



USC on the Brink of College Football Glory

USC BIO

National Championships - **11**

'28 '31 '32
'39 '62 '67
'72 '74 '78
'03 '04

PAC-12 Championships: **39**
(Last: **2017**)

Location: **Los Angeles, CA**

All-Time Record: **769-322-40**

2022 Results: **11-3**
Lost in Cotton Bowl

Head Coach: **Lincoln Riley**
2nd Year (11-3)

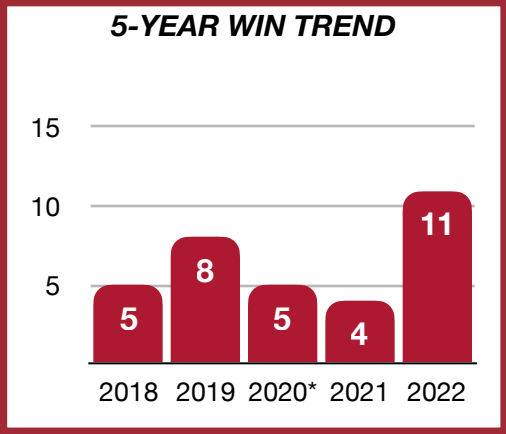
Lincoln Riley and Heisman trophy winning quarterbacks go hand in hand. Since becoming the head coach of Oklahoma in 2017, the quarterbacks in Riley's offense have won three Heisman trophies. It's an insane streak that has no end in sight. Now, the new challenge is for quarterback **Caleb Williams** to join Archie Griffin of Ohio State as the second player ever to win two Heisman trophies (and the first quarterback to do so). After Riley made the surprise move from Oklahoma to Southern California last season and brought Williams with him, the expectations were through the roof. Yet, the Trojans still arguably exceeded them. After going 4-8 and missing a bowl game in 2021, Riley led the team to an 11-3 season in 2022 with an appearance in the PAC-12 title game and the Cotton Bowl. However, the end of the year was a bit of a letdown, especially considering the second loss to Utah in the PAC-12 title game with a spot in the College Football Playoff on the line. Then, the season ended with a thud as they were upset in the Cotton Bowl by Tulane after leading by 15 points late in the fourth quarter. Still, no matter how big of a letdown the end of the season was, the year was clearly an unmitigated success based on what Riley inherited in Los Angeles.

It's no secret that Riley's teams have struggled on defense going back to his time at Oklahoma and those issues followed him to USC. In fairness, he chose to bring some of those issues with him by keeping embattled defensive coordinator, Alex Grinch. Grinch was originally brought in to Norman to fix the poor defense there and he became a friend of Riley's during his time on the staff. Yet, there has been little to no improvement. In fairness to Grinch, he didn't inherit much on the defensive side of the ball and it was his first year at the program. The reliance on transfers to play immediately and having no depth also prevented the Trojans from practicing how they wanted to last offseason. Still, it was a tough pill to swallow for USC fans to watch missed tackle after missed tackle, knowing if they possessed an average defense they would've made the College Football Playoff.

To fix the defense, USC went deep into the transfer portal to find players who could make an immediate impact. Defensive tackles **Kyon Barrs** (Arizona) and **Bear Alexander** (Georgia) are expected to clog the leaky defensive front that ranked 80th in the country, giving up almost 160 yards per game. Linebacker **Mason Cobb** (Oklahoma State) should help with the missed tackles that caused USC to surrender 424 yards per game, ranking 106th in the country. This defense should be significantly better, but it may not always feel like it this season. Other than the high-powered offense, one of the most important factors of last year's success was the turnover margin. Despite being a porous defense, the Trojans were able to take advantage of their opponent's mistakes with a turnover margin of +22, which easily led the nation. Don't expect Williams to start turning the ball over left and right but also don't expect opposing offenses to hand wrap turnovers again.

