

Race is wide open for college football title

By SCOTT SMITH
Staff Writer

This year's race for the national championship should be one of the most wide-open ever.

At least 15 teams look on paper as if they can go all the way, with the right breaks. That lends support to the theory of growing parity in college football that coaches are always talking about.

Even the so-called experts had trouble in pre-season polls predicting who will be No. 1. For instance, in many polls Auburn was picked to finish first, but in one poll they couldn't even be found in the Top 20.

The following is a composite Top 20 of the AP, UPI, *Sports Illustrated*, *Sport*, *The Sporting News*, *Street and Smith* and *Playboy* pre-season polls:

Auburn

With Heisman candidate Bo Jackson, a running back who could make the South forget about Herschel Walker, and a stingy defense with four possible All-Americans, this team is the consensus pre-season pick to take it all.

Junior tailback Jackson, a 222-pound superman who had a 7.7 yards per carry average last year, spearheads a potent wishbone attack. The only missing piece to the offensive puzzle is at quarterback, where flawless triple-option threat Randy Campbell has graduated. Junior Pat Washington, a gifted passer, looks to be the man to fill the job.

Defensive end Gerald Robinson, tackle Ben Thomas, linebacker Greg Carr and cornerback David King anchor another strong Tiger defense.

Even with the opening-game loss to defending champ Miami, coach Pat Dye should have plenty to smile about this season.

Clemson

Although probation keeps the Tigers ineligible for the ACC title, it doesn't hinder them from going undefeated and being voted number one in the final AP poll. Both are good possibilities, as coach Danny Ford directs his best team since the 1981 national championship club. Forty-seven lettermen return, including an especially strong senior class.

The always-tough Clemson defense will be particularly stingy this season. Mammoth noseguard William Perry (6-3, 320), a pre-season All-America pick, heads up a veteran cast that will be tough to penetrate.

Offensively, firepower abounds as underrated QB Mike Eppley is back to call signals for a veteran crew that includes elusive running backs Stacy Driver and Terrence Flagler and what Ford calls one of the best Tiger receiving corps in a while. Those receivers include wide-outs Terrence Rhoulac and Shelton Boyer, plus tight end K.D. Dunn.

All in all, probation won't keep Clemson fans from enjoying one of its best teams ever. It's no accident that Clemson is the only school in the ACC that puts football ahead of basketball.

Texas

Only a narrow 10-9 loss to Georgia in the Cotton Bowl kept the Longhorns from going undefeated and winning the national championship last season. This season, if everyone stays healthy coach Fred Aker's team could have the same opportunities as last year.

The reason the Longhorns must keep a clean bill of health is twofold. Both starting QB Rob Moerschell and multi-talented tailback Edwin Simmons went down with

injuries at mid-season last year and weren't able to come back.

Both are presumably healthy this year and should add some punch to what was, at times, an anemic offense last season. Akers is looking for a big year in particular from Simmons, who is said to be the most dynamic back in the Southwest Conference.

Texas had the number one defensive unit in the country last year. However, seven starters are gone and that has Longhorn coaches worried. Still, this team should be a powerhouse if it can hold steady on defense and Simmons fulfills his promise at tailback.

Nebraska

Last year many said the Cornhuskers' second string could beat most first units in the country. This year we'll be able to see if that's true.

Although they return eight starters on defense, the Nebraska offense will not resemble last year's high-powered attack at all. Gone are the likes of QB Turner Gill, Heisman Trophy winner Mike Rozier and number one NFL pick Irving Fryar.

Trying to fill those spots will be QB Craig Sundberg, RB Jeff Smith, who sparked the Orange Bowl comeback against Miami, and wingback Shane Swanson, who coach Tom Osborne says lacks Fryar's explosiveness but has better hands.

Blocking for those people will be the usual tank-like Nebraska offensive line. This year's version averages 265 pounds and is led by guard Harry Grimminger.

