FINISH: NO. 10
KEY GAMES:
Washington at Atlanta, Sept. 1
@ Georgia, Nov. 10
@ Alabama, Nov. 24

NO. 10 PENN STATE

COACH: JAMES FRANKLIN
CONFERENCE: BIG TEN
2017 RECORD: 11-2
2017 FINISH: NO. 8
KEY GAMES:
Ohio State, Sept. 29
@ Michigan, Nov. 3
Wisconsin, Nov. 10

NO. 11 MICHIGAN STATE

COACH: MARK DANTONIO
CONFERENCE: BIG TEN
2017 RECORD: 10-3
2017 FINISH: NO. 15
KEY GAMES:
@ Penn State, Oct. 13
Michigan, Oct. 20
Ohio State, Nov. 10

NO. 12 NOTRE DAME

COACH: BRIAN KELLY
CONFERENCE: INDEPENDENT
2017 RECORD: 10-3
2017 FINISH: NO. 11
KEY GAMES:
Michigan, Sept. 1
Stanford, Sept. 29
@ Virginia Tech, Oct. 6

NO. 13 STANFORD

COACH: DAVID SHAW
CONFERENCE: PAC-12
2017 RECORD: 9-5
2017 FINISH: NO. 20
KEY GAMES:
USC, Sept. 8
@ Notre Dame, Sept. 29
@ Washington, Nov. 3

NO. 14 MICHIGAN

COACH: JIM HARBAUGH
CONFERENCE: BIG TEN
2017 RECORD: 8-5
2017 FINISH: UNRANKED
KEY GAMES:
@ Notre Dame, Sept. 1
@ Michigan State, Oct. 20
@ Ohio State, Nov. 24

NO. 15 USC

COACH: CLAY HELTON
CONFERENCE: PAC-12
2017 RECORD: 11-3
2017 FINISH: NO. 12
KEY GAMES:
@ Stanford, Sept. 8
@ Texas, Sept. 15
Notre Dame, Nov. 24

NO. 16 TCU

COACH: GARY PATTERSON
CONFERENCE: BIG 12
2017 RECORD: 11-3
2017 FINISH: NO. 9
KEY GAMES:
Ohio State at Arlington, Texas, Sept. 15
Oklahoma, Oct. 20
@ West Virginia, Nov. 10

NO. 17 WEST VIRGINIA

COACH: DANA HOLGORSSEN
CONFERENCE: BIG 12
2017 RECORD: 7-6
2017 FINISH: UNRANKED
KEY GAMES:
@ Texas, Nov. 3
TCU, Nov. 10
Oklahoma, Nov. 23

NO. 18 MISSISSIPPI STATE

COACH: JOE MOORHEAD
CONFERENCE: SEC
2017 RECORD: 9-4
2017 FINISH: NO. 19
KEY GAMES:
Auburn, Oct. 6
@ LSU, Oct. 20
@ Alabama, Nov. 10

NO. 19 FLORIDA STATE

COACH: WILLIE TAGGART
CONFERENCE: ACC
2017 RECORD: 7-6
2017 FINISH: UNRANKED
KEY GAMES:
Virginia Tech, Sept. 3
@ Miami, Oct. 6
Clemson, Oct. 27

NO. 20 VIRGINIA TECH

COACH: JUSTIN FUENTE
CONFERENCE: ACC
2017 RECORD: 9-4
2017 FINISH: NO. 24
KEY GAMES:
@ Florida State, Sept. 3
Notre Dame, Oct. 6
Miami, Nov. 17

NO. 21 UCF

COACH: JOSH HEUPEL
CONFERENCE: THE AMERICAN
2017 RECORD: 13-0
2017 FINISH: NO. 12
KEY GAMES:
Florida Atlantic, Sept. 21
@ Memphis, Oct. 13
@ South Florida, Nov. 23

NO. 22 BOISE STATE

COACH: BRYAN HARSIN
CONFERENCE: MOUNTAIN WEST
2017 RECORD: 11-3
2017 FINISH: NO. 12
KEY GAMES:
@ Oklahoma State, Sept. 15
@ Wyoming, Sept. 29
Fresno State, Nov. 9

NO. 23 TEXAS

COACH: TOM HERMAN
CONFERENCE: BIG 12
2017 RECORD: 7-6
2017 FINISH: UNRANKED
KEY GAMES:
USC, Sept. 15
Oklahoma at Dallas, Oct. 6
West Virginia, Nov. 3

NO. 24 OREGON

COACH: MARIO CRISTOBAL
CONFERENCE: PAC-12
2017 RECORD: 7-6
2017 FINISH: NO. 18
KEY GAMES:
Stanford, Sept. 22
Washington, Oct. 13
@ Washington State, Oct. 20

NO. 25 LSU

COACH: ED ORGERON
CONFERENCE: SEC
2017 RECORD: 9-4
2017 FINISH: NO. 18
KEY GAMES:
Miami at Arlington, Texas, Sept. 2
@ Auburn, Sept. 15
Alabama, Nov. 3