Why OU will thrive in the SEC
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2024 promises to be a fascinating season for college football fans. The realignment of the four remaining *power* conferences, which includes the relocation of Texas and Oklahoma to the SEC, will make for compelling football. Some football pundits predict that OU, a perennial conference contender in the Big 8 and Big XII, will sink to a mid-tier team in the SEC conference. This article presents why I predict OU will have *early-term* success and *long-term* success in the SEC. I'll define success as competing in the SEC Championship, and I'll define *early-term* as within the first 3 years of SEC play. I'll support my case with four observations: (1) OU will receive comparative benefit from their team talent; (2) OU will perform well against SEC rivals based on a broad body of historical data; (3) concerns about OU facing an "SEC Gauntlet" are overblown; (4) OU's current condition and future outlook is unreservedly favorable based on a combination of circumstances.

1. Team Talent

When asked about the decisive factors in successful coaching and strategy, former Oklahoma coach and College Football Hall-of-Famer Barry Switzer Is fond of saying "It's not the X's and O's, but the Jimmies and the Joes." While many things contribute to success on the gridiron, victory ***usually*** goes to the team with the best complement of players that see playing time. In fact, Bud Elliott of SBnation.com observed that over the last 20 years, winning a national title is *always* correlated with a certain percentage of players with four-star or five-star rating – a metric Elliott calls "the Blue Chip ratio". Using the Blue-Chip Ratio, Elliott devised a two-tier system: those that can win a national title because they have a critical mass of team talent (50% blue chips), and those that cannot. Table 1 indicates that OU is in the top tier of Elliott's two-tier rating system. While Table 1 in isolation is not sufficient to support the hypothesis that OU will be among the top 2 SEC teams – it does support a near-term separation from nine SEC teams.

Table 1 – Current Player Level: Two-tiered Division from the Blue Chip Ratio (includes transfer portal)

Tier	Team	2022 Blue-chip Ratio[1]	2023 Blue-chip Ratio[2]	2024 Blue-chip freshman incoming[3]	2024 blue-chip portal transfer in[3]	2024 blue-chip portal transfer out[3]	2024 loss to NFL draft[4,5]	**2024 Blue-chip Ratio[6]**
Championship Capable Tier	Ohio State	78%	85%	+18	+5	-4	-4	**86%**
	Alabama	90%	90%	+22	+8	-17	-10	**82%**
	Georgia	77%	77%	+24	+6	-8	-8	**77%**
	Oregon	56%	67%	+22	+7	-4	-8	**71%**
	Texas	67%	70%	+19	+6	-3	-11	**70%**
	LSU	62%	71%	+20	+3	-6	-6	**66%**
	Clemson	62%	72%	+12	+0	-2	-6	**64%**
	OU	65%	70%	+19	+4	-5	-3	**63%**
	Notre Dame	61%	65%	+15	+3	-5	-7	**63%**
	Texas A&M	69%	73%	+16	+8	-8	-4	**63%**
	Florida	60%	64%	+14	+6	-4	-1	**58%**
	Penn State	54%	55%	+15	+2	-2	-8	**57%**
	Miami	59%	61%	+14	+6	-6	-4	**56%**
	USC	<50	52%	+13	+5	-10	-7	**54%**
	Michigan	59%	54%	+17	+1	-2	-13	**54%**
	Florida State	<50	<50	+15	+10	-0	-10	**53%**
Not Championship Capable Tier	Arkansas, Auburn, Kentucky, Miss State, Missouri, Ole Miss, So. Carolina, Tennessee, Vanderbilt (SEC Schools with insufficient team talent to win a national championship)							

