



KANSAS STATE WILDCATS

2024 Record: 9-4 (5-4 B12)

Big 12 Conference

Manhattan, KS

Wildcats Back on the Prowl

Taking over for a legend (the person who the stadium is named after) is never easy, but Chris Klieman has done a terrific job with the Kansas State program. In the topsy-turvy Big 12, the Wildcats have been as consistent a team as any in the conference. Last season it appeared as though K-State could make their second trip to the Big 12 title game in just three seasons, but they stumbled down the stretch and lost three of their final four games including upset losses to Houston and Arizona State.

Key pieces return to the roster in 2025 including the starting quarterback, top receiver, a quality offensive line, and the top two tacklers. The conference is a minefield, but if there's anyone that can navigate a safe path, it just might be this Wildcats team.

OFFENSE

Quarterback **Avery Johnson** posted well over 3,000 total yards between his arm and quick legs and he set the school record with 25 passing touchdowns. However, he was inconsistent in some inopportune moments and he tossed 10 picks and completed only 58.3% of his passes. With the physical ground and pound style of offense that the Wildcats tend to employ, those mistakes were particularly impactful (all four losses included two or more turnovers). Still, there's no denying Johnson's talent and he should be more comfortable as a passer with his quarterback coach Matt Wells being elevated to OC.

The Wildcats will need Johnson to take the next step as a passer especially if they aren't able to replicate the impressive production from running back DJ Giddens. He only needed 205 carries to net 1,343 yards and he added another 258 yards as a receiver. The good news is that **Dylan Edwards** picked up where Giddens left off and rushed for 196 yards in the Rate Bowl victory and his average rush yards were somehow even better at 7.4 a pop. Edwards will run behind one of the best offensive lines in the conference. **Sam Hecht** and **Taylor Poitier** headline the linemen who return while transfers **Terrence Enos** (Pittsburgh) and **JB Nelson** (Penn State) help bolster the unit.

Johnson's favorite target **Jayce Brown** is back and the coaching staff is high on transfers **Jaron Tibbs** (Purdue) and **Jerald Bradley** (Texas Tech/Boston College). **Garrett Oakley** finished third on the team with 22 receptions at the tight end position and he was a major threat in the red zone with five touchdowns to tie Brown for the team lead. Oakley isn't the only tight end of note, **Will Swanson** caught three touchdown passes and true freshman **Linkon Cure** is a five-star recruit and the top ranked tight end in the 2025 class, per 247Sports.

DEFENSE

The Wildcats have held opponents to under 24 points per game for four consecutive seasons. That streak will be put to the test with just five returning starters on that side of the ball but returning the top two tacklers in linebacker **Austin Romaine** and safety **VJ Payne** certainly helps. Those veterans will lead their position groups, but where the Wildcats really hung their hat last year was a pass rush that netted 35 sacks and slowed down opposing runners to just 3.6 yards per carry.

Defensive end **Brendan Mott** was exceptional with 49 tackles and 8.5 sacks and he finished his K-State career as the 2024 Big 12 Defensive Lineman of the Year. The line obviously takes a hit with his departure but there's still talent in the form of **Chiddi Obiazor** who is physically imposing at 6'6" 275 pounds. **Damian Ilalio** and **Cody Stufflebean** were both full-time starters on the line last year.

Defensive coordinator **Joe Klanderman** needs to find a pair of new starters to gel alongside Romaine. The Wildcats bring in only 17 total transfers but former blue chipper **Gabe Powers** might be the most notable newcomer who arrives from defending champion Ohio State. In addition to Romaine, **Desmond Purnell** is an established commodity and his four sacks from last season lead all returners. The secondary is a question mark with a starting corner and starting safety now in the NFL. The aforementioned VJ Payne registered 64 tackles and a pair of interceptions and safety running mate **Gunner Maldonado** is a great addition from Arizona. He missed most of the 2024 season but tallied 81 tackles and forced four turnovers in 2023.

Preseason Ranking

11

HC: Chris Klieman
(7th Year, 48-28)

OC: Matt Wells
(1st Year)

DC: Joe Klanderman
(6th Year)

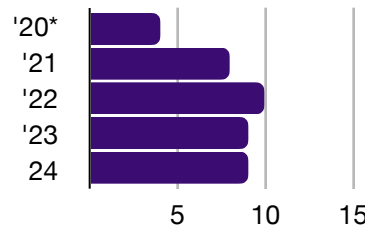
2025 Class Rankings

Recruiting
35

Transfer Portal
55

Via 24/7 Sports

KANSAS STATE WIN TREND



2024 Results (8-5)

UT-Martin (W 41-6)
@ Tulane (W 34-27)
Arizona (W 31-7)
@ BYU (L 9-38)
Oklahoma State (W 42-20)
@ Colorado (W 31-28)
@ West Virginia (W 45-18)
Kansas (W 29-27)
@ Houston (L 19-24)
Arizona State (L 14-24)
Cincinnati (W 41-15)
@ Iowa State (L 21-29)
vs. Rutgers* (W 44-41)
Rate Bowl

