

Is any team capable of perfection?

■ College football teams playing more games, making an unblemished record more difficult

By The Associated Press

Larry Coker calls No. 1 Miami's schedule daunting, yet absolutely believes his defending national champions are poised for another perfect season.

"No doubt it can be done, and we feel like we can win every game," Coker says of a lineup that includes games

against powerhouses Florida, Florida State and Tennessee.

"Is that realistic? Maybe not. But if we win every game it's a no-brainer — we're going to Tempe."

In the crazy world of the Bowl Championship Series, winning 'em all seems to be the safest way to gain entry to the national title game. This season, the BCS championship game will be in the Fiesta Bowl at Tempe, Ariz., on Jan. 3.

Perfection will be tougher to come by in 2002. Teams are playing 12 games instead of the usual 11 because the NCAA allows it when there's an extra Saturday between the Labor Day weekend and Nov. 30.

More than a dozen teams are playing 13 games courtesy of "preseason classics," and a few, like Nebraska, could end up playing 15 games.

"It sure makes it tougher for teams to go undefeated," Coker says.

Despite the return of only 10 starters, Miami rests its repeat hopes on the accurate arm of quarterback Ken Dorsey and a defense led by hard-hitting linebacker Jonathan Vilma.

"I'm looking for a repeat," 'Canes center Brett Romberg says. "You're only as good as your last game and I hope to get a ring to prove it."

Nebraska is simply thinking about winning any game: The Huskers are trying to forget humiliating losses at the end of last season — 62-36 to Colorado and 37-14 to Miami in the Rose Bowl.

With Jammal Lord replacing departed Heisman Trophy winner Eric Crouch at quarterback, Nebraska opens Aug. 24 against Arizona State.

"I think we're a football team that will be coming back with a purpose," Huskers coach Frank Solich says.

Nebraska isn't the only team trying to restore the glory days.

Notre Dame tops the list. Tyrone Willingham arrived from Stanford to take over a once-grand football team that has fallen mightily.

A 5-6 season led to the firing of Bob Davie, which led to the embarrassing resignation of his replacement, George O'Leary, five days into the job.

Six players left the team, including three who were expelled after a woman said she was raped. Quarterback Matt LoVecchio transferred, and leading rusher Julius Jones is academically ineligible.



NCAA
OVERVIEW

PRESEASON TOP 25

The Top Twenty Five teams in The Associated Press preseason college football poll, with first-place votes in parentheses, 2001 records, total points based on 25 points for a first place vote through one point for a 25th place vote and 2001 final ranking:

	Record	Pts	Pvs
1. Miami (27)	12-0	1,746	1
2. Oklahoma (21)	11-2	1,732	6
3. Florida St. (10)	8-4	1,683	15
4. Texas (13)	11-2	1,682	5
5. Tennessee (3)	11-2	1,601	4
6. Florida	10-2	1,313	3
7. Colorado	10-3	1,291	9
8. Georgia	8-4	1,179	22
9. Washington	8-4	1,133	19
10. Nebraska	11-2	1,131	8
11. Wash. St.	10-2	1,096	10
12. MICHIGAN	8-4	1,061	20
13. Ohio St.	7-5	1,029	—
14. LSU	10-3	832	7
15. Oregon	11-1	736	2
16. Virginia Tech	8-4	583	18
17. Louisville	11-2	574	17
18. MICH. ST.	7-5	468	—
19. Marshall	11-2	433	—
20. Southern Cal	6-6	420	—
21. Maryland	10-2	318	11
22. South Carolina	9-3	268	13
23. Texas A&M	8-4	247	—
24. Penn St.	5-6	221	—
25. Wisconsin	5-7	193	—

Others receiving votes: Kansas St. 171, N.C. State 154, Auburn 131, Boston College 108, Alabama 106, UCLA 59, Oregon St. 52, Illinois 51, Arkansas 50, Georgia Tech 47, Clemson 29, Southern Miss. 27, Purdue 24, Texas Tech 18, BYU 10, Utah 10, Mississippi 9, Colorado St. 6, Boise St. 4, Syracuse 4, Notre Dame 3, Fresno St. 2, North Carolina 2, Toledo 2, Middle Tennessee 1.

