



Georgia quarterback Gunner Stockton runs against Alabama during last season's SEC Championship game in Atlanta. (AP PHOTO/MIKE STEWART, FILE)

SEC desperate to end title drought

By MARK LONG
AP Sports Writer

Blame Alabama and Georgia. Point fingers at Auburn, Florida, LSU, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas, too. The Southeastern Conference, once the most dominant league in the land, lost its stranglehold on college football over the last three years. The organization that boasts a combined 19 national championships since 1990 hasn't even made the title game since Georgia won it all in back-to-back years to close out the 2021-22 seasons. It's a drought the league desperately would like to end this season. But the path back to the top could be harder with the addition of a ninth conference game. Sure, it provides teams with an extra chance to prove they belong in the 12-team College Football Playoff.

It's also another potential loss on postseason resumes. "It creates, without question, the most demanding sets of football schedules in all of college football," SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey said last month. "No one has created the kind of weekly competition that exists in the Southeastern Conference. It's competition that our fans will experience every week because we believe we're the best conference in college football." The last three CFPs would say otherwise, especially when recalling no-shows by Alabama last year (against Indiana) and Tennessee (against Ohio State) the year before. The Big Ten has won three straight national titles. The SEC is a combined 5-8 in the last three playoffs, with

two of those victories coming against other league opponents. SEC coaches were initially divided on a nine-game league slate but eventually agreed under the guise that the CFP would expand to 16 or 24 teams. It stayed at 12, and now league coaches are stuck with more daunting schedules and the same access to the lucrative postseason tournament. "Like anything in this world, if you want to be really good at something, you got to take risk," Texas coach Steve Sarkisian said. "There's calculated risks involved in life that you have to take. ... Is the juice worth the squeeze or not?" The league will have a better idea in four months. Ultimately, though, SEC success will be decided in the CFP. After all, the league went 54-8 against non-conference opponents in the regular season last year — including winning records against the Atlantic Coast Conference, the Big 12 and the Big Ten — but ended up again watching the title game from afar. Simply put, the SEC has been good but not great in recent years. Is the league lagging behind? Not even close. But the transfer portal and the ability to compensate players through revenue sharing as well as name, image and likeness deals have clearly minimized advantages the league enjoyed for decades. "I think it's great for the sport," Georgia coach Kirby Smart said. "I think having everybody competitive, more guys can be invited to the party and get to the party, mainly through the portal in a lot of ways. ... It's not a one-team dominant

program. It's really everybody." STAR POWER The SEC has plenty of star power, which provides hope of ending the Big Ten's reign. Ole Miss quarterback Trindad Chambliss, Texas quarterback Arch Manning and South Carolina stars LaNorris Sellers and Dylan Stewart are just a few of the guys who could make a difference. Alabama receiver Ryan Coleman-Williams, Ole Miss running back Kewan Lacy, Texas receivers Cam Coleman and Ryan Wingo, Georgia defensive backs KJ Bolden and Ellis Robinson IV, and Auburn linebacker Xavier Atkins also are ones to watch. NEW COACHES The league has six new coaches in 2026, the largest turnover in league history. Arkansas (Ryan Silverfield), Auburn (Alex Golesh), Florida (Jon Sumrall), Kentucky (Will Stein), LSU (Lane Kiffin) and Ole Miss (Pete Golding) have new guys in charge. None of the changes caused as much of a stir as Kiffin's move from Ole Miss to LSU. But all of them should provide compelling storylines. LEAGUE FAVORITES This is the first season since 2015 that no SEC team received a first-place vote in the AP Top 25 preseason poll. It's an indication of how much parity there is in the league. Nonetheless, Georgia (plus-280) and Texas (plus-300) are the betting favorites to win the SEC. Alabama (plus-850) and LSU (plus-850) are next, followed by Texas A&M, Oklahoma and Ole Miss at plus-1000. Looking for a dark horse? Try Tennessee at plus-1800.

and it's a phenomenal opportunity for young guys who fall in love with it." It's certainly nothing new for the Gorrillas to have strong special teams play. "Our special teams are phenomenal, and that's the standard here," Hollins said. "Special teams are a vital part of our team, and TA (head coach Tom Anthony) really pushes that. It's not just offense and defense. He wants all three phases. You can win and lose a lot of games in special teams."

key core-4 guys who are on all four units — punt return, punt, kickoff return and kickoff. "Kam Gillespie (senior wide receiver) is one of the best on our team," Hollins said. "Kam has carved that niche. This is what I do. I'm going to play receiver, yes, but he wants to be on special teams. He loves running down on kickoffs. He's our best gunner. Having that mindset is phenomenal. "And it's not just him. Jaydon Knight (senior tight end) is a great core-4 guy for us. We have some guys who take that role very seriously. It's another way to get on the field,

