



2026 SUN BELT FOOTBALL

WEEK 1 • SEPTEMBER 2, 2026

APP STATE • ARKANSAS STATE • COASTAL CAROLINA • GEORGIA SOUTHERN • GEORGIA STATE • JAMES MADISON
LOUISIANA • ULM • LOUISIANA TECH • MARSHALL • OLD DOMINION • SOUTH ALABAMA • SOUTHERN MISS • TROY

2026 SUN BELT CONFERENCE STANDINGS

	CONFERENCE					OVERALL							
	W-L	Pct.	PF	PA	Streak	W-L	Pct.	PF	PA	H	A	N	Streak
EAST DIVISION													
App State	0-0	.000	0	0	Lost 1	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Lost 2
Coastal Carolina	0-0	.000	0	0	Lost 2	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Lost 4
Georgia Southern	0-0	.000	0	0	Won 1	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Won 2
Georgia State	0-0	.000	0	0	Lost 9	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Lost 9
James Madison	0-0	.000	0	0	Won 8	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Lost 1
Marshall	0-0	.000	0	0	Lost 2	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Lost 2
Old Dominion	0-0	.000	0	0	Won 5	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Won 6
WEST DIVISION													
Arkansas State	0-0	.000	0	0	Won 1	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Won 2
Louisiana	0-0	.000	0	0	Won 4	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Lost 1
ULM	0-0	.000	0	0	Lost 7	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Lost 8
Louisiana Tech	0-0	.000	0	0	N/A	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Won 3
South Alabama	0-0	.000	0	0	Lost 1	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Lost 1
Southern Miss	0-0	.000	0	0	Lost 3	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Lost 4
Troy	0-0	.000	0	0	Won 2	0-0	.000	0	0	0-0	0-0	0-0	Lost 2

WEEK 1 SCHEDULE

Friday, September 4

North Carolina A&T at Georgia State 6:00 p.m. ESPN+

Saturday, September 5

Coastal Carolina at West Virginia 11:00 a.m. TNT
Liberty at James Madison 11:00 a.m. ESPNU
Maine at App State 2:30 p.m. ESPN+
Marshall at No. 18/17 Penn State 2:30 p.m. FS1
Alcorn State at Southern Miss 4:00 p.m. ESPN+
Norfolk State at Old Dominion 5:00 p.m. ESPN+
Arkansas State at Memphis 6:00 p.m. ESPN+
Charleston Southern at Georgia Southern 6:00 p.m. ESPN+
Southeastern Louisiana at South Alabama 6:00 p.m. ESPN+
Sam Houston at Troy 6:00 p.m. ESPN+
ULM at Mississippi State 6:30 p.m. ESPNU
Northwestern State at Louisiana Tech 6:30 p.m. ESPN+
Lamar at Louisiana 7:00 p.m. ESPN+

All Times CT

IN THE POLLS

Associated Press Top 25 Poll

RV James Madison

US LBM Coaches Poll

RV James Madison

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SBC PRESEASON COACHES POLL

East Division

1. James Madison - 94 Points (11)
2. Old Dominion - 73 Points (1)
3. Marshall - 67 Points
4. Georgia Southern - 53 Points (1)
5. Coastal Carolina - 45 Points (1)
6. App State - 43 Points
7. Georgia State - 17 Points

West Division

1. Troy - 96 Points (12)
2. Louisiana - 75 Points (1)
3. Arkansas State - 69 Points
4. Louisiana Tech - 55 Points
5. Southern Miss - 47 Points (1)
6. South Alabama - 31 Points
7. ULM - 19 Points

