



Paul Vernon/AP photo

Ohio State coach Ryan Day talks to his team during NCAA college football practice on Aug. 1 in Columbus, Ohio.

College football season kicks off with thrilling matchups and high stakes

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

After a long and busy season for college athletics, the football season arrives with a host of tantalizing angles. A look at some of the big games among the top teams, what's at stake and the hurdles that must be cleared on the way to the national championship.

WHEN DOES COLLEGE FOOTBALL START?

A handful of games kick off the season Aug. 23, with the most intriguing a Big 12 matchup between No. 22 Iowa State and No. 17 Kansas State that will take place in Dublin, Ireland. Both teams are considered contenders in their wide-open conference. Kansas State quarterback Avery Johnson threw for a school-record 25 touchdowns last season and ran for seven more. Iowa State played in the conference title game last year.

The following weekend has some doozies: No. 9 LSU faces No. 4 Clemson, No. 6 Notre Dame visits No. 10 Miami and defending champion No. 3 Ohio State hosts No. 1 Texas. Before the College Football Playoff expanded to 12 teams last year, a game like that might have been make or break. Now, teams have second chances and can afford three (maybe four) losses and still get in.

WHO ARE THE FAVORITES?

The AP Top 25 and the coaches poll both list Texas as the preseason No. 1 team and the Longhorns are currently the favorite (plus-450, or 9-2 odds) to win the

national championship, according to BetMGM Sportsbook. Ohio State is right behind them (plus-525), followed by No. 5 Georgia and No. 2 Penn State (both 7-1) and then Clemson and No. 7 Oregon (both 9-1).

KEY GAMES TO WATCH

Preseason No. 7 Oregon visits No. 2 Penn State on Sept. 27 in a rematch of last season's Big Ten title game. Penn State also has a game against Ohio State on Nov. 1. Speaking of the Buckeyes, the national title helped them get over their fourth straight loss to pre-season No. 14 Michigan. That rematch is in its usual spot, Thanksgiving weekend, Nov. 29 at the Big House. ... TCU at North Carolina (Bill Belichick's coaching debut) on Sept. 1 ... Oklahoma vs. Texas on Oct. 11 ... USC at No. 6 Notre Dame on Oct. 18 ... LSU at No. 8 Alabama on Nov. 8 ... No. 11 Arizona State at Colorado on Nov. 22.

THE 12-TEAM PLAYOFF

The College Football Playoff remains at 12 teams this year with one significant tweak: Unlike last year, conference champions will not be guaranteed a bye in the first round. But the best five conference champions are still guaranteed spots in the tournament.

Seeds 5-8 will host first-round games against 9-12 on Dec. 19 (one game) and Dec. 20 (three games). The quarterfinals will be at the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 1, then at the Orange, Rose and Sugar

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For First Time Ever, NBC Sports to Present Kentucky Oaks in Primetime – Friday, May 1, 2026, on ...

CHURCHILL DOWNS INCORPORATED (GLOBE NEWSWIRE)

LOUISVILLE, Ky., July 24, 2025 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) – NBC Sports will showcase the Kentucky Oaks in primetime for the first time ever in 2026, it was announced today by Churchill Downs Incorporated (Nasdaq: CHDN, “CDI”) and NBC Sports.

The 152nd Kentucky Oaks, featuring thoroughbred racing's best three-year-old fillies, will be presented on Friday, May 1, 2026, at 8 p.m. ET on NBC and Peacock. In addition to premier racing, Kentucky Oaks traditions centered around fashion and women's health advocacy will remain central pillars of the event pageantry—now culminating in a spectacular twilight finish.

“We are excited to present the Kentucky Oaks in primetime for the first time ever,” said Jon Miller, President, Acquisitions & Partnerships, NBC Sports. “With the Oaks on Friday night leading into the Kentucky Derby on the first Saturday in May, we can't wait to get back to Churchill Downs for another historic weekend of racing.”

