

REFERENCE

*They'll defend their division  
Others will stay in the hunt*

# South

## Texas

**Coach:** John Mackovic  
**Last year's record:** 8-5  
**Big 12 record / finish:** 6-2 / First in South  
**Starters returning:** 6 offense / 6 defense  
**Top players returning:** TB Ricky Williams, QB James Brown, PK Phil Dawson  
**The Longhorns will be in the Big 12 Championship if ...** their defense is half as good as their offense.  
**The Longhorns will have a long season if ...** senior quarterback James Brown starts making predictions that don't come true.



One win was all Texas needed to prove that the Southern teams of the Big 12 could hang with the North division. And that win – a 37-27 upset of Nebraska in the Big 12 Championship on Dec. 7, 1996 – was solidified by one gutsy call from Texas coach John Mackovic.

Ahead by three, the Longhorns faced a fourth-and-one situation with the game clock winding down in the fourth quarter. Mackovic elected to go for the first down and rather than bust the ball up the middle, he opted to have quarterback James Brown roll left and throw to reserve tight end Derek Lewis for what turned into a 61-yard gain.

"Most people thought I was crazy – but I am," Mackovic said. "It was a defining moment for our program but I don't think it was out of character. It was a real boost and confidence-builder for our team. It said to everybody, 'Don't count yourself out. It's a one-game season when you get to that spot.' In that regard it was good for everyone."

Senior kicker Phil Dawson agreed that the game helped the Longhorns and the conference as well.

"That game showed us that if we show up and play, we can beat anybody," Dawson said. "I think it strengthened the conference. It showed everyone that the Southwest Conference schools can play. It taught us a valuable lesson."

The Longhorns proceeded to lose to No. 7 Penn State on Jan. 1 in the Fiesta Bowl and finished the season 8-5 and ranked 23rd in the nation. But the bowl loss didn't take away from a good season, Brown said.

Brown, who has been mentioned as a Heisman Trophy candidate

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## Oklahoma

**Coach:** John Blake  
**Last year's record:** 3-8  
**Big 12 record / finish:** 3-5 / Fourth in South  
**Starters returning:** 9 offense / 7 defense  
**Top players returning:** RB DeMond Parker, TE Stephen Alexander, FS Gana Joseph  
**The Sooners will be in the Big 12 Championship if ...** their young players mature very quickly.  
**The Sooners will have a long season if ...** they continue playing like they did in the Pigskin Classic against Northwestern on Aug. 23.



Despite finishing 3-8 in his first season as Oklahoma's head coach, John Blake is ready to win the Big 12 Championship this fall.

"I expect to compete for it," Blake said. "We come to play and I think we have a chance to win. It won't be a surprise. I expect us to be right there in the hunt for it."

The Sooners finished 3-2 against the Southern Conference of the Big 12 last season with wins over Texas, Baylor and Oklahoma State. This season, Blake said, experience will help Oklahoma improve that mark.

"It's a much more comfortable year for me," Blake said. "I've learned from my mistakes and we're excited about the upcoming season."

But Blake won't be the only one returning with more experience. Forty Sooners saw collegiate-level playing time for the first time last season, including starting quarterback Justin Fuente.

Fuente, a sophomore, started in eight games for Oklahoma last season, and led the Sooners in every passing category. The 6-foot-2, 230-pounder completed 91 of 196 passes for 1,271 yards, making him just the second freshman quarterback in Oklahoma history to throw for more than 1,000 yards.

Junior Eric Moore will open the season as Fuente's backup, but will get a chance at some playing time, Blake said. Moore, who has started 14 games in his career, threw for 741 yards last season. But having two quarterbacks may not be an advantage, senior center Bruce McClure said.

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## Texas A&M

**Coach:** R.C. Slocum  
**Last year's record:** 6-6  
**Big 12 record / finish:** 4-4 / Third in South  
**Starters returning:** 8 offense / 6 defense  
**Top players returning:** LB Dat Nguyen, PK Kyle Bryant, QB Brannon Stewart  
**The Aggies will be in the Big 12 Championship if ...** junior quarterback Brannon Stewart has a season that rivals Tennessee's Payton Manning.  
**The Aggies will have a long season if ...** they struggle with an easy non-conference schedule.



Still recovering from the effects of its worst showing in 12 years, Texas A&M enters the 1997 season hoping to heal a damaged ego by establishing itself as a Big 12 title contender.

The Aggies were never a serious threat to represent the South division in the conference championship game in 1996, finishing the season with a 6-6 record.

After beginning the year ranked 12th in the nation, A&M quickly fell to its first 0-2 start since 1988 with consecutive losses to Brigham Young and Southwestern Louisiana.

"We did not have the kind of season we'd like to have had last year," Aggie coach R.C. Slocum said. "It's all in how you look at it. We lost three games to bowl teams by less than 10 points. We're not that far from where we've been. We haven't disappeared off the map."

In order to make its mark on the Big 12 this year, Slocum said, A&M needs junior quarterback Brannon Stewart to produce. Stewart, who transferred to A&M after spending his freshman season at Tennessee, often fell short of high expectations last season.

"There were a lot of small factors as to why we were unsuccessful, and I think an inexperienced quarterback was one of them," Slocum said. "We need better play out of that position, and I think we will get it this year."