Strong defense leads Sooners

By TIM WILLERT
Associated Press

The Oklahoma Sooners could challenge for the national championship if they can duplicate their dominance on defense, run the ball more effectively and survive a brutal stretch of early-season games on the road. Oklahoma reached the College Football Playoff last season only to lose in the first round to Alabama after blowing a 17-0 lead. Defensive end Taylor Wein and linebackers Owen Heinecke and Kip Lewis lead a unit that figures to be solid up the middle once again with former five-star recruit David Stone stepping into a bigger role at tackle. Starting quarterback John Mateer, leading receiver Isaiah Sategna and four starting offensive linemen return along with Lou Groza Award winner Tate Sandell, who made eight of

nine kicks from 50-plus yards. For the Sooners to take the next step they'll need to average more than 3.54 yards per carry to take some of the pressure off Mateer, the team's second leading rusher who played through injury for much of the season. Coach Brent Venables brought in Oakland Raiders running backs coach Deland McCullough and former NFL All-Pro tight end Jason Witten to help turn things around with a host of ranked teams on the schedule. MATEER, LEWIS RETURN Mateer passed for 2,885 yards and 14 touchdowns and ran for 431 yards and eight scores. A hand injury early in the season derailed momentum that had him among the favorites for the Heisman Trophy. Lewis led one of the nation's best defensive units with 76 tackles, including 10.5 for loss. He and Heinecke (74 tackles, including

12 for a loss) should be among the top LB duos in the country. Wein is also poised for a big season after seven sacks and 15 tackles for loss in eight starts to lead the team. The secondary is another area of strength with the return of playmakers Eli Bowen and Peyton Bowen and rising cover corner Courtland Guillory. RUNNING GAME Last season, Oklahoma finished 13th in the 16-team Southeastern Conference in rushing with an average of 118.5 yards per game. Tory Blaylock returns after being the team's leading rusher a season ago with 480 yards. NEW FACES TE Hayden Hansen (transfer from Florida), LB Cole Sullivan (transfer from Michigan), WR Parker Livingston (Transfer from Texas), WR Trell Harris (transfer from Virginia), TE Rocky Beers (transfer from Colorado State).

LEGALS

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Notice of Hearing 2026-2027 Budget

The governing body of Unified School District 250 will meet on the 14th day of September 2026 at 5:50 PM at 510 Deill St., Pittsburg, KS 66762 for the purpose of hearing and answering objections of taxpayers relating to the proposed use of all funds and the amount of tax to be levied. Detailed budget information, including budget profile, building needs assessment and Board state assessments review is available at USD #250 District Office on the district website and will be available at this hearing. The Amount of 2026 Tax to be Levied and Expenditures (published below) establish the maximum limits of the 2026-2027 Budget. The 'Est. Tax Rate' (column 7), shown for comparative purposes, is subject to slight change depending on final assessed valuation.

	Code 99 Line	2024-2025 Actual		2025-2026 Actual		2026-2027 Proposed Budget		
		Actual Expenditures (1)	Actual Tax Rate* (2)	Actual Expenditures (3)	Actual Tax Rate* (4)	Budgeted Expenditures (5)	Amount of 2026 Tax to be Levied (6)	Est. Tax Rate* (7)
OPERATING								
General	06	29,957,901	20.000	30,060,509	20.000	30,520,840	3,177,154	20.000
Supplemental General (LOB)	08	9,654,891	15.193	9,996,549	16.760	10,106,240	3,376,229	15.482
SPECIAL REVENUE								
Federal Funds	07	3,782,731		2,295,196		5,038,077		
Adult Education	10	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Preschool-Aged At-Risk	11	462,847		508,548		491,953		
Adult Supplemental Education	12	0		0		0		
At-Risk Education Fund	13	10,539,090		13,857,002		16,134,416		
Bilingual Education	14	654,212		528,454		677,724		
Virtual Education	15	96,018		199,187		221,426		
Capital Outlay	16	1,719,298	8.000	3,636,047	8.000	8,679,704	1,756,488	8.000
Driver Training	18	4,656		8,933		66,526		
Declining Enrollment	19	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Extraordinary School Program	22	0		0		0		
Food Service	24	2,364,165		2,675,414		3,727,759		
Professional Development	26	124,526		52,855		82,183		
Parent Education Program	28	0		0		0		
Summer School	29	0		0		0		
Special Education	30	5,808,234		6,089,271		10,307,569		
Cost of Living	33	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Career and Postsecondary Education	34	586,549		574,489		580,859		
Gifts and Grants	35	87,130		46,899		937,511		
Special Liability Expense Fund	42	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Extraordinary Growth Facilities	45	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Special Reserve Fund	47	0		0		0		
KPERs Special Retirement Contribution	51	2,844,878		2,910,719		3,431,010		
Contingency Reserve	53	0		0		0		
Textbook & Student Material Revolving	55	347,563		117,774				
Activity Fund	56	308,258		244,680				
DEBT SERVICE								
Bond and Interest #1	62	3,634,139	10.140	3,614,451	10.957	3,610,327	2,868,306	12.236
Bond and Interest #2	63	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
No-Fund Warrant	66	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Special Assessment	67	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Temporary Note	68	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
COOPERATIVES								
Special Education	78	0		0		0		
TOTAL USD EXPENDITURES	100	72,976,681	53.333	77,416,987	55.717	94,614,164	10,980,177	55.718
Less: Transfers	105	19,930,167		24,327,353		24,000,206		
NET USD EXPENDITURES	110	53,046,514		53,089,634		70,613,958		
TOTAL USD TAXES LEVIED	115	9,601,577		10,906,412		10,980,177		