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

KICKING THINGS OFF

Georgia State will officially open the Sun Belt football season when it hosts North Carolina A&T at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 4, on ESPN+. The matchup is 1-of-8 Sun Belt season-openers against FCS opposition in 2026. On Saturday, Sept. 5, App State will host Maine at 2:30 p.m. on ESPN+; Southern Miss will welcome Alcorn State to Hattiesburg at 4:00 p.m. on ESPN+; Old Dominion will clash with cross-town foe Norfolk State at 5:00 p.m. on ESPN+; Georgia Southern will take on Charleston Southern at 6:00 p.m. on ESPN+; South Alabama will host Southeastern Louisiana at 6:00 p.m. on ESPN+; Louisiana Tech will take on Northwestern State at 6:30 p.m. on ESPN+ and Louisiana will face Lamar at 7:00 p.m. on ESPN+. The Sun Belt is 55-0 against FCS opposition since expanding to 14 football-playing members in 2022.

AGAINST AUTONOMY

The Sun Belt, which owns 12 wins over autonomy conference foes since 2022, will have three opportunities to add to that tally in Week 1 in front of national television audiences. On Saturday, Sept. 5, Coastal Carolina will take on West Virginia at 11:00 a.m. on TNT; Marshall will travel to No. 18/17 Penn State at 2:30 p.m. on FSI; and ULM will visit Mississippi State at 6:30 p.m. on ESPN. The Chanticleers, who will commence the Ryan Beard era on Saturday, own three wins over autonomy conference foes since 2019. The Thundering Herd has earned two victories over autonomy conference opposition since joining the Sun Belt in 2022. This is the second-straight season that Marshall will open against a nationally-ranked foe, after traveling to then-No. 5/4 Georgia to kick off the 2025 campaign.

BATTLE OF THE BLUE RIDGE

Head coach Billy Napier—who led Louisiana to four-straight Sun Belt West Division titles and Sun Belt Football Championship Game berths ahead of a four-year stint as the head coach at Florida—will make his James Madison debut when the reigning Sun Belt champion Dukes host in-state rival Liberty at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 5, on ESPN. James Madison leads the all-time series 13-6, including a 31-13 triumph in Lynchburg a year ago en route to a 12-2 season that concluded with a Sun Belt championship and the conference's first-ever appearance in the College Football Playoff. In the 19 prior meetings in the Battle of the Blue Ridge rivalry between the Dukes and Flames, 10 games have been decided by one possession.



FAMILIAR FOE

Arkansas State will take on a familiar foe in Memphis to open the 2026 season at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 5, on ESPN+. The Red Wolves have played the Tigers more than any opponent in program history, with Saturday's matchup marking the 63rd all-time clash since 1914. Memphis leads the all-time series 33-24-5, including a 24-11-4 mark at home in Memphis. As it opens a four-year, home-and-home series that will run from 2026-29, Arkansas State will attempt to snap a five-game skid to its rival Memphis. The Red Wolves' most recent victory in the series was a 33-28 win in 2012 in Jonesboro under head coach Gus Malzahn, as part of a 10-3 season that concluded with a Sun Belt championship and a bowl victory.

CHOOSIN' TEXAS

Reigning Sun Belt West Division champion Troy will kick off its 2026 season when it hosts Sam Houston at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 5, on ESPN+. The matchup will be the first between the two teams at the FBS level, though the Trojans lead the all-time series 7-0-1. Troy has won 13 of its last 14 games against teams from the state of Texas dating back to the 2012 season—Texas State (10-1), North Texas (2-0) and UTSA (1-0). The Trojans have appeared in the Sun Belt Football Championship Game in three of the past four seasons and are 1-of-3 programs alongside Louisiana (5) and App State (4) with three-or-more appearances since the postseason event was established in 2018.