The defense will probably be even better than last year, as free safety Bret Clark heads up a particularly strong defensive backfield.

While probably not winning by the same 73-6 scores as last year, this year's Nebraska club should find its way back to Miami for a fourth-straight Orange Bowl and Big Eight championship.

Pittsburgh

If the Panthers can get past a tough early-season schedule, coach Foge Fazio's troups could be in line for an outstanding year. In all, 45 lettermen return.

Leading the cast of offensive returnees is junior QB John Congemi, who took over the signal

calling midway through last year and showed a fine arm. Marlon McIntyre and Chuck Scales make up a potent backfield. But the real offensive strength is in the offensive line, where two-time All-American Bill Fralic paces one of the country's best interior lines.

Senior linebacker Troy Benson heads up what is always a tough defense. Only a young defensive line keeps this contingent from being one of the best.

If Fazio can get that young line to come of age in a hurry, Pitt can again lay claim to being the best in the East, if not the entire country.

UCLA

It's hard to believe that the Bruins bounced back from a 0-3-1 start last year to win their second straight Pac-10 title, but they did. After a few lax years in the late 70s and early 80s, coach Terry Donahue has been quietly building some solid football teams. With superior personnel and back-to-back super recruiting years, this could be a team for the 80s.

Senior QB Steve Bono will lead a dynamic passing attack centered around a talented crew of receivers that include Mike Sherrod (48 catches last year), Mike Young and tight end Karl Dorrell. What running the Bruins do will be handled by senior tailback Danny Andrews.

On defense Donahue returns six starters and several other experienced players. All Pac-10 linebacker Neal Dellocono highlights a solid contingent.

Another plus is the kicking game, where junior John Lee made 31 of 39 field goals last year.

Overall, with seven home games, this UCLA squad could be in the thick of the national championship derby if it fulfills the promise of its immense talent.

Notre Dame

Under Gerry Faust, the Irish have always been a perennial pre-season top 10 pick, but somehow always seem to fizzle out by mid-season. The experts have to rate this team high, if for nothing else, their unbelievable talent. With good recruiting under his belt, all Faust has to do is mold this unit and it should come out looking like a masterpiece.

Sophomore quarterback Steve Beuerlein, junior RB Allen Pin-

kett, who could break the school rushing record this season, and defensive tackle Mike Golic (6-5, 257) are at the top of a star-studded list of returnees.

Faust has a lot of talented pieces to a winning puzzle in 1984. The only question is, after three years will he finally be able to put it together?

Arizona State

Three things make you want to bet that the Sun Devils will have their best season ever in 1984: (1) there are eight home games dotting the schedule, (2) the defense returns 21 of the top 22 players and (3) Luis Zendejas, probably the best kicker in the NCAA, is back.

However, there are some question marks. Foremost of them is how well third-year QB Jeff Von Rasphorst will replace the departed Todd Hons. Coach Darryl Rogers says Van Rasphorst's leadership qualities will make him successful in engineering an explosive Sun Devil offense.

That offense will include last year's Pac-10 rushing runner-up Darryl Clack (932 yards) and strong fullback Channing Williams. Doug Allen and Paul Day are veteran receivers.

All-America hopeful safety David Fulcher, who had 110 tackles last year, leads an offense that coach Rogers says should carry the team through the first half of the season.

If all goes as expected, ASU could get its first taste of the Rose Bowl and national limelight in 1984.

Michigan

Last year's 9-3 team that played Auburn to a virtual standstill in the Sugar Bowl, returns a good nucleus this year. With the exception of graduated QB Steve Smith, the offense is pretty much back intact.

That offense will feature the Rogers and Hammerstein show. However, this orchestra will not be playing music. The brother tandem of Mark and Mike Hammerstein will be opening holes for tailback Rick Rogers, who gained 1000 yards last year, to spearhead the offense. Junior Jim Harbaugh will be the new quarterback, in what coach Bo Schembechler is

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