

## NFL PRESEASON

*"As we progress as an offense — we want to continue to have the gas pedal down and find ways to continue to score. I like where we're going, I like where we're headed."*

—Marcus Mariota,  
Atlanta Falcons

## Mariota impresses in 2nd game with Atlanta

BY GEOFFREY C. ARNOLD  
oregonlive.com

Marcus Mariota can seemingly do little wrong with the Atlanta Falcons.

The former Oregon Ducks quarterback, whose debut performance was impressive in the preseason opener, produced an even better performance in his second preseason game Monday night, Aug. 22.

Mariota, who displayed his dual-threat ability in the first preseason game, stayed in the pocket and showed off his arm during the Falcons' 24-16 loss to the New York Jets. Mariota, who started, led the Falcons on scoring drives in two of the three offensive series when he played.

"I thought we were efficient — made some plays and got some points on the board," Mariota told reporters after the game. "But we can always be better."

Mariota displayed his ability to throw the deep ball by completing a 52-yard pass to tight end Kyle Pitts on the second offensive play of the game.

While Mariota completed the pass, a better pass of placing the ball in front of Pitts would've likely resulted in a touchdown. The Falcons ended the drive with a field goal after Mariota completed 3 of 4 passes for 67 yards during the drive.

"He just brings a lot to it," Pitts told ESPN Monday night. "The pocket moves, that makes it pretty fun."

Mariota, who signed a two-year, \$18.75 million contract with the Falcons in March, completed another pass for a chunk play during their second offensive series, finding tight end Anthony Firkser wide open deep down the left sideline for a 39-yard gain to the Jets' 14.

Mariota ended the drive with a laser-like 13-yard touchdown pass in a tight window to wide receiver Olamide Zaccheaus. Mariota completed 3 of 4 passes for 65 yards during that drive.

Falcons coach Arthur Smith said he saw a lot of positives from Mariota's performance.

"I'm pleased with Marcus," Smith told reporters after the game. "He got into a good rhythm. The only drive I thought wasn't very good was where we tried to simulate a two-minute situation, we got backed up and it wasn't really clean there, but other than that I thought he was really clean when he was in there. I think he got into the offense, got into a rhythm, made a big-time throw."

Mariota's night wasn't completely error free. He under-threw running back Qadree Ollison on a short pass to his left and threw behind Zaccheaus on a slant pattern during the Falcons' third offensive series. Mariota was pulled after the third series, finishing the night completing 6 of 10 passes for 132 yards and a touchdown.

"It was great that we got points early," Mariota told reporters after the game. "As we progress as an offense — we want to continue to have the gas pedal down and find ways to continue to score. I like where we're going. I like where we're headed."

## BAKER VOLLEYBALL



Ian Crawford/Baker City Herald

Baker volleyball during a preseason practice on Aug. 17, 2022, in the Baker gym.

## Bulldogs ready to defend GOL title

### Coach Ali Abrego excited about veteran team

BY IAN CRAWFORD  
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With a senior class leading the way, Baker volleyball coach Ali Abrego is looking to repeat as Greater Oregon League champions and return to the Class 4A state playoffs.

"We will be putting a lean on the majority of the seniors, and we are returning with the player of the year from the 2021 season, Jozie Ramos," said Abrego, who is starting her third year as head coach. "This senior class has a remarkable work ethic, and is a group of girls that is hard to come by in terms of class, kindness, and character. This group I've

had for the last three years, and so we are cohesive and have a lot of fun together."

Ramos will be joined by fellow seniors Taylor Dalton, Makenzie Flanagan and Campbell Vanderwiele, who is recovering from a broken arm sustained in June during summer volleyball.

Seniors Rylee Elms and Macey Moore won't return to the court for the Bulldogs, but Abrego said she's excited about the Bulldogs' prospect for improving on last year's 10-3 record, which included a 6-0 mark in the GOL and a first-round playoff win over Marshfield.

Baker was eliminated from the playoffs by Philomath.