* Tax Rates are expressed in Mills

State of Kansas
Budget Form USD-A

USD #250
2026-2027

Notice of Hearing 2026-2027 Budget								
	Code 99 Line	2024-2025 Actual		2025-2026 Actual		2026-2027 Proposed Budget		
		Actual Expenditures (1)	Actual Tax Rate* (2)	Actual Expenditures (3)	Actual Tax Rate* (4)	Budgeted Expenditures (5)	Amount of 2026 Tax to be Levied (6)	Est. Tax Rate* (7)
OTHER								
Historical Museum	80	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Public Library Board/District	82	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Public Library Board Employee Benefits	83	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Recreation Commission	84	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
Rio Comm Emp Benefits & Spec Liab	85	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
TOTAL OTHER	120	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0	0.000
TOTAL TAXES LEVIED	125	\$9,601,577		\$10,906,412		\$10,980,177		
Assessed Valuation - General Fund	128	\$145,780,176		\$158,175,412		\$158,857,724		
Assessed Valuation - All Other Funds	130	\$202,494,951		\$216,509,711		\$218,072,244		
Assessed Valuation - Capital Outlay	129	\$200,907,057		\$215,736,814		\$219,811,020		
Outstanding Indebtedness, July 1		2024		2025		2025		
General Obligation Bonds	135	48,175,000		46,480,000		44,740,000		
Capital Outlay Bonds	140	0		0		0		
Temporary Note	145	0		0		0		
No-Fund Warrant	150	0		0		0		
Lease Purchase Principal	153	0		0		0		
TOTAL USD DEBT	155	48,175,000		46,480,000		44,740,000		

* Tax Rates are expressed in Mills

Kari Cronister
Board President

Yvonne Horton
Clerk of the Board

Exceeding Revenue Neutral for the 2026-2027 School Year					
The governing body of Unified School District 250 will meet on the 14th day of September 2026 at 5:45 PM at 510 Dell St., Pittsburg, KS 66762 for the purpose of hearing and answering objections of taxpayers relating to the proposed use of all funds and the amount of tax to be levied. Detailed budget information, including budget profile, is available at USD #250 District Office and will be available at this hearing.					
		2025-2026		2026-2027	
		Actual Taxes Levied (1)	Actual Tax Rate (2)	Revenue Neutral Taxes (3)	Proposed Taxes to be Levied (5)
General		\$3,163,508	20.000	\$3,006,296	19.491
ALL OTHER FUNDS					
Supplemental General (LOB)		\$3,628,709	16.760	\$3,572,023	16.380
Adult Education		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
Capital Outlay		\$1,741,894	8.000	\$1,714,956	7.802
Cost of Living		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
Special Liability Expense Fund		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
Extraordinary Growth Facilities		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
Bond and Interest #1		\$2,372,301	10.957	\$2,335,554	10.710
Bond and Interest #2		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
No-Fund Warrant		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
Special Assessment		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
Temporary Note		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
Historical Museum		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
Public Library Board/District		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
Public Library Board Employee Benefits		\$0	0.000	\$0	\$0
Revenue Neutral Calculation					
Total Taxes Levied Including General Fund		\$10,906,412	55.717	\$10,718,839	54.383
Total Taxes Levied Excluding General Fund		\$7,742,904	35.717	\$7,622,543	34.892

Kari Cronister
Board President

Yvonne Horton
Clerk of the Board