“By moving the Kentucky Oaks to primetime, we're giving one of horse racing's most treasured traditions the national stage it deserves,” said CDI CEO Bill Carstanjen. “This decision is rooted in our commitment to growing the sport, reaching new audiences and creating unforgettable experiences for our fans.”

The Kentucky Derby stands as America's oldest continually held major sporting event. The 152nd Kentucky Derby is Saturday, May 2, 2026, on NBC and Peacock. The 151st Kentucky Derby on May 3, 2025, was the most-watched “Run for the Roses” since 1989, with the audience peaking at 21.8 million viewers on NBC and Peacock as Sovereignty ran to victory.

In May 2024, NBC Sports and Churchill Downs announced a multi-year extension of their historic partnership. The relationship, which began with the 2001

Kentucky Derby, will make NBC the longest running home of the Kentucky Derby, as NBCUniversal will become the first media company to present the most prestigious event in horse racing for three decades (32 editions of the Kentucky Derby from 2001-32).

About Churchill Downs Incorporated

Churchill Downs Incorporated (“CDI”) (Nasdaq: CHDN) has been creating extraordinary entertainment experiences for over 150 years, beginning with the company's most iconic and enduring asset, the Kentucky Derby. Headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky, CDI has expanded through the acquisition, development, and operation of live and historical racing entertainment venues, the growth of online wagering businesses, and the acquisition, development, and operation of regional casino gaming properties. www.churchilldownsincorporated.com

This news release contains various “forward-looking statements” within the meaning of the “Safe Harbor” provisions of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. Forward-looking statements are typically identified by the use of terms such as “anticipate,” “believe,” “could,” “estimate,” “expect,” “intend,” “may,” “might,” “plan,” “predict,” “project,” “seek,” “should,” “will,” “scheduled,” and similar words or similar expressions (or negative versions of such words or expressions), although some forward-looking statements are expressed differently. Although we believe that the expectations reflected in such forward-looking statements are reasonable, we can give no assurance that such expectations will prove to be correct. Important factors, that could cause actual results to differ materially from expectations include the following: the occurrence of extraordinary events, such as terrorist attacks, public health threats, civil unrest, and inclement weather, including as a result of climate change; the effect of economic conditions on our consumers' confidence and discretionary spending

or our access to credit, including the impact of inflation; changes in, or new interpretations of, applicable tax laws or rulings that could result in additional tax liabilities; the impact of any pandemics, epidemics, or outbreaks of infectious diseases, and related economic matters on our results of operations, financial conditions and prospects; lack of confidence in the integrity of our core businesses or any deterioration in our reputation; negative shifts in public opinion regarding gambling that could result in increased regulation of, or new restrictions on, the gaming industry; loss of key or highly skilled personnel, as well as general disruptions in the general labor market; the impact of significant competition, and the expectation that competition levels will increase; changes in consumer preferences, attendance, wagering, and sponsorships; risks associated with equity investments, strategic alliances and other third-party agreements; inability to respond to rapid technological changes in a timely manner; concentration and evolution of slot machine and historical racing machine (HRM) manufacturing and other technology conditions that could impose additional costs; failure to enter into or maintain agreements with industry constituents, including horsemen and other racetracks; inability to successfully focus on market access and retail operations for our sports betting business and effectively compete; online security risk, including cyber-security breaches, or loss or misuse of our stored information as a result of a breach including customers' personal information could lead to government enforcement actions or other litigation; costs of compliance with increasingly complex laws and regulations regarding data privacy and protection of personal information; reliance on our technology services and catastrophic events and system failures disrupting our operations; inability to identify, complete, or fully realize the benefits of our proposed acquisitions,