AP TOP 25 POLL

AUGUST 17

1	Ohio State (40)	0-0	1,672
2	Oregon (14)	0-0	1,597
3	Georgia	0-0	1,513
4	Notre Dame (6)	0-0	1,510
5	Texas	0-0	1,483
6	Indiana (8)	0-0	1,440
7	Miami (1)	0-0	1,379
8	Texas A&M	0-0	1,131
9	Ole Miss	0-0	1,102
10	Oklahoma	0-0	1,047
11	LSU	0-0	988
12	Texas Tech	0-0	983
13	Alabama	0-0	904
T14	USC	0-0	839
T14	BYU	0-0	839
16	Michigan	0-0	718
17	Washington	0-0	501
18	Penn State	0-0	482
19	SMU	0-0	434
20	Tennessee	0-0	394
21	Utah	0-0	304
22	Iowa	0-0	260
23	Houston	0-0	252
24	Louisville	0-0	194
25	Missouri	0-0	117

Receiving Votes: Clemson 112, Florida 51, Boise State 43, Arizona 32, TCU 11, Navy 10, South Carolina 10, Illinois 9, Oklahoma State 8, Vanderbilt 8, Pittsburgh 7, Virginia Tech 6, Minnesota 5, UNLV 4, New Mexico 4, Georgia Tech 4, **James Madison** 3, Auburn 3, Memphis 2, California 2, Liberty 1, Western Michigan 1, Tulane 1, Virginia 1.

US LBM COACHES POLL

AUGUST 4

1	Ohio State (38)	0-0	1,741
2	Oregon (6)	0-0	1,637
3	Georgia (7)	0-0	1,591
4	Texas (2)	0-0	1,544
5	Notre Dame (5)	0-0	1,524
6	Indiana (14)	0-0	1,522
7	Miami	0-0	1,409
8	Texas A&M	0-0	1,174
9	Oklahoma	0-0	1,104
10	Ole Miss	0-0	1,096
11	Alabama	0-0	1,050
12	Texas Tech	0-0	1,034
13	LSU	0-0	951
14	USC	0-0	838
15	BYU	0-0	781
16	Michigan	0-0	719
17	Penn State	0-0	463
18	Tennessee	0-0	428
19	Washington	0-0	406
20	SMU	0-0	378
21	Utah	0-0	313
22	Iowa	0-0	291
23	Clemson	0-0	235
24	Houston	0-0	194
25	Missouri	0-0	158

Receiving Votes: Louisville 153, Florida 147, TCU 63, Illinois 62, South Carolina 50, Arizona 50, Virginia 40, Vanderbilt 37, Auburn 29, Georgia Tech 26, Boise State 24, Oklahoma State 22, UNLV 17, NC State 13, Florida State 13, Virginia Tech 12, Nebraska 12, Memphis 9, Arizona State 8, **James Madison** 6, Duke 6, Pittsburgh 4, New Mexico 4, Western Michigan 3, Navy 3, San Diego State 2, Kansas State 1, Hawai'i 1, Jacksonville State 1, California 1.

WEEKLY AWARDS

OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE WEEK

Sept. 7
Sept. 14
Sept. 21
Sept. 28
Oct. 5
Oct. 12
Oct. 19
Oct. 26
Nov. 2
Nov. 9
Nov. 16
Nov. 23
Nov. 30

DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE WEEK

Sept. 7
Sept. 14
Sept. 21
Sept. 28
Oct. 5
Oct. 12
Oct. 19
Oct. 26
Nov. 2
Nov. 9
Nov. 16
Nov. 23
Nov. 30

SPECIAL TEAMS PLAYER OF THE WEEK

Sept. 7
Sept. 14
Sept. 21
Sept. 28
Oct. 5
Oct. 12
Oct. 19
Oct. 26
Nov. 2
Nov. 9
Nov. 16
Nov. 23
Nov. 30

MEDIA AVAILABILITY

The Sun Belt will conduct its weekly football coaches media availability via Zoom on Mondays throughout the regular season, beginning at 10:30 a.m. CT. Members of the media should email sam@sunbeltports.org for the Zoom link.

