

UCLA ATHLETIC

1. UCLA Bruins

■ **1997 Record:** 10-2 overall, 7-1 Pac-10; beat Texas A&M 29-23 in the Cotton Bowl
 ■ **Head Coach:** Bob Toledo, third year (15-8)
 ■ **Returning Starters:** Offense 7, Defense 4, Punter/Kicker
 ■ **Player to watch:** QB Cade McNown
 ■ **Outlook:** Nine points separated UCLA from an unbeaten record last season.

Season-opening losses at Washington State (37-34) and Tennessee (30-24) were all that kept the Bruins from battling for a possible national title.

This season, UCLA plans to more than make up for those nine points.

Senior quarterback Cade McNown, who set a single-season conference record and led the nation in passing efficiency at 168.6, is being hyped as a Heisman Trophy candidate. McNown, who graduated from West Linn High School, would be the Pac-10's first winner since Marcus Allen in 1981.

However, if the Bruins are going to score more than 40 points per game again, like they did in 1997, they need to replace big-play threats Skip Hicks and Jim Farmer on offense.

Senior tight end Mike Grieb, junior wideout Danny Farmer and sophomore wide receiver Brian Polidixon, who is being compared to UCLA-alumnus, J.J. Stokes, will be McNown's primary targets.

For the Bruins to produce a 1,000-yard rusher for the fifth straight season, sophomore Jermaine Lewis, junior Keith Brown or freshman DeShaun Foster will have to ignite at tailback.

The offensive line is solid with three starters returning led by 6-foot-9 junior tackle Kris Farris. Second-team All-American Larry Atkins, a senior free safety, will lead the defense and have opposing receivers thinking twice about crossing the middle.

Outside linebacker Brendon Ayanbadejo will seek and destroy opponents from sideline to sideline. There will be two new starters on the defensive line and three newcomers in the linebacking corps, but the solid secondary, which also includes two returning starting cornerbacks, and the depth infused by the No. 1-ranked recruiting class

in the country should make up for any shortcomings.

2. ASU Arizona State Sun Devils

■ **1997 Record:** 9-3 overall, 6-2 Pac-10; beat Iowa 17-7 in the Sun Bowl
 ■ **Head Coach:** Bruce Snyder, seventh year (41-27)
 ■ **Returning Starters:** Offense 9, Defense 4
 ■ **Player to watch:** TB/WR/KR/S J.R. Redmond
 ■ **Outlook:** In the inaugural season of the Bowl Championship Series, the Fiesta Bowl will host the national championship game at Sun Devil Stadium. With that in mind, Arizona State was dreaming of celebrating the new year in style, wrapping up a perfect season on its home turf.

But in came Washington in the team's first game, and out went any national title aspirations. Brock Huard's last-second, 63-yard touchdown pass to Reggie Davis on fourth down spurred the Huskies to a 42-38 upset. In the process, Arizona State's weakness — defense — was vividly exposed.

The Sun Devils boast some of the country's best talent, but most of it is on the offensive side of the ball.

Junior tailback J.R. Redmond will return kick offs, line up at wide receiver, and even play some safety in obvious passing situations. He is a bona fide Heisman Trophy candidate. His 159 all-purpose-yards per game last season ranked him 12th in the nation.

Quarterback Ryan Kealy filled Jake Plummer's shoes by passing for 2,137 yards and 15 touchdowns as a redshirt freshman in 1997. Kealy's four best receivers also return, including preseason all-conference performers Lenzie Jackson and Kendrick Bates. As if that weren't enough, three of the five starting off-

ensive linemen are back, including center Grey Ruegamer, who is being mentioned as a candidate for the Outland and Lombardi awards.

The Sun Devils also have four proven starters return on defense. Seniors Albrey Battle (defensive tackle), Mitchell Freedman (free safety), Larry Johnson (outside linebacker) and junior corner back Courtney Jackson should hold their own. However, the other seven spots aren't such a sure thing, as Washington showed on Sept. 5.

Arizona State could very well end the regular season 10-1, if the defense can devise a way to produce like last season's, which ranked third in the conference. Even without a solid defense, this team should outscore most of its opponents. But with games against Notre Dame at home, and Oregon and Arizona on the road, the Sun Devils will need some semblance of a defense.



3. Oregon Ducks

■ **1997 Record:** 7-5 overall, 3-5 Pac-10; beat Air Force 41-13 in Las Vegas Bowl
 ■ **Head Coach:** Mike Bellotti, fourth year (22-13)
 ■ **Returning Starters:** Offense 7, Defense 8, Punter
 ■ **Player to watch:** QB Akili Smith

■ **Outlook:** There is no denying that this team is loaded, just ask Michigan State. However, Oregon needs to prove it can win close games and play consistent defense to rise back into the top-tier bowl games.