Table notes:
1. 2022 Blue Chip ratio: 247sports.com 2022 Blue Chip Ratio article [1]
2. 2023 Blue Chip ratio: 247sports.com 2023 Blue Chip Ratio article [2]
3. Recruiting & Transfer portal data: 247Sports.com data [3]
4. I couldn't find blue chip losses due to graduation/early NFL entry; the rightmost column lists NFL draftees instead of high school blue chips loss to graduation/early NFL entry. A reasonable guess for a team's 2024 blue chip losses due to graduation/early NFL entry is to multiply their NFL draft count by their team blue chip ratio; this heuristic would give 9 for Alabama (10 NFL draftees * 90% blue-chips) and 6 for Georgia (8 NFL draftees * 77% blue-chips).
5. NFL drafts source: https://www.ncaa.com nfl draft article [4]
6. 2024 Blue Chip ratio: CBSsports.com 2024 Blue Chip Ratio article [5]

What about player development? How well does Oklahoma and their SEC competitors take talented recruits from *has great potential* to *NFL ready*? For this important question, a more comprehensive evaluation of player data is needed to supplement Table 1. In Table 2, we provide an expanded perspective of player development. To avoid any short-term anomaly, we use a much longer timeframe. Table 2 considers each SEC team's historical record including the number of consensus All-Americans, the number of Heisman winners, and the number of NFL draft picks. Each school is rank ordered (for example, Oklahoma has the 2nd most number of consensus All-Americans at 82 players giving them a rank of 2 for that category). We then calculate a total points based on rankings. The table shows that Oklahoma leads all SEC teams with 78 points.

Table 2– Historical Player Level: Rank ordering SEC teams based on player recognition metrics

Rank	Team	Consensus All-Americans[1]	Football Academic All-Americans[2]	College Hall of Fame Players[3]	Heisman winners[4]	NFL Draft picks[5]	**Total Points[6]**
1	Oklahoma	2 (82)	1 (54)	2 (25)	1 (7)	1 (417)	**78**
2	Alabama	1 (86)	4 (30)	3 (24)	2 (4)	2 (411)	**73**
4	Texas	3 (63)	2 (39)	3 (24)	6 (2)	6 (368)	**65**
3	Georgia	4 (41)	3 (31)	5 (16)	6 (2)	4 (379)	**63**
3	LSU	4 (41)	5 (28)	11 (2)	3 (3)	3 (381)	**59**
6	Florida	7 (34)	11 (20)	6 (11)	3 (3)	5 (374)	**53**
8	Tennessee	4 (41)	13 (17)	1 (28)	10 (0)	7 (363)	**50**
7	Auburn	9 (31)	7 (24)	9 (8)	3 (3)	9 (300)	**48**
9	TAMU	7 (34)	15 (13)	6 (11)	6 (2)	8 (306)	**43**
10	Arkansas	10 (26)	10 (21)	8 (10)	10 (0)	10 (281)	**37**
13	Missouri	11 (14)	9 (22)	9 (8)	10 (0)	12 (232)	**34**
11	Ole Miss	13 (13)	7 (24)	12 (1)	10 (0)	11 (261)	**32**
11	Kentucky	11 (14)	6 (26)	13 (0)	10 (0)	14 (216)	**31**
14	Vanderbilt	14 (7)	12 (18)	13 (0)	10 (0)	16 (126)	**20**
15	So Carolina	15 (4)	16 (5)	13 (0)	9 (1)	13 (220)	**19**
16	Miss State	16 (3)	14 (16)	13 (0)	10 (0)	15 (212)	**17**

Table notes: For columns three through seven, each cell contains two numbers: the number in parenthesis is the measurement for that team, and the orange number is the rank. For example, in column three Oklahoma has the 2nd most number of consensus All-Americans at 82 players (82) giving them a rank of 2 for that category. **Total points** is calculated as follows: a rank of 1 earns 16 points, a rank of 2 earns 15 points, and so on; total points sums columns three through seven. The data sources for this table are as follows:
1 Consensus: https://www.winsipedia.com/ranking/all-americans#google_vignette [6]
2 Academic AA: Academic All-Americans by School (as of Feb-2024) [7]
3 College Football Hall of Fame Players: https://www.cfbhall.com/inductees/ [8]
4 Heisman https://www.winsipedia.com/ranking/heisman-winners#google_vignette [9]
5 NFL drafts https://www.winsipedia.com/ranking/nfl-draft-picks [10]
6 Total Points Calculation: Sum points based on rankings from the five table columns – a ranking of 1 adds 16 points, a ranking of 2 adds 15 points, and so on.