divestitures, development of new venues or the expansion of existing facilities on time, on budget, or as planned; difficulty in integrating recent or future acquisitions into our operations; cost overruns and other uncertainties associated with the development of new venues and the expansion of existing facilities; general risks related to real estate ownership and significant expenditures, including risks related to environmental liabilities; personal injury litigation related to injuries occurring at our racetracks; compliance with the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act or other similar laws and regulations, or applicable anti-money laundering regulations; payment-related risks, such as risk associated with fraudulent credit card or debit card use; work stoppages and labor problems; risks related to pending or future legal proceedings and other actions; highly regulated operations and changes in the regulatory environment could adversely affect our business; restrictions in our debt facilities limiting our flexibility to operate our business; failure to comply with the financial ratios and other covenants in our debt facilities and other indebtedness; increases to interest rates (due to inflation or otherwise), disruption in the credit markets or changes to our credit ratings may adversely affect our business; increase in our insurance costs, or inability to obtain similar insurance coverage in the future, and any inability to recover under our insurance policies for damages sustained at our properties in the event of inclement weather and casualty events; and other factors described under the heading “Risk Factors” in our most recent Annual Report on Form 10-K and in other filings we make with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

We do not undertake any obligation to update or revise any forward-looking statements, whether as a result of new information, future events or otherwise, except as required by law.

FIELD

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me from the very beginning super eager to get better and to be successful,” Campbell said. “They came and talked to me and said, ‘Hey, these are the things that we want to improve on from last year, and we want you to push us. We want you to make us work, because we want to have higher standards and be competitive.’ That's when I realized I had the opportunity to be with and coach a really great group of girls who come out here every day trying to get better and asking what they can do to improve.”

Dennison is one of two players that played in all 19 games last season for the team. Dennison has felt like Campbell has instilled more effort and determination from the team. She will be helping lead the back row and defense for the team. She feels like the communication has gotten better.

“I think we've improved on our communication, making sure we're in the right spots and helping the new girls just know where to go and how to get down and block better,” Dennison said.

Campbell has found Dennison to be very coachable, especially coming over from softball. She has seen the leadership Dennison brings to the team help the other girls become more coachable.

“If I tell her one thing, [Dennison] does it immediately,” Campbell said. “I think that's super helpful, because younger girls see that about her, and they want to be like

her. They want to be that person who leads by example. They want to be as strong of a defender as her, so they see her in the weight room, and they want to be like her. I think that is something you can't coach. I'm very honored and lucky to have her as a player.”

Officer has seen Campbell bring determination and accountability to the team in her first year at the helm.

“I feel like I never used to do running and stuff on my own, and I feel like she's definitely inspired me to work harder and actually want to see success for myself in the sport,” Officer said. “I don't feel like last year, I really was as determined as I am now. I feel like she's helped out a lot, making us want to put in more effort.”

Officer scored the first goal of the season for the Lady Colonels in a scrimmage. Officer has been intentional on where she is on the field and focusing on getting open early in the season.

“At the beginning of the season, I was kind of just going wherever I felt like was right, and I feel like Coach Campbell has definitely helped me be more intentional and just be in the right place and be in a spot where we can get goals and not just unthinkably going around.”

Officer expects junior Sara Alvarado to step up as an important piece of the offense this year.

“[Alvarado] is always open, and she's always thinking of plans that we can make to get a goal,” Officer said. “I feel like she's always trying to help others be better and be better for herself. She's

been great.”

Campbell's goalie for the team will be junior Raegan Richins. Richins played in 14 games last year, making 41 saves and allowing just 11 goals. She has seen Richins not be afraid of stepping in and being committed to being the goalie for the team this year.

“[Richins] is aggressive. She wants to learn more. She'll go for the ball. She'll dive,” Campbell said. “She's impressed me in a lot of different ways. She's been one of our leaders in the weight room and on the track as well, putting in the work every day, and that's a lot from a goalie. You don't usually see that. She's been huge for our team in defensive efforts. She had a really strong scrimmage as well. Last week, in our first scrimmage, she did a really great job and had several saves. I was very impressed with that.”

