

## Football

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But Clemson has a major issue that's holding it back entering 2022—QB.

D.J. Uiagalelei entered 2021 as one of the highest touted quarterbacks in the game.

What he did for the Tigers a season ago was anything but stellar, completing just 55.6% of his passes for 2,246 yards.

He also only had nine touchdowns against 10 interceptions.

As such, Clemson suffered ACC losses to NC State and Pitt and despite finishing with a 10-3 overall record, the Tigers didn't play for an ACC title and was left out of the College Football Playoff.

Given that void a season ago, and the rise of USC, the Trojans should be able to make a quick rise back to the national conversation with Riley at the helm and make the playoffs.

### C.J. Stroud unseats Bryce Young as Heisman winner

Last season, Alabama quarterback Bryce Young put together one of the best seasons in history and led the Crimson Tide to the College Football National Championship game against Georgia.

Young eventually was named the Heisman Trophy winner with a stellar stats line.

He completed just shy of 67% of his passes and he went for 4,872 passing yards.

He also posted a 47-7 TD-INT ratio.

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud wasn't far off the mark a season ago and as a freshman, completed nearly 72% of his passes for 4,443 yards and 44 touchdowns against six interceptions.

Taking nothing away from Young, who barring injury, is poised for a big junior season.

Young will certainly put forth another spectacular year and there's not much to indicate otherwise.

Alabama was the pre-season favorite to win the SEC West and with good reason.

Another year in the system under Nick Saban, Young should have another stand out year.

But this year, it's Stroud's turn to hoist the top award in college football.

Ohio State returns the bulk of its team that went 11-2 a season ago.

The Buckeyes suffered a loss to Oregon in Week 2 last season, but then rattled off nine-straight wins before Michigan upset Ohio State and ended its run at a College Football Playoff bid.

Having taken a loss to its arch-rival a season ago, Stroud enters his sophomore campaign with a Michigan-sized chip on his shoulder, and that should terrify any team with Ohio State on the schedule this season.

While Young will have another stellar season in what figures to be his last season in Tuscaloosa, it will be Stroud hoisting the Heisman Trophy this fall.

### Vols reach 10 wins for first time in 15 years

Tennessee fans have spent years in football purgatory.

It's been 15 years since the Vols have won 10 games in a single season, which came last under Phillip Fulmer in 2007.

Since then, Tennessee has gone 85-88 overall and have gone through

five head coaches, searching for the right fit on the sidelines to bring the Vols back into the national spotlight.

After former coach Jeremy Pruitt was fired for what eventually came to be 18 Level I violations, the Tennessee athletic administration hired Josh Heupel out of USC, who came to Knoxville with a 28-8 record over three seasons.

With the era of college football changing from a ground-and-pound offense, play solid defense style, to which team can turn every game into a track meet with up-tempo offenses and scoring as much as possible, Heupel's offense seemed to be a natural fit in Knoxville.

With a patchwork roster depleted in depth from an exodus of players amid the Pruitt fallout, Heupel orchestrated perhaps one of the most unexpected seasons in recent history for the Volunteers.

Butch Jones put together back-to-back nine-win seasons for Tennessee in 2015 and 2016, but then fell from grace before being replaced with Pruitt.

Pruitt never was able to gain his footing among the Rocky Top faithful, nor the athletic administration—notably former head coach Phillip Fulmer, who was the Tennessee athletic director at the time.

Even with depth issues throughout the roster, Tennessee was fairly close to putting together a nine-win season ago.

A Week 2 loss to Pitt came on the heels of a huge second-quarter for the Panthers.

Pitt only escaped Knoxville with a seven-point win.

Fast forward to the Music City Bowl, Purdue edged out a three-point win over Tennessee in arguably the most entertaining bowl of the whole season.

Still, Tennessee sat within one score of another win.

If Tennessee caught a bit of luck in either of those two losses, the Vols could well have reached the nine-win plateau for the first time in five years and the first time with Heupel at the helm.

A quick glance at the schedule has Tennessee opening up with a favorable record through the first two months of the season.

Sandwiched between Ball State and Akron, Tennessee makes the trip to Pittsburgh, looking for revenge for a close loss from a season ago.

From there, Tennessee will shrug the bugaboo of playing Florida and move to 4-0 on the season.

The Vols will follow with a trip to Baton Rouge and will pick up a win against LSU, searching for an identity under first-year coach Brian Kelly.

After moving to 5-0, Tennessee will have a tough stretch, with three of its next four games coming against Kentucky, Alabama and Georgia.