Table 2's historical perspective supports that Oklahoma has a well-established trend of *developing* outstanding talent. Further, the data in Table 1 and Table 2 indicates that OU is among the top two SEC teams in team-talent.

Does a track record of past elite team talent guarantee a future with elite team talent? The answer is no. Yale was a powerhouse in the 1880s but is not considered a national championship contender today. Likewise, Minnesota has been unable to resurrect their success from the 1930s, and Nebraska no longer contends at the level they did in the 1970s and 1990s. Nebraska's move to the Big 10 conference in 2012 resulted in the loss of conference games in the state of Texas and made recruiting in that key recruiting state more difficult. In addition, NCAA rule changes eliminated the strategy employed by Nebraska and many other schools of relying on players *trying out for the team* on campus to fill most first- and second-string positions; today there are stricter limits on the number of practices, the duration of practices, the number of scholarships, and the size of team rosters. [Oklahoma great QB Steve Davis (1973 to 1975) tells of his freshman year at Oklahoma try-outs--he began his college career as 12th string QB among hundreds of players trying out for the Sooners!] Without the ability to count on Texas phenoms, or the ability to have talent come to Nebraska for tryouts, Nebraska has been unable to field an elite team talent wise. Just as Nebraska must find a way to gather elite talent by nimbly adjusting to the new reality of Big 10 conference membership, today's FBS teams must find a way to address NIL, an unregulated transfer portal and other shifts in the FBS landscape to land the current generation of blue chips. Yale, Minnesota and Nebraska lost that edge and are missing from Bud Elliot's 50% and higher Blue Chip Ratio list in Table 1. Oklahoma's ability to recruit elite team talent over multiple generations, multiple coaches, and multiple eras does provide some measure of evidence that they will be able to continue the trend.

While team talent is paramount, other factors are also important. Next we will consider program strength.

2. Program Strength and Achievements

This section considers the premise that OU will perform well against SEC rivals based on a broad body of historical evidence that go beyond cumulative team recruiting-rankings and recognition to individual players. We first consider OU's head-to-head record versus SEC opponents in Table 3. Many of these games have been in post-season Bowl games. The data shows that while OU has found challenging to defeat the SEC champion, they have had an **over 83%** winning percentage against SEC teams that finished 2nd or lower in the SEC.

Table 3 – Head-to-head record of OU versus SEC opponents

Results by Category		Oklahoma's Win-Loss Record	
		Full Program History	**Since 2000**
OU versus: (various groupings)	All SEC opponents	15-10-2 (.592)	8-6-0 (.571)
	SEC conf rank: 2nd or lower	14-3-2 (.833)	8-1-0 (.889)
	SEC conf rank: 1st	1-7-0 (.125)	0-5-0 (.000)
	SEC team is national champ	0-4-0 (.000)	0-3-0 (.000)
	SEC when OU is natl. champ	1-0-0 (1.00)	---
OU is tied or leads: (team series)	Alabama	3-2-1 (.583)	3-1-0 (.750)
	Arkansas	1-0-0 (1.00)	1-0-0 (1.00)
	Auburn	2-0-0 (1.00)	1-0-0 (1.00)
	Florida	1-1-0 (.500)	1-1-0 (1.00)
	Kentucky	2-1-0 (.667)	---
	Missouri	67-24-5 (.724)	7-1-0 (.875)
	Tennessee	3-1-0 (.750)	2-0-0 (1.00)
	Texas A&M	19-12-0 (.613)	10-3-0 (.769)
	Vanderbilt	2-0-0 (1.00)	---
OU trails: (team series)	Georgia	0-1-0 (.000)	0-1-0 (.000)
	LSU	1-2-0 (.333)	0-2-0 (.000)
	Mississippi	0-1-0 (.000)	---
	Texas	51-63-5 (.450)	17-8-0 (.680)
OU has never played:	South Carolina	---	---
	Mississippi State	---	---

Table notes: Data source: http://mcubed.net/ncaaf/tvc/ok/index.shtml [11]

In Table 4, we employ a similar strategy to our earlier section where we evaluated overall team skill level using a comprehensive perspective. Again, we seek to avoid any short-term anomaly, so we take a historical view. Nearly all historical metrics will underscore that OU has maintained an *elite* level of play over time. Coaches retire, offensive and defensive formations come and go, conferences change membership and rules are changed over time, but Oklahoma consistently fields an elite football team as evidenced by national championships from the 1950s, 1970s, 1980s, and 2000s. The data in Table 4 supports the point that OU will perform well against SEC rivals on the field of play based on past results.

