

History Split On OSU's Playoff Standing



Ohio State checked in as the No. 4 team in the second College Football Playoff rankings of the season for the second straight year, moving up one spot from the inaugural rankings on Nov. 9 after a Nov. 6 win over Nebraska – and thanks to Michigan State, formerly No. 3, losing to Purdue at the same time. The Buckeyes, who trail Georgia, Alabama and Oregon this season, sat in the same spot a season ago, holding a 4-0 record and trailing Alabama, Notre Dame and Clemson, which would ultimately comprise the final playoff field.

This top four holding as it did last year seems unlikely, with Alabama and Georgia on a collision course in the SEC title game and tough matchups still on the table for the Ducks and Buckeyes, but if the history of the poll is any indication, Ohio State should be feeling pretty good about its positioning.

In the seven seasons of the College Football Playoff era, the No. 4 team in the second poll of the season has held on and secured a playoff spot four times, and never once dropped further than eighth by the end of the season. Meanwhile, this is tied for Ohio State's third-best ranking at this time in the season, trailing a No. 2 title in 2019 and No. 3 in 2015. Let's take a closer look at the recent history of these fourth-ranked squads and of Ohio State's status at this point in the season.

2020

A week and change removed from its 42-35 escape against then-No. 9 Indiana, Ohio State stayed put in the No. 4 spot for a second straight week after debuting there in the inaugural rankings. However, a second cancellation in three weeks, the first against Maryland and the second against Illinois, held the Buckeyes back from any chance to further their case – especially as Alabama, Notre Dame and Clemson continued to win.

The Buckeyes would play only one more regular season game, toppling Michigan State 52-12 on Dec. 5, but it wasn't until the final batch of rankings that they would jump into third place, following a close win over Northwestern, paired with Clemson's ACC title win over Notre Dame, which knocked the Golden Domers into the No. 4 spot and a first-round matchup with the eventual national champion Crimson Tide. Ohio State, as Buckeye fans surely know, would take advantage of their good fortune, demolishing Clemson in the first round to advance to the title game.

2019

The Georgia Bulldogs earned the No. 4 spot in the second poll back in 2019, leaping two spots from their debut as Alabama and Penn State dropped games to fall out of the No. 3 and No. 4 spots, respectively. That fourth spot was as high as the Bulldogs would climb, though, falling to top-ranked LSU in the SEC championship game and dropping to No. 5 in the final rankings, making way for Oklahoma to make its way into the field.

Ohio State, meanwhile, debuted at No. 1, fell behind the LSU Tigers in week two and took turns trading the top spot with Ed Oregeron's group, ultimately finishing in the second spot after a closer-than-expected win over Wisconsin in the Big Ten title game. The Buckeyes would fall in dramatic fashion to the three-seeded Clemson Tigers in the first round.

2018

Thanks to a loss from LSU, which opened the polls as the No. 3 team, the teams formerly ranked No. 4 and 5 in the initial polls, Notre Dame and Michigan, were able to move up one spot each in the second batch, putting the Wolverines in one of their highest perches under the guidance of head coach Jim Harbaugh. Those Wolverines would stand pat for three weeks but dropped to a final spot at No. 7 after a season-ending loss to Ohio State, 62-39.

Though that win would catapult the Buckeyes up the rankings, it was not enough to overcome a debut ranking at No. 10 that OSU would carry for four weeks until it toppled the Wolverines, moving up to No. 6 in the nation. A blowout win over Northwestern in the Big Ten title game a week later couldn't alter Ohio State's fortunes in Urban Meyer's final season at the helm, as it closed out the season ranked sixth due almost exclusively to its blowout defeat at the hands of Purdue in late October, just before the initial rankings were released.

2017

Clemson, only two weeks removed from a road loss to Syracuse, checked in at No. 4 in each of the first two CFP rankings, thanks to a trio of ranked wins over Auburn, Louisville and Virginia Tech in the first five weeks of the season, and a fourth over North Carolina State before the second rankings were unveiled. The Tigers would benefit from the mayhem at the top of the rankings for the remainder of the season, moving to No. 2 after the former No. 1 and No. 3 teams, Georgia and Notre Dame fell ahead of the third rankings. When Alabama and Miami fell during rivalry week, Clemson leaped into the top spot and held it into the playoff, where Alabama would claim its revenge with a first-round victory over the top-seeded Tigers.

Ohio State, meanwhile, was picked as the No. 13 team in the second set of rankings after a shocking blowout defeat against Iowa - its second of the season - falling from a debut at No. 6. The Buckeyes would rebound and rise as high as the No. 5 spot, but its two losses were too much to overcome when it was compared in the final rankings to a one-loss Crimson Tide team, despite donning a conference crown, which Alabama was without.

2016

The lone near wire-to-wire No. 4 seed on the board, Washington moved into the spot in the second batch of rankings and did not relinquish it, falling to sixth after its lone loss of the season but returning

to No. 4 only two weeks later, where it would remain in the final picks as well, losing to Alabama in the first round.

Ohio State, meanwhile, sat fifth in the second rankings and used ranked wins over Nebraska and Michigan to vault the Huskies, finishing as the No. 3 seed and drawing a first-round matchup with Clemson that would end well for the Buckeyes.

2015

The largest drop of the group belongs to this Notre Dame bunch, which checked in at No. 4 in the second batch of rankings but fell first to No. 6 ahead of rivalry week after a lackluster showing against Boston College and then all the way to No. 8 in the penultimate and final rankings following a loss to Stanford. The Fighting Irish would head instead to the Fiesta Bowl, where they would meet up with the...

No. 7 ranked Ohio State Buckeyes! The Buckeyes opened the rankings at No. 3 and held pat in week two before a home loss to Michigan State at the buzzer dropped them all the way to eighth. A win over Michigan in the final week of the season helped to move Ohio State up that one spot, as did the Notre Dame loss, but this is the furthest the Buckeyes have been from the playoffs thus far.

2014

Perhaps the most chaotic of any rankings, the second set of CFP polls from 2014 produced only two of the final four teams that qualified for the playoff, including the No. 4 ranked Oregon Ducks, who would evade defeat for the remainder of the season and finish second, toppling Florida State in the first round before falling to Ohio State in the national title game.

Ohio State's story, meanwhile, is pretty well known among Buckeye fans. OSU checked in the second rankings at No. 14 and worked its way up the polls, toppling Michigan State and blowing out Wisconsin to earn the final spot in the only rankings that mattered before upsetting Alabama in round one and upending the Ducks in the title game to claim the first championship for Ohio State since 2002.