



AP Photo

Southern Cal coach Pete Carroll and quarterback Matt Leinart embrace after their 55-19 win over Oklahoma in the Orange Bowl at Pro Player Stadium in Miami, Jan. 4, 2005. Change is in store for college football in 2005, from an abundance of new head coaches to instant replay in eight conferences. But there's one striking constant: Southern California starts at the head of the class.

2005 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Trojans try for a 'three-peat'

Leinart tries for a Heisman repeat

(AP) — What's new in college football in 2005? Plenty, starting with nearly 20 percent of Division I-A head coaches.

Eight conferences will use instant replay for the first time, six leagues will welcome first-year members and a new poll will help determine which teams play in the Bowl Championship Series.

Amid all that change, Southern California remains a constant — the Trojans are still the class of college football.

With back-to-back national titles, 22 straight wins and a 36-3 record over the last three seasons, USC already has established itself as college football's first dynasty of the new millennium.

If Heisman Trophy winner Matt Leinart and the rest of coach Pete Carroll's Trojans add an unprecedented third straight national title, a case can be made that theirs is the greatest run in the sport's history.

"It would be a tremendous accomplishment just from the standpoint of parity in foot-

ball now," said Miami coach Larry Coker, who was part of a Hurricanes program that won 34 straight from 2000-2003, but only one championship. "Getting there is very, very difficult, but to win those games would be a tremendous accomplishment. It's never been done. That says a lot right there."

Eleven teams have won at least 30 straight games, but only Miami's streak came within the last three decades.

"Our focus isn't about any kind of numbers you can put up, or any championships or any of that stuff," Carroll said. "It's about practicing really well, and battling every day. We do that kind of stuff and we'll be a good football team and we'll see how far we can take it."

Leinart, the big left-hander with SoCal roots, shocked many — and no doubt deflated quite a few competitors — when he decided to return for his senior season.

After tossing five touchdown passes in a 55-19 Orange Bowl rout of Oklahoma, it was assumed that Leinart would take his cool demeanor and pinpoint accuracy to the NFL, where he was almost assured of being the No. 1 pick in the

draft.

But who needs a job when you're having this much fun? Now Leinart has a chance to join college football's most exclusive club.

"There's a lot of preseason hype about Archie Griffin being the only two-time winner of the Heisman, but everybody on our team knows that's not what I'm about," said Leinart, one of nine returning starters to USC's offense and one of two Heisman Trophy finalists in the Trojans' backfield. Do-it-all tailback Reggie Bush is the other.

The Rose Bowl will host the BCS national title game this season, and the Trojans are overwhelming favorites to be playing in Pasadena on Jan. 4. But there are other teams with championship aspirations, and Leinart should have plenty of company in the Heisman race.

In the Big 12, Texas could have its best team in the Mack Brown era, led by elusive quarterback Vince Young, who began his Heisman campaign with an eye-popping performance in the Rose Bowl. Oklahoma has to replace 11 players drafted by the NFL, plus 2003 Heisman winner Jason White. Having

tailback Adrian Peterson, the Heisman runner-up as a freshman in 2004, is a nice way to start.

Michigan and Ohio State, as usual, are expected to make a run at the national title out of the Big Ten, and Iowa, with three straight double-digit win seasons under Kirk Ferentz, has now nudged its way into the league's elite.

There's a new Vick leading Virginia Tech, Mike's little brother, Marcus, and — unlike last season — the Hokies won't surprise anybody if they win another Atlantic Coast Conference crown.

In the Southeastern Conference, Tennessee and LSU are loaded for a run for the Rose Bowl, while Florida is one of those schools banking on a new coach to change its fortunes. Urban Meyer, with his record of quick turn-arounds and explosive offenses, has the Gators believing a reprise of the not-so-distant glory days under Steve Spurrier is imminent.

Speaking of Spurrier, the Ol' Ball Coach returns to college football and the SEC with South Carolina.

"It was a lot more fun hanging

Conference shuffle glance

The conference shake-up that started last season continues in 2005. Here are the conferences that'll have a new look:

ATLANTIC COAST CONFERENCE
Boston College's arrival makes 12 teams in the ACC with two divisions:

Atlantic
Boston College
Clemson
Florida State
Maryland
North Carolina State
Wake Forest
Coastal
Duke
Georgia Tech
Miami
North Carolina
Virginia
Virginia Tech

BIG EAST

Boston College and Temple are out. Cincinnati, Louisville and South Florida are in via Conference USA. They join Connecticut, Pittsburgh, Rutgers, Syracuse and West Virginia.

MID-AMERICAN CONFERENCE

Marshall and Central Florida exited, leaving the MAC with 12 teams.

East
Akron
Bowling Green
Buffalo
Kent State
Miami (Ohio)
Ohio
West
Ball State
Central Michigan
Eastern Michigan
Northern Illinois
Toledo
Western Michigan

CONFERENCE USA

Marshall and Central Florida move over from the MAC, and Rice, SMU, Tulsa and UTEP from the WAC to replace five defectors (TCU, Louisville, Cincinnati, South Florida and Army), and the conference splits into two six-team divisions:

East
UAB
Central Florida
East Carolina
Marshall
Memphis
Southern Miss
West
Houston
Rice
SMU
UTEP
Tulane
Tulsa

MOUNTAIN WEST

TCU bolts C-USA and joins Air Force, BYU, Colorado State, New Mexico, San Diego State, UNLV, Utah and Wyoming.

WESTERN ATHLETIC

Reached into the Sun Belt Conference for Idaho, New Mexico State and Utah State. They join Boise State, Fresno State, Hawaii, Louisiana Tech, Nevada and San Jose State.

SUN BELT

Division I-A neophytes Florida Atlantic and Florida International join North Texas, Troy, Louisiana-Monroe, Louisiana-Lafayette, Middle Tennessee and Arkansas State.

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