Table 4 – Historical Team Strength: Rank ordering SEC teams based on program quality metrics

	All Time win pcnt[1]	Natll. Champ[1]	Home Record[3]	Away Record[3]	Bowl Record[1]	Against Ranked[3]	Conf Champ[1]	# Bowl Games[1]	All time wins[1]	Weeks in AP Poll[1]	in Final AP Poll[4]	Weeks AP #1[1]	# HoF Coach[2]	**Total Points[5]**
OU	2 (.725)	2 (7)	1 (.840)	2 (.691)	7 (.553)	2 (.643)	1 (50)	4 (57)	3 (944)	1 (898)	1 (63)	2 (101)	1 (6)	**192**
Bama	1 (.733)	1 (18)	5 (.813)	3 (.690)	3 (.612)	1 (.794)	2 (34)	1 (77)	1 (965)	2 (873)	2 (62)	1 (140)	8 (4)	**190**
UGA	5 (.666)	4 (4)	2 (.828)	1 (.727)	1 (.637)	4 (.579)	7 (15)	2 (62)	4 (881)	5 (661)	6 (43)	3 (51)	1 (6)	**176**
Texas	3 (.702)	4 (4)	5 (.758)	4 (.655)	8 (.552)	6 (.375)	3 (31)	3 (59)	2 (948)	3 (773)	3 (52)	4 (45)	12 (3)	**161**
LSU	6 (.656)	4 (4)	4 (.816)	6 (.585)	5 (.555)	3 (.582)	5 (16)	6 (55)	6 (843)	4 (665)	5 (45)	6 (38)	6 (5)	**155**
Tenn	4 (.676)	3 (6)	6 (.728)	7 (.504)	6 (.554)	15 (.230)	5 (16)	5 (56)	5 (876)	7 (618)	4 (47)	7 (19)	8 (4)	**139**
Florida	7 (.627)	7 (3)	3 (.817)	5 (.616)	11 (.521)	11 (.292)	12 (8)	7 (48)	9 (760)	6 (646)	8 (34)	5 (41)	6 (5)	**124**
TAMU	9 (.603)	7 (3)	8 (.714)	9 (.459)	13 (.476)	5 (.382)	4 (18)	10 (42)	8 (778)	9 (489)	10 (28)	9 (6)	1 (6)	**119**
Auburn	8 (.625)	10 (2)	7 (.727)	8 (.496)	9 (.532)	7 (.366)	10 (12)	8 (47)	7 (799)	8 (602)	7 (40)	8 (9)	8 (4)	**116**
Arky	10 (.576)	11 (1)	10 (.637)	14 (352)	15 (.420)	12 (.250)	8 (13)	9 (44)	10 (740)	10 (432)	9 (29)	13 (1)	1 (6)	**89**
Ole Miss	11 (.551)	7 (3)	11 (.630)	11 (.389)	2 (.625)	8 (.333)	13 (6)	11 (41)	12 (676)	11 (333)	10 (28)	10 (5)	16 (1)	**88**
Mizzu	12 (.546)	13 (0)	9 (.669)	10 (.410)	14 (.444)	10 (.296)	10 (12)	12 (36)	11 (713)	12 (266)	12 (20)	12 (2)	1 (6)	**83**
Miss St	15 (.494)	13 (0)	13 (.590)	12 (.380)	4 (.577)	13 (.242)	15 (1)	13 (26)	16 (594)	13 (209)	13 (15)	10 (5)	12 (3)	**59**
So Car	13 (.509)	13 (0)	12 (.624)	13 (.375)	16 (.400)	9 (.308)	15 (1)	14 (25)	14 (635)	14 (191)	14 (10)	14 (0)	12 (3)	**48**
KY	14 (.502)	11 (1)	14 (.561)	15 (.312)	10 (.522)	14 (.236)	14 (2)	15 (23)	13 (652)	15 (111)	14 (10)	14 (0)	12 (3)	**46**
Vandy	16 (.482)	13 (0)	16 (.376)	16 (.247)	12 (.500)	16 (.070)	8 (13)	16 (9)	15 (618)	16 (31)	16 (3)	14 (0)	8 (4)	**39**