Caleb Williams will make the offense go with his off-script abilities and great playmakers including **Mario Williams** on the outside. He will need to stay healthy as his injury in the PAC-12 title game against Utah prevented his movement and significantly altered the game's momentum. To that point, the offensive line is a concern after losing First Team All-Americans **Brett Neilon** and **Andrew Vorhees**. A Caleb Williams injury not only could spoil playoff hopes but could completely derail the season, so newly acquired transfers **Michael Tarquin** (Florida) and **Jarret Kingston** (Washington State) must be plug and play starters.

The Bottom Line: With one of the easiest schedules to start the year, expect the Trojans to be 6-0 before their season truly starts with a trip to South Bend to face Notre Dame. Their extremely backloaded schedule will also include a trip to Oregon and home dates against Utah and Washington. Once again, this team under Riley has everything needed on offense to win a national championship, but the defense will hold them back. The turnover margin will come back down to earth and the high level of competition in the conference will trip them up. The patchwork defense will be improved but only slightly as depth will still be an issue. Expect USC to make the PAC-12 title game again this season, but nothing more.



Projection: 10-2 (2nd in PAC-12)



2022 Statistics

Points Scored 41.4 3rd in FBS	Rush Yards 171.1 53rd in FBS	Pass Yards 335.4 3rd in FBS	Turnover Margin +22 1st in FBS
Points Allowed 29.2 93rd in FBS	Rush YDS Allowed 159.8 80th in FBS	Pass YDS Allowed 264.1 112th in FBS	

2023 USC Schedule

Week	Date	Team
0	Sat, Aug 26	 vs. San Jose St.
1	Sat, Sept 2	 vs. Nevada
2	Sat, Sept 9	 vs. Stanford
3	Bye Week	
4	Sat, Sept 23	 @ Arizona State
5	Sat, Sept 30	 @ Colorado
6	Sat, Oct 7	 vs. Arizona
7	Sat, Oct 14	 @ Notre Dame
8	Sat, Oct 21	 vs. Utah
9	Sat, Oct 28	 @ California
10	Sat, Nov 4	 vs. Washington
11	Sat, Nov 11	 @ Oregon
12	Sat, Nov 18	 vs. UCLA
13	Bye Week	

Conference Games in Bold

KEY GAMES

Sat, Oct 14: @ Notre Dame - Early season layups come to a screeching halt with a trip to South Bend. Expect the Irish to force a physical style of game upon the Trojans.

Sat, Oct 21: @ Utah - Avenging not one but two of their losses from the previous season will be fresh on the Trojans' mind. The Utes provide the perfect antidote for the high-flying USC offense, but this time the game is in Los Angeles.

Sat, Nov 11: @ Oregon - In a game expected to be a pivotal factor in the PAC-12 race, the Ducks have the benefit of their raucous crowd and plenty of firepower to make this contest one of the year's biggest matchups.

KEY PLAYERS

Bear Alexander - DT

A defense struggling to find its identity needs to start by stopping the run. Alexander is part of several incoming transfers that offer Trojan fans hope that this season could special. As a freshman at Georgia, the former 5-star was able to get on the field amongst a talent-laden group and play 12 games. Production and health will be critical as USC still lacks quality depth behind him on the defensive line.



Mason Cobb - LB

Grinch will be relying on the experienced Cobb to help make significant improvements in the middle of the field. The defense was atrocious at tackling at times last season and that issue reared its ugly head in the Cotton Bowl against Tulane. The senior had 58 solo tackles alone last season for Oklahoma State and will bring badly needed stability.



2022 RESULTS (11-3)

Rice (W 66-14)
@ Stanford (W 41-28)
 Fresno State (W 45-17)
@ Oregon State (W 17-14)
Arizona State (W 42-25)
Washington State (W 30-14)
 @ Utah (L 42-43)
@ Arizona (W 45-37)
California (W 41-35)
Colorado (W 55-17)
@ UCLA (W 48-45)
Notre Dame (W 38-27)
 Utah (L 24-47)
 Tulane (L 45-46)

USC

RECRUITING

2023 Class Ranking

8th

(Via 24/7 Sports)