

INSIDE THE POCKET WITH ... "I've never seen anybody — running back, quarterback, wide receiver — make the plays that Vince Young made today." — ABC analyst and former QB **DAN FOUTS** during last year's national championship game

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Conference previews

XII Favorites: Sooners, Longhorns, Cornhuskers
Sleepers: Red Raiders, Aggies, Buffaloes
Top players: Adrian Peterson, RB, Oklahoma; Justin Blalock, OT, Texas; Bret Meyer, QB, Iowa State; D'Juan Woods, WR, Oklahoma State; Rufus Alexander, LB, Oklahoma
Defending champ: Texas (South, overall); Colorado (North)
2005 bowl teams: 8

BIG EAST Favorites: Cardinals, Mountaineers • Sleeper: Panthers
Top players: Michael Bush, RB, Louisville; Steve Slaton, RB, West Virginia; Brian Brohm, QB, Louisville; H.B. Blades, LB, Pittsburgh; Brian Leonard, RB, Rutgers
Defending champ: West Virginia
2005 bowl teams: 4

BIG TEN Favorites: Buckeyes, Wolverines, Hawkeyes
Sleepers: Nittany Lions, Boilermakers
Top players: Troy Smith, QB, Ohio State; Drew Stanton, QB, Michigan State; Albert Young, RB, Iowa; Mike Hart, RB, Michigan; Ted Ginn Jr., WR, Ohio State; Paul Posluszny, LB, Penn State
Defending co-champ: Penn State, Ohio State
2005 bowl teams: 7

PAC 10 Favorites: Trojans, Golden Bears, Ducks
Sleepers: Sun Devils
Top players: Dwayne Jarrett, WR, Southern California; Sam Keller, QB, Arizona State; Marshawn Lynch, RB, California; Keith Rivers, LB, Southern California; Jason Hill, WR, Washington State; Brandon Mebane, DL, California
Defending champ: Southern Cal
2005 bowl teams: 5

SEC Favorites: Auburn and LSU Tigers, Gators, Bulldogs
Sleepers: Volunteers, Razorbacks
Top players: Kenny Irons, RB, Auburn; Darren McFadden, RB, Arkansas; Sidney Rice, WR, South Carolina; Patrick Willis, LB, Mississippi; LaRon Landry, S, LSU; Chris Leak, QB, Florida
Defending champ: Georgia (East, overall); LSU (West)
2005 bowl teams: 6

MOUNTAIN WEST Favorites: Horned Frogs, Utes
Sleepers: Cougars
Top players: John Beck, QB, BYU; Brian Johnson, QB, Utah; Kyle Bell, RB, Colorado State; Chase Ortiz, DL, TCU; Tommy Blake, DL, TCU
Defending champ: TCU
2005 bowl teams: 4

USA Favorites: Miners, Golden Hurricane, Golden Knights
Sleepers: Golden Eagles, Cougars
Top players: Kevin Kolb, QB, Houston; Larry McSwain, DL, UAB; Marcus Thomas, RB, UTEP; Aundrea Allison, WR, E. Carolina; Nick Bunting, LB, Tulsa
Defending champ: Tulsa (West, overall); UCF (East)
2005 bowl teams: 6

MID-AMERICAN Favorites: Huskies, Zips
Sleepers: Bobcats, Broncos
Top players: Garrett Wolfe, RB, N. Illinois; Luke Getsy, QB, Akron; Daniel Bauzin, DL, Central Michigan; Ryne Robinson, WR, Miami (Ohio); Andrew Wellock, K, Eastern Michigan
Defending champ: Akron (East, overall); Northern Illinois (West)
2005 bowl teams: 2

WAC Favorites: Broncos, Bulldogs
Sleepers: Wolf Pack, Rainbow Warriors
Top players: Colt Brennan, QB, Hawaii; Corey Hall, LB, Boise State; Dwayne Wright, RB, Fresno State; Jeff Rowe, QB, Nevada; Jared Zabransky, QB, Boise State
Defending champ: Nevada, Boise State
2005 bowl teams: 3