Table notes: For columns two through fourteen, each cell contains two numbers: the number in parenthesis is the measurement for that team, and the orange number is the rank. For example, in column two Georgia has the 5th best all time winning percentage among SEC teams with winning 66.6% of the time (or .666) which gives them a rank of 5 for that category. **Total points** is calculated as follows: a rank of 1 earns 16 points, a rank of 2 earns 15 points, and so on; total points sums columns two through fourteen. The data sources for this table are as follows:

1. Data source: https://www.winsipedia.com/ranking/all-time-record [12]
2. College Football Hall of Fame Coaches: Wikipedia article [13]
3. Data source: https://betiq.teamrankings.com [14]
4. Data source: https://sports-reference.com/cfb/schools [15]
5. Total Points Calculation: Sum points based on rankings from the nine table columns with rankings – a ranking of 1 adds 16 points, a ranking of 2 adds 15 points, and so on.

Those that would dismiss Oklahoma's accomplishments because they hail from the Big 8/Big XII are probably unaware of the SEC's record against the Big 8 in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Certainly the strongest teams within the SEC have been elite since 2005. However, history shows the SEC has not always been the conference with the best teams. In leather helmet days, the Ivy league dominated college football. In the modern era (post WW2), each of the current Power4 conferences, the former Pac conference, and the Independents have produced dynasties lasting 4 seasons or more. The Big 8 champion once beat the SEC champion in a #1 versus #2 showdown at the end of the season by 32 points. In another #1 versus #2 showdown that happened years later, the Big 8 champion beat the SEC champion by 38 points. In fact, the Big 8 once had the AP #1 team, the AP #2 team, and the AP #3 team at the end of the season. Oklahoma's tally of 50 conference championships from the Big 8 and Big XII should portend a favorable AP ranking versus SEC teams. In *Table 5*, we contrast the final AP poll ranking of Oklahoma with the final AP poll ranking of the SEC champion and the SEC runner-up. During the 78 years of comparison, Oklahoma finished ranked above the SEC champion 17 times (22% of the time), and ranked above the SEC runner-up 41 times (53% of the time).

Table 5 – Years When Oklahoma's Final AP poll rank surpassed SEC champ or runner-up [Modern Era[1]]