10:30 a.m. CT - Dowell Loggains, App State
 10:37 a.m. CT - Ryan Beard, Coastal Carolina
 10:44 a.m. CT - Bryant Vincent, ULM
 10:51 a.m. CT - Billy Napier, James Madison
 10:58 a.m. CT - Dell McGee, Georgia State
 11:05 a.m. CT - Sonny Cumbie, Louisiana Tech
 11:12 a.m. CT - Clay Helton, Georgia Southern
 11:19 a.m. CT - Michael Desormeaux, Louisiana
 11:26 a.m. CT - Gerad Parker, Troy
 11:33 a.m. CT - Tony Gibson, Marshall
 11:40 a.m. CT - Butch Jones, Arkansas State
 11:47 a.m. CT - Ricky Rahne, Old Dominion
 11:54 a.m. CT - Blake Anderson, Southern Miss
 12:01 p.m. CT - Major Applewhite, South Alabama



PRESEASON ALL-CONFERENCE

Preseason Offensive Player of the Year

Carlos Del Rio-Wilson, Marshall (RS Sr., QB - Atlanta, Ga.)

Preseason Defensive Player of the Year

Donnie Smith, Troy (Sr., DL - Greenville, Miss.)

Preseason Special Teams Player of the Year

Evan Crenshaw, Troy (Sr., P - Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.)

Preseason All-Sun Belt First Team Offense

QB - Carlos Del Rio-Wilson, Marshall (RS Sr., QB - Atlanta, Ga.)
 RB - Kenyon Clay, Arkansas State (RS Sr., RB - Union, Miss.)
 RB - Devin Roche, Old Dominion (RS Jr., RB - Baltimore, Md.)
 OL - Tristian Smith, Arkansas State (RS Sr., OL - Crossett, Ark.)
 OL - Zach Greenberg, James Madison (Gr., OL - Livingston, N.J.)
 OL - AJ Vinson, ULM (Sr., OL - Social Circle, Ga.)
 OL - Tariq Montgomery, Marshall (RS Sr., OL - Akron, Ohio)
 OL - Jalen Slappy, Marshall (RS Sr., OL - Columbus, Ohio)
 TE - Toby Payne, Marshall (RS Sr., TE - Poca, W.Va.)
 WR - Chauncy Cobb, Arkansas State (RS Jr., WR - Clewiston, Fla.)
 WR - Shelton Sampson Jr., Louisiana (RS Jr., WR - Baton Rouge, La.)
 WR - Adrian Norton, Marshall (Sr., WR - Huber Heights, Ohio)

Preseason All-Sun Belt First Team Defense

DL - Aiden Benton, App State (RS Jr., DL - Clayton, Ga.)
 DL - MJ Stroud, Georgia Southern (RS Sr., DL - Covington, Ga.)
 DL - Amar Thomas, James Madison (RS Sr., DL - Upper Marlboro, Md.)
 DL - Donnie Smith, Troy (Sr., DL - Greenville, Miss.)
 LB - Colton Phares, App State (RS Jr., LB - Beaufort, S.C.)
 LB - Noah Flemmings, ULM (Sr., LB - Austin, Texas)
 LB - Kolbe Fields, Louisiana Tech (Gr., LB - New Orleans, La.)
 DB - AG McGhee, Arkansas State (RS Sr., DB - Chipley, Fla.)
 DB - Ja'Marion Wayne, Coastal Carolina (Gr., DB - St. Louis, Mo.)
 DB - Chance Gamble, Georgia Southern (6th Yr., DB - Fitzgerald, Ga.)
 DB - Brent Gordon Jr., Louisiana (So., DB - Cecilia, La.)
 DB - Daytione Smith, Marshall (RS Sr., DB - East Highland Park, Va.)

Preseason All-Sun Belt First Team Special Teams

K - Clune Van Andel, Arkansas State (Sr., K - Grand Rapids, Mich.)
 P - Evan Crenshaw, Troy (Sr., P - Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.)
 RS - Chauncy Cobb, Arkansas State (RS Jr., RS - Clewiston, Fla.)
 AP - Chauncy Cobb, Arkansas State (RS Jr., AP - Clewiston, Fla.)

