

Contenders, pretenders head into Week 3

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A couple of weeks into the NCAA football season, fans probably have a good idea which teams stink. However, trying to figure out whether some of the 2-0 "surprise" teams are any good remains a puzzle.

Here is a look at a few of those squads and whether their fans should be making bowl travel plans.

Kentucky

Quarterback Jared Lorenzen is a man on a mission. After a 2-9 season in 2001, his Wildcats could make some people take notice in the SEC. After nipping a solid Louisville team in the opener (22-17), Kentucky pounded UTEP 77-17. With games against defensively challenged Indi-

ana and Middle Tennessee State, the 'Cats should be 4-0 before SEC play begins with a game at Florida. Don't expect miracles, but this could be the turnaround of the year.

Minnesota

The fraud opponent award has been passed from Kansas State to Minnesota, which has lined up a list of Who's Horrible opponents. A 4-7 team a year ago, the Golden Gophers have raced out of the gate by feeding upon Southwest Texas (42-0) and Louisiana-Lafayette (35-11). Next up are Toledo and Buffalo, which means Minnesota should be 4-0 going into its Big Ten opener at Purdue. When Glen Mason's crew gets into the Big Ten, bet the other guys. It's hard to sharpen those competitive teeth on cream puffs.

Kansas State

After the Wildcats fell to 6-6 last season, fans in Manhattan probably are wondering whether the bottom has dropped out on coach Bill Snyder. A 2-0 start with romps over Western Kentucky (48-3) and Louisiana-Monroe (68-0) just proves the Wildcats are better than Minnesota. This Saturday's home game against Eastern Illinois is more proof that a shark can swallow a minnow. Snyder has just 10 returning starters from last season's team, and the Big 12 should be tougher than ever. Don't expect the Wildcats to be doing any major bowling soon, unless they join a pee-wee league.

Missouri

The Tigers' 33-20 win over Illinois in their opener gives some legitimacy to

thoughts of a rebirth in Columbia, Mo., after a 4-7 2001. They followed up by hammering Ball State 41-6 and should go to 4-0 as Bowling Green and Troy State are next in line. Unfortunately for second-year coach Gary Pinkel, his team has to open Big 12 play against Oklahoma and Nebraska back-to-back. Getting six or seven wins doesn't seem likely, but don't count out a minor bowl berth for Missouri.

California

The Golden Bears, 1-10 a year ago, feasted on a couple of bottom feeders, Baylor and New Mexico State, but will get a real test against No. 15-ranked Michigan State on Saturday in East Lansing. Fortunately for new coach Jeff Tedford, he has a senior-laden team that has absorbed a new system quickly. Unfor-

tunately for Tedford, he doesn't have enough depth to get through a season's worth of pounding. Three or four more wins would make Tedford a coach of the year candidate.

Air Force

With only three offensive starters returning from the 2001 squad that went 6-6, the Falcons have scored 90 points in wins over Northwestern and New Mexico. Although Air Force plays at Cal on Sept. 21, the real test will be its game on Sept. 28 at Utah. If Fisher DeBerry's team passes that test, bowl possibilities are real for a team that eventually will face BYU, Notre Dame and Colorado State.

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