	Year	SEC Champ & Final AP Ranking[2,3]	SEC Runner up & Final AP Ranking[2,3]	Oklahoma's Final AP Ranking[3]
1	2020	Alabama (5)	Florida (13)	6
2	2018	Alabama (2)	Georgia (7)	4
3	2017	Georgia (2)	Auburn (10)	3
4	2016	Alabama (2)	Florida (14)	5
5	2015	Alabama (1)	Florida (25)	5
6	2011	LSU (2)	Georgia (19)	16
7	2010	Auburn (1)	So Carolina (22)	6
8	2008	Florida (1)	Alabama (6)	5
9	2007	LSU (1)	Tennessee (12)	8
10	2006	Florida (1)	Arkansas (15)	11
11	2004	Auburn (2)	Tennessee (13)	3
12	2003	LSU (2)	Georgia (7)	3
13	2002	Georgia (3)	Arkansas (nr)	5
13	2001	LSU (7)	Tennessee (4)	6
15	2000	Florida (10)	Auburn (18)	1
16	1988	Auburn (8)	LSU (19)	14
17	1987	Auburn (7)	LSU (5)	3
18	1986	LSU (10)	Auburn (6)	3
19	1985	Tennessee (4)	Florida (5)	1
20	1984	Florida (3) [vacated]	So Carolina (11)	6
21	1980	Georgia (1)	Alabama (6)	3
22	1979	Alabama (1)	Auburn (16)	3
23	1978	Alabama (1)	Georgia (16)	3
24	1977	Alabama (1)	Georgia (nr)	7
25	1976	Georgia (10)	Kentucky (18)	5
26	1975	Alabama (3)	Georgia (19)	1
27	1974	Alabama (5)	Auburn (8)	1
28	1973	Alabama (4)	LSU (13)	3
29	1972	Alabama (7)	Auburn (5)	2
30	1971	Alabama (2)	Auburn (5)	2
31	1968	Georgia (8)	Tennessee (13)	11
32	1967	Tennessee (2)	Alabama (8)	3
33	1957	Auburn (1)	Ole Miss (7)	4
34	1956	Tennessee (2)	Ole Miss (nr)	1
35	1955	Ole Miss (10)	Auburn (8)	1
36	1954	Ole Miss (6)	Auburn (13)	3
37	1953	Alabama (13)	Ga Tech (8)	4
38	1952	Ga Tech (2)	Ole Miss (7)	4
39	1950	Kentucky (7)	Tennessee (4)	1
40	1949	Tulane (nr)	LSU (9)	2
41	1948	Georgia (8)	Tulane (13)	5

Table notes: 1. Modern Era is generally regarded as post World War 2 (1946 and thereafter -- featured two platoons for offense and defense, and players back from the war).
2. SEC champ & runner-up List: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SEC_Championship_Game [16]
3. Final AP Poll source: https://maaw.info/GadgetsandGames/APFinalFootballRankings.htm [17]
4. Years where OU was ranked higher than the SEC champ is denoted by blue background.

3. What about "The SEC Gauntlet"

One of the arguments given for why OU will fall to a mid-tier team within the SEC conference focuses on the level of SEC play. Sometimes referred to as "the SEC Gauntlet", this theory states that the overall SEC level of play is much better than that in other P5 conferences. The following claims are said to support the SEC Gauntlet theory:

- Teams in the SEC have "SEC speed".
- Mid-tier SEC teams would compete for championships in other P5 conferences.
- Bottom-tier SEC teams would slot into mid-tier levels in other P5 conferences.
- An SEC schedule is therefore much tougher than other conferences. SEC conference members must endure a unique week-to-week grind of playing strong team after strong team. Teams from other conferences would have a significantly worse record if they played in the SEC.

Can the SEC Gauntlet theory be supported by facts?

To evaluate this theory, it will be most effective to uncover a test with two characteristics: (1) our yardstick should be game results from the field of play; (2) the metric should apply evenly to top-tier, mid-tier, and bottom-tier teams (we should avoid metrics where top-tier teams have more influence). One could devise an indirect metric that is not based on field of play results, but such metrics usually tell only a small part of the overall story. For instance, we could use a roster-based metric like the number of teams with championship-tier Blue-Chip Ratios, or counts of NFL draftees, but these metrics are unevenly distributed and inconclusive: the Gauntlet theory is deeply dependent on field of play performance of mid-tier and lower-tier teams.

Fortunately, we can test the SEC Gauntlet theory with actual results that meet our desired criteria: our selected test evaluates wins and losses from the field of play, and it includes results from mid-tier and lower-tier teams evenly with top-tier teams. Here's the basis for the test: two mid-tier teams recently left the Big XII and joined the SEC. If the SEC Gauntlet theory is correct, we should observe a noticeable decline in their conference record: they should exhibit more loses in SEC play against the stronger top-to-bottom competition. Table 6 provides the record of both Missouri and Texas A&M for their last 12 years of Big XII play, and their last 12 years of SEC play. The results are telling: one team improved in SEC play by a very small amount, one team regressed in SEC play by a very small amount, and the number of championship appearances was equal. I especially like this test case because it is easy to understand and meaningful. The record shows Missouri and Texas A&M had no appreciable performance decline -- an extremely strong counter proof indicating the SEC Gauntlet effect is minimal to a program's performance over time.