Preseason All-Sun Belt Second Team Offense

QB - Goose Crowder, Troy (Sr., QB - Gardendale, Ala.)
 RB - George Pettaway, James Madison (RS Sr., RB - Suffolk, Va.)
 RB - Keenan Phillips, South Alabama (Jr., RB - Bainbridge, Ga.)
 OL - Tyriq Poindexter, App State (RS Sr., OL - Roanoke, Va.)
 OL - Kaden Moreau, Louisiana (RS Sr., OL - Pineville, La.)
 OL - Ethan Hubbard, South Alabama (RS Jr., OL - Hoover, Ala.)
 OL - Kenton Jerido, South Alabama (RS Sr., OL - Tuscaloosa, Ala.)
 OL - Jordan Jones, Troy (Sr., OL - Ashland, Ky.)
 TE - Eli Finley, Louisiana Tech (Sr., TE - Heath, Texas)
 WR - Josh Dallas, Georgia Southern (RS Sr., WR - Sharpsburg, Ga.)
 WR - Nic Trujillo, ULM (Sr., WR - Rio Rancho, N.M.)
 WR - Anthony Eager, South Alabama (RS Jr., WR - Mobile, Ala.)

Preseason All-Sun Belt Second Team Defense

DL - Anthony Bynum, Georgia Southern (RS Jr., DL - Covington, Ga.)
 DL - Fitzgerald West Jr., Louisiana (RS Sr., DL - Lafayette, La.)
 DL - Braydin Ward, Marshall (RS Jr., DL - Montgomery, W.Va.)
 DL - Chris Forbes, Old Dominion (RS So., DL - Upper Marlboro, Md.)
 LB - Tray Brown, Coastal Carolina (RS Sr., LB - Margate, Fla.)
 LB - Brandon Tyson, Georgia Southern (RS Sr., LB - Whiteville, N.C.)
 LB - Javae Gilmore, Marshall (RS Sr., LB - Amite, La.)
 DB - Myles Woods, Coastal Carolina (Jr., DB - Grayson, Ga.)
 DB - Jabari Tiller, ULM (Sr., DB - Sumter, S.C.)
 DB - Mario Easterly, Old Dominion (RS Sr., DB - Harrisburg, Pa.)
 DB - Zion Frink, Old Dominion (RS Jr., DB - Chesapeake, Va.)
 DB - Justin Powe, Troy (Sr., DB - Mobile, Ala.)

Preseason All-Sun Belt Second Team Special Teams

K - Tripp Bryant, Georgia Southern (So., K - Lexington, S.C.)
 P - Alex Smith, Georgia Southern (Sr., P - Melbourne, Australia)
 RS - Xayvion Turner-Bradshaw, Marshall (RS Sr., RS - Bluefield, Va.)
 AP - Jordan Lovett, Troy (Jr., AP - Statesboro, Ga.)

2026 NFL DRAFT

Following a 2025 season in which it earned its first-ever berth into the College Football Playoff (CFP) and paced all non-autonomy conferences in Bowl Season representation for the fourth-straight year, the Sun Belt produced a pair of 2026 NFL Draft selections in All-Sun Belt First Team wide receiver Ted Hurst from Georgia State and All-Sun Belt First Team linebacker Jaden Dugger from Louisiana.

The conference has produced multiple NFL Draft selections in 22-of-25 drafts since it began sponsoring football in 2001, with four of its six highest NFL Draft totals coming over the past seven seasons. The Sun Belt registered a conference-record nine selections in 2023, seven draftees in 2020 and six picks in 2022 and 2024. The Sun Belt has tallied six-or-more draft picks on six occasions all-time (2010, 2012, 2020, 2022, 2023 & 2024).