Senior quarterback Akili Smith looks primed for an outstanding season. With a year in the system under his belt, he looks confident and ready to showcase his great athleticism. If Smith falters, senior Jason Maas is ready, willing and able.

Replacing tailback Saladin McCullough, wide receiver Pat Johnson and tight end Blake Spence, who combined for 66-percent of the Ducks' total offense last season, will be tough. But Oregon appears to have an abundance of talent at the skill positions. Wide out Damon Griffin, a senior, and Tony Hartley, a junior, should be a great tandem. Junior college transfer Reuben Droughns shredded the Spartans vaunted defense to solidify his claim to the starting tailback slot. Senior tight end Jed Weaver has impressed the coaching staff throughout the spring and fall camps.

After ranking dead last in total defense a year ago, the Ducks return eight starters and hope to gel under new defensive coordinator Bob Foster. Junior middle linebacker Peter Sirmon, who led the Pac-10 with 115 tackles in 1997, will be the glue. Cornerbacks Rashad Bauman and Eric Edwards look ready to make life miserable for opposing receivers, like stars Kenny Wheaton and Alex Molden before them. The key to how much improvement the defense makes will be the defensive line, in both stopping the run and getting to the quarterback.

Oregon could either be very good or very mediocre this season. A key three-game stretch at Arizona and then in Eugene against Washington and Arizona State will probably determine the Ducks' fate. From a dedicated summer of workouts, to brand-new facilities, to the season-opening Spartan smashing, all signs are pointing up.

1998 Pac-10 PREVIEW

UCLA is expected to rule, but don't count out Washington or the Ducks in the title chase



4. Washington Huskies

■ **1997 Record:** 8-4 overall, 5-3 Pac-10; beat Michigan State 51-23 in the Aloha Bowl
 ■ **Head Coach:** Jim Lambright, sixth year (38-19-1)
 ■ **Returning Starters:** Offense 5, Defense 6, Punter, Kicker
 ■ **Player to watch:** QB Brock Huard

■ **Outlook:** Washington had 10 players selected in last spring's NFL Draft, the most of any team in the country. With those players, the Huskies were supposed to compete for the national title last season, but faltered amid injuries and a three-game losing streak to end the regular season.

But Washington's most important player — junior quarterback Brock Huard — is back. Huard dropped to seventh in the country in passing efficiency a year ago even following a five-interception debacle against Washington State. But he looks ready to return to stardom after throwing for 318 yards and four touchdowns against Arizona State in the season opener.

Tailback Rashan Shehee's graduation leaves the Huskies thin at tailback with junior Maurice Shaw and senior Jason Harris expected to carry the load.

Former walk-on wide receiver Dane Looker and senior tight end Reggie Davis will catch their share of Huard's spirals, as both had more than 100 yards receiving in the opener. Sophomore wideout and kick returner Ja'Warren Hooker has Olympic-caliber speed but separated his shoulder against the Sun Devils. The offensive line lost two underclassmen to the draft but returns three starters and should be steady as usual.

Junior linebackers Lester Towns and Marcus Hairston will lead the defense. The secondary returns three of four starters, but the defensive line is a question mark. Just how fast that line can form and produce will be key.

The Dawgs will get an extremely tough early-season test at Nebraska on Sept. 26. After that, the last four games — at Southern California, at Oregon, UCLA and at Washington State, in that order — will be the most rugged.



5. Arizona Wildcats

■ **1997 Record:** 7-5 overall, 5-3 Pac-10; beat New Mexico 20-14 in the Insight.com Bowl
 ■ **Head Coach:** Dick Tomey, 12th year (72-51-4)
 ■ **Returning Starters:** Offense 8, Defense 5, Punter, Kicker
 ■ **Player to watch:** CB/KR Chris McAlister

■ **Outlook:** This is not your normal Tomey-led Arizona team.

If Wildcats' fans think they're watching their familiar Desert Swarm squad in Tucson this season, they will most likely be suffering from that infamous desert trick — the mirage. However, a multitude of weapons on offense has the Cats thinking big. Ranked No. 24 in the preseason Associated Press poll, Arizona will try to outscore opponents after tallying 27 points or more in eight of its last nine games in 1997.