SUN BELT Favorites: Ragin' Cajuns, Indians
Sleepers: Trojans, Blue Raiders
Top players: Jamario Thomas, RB, North Texas; Omar Haugabook, QB, Troy; Chaz Williams, CB, La.-Monroe
Defending champs: Arkansas State, Louisiana-Lafayette, Louisiana-Monroe
2005 bowl teams: 1

INDEPENDENTS
Top players: Brady Quinn, QB, Notre Dame; Jeff Samardzija, WR, Notre Dame; Adam Ballard, RB, Navy; Barrett Scruggs, LB, Army
2005 bowl teams: 2

With last season's heavyweights in rebuilding mode, more programs sense now is the time to alter the balance of power because the national title is ...

Up for grabs

By Ralph D. Russo | Associated Press

The Southern California dynasty has been derailed and so for the first time in a few years, there will be a race instead of a chase for the national championship. The field appears to be wide open.

There's legitimate title talk going on at Ohio State, Notre Dame, LSU, Auburn and West Virginia and hopes are high for Florida and California.

Oh, and USC and Texas are still really good. In fact, it wouldn't be shocking to see the Trojans and Longhorns playing for the national title in a rematch of the Rose Bowl.

So who's the favorite? Is there a favorite?

"At this time of year, I never have an opinion," said USC coach Pete Carroll, whose Trojans team featuring Matt Leinart and Reggie Bush was denied a third straight national title by Vince Young and Texas. "We just got to start playing and see what happens."

Fans in the stands

The total attendance at Division I-A games was up slightly over the previous season.	(in millions)
2005	32.6
2004	32.5
2003	35.1
2002	34.4
2001	30.3

Scoring

Average points per game by team:	
2005	26.9
2004	26.6
2003	26.9
2002	27.3
2001	27.2
2000	26.2

Teams on a roll...

Top winning streaks
1. Texas20
2. TCU10
3. Ohio State7
4. West Virginia .. 7

... and in a hole

Top losing streaks
1. New Mexico St. ...13
2. Temple12
3. Syracuse9
4. Illinois9
5. Kent State9

Some teams will carry over trends from last season, including national championship winner Texas.

Heisman hopefuls

Heading into the 2006 season, here are the players already producing a Heisman buzz:

Brady Quinn, QB • Notre Dame
Deserves to be at the top of the Heisman watch; might be the best quarterback in the country.



Adrian Peterson, RB • Oklahoma
Injuries and an inconsistent supporting cast curtailed the 218-pound battering ram. This season, he'll be back with a vengeance.



Troy Smith, QB • Ohio State
Buckeyes fans feel if he hadn't been suspended for first game of last season they would have beaten Texas in Game 2 and gone on to the Rose Bowl.



Brian Brohm, QB • Louisville
Big East player of the year is coming back from major knee surgery; nothing like overcoming adversity to bolster your Heisman resume.



Ted Ginn Jr., WR • Ohio State
Breathakingly fast, capable of the type of highlight reel moments that sway Heisman voters.



Kenny Irons, RB • Auburn
The Tigers' newest star running back led the SEC in rushing last season, despite starting only nine games.



Double trouble for the opposition

Every football team has a good player or two, but not all have the kind of twinned stars who can complement each other on the field. Here's a look at some of the best dynamic duos in the nation:



Brady Quinn, QB
Jeff Samardzija, WR
Notre Dame
Quinn threw a school-record 32 TD passes last season. Samardzija caught 15 of them. Sounds like a pretty successful combination.



Dwayne Jarrett
Steve Smith, WRs
Southern California
How about a pair of receivers who combined for 151 catches and 2,231 yards receiving last season. Yes, that'll do nicely.



Steve Slaton, RB
Pat White, QB
West Virginia
Let's see: 2,000 yards combined last season? Check. Vast majority of the Mountaineers' rushing TDs? Check. Chances they can do it again? Excellent.