Table 6 – Comparing Missouri and TAMU's Big XII and SEC Records

	Big XII conference record (2000 – 2011)	Big XII runner-up occurrences	SEC conference record (2012 – 2023)	SEC runner-up occurrences
Missouri	44-47 (.483)	2 times	44-51 (.458)	2 times
Texas A&M	45-46 (.494)	0 times	50-43 (.537)	0 times

Table notes: Data source: http://mcubed.net/ncaaf/tvc/ok/index.shtml   [18]
Results do not include self references (Missouri versus TAMU games).

Certainly the SEC is currently the premier college football conference based on top-tier performance. During the Alabama dynasty under coach Nick Saban, the SEC's best teams have earned more championships than those by other conferences. However, the same cannot be said about the conference as a whole. Table 6 provides convincing evidence that the mid-tier and lower-tier of the SEC were no better than that of the Big XII while OU and Texas were members. We observe that a typical mid-tier team in the Big XII conference remained a mid-tier team in the SEC. Pundits that predict Oklahoma will regress from a top-tier Big XII position to a mid-tier SEC position should find the following facts very informative:

- Looking back at their last 12 games, OU was 10-2 against Missouri and 9-3 against Texas A&M. That's next-level better than recent *on the field* results from Tennessee, LSU, Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Florida, and Kentucky.

- Alabama and Georgia, the top teams in the SEC during the last 12 years, had roughly comparable results with OU. Alabama was 10-2 against Texas A&M and 4-0 against Missouri. Georgia was 11-1 against Missouri and 1-0 against Texas A&M.

- While we're looking at on the field results from SEC teams that have played Missouri and Texas A&M, consider that OU has winning streaks of **18** home games in a row when playing Missouri in Norman, and **7** home games in a row when playing Texas A&M in Norman.

If Oklahoma brings their "b game" against a mid-tier Big XII team, they could easily get beat (and history provides examples). Further, Oklahoma can have a key player injured while playing against a lower-tier Big XII team (and history provides examples). Missouri and Texas A&M's field-of-play results reveals that a mid-tier team in the Big XII mapped to a mid-tier team in the SEC -- *they didn't magically drop 5 or 6 slots in the new league*.

4. Current Condition and Future Outlook

Each football program develops its own culture over time. Central to the 50-time conference champion and 7-time national champion Oklahoma culture is *winning championships*.

The Sooners already have exceptional football resources, yet they are continuing to invest heavily in facilities and services. Oklahoma's football revenue enables the program to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on facilities (nationally OU ranks [third in operating revenue](#) [19]). This Summer, the Brian and Kim Kimrey family donated $20M toward Sooner football and baseball. When you're adding a $10M donation here, and a $20M donation there, pretty soon it adds up to real money! ;-) Oklahoma's Gaylord Family – Oklahoma Memorial stadium just received a $370M South end zone renovation. The Sooners' beautiful football stadium has been sold out 148 consecutive times (second only to Nebraska), so it may surprise outsiders to learn that these big-budget upgrades prioritize fan experience over increasing head count (aspects of seating capacity were actually decreased somewhat in the latest renovation). Among the upgrades were significant improvements for fans with disabilities, improved general seating, deluxe suites, open air "loge boxes", a colossal 50' x 170' video board, and fan plazas. Oklahoma's exceptional football atmosphere should make a nice addition to an already outstanding set of football facilities across their new conference--I can hardly wait to visit the Heisman park at other SEC schools (surely it's common for SEC schools to have a plaza with statues of all their Heisman winners). And OU's support doesn't stop at the gridiron: the Prentice Gautt Academic Center for student-athlete assistance is one of the finest in the nation (note Table 2 shows Oklahoma leads all SEC schools in football Academic All Americans, and it's not close). In the works is a new $175M football operations facility (the facility is already approved by regents). The new football operations facility will include a new practice facility and world class resources in recovery, sports science and nutrition.