If A&M can find consistency at the quarterback spot, the offensive unit should be a strong one, Slocum said. The Aggies return 23 lettermen and 10 starters from an offense that ranked fifth in the Big 12 with 405 yards per game. Senior and returning starter Steve McKinney

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## Oklahoma State

**Coach:** Bob Simmons  
**Last year's record:** 5-6  
**Big 12 record / finish:** 2-5 / Fifth in South  
**Starters returning:** 6 offense / 7 defense  
**Top players returning:** TE Alonzo Mayes, TB Andre Richardson, FS R.W. McQuarters  
**The Cowboys will be in the Big 12 Championship if ...** their new academic coordinator finds another year of eligibility for Barry Sanders.  
**The Cowboys will have a long season if ...** they find out more players are academically ineligible.



As much as R.W. McQuarters would like to forget the embarrassment and humiliation that overcame every member of the Oklahoma State football team one Saturday night in Austin last fall, he cannot keep the images from lingering in his mind.

The junior defensive back still remembers the ease with which Texas shattered the upstart Cowboys' hope of a breakthrough season with a 71-14 bashing. McQuarters can still see the Longhorn offense scoring 11 consecutive times on its way to piling up 624 total yards of offense. He won't soon forget how OSU took a 3-1 record into Austin that day, only to have its early season momentum destroyed.

"I don't ever want to go through anything like that again," McQuarters said. "It was a nightmare. Nothing went our way."

OSU went on to lose four of its last six games after the blowout at Texas and finished the season 5-6 overall and 2-6 in the conference. It was the first time since the 1988 team went 10-2 that an Oklahoma State team has won more than four games in a season.

If OSU concentrates on that instead of the embarrassment in Austin, third-year coach Bob Simmons said, then the Cowboys can once again make their case for respectability.

"We just have to forget the Texas game," Simmons said. "We did not play well that day. We played a lot of young kids who had a lot of things they needed to learn. And last year, some of the kids did learn to win."

Oklahoma State lists only four seniors on its roster, and of the 51 letters awarded last season, 25 went to first-time winners, including 17

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## Texas Tech

**Coach:** Spike Dykes  
**Last year's record:** 7-5  
**Big 12 record / finish:** 5-3 / Second in South  
**Starters returning:** 5 offense / 7 defense  
**Top players returning:** QB Zebbie Lethridge, DE Montae Reagor, CB Tony Darden  
**The Red Raiders will be in the Big 12 Championship if ...** a win at Tennessee in the season opener gives sparks a magical season in Lubbock.  
**The Red Raiders will have a long season if ...** their running backs don't go to class.



A combination of injuries and bad luck has left Texas Tech with a question mark at running back.

This season, the Red Raiders will be without running back Byron Hanspard, Tech's career rushing leader with 4,219 yards. Hanspard elected to bypass his senior season and become eligible for the NFL draft.

Sophomore Clint Robertson, the only returning running back with any experience, was slated to move into Hanspard's spot this season. However, after suffering a knee injury during spring practice, Robertson's availability is doubtful. Another contender for the position, Sammy Morris, was ruled academically ineligible.

That leaves the Red Raiders with redshirt freshmen Anthony Malbrough and James Easterling and freshmen Dominic Rhodes and Ricky Williams, all of whom have no collegiate game experience.

"Whoever our backs are – and we don't know who they are yet – their first carry will be at Tennessee, so we'll break them in in pretty good fashion," Dykes said. "It will be interesting to see how that position unravels. It's definitely a concern."

Dykes is faced with the task of finding a stand-in for Hanspard while attempting to prepare his team for its first game of the season. The Red Raiders will face Tennessee in Knoxville, Tenn., on Saturday. But Dykes pointed out some positives about the trip.

"Playing Tennessee is good for our program," Dykes said. "It's not good for my record, but I don't care about my record. It helps us recruiting, but more importantly it gives us a measuring stick to see how far we

Please see **RED RAIDERS** on 7

## Baylor

**Coach:** Dave Roberts  
**Last year's record:** 4-7  
**Big 12 record / finish:** 1-7 / Sixth in South  
**Starters returning:** 7 offense / 6 defense  
**Top players returning:** RB Jerod Douglas, QB Jeff Watson, OT Michael Johnson  
**The Bears will be in the Big 12 Championship if ...** it is found that all other South Division teams must forfeit games because of NCAA violations.  
**The Bears will have a long season if ...** they lose too much momentum in their first five games – including Miami (Fla.), Michigan, and Nebraska.



First-year Baylor coach Dave Roberts hopes his team will be ready to compete when it opens the season Saturday, at home against Miami before traveling to Fresno State and Michigan.

For the Bears to recover from their worst season since a 3-8 showing in 1978, they will have to overcome inexperience, improve physically and quickly adapt to a new offense, Roberts said.

Baylor will be without 10 starters from last year's team that won one league game before finishing the year at 4-7, and it doesn't stop there.

A small quarterback controversy is brewing among Jeff Watson, Jermaine Alfred and Odell James, who is still recovering from extensive knee surgery after suffering an injury last November. Roberts said he will have to be creative when it comes to his substitution patterns because it's likely that only seven offensive linemen will see playing time. The predicted starting defensive line averages only 250 pounds per man and most of the linebackers run about 4.9 seconds in the 40-yard dash.

Throw in the fact that Roberts hopes to implement 60 percent of his offense before Miami comes to town, and an obvious uphill battle looms a little steeper. But Roberts is not discouraged.

"We have one of the toughest schedules in the country," Roberts said. "But that's what we need to get Baylor back. We've got to put people in the stands and get some exposure. Our system won't be in yet because we have a ways to go with toughness and being more physical. But the players have responded well."

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