While Mark Stoops has Kentucky trending upward, including four-straight bowl wins, Tennessee has dominated the series against the Wildcats, including a 45-42 upset last season in Lexington.

Tennessee should be able to defend its home turf against Kentucky this season, which leaves Alabama and Georgia as the two remaining juggernauts left on the Vols' schedule.

Tennessee played Alabama to within one score in the fourth quarter with a depleted roster last season in Tus-

caloosa.

While improbable, Tennessee is primed to upset one of its two biggest rivals this season.

After the October gauntlet, Tennessee gets Missouri, South Carolina and Vanderbilt left on the schedule.

Missouri and Vanderbilt should both be chalked up as wins for the Vols, but South Carolina remains as a trap game for Tennessee after quarterback Spencer Rattler transferred from Oklahoma to give the Gamecocks a legitimate quarterback threat.

In the end, Tennessee will take care of the games its supposed to, aside from a possible late-season upset, and pick up a win it shouldn't en route to its first 10-win season in 15 years.

### Ohio State beats Georgia in the national championship

It's mid-July, so it only seems natural we should know who will be playing for a national championship, right?

Throughout the tenure of the College Football Playoff, it's been a mainstay to expect certain teams in the mix for a national title.

The greatest football coach of all time, Nick Saban, typically has the Tide not just in the playoffs, but playing for a national title.

Since taking over as the Georgia head coach, former Saban assistant Kirby Smart has had Georgia in the thick of the playoffs as well.

In five seasons in Athens, Smartt has won 66-15 and finally was able to overcome his former mentor last season and win his first national title.

He was handsomely rewarded for bringing a title to Georgia with a 10-year, \$112.5 million contract to secure his future as the Bulldogs' head coach.

Another team that continually finds itself in the playoff mix is Ohio State.

In 2014, Urban Meyer took the Buckeyes to the national championship and delivered its first title in 12 years.

Since the implementation of the playoff format, the Buckeyes have made four playoff appearances, including two after Meyer's departure for "health reasons."

Since then, Ryan Day has taken over the program and has continually delivered and in four seasons as the Buckeyes head coach, has posted a 31-4 overall record.

While Georgia returns to 2022 as the reigning national champions, Ohio State was in the mix for a playoff berth a season ago, and had it not been for an upset loss to Michigan, the Buckeyes would have taken the No. 4 seed over Cincinnati.

In 2022, Ohio State returns arguably the most complete roster in the nation, highlighted by sophomore C.J. Stroud.

For years, Georgia has relied on its top-tiered defense that allowed just 10.4 points per game.

While the offense wasn't a record-breaking system by any stretch, the managerial style play of Stetson Bennett was efficient enough to lead Georgia to the College Football Playoff championship.

Georgia's brand of football is in just contrast of much of the nation that wants to spread the field and push the ball downfield at will.

Ohio State is the polar opposite of Georgia football, having led the nation with 45.7 points per game a season ago.

# NFL teams open camp with biggest question still unanswered

By **ROB MAADDI**  
AP Pro Football Writer

Training camps opened across the NFL and the biggest offseason question remains unanswered.

The Cleveland Browns still don't know how many games they'll be without Deshaun Watson, who is still waiting for retired judge Sue L. Robinson to issue a ruling following his disciplinary hearing that concluded nearly four weeks ago.

The league and the NFL Players' Association requested a decision by the start of training camp, according to a person familiar with the process who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the discussions are private. Robinson, who was jointly appointed by the league and the union, had no obligation to meet that deadline. Representatives are hopeful a decision comes this week.

Watson was accused of sexual misconduct by 24 women and has settled 20 of the civil lawsuits. Two separate Texas grand juries declined to indict Watson on criminal complaints stemming from the allegations.

The Browns, along with 27 other teams, welcomed their veterans on Tuesday as each of the 32 teams have now kicked off camp. Watson reported to his first camp with Cleveland last week along with veteran backup Jacoby Brissett, the team's presumed starter if there is a suspension. The Browns also signed Josh Rosen last week as more quarterback insurance.

Watson should be on the field for the team's first full-squad practice Wednesday. There was an amusing moment on Monday when the three-time Pro Bowl quarterback was seen walking in full uniform across the street

in front of the Browns' training facility to take part in a photo shoot.