Oklahoma is graced with multiple factors that reinforce favorable recruiting. Six often-cited reasons are:

1. A superior NIL collective;
2. An exceptional record of developing players for the NFL (OU's 417 draft picks is first among all SEC schools [20], OU has elite status in active combined NFL earnings by college [21], and OU has elite status in providing top-100 NFL players [22]);
3. Close proximity to hotbeds of high-school football talent (families of recruits can usually drive to home games and visit the OU campus on weekends with ease);
4. An exceptional program track-record worthy of the name *blue blood*;
5. A phenomenal coaching staff in place with a track record of success at the highest level;
6. And those phenomenal football facilities discussed above.

OU enters the SEC in a deceptively strong position as the media has rallied around Texas as the new member expected to contend for a top spot within the conference. Note that Oklahoma has finished above Texas in 8 of the last 10 Big XII conference seasons, Oklahoma is 8-3 in head-to-head matchups during that timespan (OU and Texas played twice in 2018), and Oklahoma beat Texas last year. Oklahoma's offensive unit should continue its long-standing run of success. Whether it's the precise execution of the Split-T offense in the 1950s, or the dynamic rushing attack of the wishbone offense of the 1970s, or the full-throttle passing attacks that Bob Stoops' teams employed since then, Oklahoma has long been associated with exceptional offenses. Super-efficient Sooner offenses have led to 4 Heisman trophies since 2000. As the Sooners begin their transition to the SEC, that same offensive onslaught will be an integral component to the Sooner attack. The 2024 Sooner offense will be building on last season's offense that finished 4th in Scoring Offense, 3rd in Total Offense, 6th in Passing Efficiency, and 7th in Third Down Conversion Percentage. Yet the Sooner faithful are probably more excited about a new and fierce defense. Coach Brent Venables has been building a defensive foundation since returning back to Oklahoma two years ago to assume the role of head coach. OU's defensive style will resemble what Venables employed as Clemson defensive coordinator to take Clemson to a national title in 2016 and 2018. OU's Blue Chip Ratio has maintained high levels (see Table 1), and the defensive depth chart is once again matching (or exceeding) the offensive depth chart in terms of highly-ranked players. Going forward, the move to the SEC should help Oklahoma to attract top defensive talent – and the early indications are positive. Now in Venables third year, Oklahoma has accumulated the proper personnel **and** garnered two seasons of scheme experience (this is key). For 2024, expect the Sooners to feature a menacing defense like those Oklahoma defenses of the early 2000s.

5. Conclusion

The SEC has a long and distinguished track record of college football success. Table 5 shows that during the modern era, the SEC champion has often finished the season as one of the top 3 teams in the nation, and the SEC runner-up has usually finished in the AP top-20. This is certainly rarified air, yet the same table documents that Oklahoma matched the best the SEC has to offer by finishing higher than the SEC runner-up 41 times and higher than the SEC champion 17 times during the seventy-eight years of the modern era (since 1946).

Since 2000, the SEC has maintained its highest level of play ever. During that time, Oklahoma earned a winning record against Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Tennessee, TAMU and Texas. More recently, Oklahoma has been among the nation's most predictable and consistent winners during the last ten years: the top three SEC teams at avoiding upsets are Oklahoma (87% favored games won), Georgia (89% favored games won), and Alabama (93% favored games won) [23]. As Oklahoma prepares for their SEC debut, Oklahoma is coming off a 10 win season, an excellent recruiting class, and a truckload of optimism and program momentum.

In conclusion, we would do well to remember that Oklahoma will not need to go undefeated in this newest version of the SEC. The Sooners' *conference objective* will be to finish within the SEC's top tier and earn an invitation to the 12-team playoff. The NFL shows us that it is possible to create conferences where even the best team in the league is unable to go undefeated; the goal is to receive a playoff berth each year. This analysis based on roster strength, player development, program achievements, current condition and future outlook supports that Oklahoma has been and is currently an elite program at the highest level relative to the other 15 SEC teams (refer to Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5). Perhaps there is a conference that will consistently field 6 or 7 teams that would defeat the Sooners year in and year out, but not at the college level.

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