Hurst was selected by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the third round with the 84th overall pick, the highest NFL Draft selection in Panthers program history. Hurst's selection gave the Sun Belt day two picks in back-to-back years for the first time since 2017 and 2018. The Panther wideout followed Marshall alumnus defensive lineman Mike Green, who was selected by the Baltimore Ravens in the second round of the 2025 NFL Draft. Hurst is the 24th Sun Belt student-athlete all-time to be selected in the first three rounds of the NFL Draft. Hurst is the fifth NFL Draft pick in Georgia State history and the fourth of the program's Sun Belt era, following the Indianapolis Colts selection of offensive lineman Ulrick John in 2014, the Washington Commanders pick of wide receiver Robert Davis in 2017 and the Green Bay Packers selection of offensive lineman Travis Glover in 2024. The Savannah, Ga., native ranked 14th in the nation with 837 receiving yards per game and 5.92 receptions per game as a senior, posting 1,004 receiving yards and six receiving touchdowns on 71 receptions. Despite playing just two years at Georgia State, he ranks fourth in program history with 1,965 receiving yards, fourth with 15 receiving touchdowns, fourth with 15.5 yards per reception and fifth with 127 receptions for his career.



Dugger was selected by the San Francisco 49ers in the fifth round with the 154th overall pick, giving the Ragin' Cajuns at least one selection in six of the last seven NFL Drafts. Dugger is the 20th NFL Draft pick of Louisiana's Sun Belt era, which dates back to the conference's inaugural football season in 2001. The Pittsburgh, Pa., native ranked 14th in the nation with 9.6 tackles per game as a senior, posting 125 tackles, 13.0 tackles for loss, 4.0 sacks, a forced fumble and an interception.

COMMUNICATIONS

App State

Joey Jones
Email: jonesj7@appstate.edu
Phone: 828-262-2845

Arkansas State

Mark Taylor
Email: martaylor@astate.edu
Phone: 870-972-3547

Coastal Carolina

Mike Uva
Email: muva@coastal.edu
Phone: 843-349-2822

Georgia Southern

Bryan Johnston
Email: bjohnston@georgiasouthern.edu
Phone: 912-478-5448

Georgia State

Ansley Rice
Email: arice21@gsu.edu
Phone: 404-413-4032

James Madison

Joe Mitchin
Email: j712h6@jmu.edu
Phone: 540-568-3702

Louisiana

Matt Sullivan
Email: matt.sullivan@louisiana.edu
Phone: 337-482-5393

ULM

Emma Grace ReVill
Email: reville@ulm.edu
Phone: 910-638-4850

Louisiana Tech

George Brandon
Email: gbrandon@latech.edu
Phone: 318-957-1463

Marshall

Grant Traylor
Email: traylor8@marshall.edu
Phone: 304-696-6525

Old Dominion

Eric Bohannon
Email: ebohannon@odu.edu
Phone: 757-683-3374

South Alabama

Seth Whitehouse
Email: sethwhitehouse@southalabama.edu
Phone: 435-850-9165

Southern Miss

Jack Duggan
Email: jack.duggan@usm.edu
Phone: 601-266-5947

Troy

Adam Prendergast
Email: adamp@troy.edu
Phone: 334-670-3832

Sun Belt Conference

Sam Knehans
Email: sam@sunbeltsports.org
Phone: 504-299-9066

50TH ANNIVERSARY

The Sun Belt, which was founded in 1976, will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the conference throughout the 2026 calendar year. The celebration will include student-athlete spotlights, this date in Sun Belt history moments and a signage and video board presence at the Sun Belt Championship events.



SBC FOOTBALL 365

SBC Football 365—the Sun Belt's around-the-clock source for all things football—will promote the conference's 14 football programs year-round through video and written content in conjunction with the conference's football-specific X account @SunBeltFB. The SBC Football 365 page on SunBeltSports.org includes highlights, stadium tours, game day central, statistics and media resources—including every game link and every game note from around the conference.