Keith Smith and Ortege Jenkins will likely split time at quarterback. Smith was named a Freshman All-American in 1996 before injuring his shoulder last season and losing his starting spot to Jenkins, who promptly threw for a Pac-10-freshman record 19 touchdown passes. In the Wildcats' season-opening 27-6 win at Hawaii, Jenkins started and began two for eight, so Smith relieved him and completed 17-of-22 passes for 218 yards and two touchdowns.

Whoever is calling the signals will have a handful of options. Tailback Trung Canidate averaged 100 rushing yards per game in 1997, but he missed three games and parts of others with ankle problems. He started this season on the same note, sitting out the Hawaii game with a foot injury.

Not to worry, former Parade All-American Leon Callen and senior fullback Kelvin Eafon, the Insight.com Bowl MVP, are adequate replacements. Junior Dennis Northcutt, who caught 58 passes last season and is a preseason all-conference selection, leads the receiving corps.

The offensive and defensive lines could be the downfall of this team. Only three players with college experience return on the offensive line, and the defensive line lacks any dominant

ing players, something unusual for Tomey.

Linebacker Marcus Bell and McAlister will lead the defense. McAlister is a two-time all-conference selection and capable of scoring any time he touches the ball, just ask the Rainbows. Ironically, McAlister returned Arizona's opening kick off of the season for a touchdown, the season after Saladin McCullough did the same to the Wildcats.

If Arizona can establish dominance at home, where it plays UCLA, Oregon and Arizona State, it could run away with the conference title. But that is unlikely to happen. The Wildcats' only scary road game seems to be in Seattle (sorry, Oregon State), where they will be chased by the Huskies.

■ **Head Coach:** Paul Hackett, first year
 ■ **Returning Starters:** Offense 7, Defense 8, Kicker
 ■ **Player to watch:** LB Chris Claiborne

■ **Outlook:** All of Southern California's losses in 1997 came to teams ranked in the top 18 of the final Associated Press poll. But the season was considered a disaster, as is any season in which the Trojans fail to make a bowl game.

With NFL-savvy Paul Hackett now in charge, many returning starters and some talented newcomers, USC figures to be improved this season. However, the plodding offense will have to catch up to the dominating defense for the Trojans to revisit their glory days.

Junior middle linebacker Chris Claiborne, a first team All-Pac-10 selection in 1997, will have a Butkus Award-like season. He will be the playmaker in the new 4-3 formation, which should suit his talents well as he recorded 16 tackles for losses, six-and-a-half sacks and 76 overall tackles last season. The experienced secondary will be led by explo-

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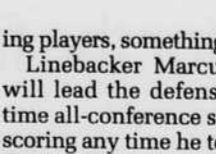
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6. Southern California Trojans

■ **1997 Record:** 6-5 overall, 4-4 Pac-10
 ■ **Head Coach:** Paul Hackett, first year
 ■ **Returning Starters:** Offense 7, Defense 8, Kicker
 ■ **Player to watch:** LB Chris Claiborne

■ **Outlook:** All of Southern California's losses in 1997 came to teams ranked in the top 18 of the final Associated Press poll. But the season was considered a disaster, as is any season in which the Trojans fail to make a bowl game.

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sive cornerback Daylon McCutcheon. The only question surrounding this unit is how well the defensive line will develop.

The offense is another story. Ranked ninth in the Pac-10 in total offense in 1997, USC needs improvement. Sophomore Mike Van Raaphorst will likely be pushed by freshman phenom Carson Palmer at quarterback. A talented group of receivers led by junior R.Jay Soward and senior Billy Miller is the strongest part of the Trojan offense.

But in order to open things up, USC must establish a running game. Junior tailback Chad Morton and the offensive line must have breakout seasons.

The Trojans' schedule is anything but forgiving, so they had better find some offense fast. Their non-conference opponents include Florida State (in Tallahassee, Fla., on Sept. 26) and Notre Dame (Nov. 28). The week after the Seminoles' game, USC encounters Arizona State. At the end of October, the Trojans play at Oregon and host Washington in consecutive weeks. Then, of course, there is rival UCLA, who hosts the Trojans on Nov. 2, and has beaten USC seven straight times.

Michigan 21-16 in the Rose Bowl
 ■ **Head Coach:** Mike Price, 10th year (53-49)
 ■ **Returning Starters:** Offense 2, Defense 4, Kicker
 ■ **Player to watch:** RB Kevin Brown
 ■ **Outlook:** Washington State has never made it to back-to-back bowl games.

Unless this young, inexperienced Cougar team matures quickly, that streak will probably continue.

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