"Last season was a great season for us, the girls worked really hard and were able to make it to the elite eight, losing our playoff

game against Philomath," Abrego said. "This year the girls are back at it and very eager to show off all of their hard work. They have put in a lot of time and effort over the summer, and I'm excited to see their upcoming success."

Baker started practice Aug. 15, and the Bulldogs will open the season Thursday, Aug. 25 by playing host to Vale.

The varsity match is set for 6:30 p.m.

In addition to the returning seniors, Baker's ranks are bolstered by a big turnout of underclassmen — enough, Abrego said, to fill JV and JV2 squads as well.

Sonny Gulick is back as JV and assistant coach, and Jayme Ramos, a BHS graduate, will lead the JV2 team and serve as an assistant.

"Jayme and Sonny run their practices, help foster skill development and ultimately help me make coaching decisions at the varsity level," Abrego said.

"Sonny and I have been coaching together for a few years now, and have created an awesome dynamic, we are very excited to add Jayme to the mix as she was a standout athlete and Baker alum."

Other returning varsity players include junior Ryann Paulsen and sophomores Sofia Hanson, Ashlyn Dalton, Lilly Wilson and Taylor Churchfield.

Abrego is in her seventh year as a coach. A 2013 graduate of Powder Valley High School, she was an all-state player in volleyball, basketball and track.

She competed in volleyball and track at Northwest Naz-

arene University in Nampa, Idaho, from 2013-15.

"I moved back to Eastern Oregon University in 2015, and began coaching La Grande JV2," Abrego said. "I graduated from EOU in 2017, and took my first teaching job in John Day which began in the fall. I took over the program in 2018, and moved back to Baker in 2020 after finishing my second master's degree."

This year Abrego says she wants to focus on helping players keep cool heads during hard matches and intensive game schedules.

"We have added more emphasis on the mental strain of volleyball," she said.

"I always tell my girls volleyball is 70% mental, 30% physical, and they have to be prepared to fight through pressure situations."

## COLLEGE FOOTBALL

## Changing Pac-12 still seeking next playoff appearance

BY JOHN MARSHALL  
Associated Press

The last major change in the Pac-12 came with the addition of Colorado and Utah in 2011, an expansion met with excitement.

The latest bit of realignment feels a lot different. UCLA and Southern California aren't leaving for the Big Ten until 2024, but there's already an uncomfortable air out West.

"It's an awkward situation for everybody," UCLA coach Chip Kelly said. The Pac-12's future is still up in the air, whether it's standing pat with 10 teams, expanding or losing more schools to other major conferences.

The main goal will remain no matter what schools are still there: getting through to the College Football Playoff.

The Pac-12 has put two teams through to the CFP and none since Washington lost to Alabama in the 2017 national semifinals. The conference's last national champion was USC in 2005.

The Pac-12 has three teams ranked in the preseason AP Top 25 to start this season: No. 7 Utah, No. 11 Oregon and No. 14 USC.

"This conference has been really deep and it's really hard to run the table in this conference," Stanford coach David Shaw said. "Maybe

other conferences it's easier playing eight conference games, maybe the conference is not quite as deep. You have three games to get up for every year. Our conference, if you slip up, you're going to get beat."

## FAVORED UTES

Utah won the Pac-12 championship a year ago and is favored to win it again, picked first in the preseason media poll.

Quarterback Cameron Rising's return is a big reason why.

As a sophomore, he threw for 2,493 yards and 20 touchdowns with just five interceptions. Rising had the Utes in position to knock off Ohio State in the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day, but went out in the fourth quarter after his head slammed to the turf as he was sacked. The Buckeyes won 48-45 with Rising on the sideline.

Rising completed nearly 64% of his passes last season and has added arm strength so he can take more deep shots down the field this year.

"Cam means so much to our football team," Utah coach Kyle Whittingham said. "Off the field he's the leader of the leaders, the alpha dog of our team, really sets the standard. You couldn't ask for a better leader."



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