Paul Posluszny
Dan Connor, LBs
Penn State
If Posluszny has recovered from a knee injury in the Orange Bowl win over Florida State, he and Connor should be the top pair of LBs in the country.

Definitely worth a look

Ten games that could — no, will — decide the national championship.



California at Tennessee
Sept. 2

Thanks to a powerful running game and staunch defense, California could be a nice dark-horse pick to play for the BCS championship. Probably not with one loss, though.



Ohio State at Texas • Sept. 9
An early season all-in call to see who gets to chase the national title, and who gets to pin hopes to the conference season.



LSU at Auburn • Sept. 16
Auburn probably has the least-harrowing schedule of the SEC contenders. Not that it'll be any consolation in the battle of Tigers.



Notre Dame at Michigan State
Sept. 23
Michigan could upset the appellation the week before, but the pesky Spartans are too often the Irish's downfall. After this, it should be smooth sailing for Notre Dame until a visit to Southern Cal (see below).



Texas at Nebraska • Oct. 21
The Cornhuskers should have a nasty defense this year, and they'll be ready for the Longhorns.



West Virginia at Louisville
Nov. 2
West Virginia, the darling of many preseason pundits, has a decidedly manageable schedule before and after this game.



Virginia Tech at Miami • Nov. 4
This should be a tilt between two of the nation's best defenses, and the winner should play for the ACC title, if not more.



California at USC • Nov. 18
Even if Cal is likely to be out of the picture, the Trojans might not be. Could they get caught looking ahead to Notre Dame?



Notre Dame at USC • Nov. 25
An early candidate for most-hyped game of the season for a reason.



Florida at Florida State • Nov. 25
Both teams have to pass tough, early season tests (at Tennessee and at Miami). But if they both pass, this could be one for the ages.

Buckeyes streak to the top of the AP poll

For the first time since 1998, Ohio State is preseason No. 1 in The Associated Press Top 25. Southern California, preseason No. 1 the past two years, is No. 6.

The Top 25 teams in The Associated Press expanded preseason college football poll with first-place votes in parentheses.

TEAM	REC	EXTRA POINTS
1. Ohio St. (35)	10-2	Seventh preseason No. 1 rank
2. Notre Dame (10)	9-3	Sixteen starters return
3. Texas (8)	13-0	Young replaced by frosh QB
4. Auburn (3)	9-3	1-3 in last four openers
5. West Virginia (6)	11-1	Tough games come in Nov.
6. Southern Cal (3)	12-1	37-2 over last three years
7. Florida	9-3	100th anniversary season
8. LSU	11-2	Visits Tigers, Gators & Vols
9. California	8-4	Best pre-rank since 1952
10. Oklahoma	8-4	Names removed from jerseys
11. Florida St.	8-5	Won 12 of 14 ACC titles
12. Miami	9-3	Six new assistants for Coker
13. Louisville	9-3	Easiest sked of top-25 teams
14. Michigan	7-5	Carr has new coordinators
15. Georgia	10-3	Averaged 11 wins last 4 years
16. Iowa	7-5	Most Big 10 wins last 4 years
17. Virginia Tech	11-2	Lost 9 players to NFL Draft
18. Clemson	8-4	No bye first 11 weeks
19. Penn St.	11-1	Joe Pa going strong at 80
20. Nebraska	8-4	Was 107th in rushing in 2005
21. Oregon	10-2	Dixon & Leaf share QB spot
22. TCU	11-1	Another 8-0 MWC season?
23. Tennessee	5-6	'05 worst year under Fulmer
24. Arizona St.	7-5	Ten offensive starters back
25. Texas Tech	9-3	Raiders switch to FieldTurf

Others receiving votes: Alabama 141, Utah 52, Boston College 41, Georgia Tech 39, Boise St. 23, Arkansas 18, Wisconsin 18, South Carolina 15, Tulsa 11, Texas A&M 10, BYU 4, Purdue 4, UTEP 4, Iowa St. 3, Mississippi 3, N. Illinois 3, Michigan St. 2, Arizona 1