Other top questions around the NFL that still need to be addressed in training camp:

### Where's Jimmy G going?

The San Francisco 49ers made it clear Trey Lance will be the starting quarterback and they're moving on from Jimmy Garoppolo, who led them to a Super Bowl appearance following the 2019 season and nearly another one last season. The Niners have to trade or release Garoppolo before Week 1 to avoid having his \$24.2 million base salary become fully guaranteed. Garoppolo would've been moved already if it weren't for his offseason shoulder surgery.

"This is Trey's team. That's nothing against Jimmy," 49ers coach Mike Shanahan said. "We made that decision a year ago and we're not going to mess around with that anymore. ... Jimmy understands that fully. He's a big guy and it's nothing against him. It's a business decision."

### Baker or Sam?

The Carolina Panthers acquired Baker Mayfield from the Browns earlier this month and plan to let him compete with Sam Darnold for the starting quarterback job. Mayfield, the No. 1 overall pick in 2018, has been more successful than Darnold, who was the third pick by the Jets in the same draft.

Panthers coach Matt Rhule isn't going to rush a decision.

"Anytime you put timelines on things, you end up rushing to make bad decisions," Rhule said. "To me this is about being in the moment but not making rash judgements. Guys are going to have good days and bad

days. When we know, we know."

### When does Lamar get paid?

The Baltimore Ravens still haven't locked Lamar Jackson into a long-term contract extension but the two sides have been talking. Jackson, the 2019 NFL MVP, saw his value increase after the Cardinals gave Kyler Murray a deal worth up to \$230.5 million with about \$105 million guaranteed at signing and \$160 million guaranteed for injury. Jackson doesn't have an agent, which could impact negotiations. It wasn't a factor for his rookie deal because the collective bargaining agreement pre-determines the money in each draft slot. This contract is far more lucrative.

### Are they healthy?

Saints quarterback Jameis Winston, Buccaneers wide receiver Chris Godwin, Ravens running back J.K. Dobbs are among more than 50 players returning from ACL injuries. Panthers running back Christian McCaffrey played only seven games last season because of hamstring and ankle injuries. Titans star running back Derrick Henry missed nine games with a foot injury before playing in the team's playoff loss to the Bengals. Cowboys receiver Michael Gallup, Ravens running back Gus Edwards, Titans receiver Robert Woods, Packers tight end Robert Tonyan are also coming back from ACL surgery. Saints star wideout Michael Thomas missed 2021 because of a severe ankle injury, and Vikings receiver Adam Thielen had ankle surgery in December.

## Titans

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at least five new starters.

Literally healing up may be the biggest focus for a franchise that put 26 different players on injured reserve, not counting 21 on the reserve/COVID-19 list, during the season. Henry, the NFL rushing champ in 2019 and 2020, was the biggest loss with a broken right foot keeping him out nine games.

General manager Jon Robinson said he's not sure where all the "video game rankings" posted over the past couple of weeks have the Titans. Robinson said he likes this group's camaraderie and trajectory building through the offseason program. Now the key is to keep winning one day at a time.

"That's the only way you're going to get to where you want to be," Robinson said.

### Healthy Burks

Burks' conditioning and health were in question with the

rookie missing drills and practices in the off-season program. Asthma also was an issue. Vrabel said Burks has put together two good days with rookies, quarterbacks and injured players reporting last weekend. Robinson said Burks was very transparent when he met with them before the draft.

The GM also likes what he's seen of Burks so far.

"He did a nice job in the conditioning test," Robinson said. "He's been out here for a couple of days and has been running around, running around well and made a couple of plays. So certainly excited with the trajectory that he's on."

### Case by case

Defensive tackle Jeffery Simmons reported to camp despite switching agents earlier this summer and being advised by a team including uncle Jason Hatcher, a former NFL player himself. Whether Simmons would report for training camp became a question after the tackle attended the mandatory

minicamp but did not practice.

Vrabel said Simmons is expected to be on the field Wednesday for the first full practice of camp.

The Titans picked up Simmons' fifth-year option in May to ensure the 19th pick overall in 2019 sticks around past this year. Robinson said he wouldn't talk about where they are from a contract standpoint, though he did say he has talked with Simmons' agent.

### Skrine retires

The Titans thought they'd have Buster Skrine as a veteran in their cornerback room, but Vrabel said Skrine notified them he is retiring after 11 seasons.

The 137th pick overall in the fifth round out of Chattanooga in 2011 played 158 games with 95 starts with five teams: Cleveland, the Jets, Chicago and San Francisco before starting three of six games after joining Tennessee during last season. He had 10 interceptions, six forced fumbles and four fumbles recovered.