K-STATE

5thandGoalSports.com

JAYCE BROWN – WR

Photo via K-State Athletics

2025 KSU Schedule

Wk		
0	Sat, Aug 23	vs. Iowa State*
1	Sat, Aug 30	vs. North Dakota
2	Sat, Sept 6	vs. Army
3	Fri, Sept 12	@ Arizona
5	Sat, Sept 27	vs. UCF
6	Sat, Oct 4	@ Baylor
7	Sat, Oct 11	vs. TCU
9	Sat, Oct 25	@ Kansas
10	Sat, Nov 1	vs. Texas Tech
12	Sat, Nov 15	@ Oklahoma State
13	Sat, Nov 22	@ Utah
14	Sat, Nov 29	vs. Colorado

Home Away Neutral

Key Games

Aug 23 vs. Iowa State: A trip to Ireland marks the start of the college football season and simultaneously serves as a critical conference showdown and litmus test.

Sept 6 vs. Army: Don't overlook the defending American champion Black Knights even without quarterback Bryson Daily. This week will be when the potential jet lag from Ireland could set in and possessions will come at a premium in this game.

Nov 1 vs. Texas Tech: The Wildcats have rattled off eight straight victories against the Red Raiders but this iteration of Texas Tech loaded up on talent and plans on threatening for a Big 12 title.

Player Spotlight

Photo via Kansas State University Athletics



AUSTIN ROMAINÉ – LB

Romaine has been impactful ever since stepping foot on campus. As a true freshman in 2023, he appeared in all but one game and his five starts that season were the most by a K-State true freshman linebacker since 1988. In 2024, he became the focal point of the defense and posted the most productive season by a Wildcat since 2017. As long as injuries that limited him in spring don't hold him back, watch out for #45.

2024 Stats: 96 TKL, 7.5 TFL, 2 SACK, 2 FF

Photo via Kansas State University Athletics



VJ PAYNE – S

Payne made highlight plays all season long from the safety position. Early in the year he claimed an interception to ice a close game against Tulane on the road and he forced a fumble in that contest, too. He hasn't missed a game (and rarely misses a snap) in his first three years in Manhattan and his consistency will be an instrumental piece in a new-look secondary in 2025.

2024 Stats: 64 TKL, 3.5 TFL, 2 INT, 2 FF

Photo via College Gridirons



Bill Snyder Family Stadium (50,000)

Photo via Hutch Post



**Avery
JOHNSON**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Who will replace kicker Chris Tennant following a strong 17 of 21 season that included a long of 51 yards? That's what new special teams coordinator Nate Kaczor must determine. **Simon McClannan** handled kickoffs last year and is a potential candidate. **Leyton Simmering** is another option but the wild card might be **Luis Rodriguez** who was added to the roster on the last day of June when freshman **Cub Patton** went down with an injury. Punter **Simon McClannan** can also kick, if needed, although the primary concern for the redshirt sophomore is increasing a net average of 36.8 punt yards.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The schedule contains its fair share of difficulties although the Wildcats do avoid three of the teams who defeated them last season and they have a week zero date against Iowa State to hopefully wash the bad taste out from the past two regular season finales. If Johnson can cut down on some of the mistakes from last year, Kansas State will have a chance to win every game the play. The Wildcats do need some playmakers to emerge on defense but Klieman and Klanderman have a proven track record. Klieman is one of just two coaches (Sonny Dykes, TCU) with a record of .500 or better against Top 25 teams and that record in 2025 will make or break the team's title hopes. Had the 12-team playoff existed in 2022, the Wildcats would have been a participant. After a disappointing 5-4 record in conference play last year, expect the Wildcats to finish at or near the top of the Big 12.

Appointment Television



vs.



Sat, Aug 23 - 12:00 PM ET (ESPN)

The very first game of the college football season carries massive implications in the Big 12 title race among two of the favorites. Iowa State has spoiled the end of Kansas State's last two seasons and the Cyclones have claimed four of the last five to jump in front in the all-time series record (54-50-4). In 2023, the Wildcats held the ball for 42:12 and won the turnover battle but still ended up on the wrong side of the scoreboard 42-35.

2024 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	30.8	46	Points	23.4	50
Rushing	215.5	11	Rushing	118.7	28
Passing	211.4	85	Passing	224.7	77
Total	426.8	T-31	Total	343.4	43
Sacks	13	T-10	Sacks	35	T-25

2025 Projection

10-2

1st in Big 12

Trophy Case



XO

**National
Champions**



X3

**Big 12
Champions**

**2003
2012
2022**



12-14

**Bowl
Record**



0

**Playoff
Appearances**