A year to remember, says quarterback Carlyle Holiday: "So many things happened in that one year that don't even happen to a team for a whole generation."

Also looking to rise up for another national title run are Florida State, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas.

The Seminoles lost four games for the first time since 1986, ending a 14-year run of Top 5 poll finishes and 10-win seasons. But with most of his players back, including quarterback Chris Rix, coach Bobby Bowden is counting on returning to the title game for the fourth time in five years.

"We're going to be very disappointed if we don't get right back into the middle of that fight," Bowden says.

Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas all blew chances to play for the national crown in an incredible late-season sequence. First the 2000 champion Sooners were knocked out of the chase with a loss to Oklahoma State; then came the Longhorns' loss to Colorado in the Big 12 title game and the Volunteers' loss to LSU in the SEC title game.

Oklahoma is ready to go again, with perhaps the most fearsome defense in the country anchored by tackle Tommie Harris and end Jimmy Wilkerson.

"We've got a chance, but we're not much on all this preseason stuff," coach Bob Stoops says of his team's No. 2 preseason ranking.

With Heisman hopeful Chris Simms back at quarterback, along with

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Head coach Frank Solich and his Nebraska Cornhuskers could play as many as 15 games this year, making a run at an undefeated season a more difficult proposition.

Vol's passing fancy

■ Tennessee combo of Clausen, Washington among best in nation

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Ask Tennessee receiver Kelley Washington about playing with quarterback Casey Clausen this season, and he won't even stop to think about the answer.

"We're going to go out and be that one-two punch, probably one of the best in the nation," Washington said.

Sure, he sounds cocky. But Clausen, who's got a fair share of swagger himself, doesn't mind.

"Hey, you have to have confidence in yourself and your abilities. It's just his personality," said Clausen, a third-year starter whose past two top receivers are in the NFL.

And after all, Washington's predictions usually come true.

Washington, 23, is entering his second and probably last college season. When he walked on the team in 2001 after four years of minor league baseball, he said he just wanted a chance to show what he could do. He did.

By the third game against LSU a year ago, Washington set a school record with 256 yards on 11 catches, all for first downs.

"It was a great coming out party for him," Clausen said.

He even made a habit during the season of pointing at his mother in the stands after each touchdown. Washington explained that he likes to "excite and electrify the crowd."

At 6-foot-4 and 225 pounds, Washington is taller and stronger than most defensive backs.

He channeled his natural abilities into catching and route-running as the season progressed, and coaches felt more comfortable moving him into different slots. Even a sore left foot that kept him out of practice did-



The Associated Press

Tennessee receiver Kelley Washington, left, and QB Casey Clausen hope to be a "one-two punch" for the Volunteers this season. Clausen will be a third-year starter and Washington holds the Vol's single-game reception mark.

n't slow him down.

There's no reason he won't be even better this year, coach Phillip Fulmer said.

"It is amazing what he was able to accomplish last year with his inexperience and injury. Hopefully we're going to have one of those tremendous breakout years," Fulmer said.

"I'll be really disappointed if he doesn't get a bunch of footballs thrown his way this year."

Fulmer expects big things out of Clausen this season, too.

"Casey Clausen is ready to take off and take control of this offensive football team," he said.

Clausen finished last season with 2,969 yards passing, including 393 yards in Tennessee's 45-17 win over Michigan in the Citrus Bowl.

The California native with spiky blonde hair was lured east by watch-

ing Peyton Manning play. His first start as a freshman in 2000 after the two previous starters had no spark and the Vols were 2-3.

Even as a freshman, Clausen was so confident it scared the coaches. Fulmer regularly jokes that his hair is grayer because of coaching a freshman quarterback.

Clausen also has become a vocal team leader.

He criticized teammates for a lack of intensity after Tennessee lost to LSU in the SEC championship. A win would have sent the Vols to the Rose Bowl against Miami for a shot at the national title.

Over the summer, Clausen and Washington practiced together three times a week and got to know each other better.

Their different displays of confidence complement each other.