Officer has also seen a lot of growth from Richins in her confidence and knowing where to be on the field. Officer and Dennison has seen her grow in communicating with the back line.

“[Richins] is always talking, always cheering,” Dennison said. “She wants the best for this team, and she's done an amazing job to fill those shoes.”

Another junior that will be an important piece on the team is junior Makenna Thompson. She played in 18 games last season and has seen her conditioning this year get a lot better.

“My conditioning, I think, has improved a lot. I think overall my skills and field awareness [have also improved],” Thompson said.

Along with Thompson, Millet and junior Lillian Sutton will be in the midfield. She has seen a lot of growth out of Millet and Sutton going into the season.

“I think [Lillian] Sutton has definitely stepped up and shown a good example, her and Tatum Millet,” Thompson said. “They just are good at playing both the offensive side and the defensive side.”

Millet was a key piece to last year's team, and Thompson, Officer and Dennison always see Millet staying positive and always encouraging her teammates.

“I feel like she's just positive, and she wants to be friends with everybody and just welcome people in and help them get better,” Officer said.

Campbell will get back sophomore Teagen McKimney, the leading goal scorer that is returning from last year. Campbell has been impressed with what she has brought to the table.

“[McKinney] has been very receptive to my coaching,” Campbell said. “I've pushed her, especially on a lot of different things, and I've really seen her take a step forward into that role, ‘now, I'm not the rookie anymore. I'm setting the tone for other people as well.”

Sutton and junior Olivia Gilbert have set a great example for the younger girls as two returning upper-classmen. Campbell has been impressed with their technical skills so far this year.

“[Gilbert and Sutton] are really great examples to use when I'm trying to teach new girls a skill,” Campbell said. “They have all the technical aspects down. Every

day I'm trying to push them to try new things, take things to a higher level, speed wise. They've been very strong this summer in the weight room and on the field.”

Campbell will have around six or seven first time players this year. She has seen each one compete and put in effort to get better each day. Campbell has been really impressed with the growth of Officer and her ability to grow as a captain and an offensive force for the team.

“[Officer] did play last year, but she's taken on more of a captain role this year, and I've been super impressed with her eagerness and her willingness to do what it takes to get better,” Campbell said. “She's very strong in the circle. She has great field positioning and communication all the time. As a coach, you can't ask for more than that.”

Officer has seen Miller become an important piece of the team after coming over from South Oldham.

“[Miller] had a break last year, and she came back,” Officer said. “She's a senior too, so she's definitely a leader already, and she's pretty talented in field hockey. I think she's been able to apply her skills here, and she's been showing up. I think she's been doing great too.”

Dennison has seen Falciola step up this year as a leader of the team.

“[Falciola] started last season but kind of ended her season early, but she's come back. She's been great, a great leader and a great midfielder,” Dennison said.

Thompson has seen first-year players Lauren Tracy and Emma Fisher step up over

the offseason.

“[Tracy and Fisher] show up, and they push themselves to their hardest every practice,” Thompson said.

Campbell's expectations for the team is to win and get better even if the program is still young and growing.

“We're trying to win games. We're just as competitive as anybody else,” Campbell said. “We have the strength. We have the endurance. We have the skills, what it takes to win games. This year, the standards are higher, and we're always trying to be the best team on the field.”

Dennison has made a goal to improve the win total by at least one game and continue to grow the program.

“One goal I think I have for us as a team is to win five games, which may seem like little, but for us, who are still super new, I think that's a great goal for us,” Dennison said.

Officer and Thompson want to see the team bond stay strong and be strong throughout the season. Officer wants everyone to keep putting in their best effort.

“Our last game, we kind of learned a lesson of not giving up the effort in the end, because we're winning,” Officer said. “I think just keeping that effort and not getting too confident and still working and being intentional, that's definitely a goal for the remainder of the season, keeping the effort the whole time and cheering each other on, because I feel like that's what makes us win.”