



#14 JAYDEN MAIAVA

USC | Redshirt junior | Quarterback | 6'4", 230 LBS | 3,174 passing yards, 65.7% completion percentage, 27 total touchdowns

Jayden Maiava burst onto the scene last year, replacing former Trojan quarterback Miller Moss as the starter in the final four games of the season.

And after throwing six interceptions as a starter in 2024, Maiava has found his footing in his first full season as the team's starting quarterback. He ranks first in the Big Ten in passing yards, is tied for fourth in the conference in passing touchdowns and ranks fifth in quarterback rating.

Not only does Maiava boast some of the Big Ten's best stats, but he also shows up when it matters most.

In USC's win over then-No. 15 Michigan, Maiava threw for 265 yards and two touchdowns on an ultra-efficient 78.1% completion percentage. And in the squad's 26-21 victory over then-No. 21 Iowa, he threw for 254 air yards and one score, boasting a 71.9% completion percentage.

Even when the Trojans falter, it is very rarely the signal-caller's fault.

When USC fell 34-32 to then-No. 23 Illinois, Maiava still threw for 364 yards and two scores on a near-70% completion clip.

He boasts the arm talent and efficiency to throw for 300-plus yards on an efficient clip on any given night, and he's not mistake-prone, only throwing six interceptions over 300 pass attempts.

Add in his 6-foot-4 frame and he possesses all the traits NFL teams desire – evidenced by his projection as a first or second round pick of the 2026 NFL Draft.

#6 MAKAI LEMON

**USC | Junior | Wide receiver | 5'11", 195 LBS
1,124 receiving yards, 10 touchdowns, 78 receptions, 14.4 yards per catch**
Ohio State wide receiver Jeremiah Smith seems to garner every last bit of attention when it comes to collegiate pass catchers.

But don't let social media, headlines and clips overshadow wide receiver Makai Lemon. The junior has easily been one of the best pass catchers in the country, and his stats back that up.

Lemon leads the Big Ten and ranks third in the entire FBS in receiving yards with 1,124 yards. On top of his 1,000-plus receiving yards, Lemon adds 10 touchdowns and 14.4 yards per catch, giving Maiava his No. 1 option on any given play.

While Lemon can play as both a slot and outside receiver, his spatial awareness of surrounding defenders and his teammates' route concepts, combined with his tackle-breaking ability, make him a terror out of the slot.

This allows him to rack up yards after the catch when opposing secondaries give cushion and open up the middle of the field.

His toughness not only allows him to make contested catches, but – combined with his steady and trustworthy hands – allows him to make catches over the middle when defenders are closing in with heavy hits.

Lemon is a projected first-round pick in the 2026 NFL Draft and is almost always the third or fourth wide receiver off the board in mocks.

The 5-foot-11 pass catcher will give the UCLA secondary headaches come Saturday.

#7 KAMARI RAMSEY

**USC | Redshirt junior | Safety | 6'0", 205 LBS
27 tackles, 1.5 tackles for loss, two pass breakups, three quarterback hits**

It is only right that USC's defensive coordinator – and UCLA's former defensive playcaller – D'Anton Lynn, oversees a defense that features a former Bruin.

That player is safety Kamari Ramsey.

Ramsey – who spent two seasons at UCLA and recorded 40 tackles, four pass deflections and one interception in 2023 – followed his defensive coordinator from the blue and gold to the cardinal and gold.

Over the past two seasons as a Trojan, Ramsey has combined for 87 tackles, seven passes defended, two sacks and two forced fumbles.

Ramsey and his secondary teammates rank seventh in red zone defense, No. 43 in the nation in passing yards allowed, tie for No. 36 in fumbles recovered and tie for No. 33 in interceptions.

The safety boasts the physicality and toughness to wrap up opposing offensive players, finish tackles and take on big-bodied receivers or tight ends in man coverage.

His tackling ability and pass rush tendencies make him versatile as a slot corner, strong safety or extra man in the box. However, his physical dominance occasionally makes him vulnerable to elite talent, and his lack of ball production has been a concern for NFL scouts – but his dominance at the collegiate level is evident.

Some anticipated that he would declare for the NFL Draft after earning an All-Big Ten honorable mention last season, but he decided to return to the Trojans for an additional year, giving him another chance to face his former team.



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#9 NICO IMALEAVA

**UCLA | Redshirt sophomore | Quarterback | 6'6", 215 LBS
1,728 passing yards, 63.5% completion percentage, 16 total touchdowns**

UCLA's 2025 roster has very few bright spots. But quarterback Nico Iamaleava is definitely one of them.

The redshirt sophomore has consistently carried the team on his back when it has needed him most, despite the squad's abysmal offensive line that fails to provide the signal-caller enough time for plays to develop downfield or give the tailbacks enough forward pressure to establish a formidable run game.

To add insult to injury, Iamaleava doesn't quite have the offensive weapons that others write home about. No UCLA wide receiver has recorded more than 500 receiving yards or more than five touchdown receptions this season.

The Bruins' tight ends – a quarterback's best friends, particularly in a new system – have combined for fewer than 200 total yards. And while the offensive line may take the brunt of the blame, the running back room hasn't helped much either, with Iamaleava leading the squad in rushing with 490 yards.

Yet, through it all, Iamaleava makes it happen.

His five-touchdown performance against then-No. 7 Penn State gave UCLA its first victory over a top-10 team since 2010. His three passing touchdowns gave the Bruins a 30-plus point victory over the Spartans. And his return from a knee injury late in the fourth quarter led the Bruins to a game-winning field goal over the Terrapins. He has run for over 50 yards four times and more than 75 twice, and he boasts a 63.5% completion percentage. Iamaleava is the best the Bruins have, and the game against USC could be his last as a college athlete.



#18 RODRICK PLEASANT

**UCLA | Redshirt sophomore | Cornerback | 5'10", 175 LBS
36 tackles, 1.5 tackles for loss, six pass breakups, one fumble recovery**

There are very few good things to say about UCLA's defense. The Bruin defensive unit ranks No. 24 in the country in most passing yards allowed, No. 134 – dead last in the nation – in sacks and is tied for No. 123 in interceptions.

Realistically, the Bruins need to throw out their whole defense and restart. But if there's one semi-bright spot, it's the team's secondary – specifically, redshirt sophomore cornerback Rodrick Pleasant.

Pleasant was a consensus four-star recruit and a top-100 player in the nation out of high school and was even ranked as a top-10 cornerback in the country by both ESPN and 247Sports.

And while he didn't register many defensive snaps after two years at Oregon, he boasts the physical traits to match up against any opposing pass catcher in the country.

He could very well be the fastest player on the team, notching a personal best 10.16 in the 100-meter dash for Oregon's track and field team in 2025 – a mark that qualified him for the NCAA West Regionals.

Pleasant consistently takes one of the opposing team's best offensive threats and could be the staple of the Bruins' secondary and the most reliable defensive back for UCLA's next defensive coordinator.

#21 JAIVIAN THOMAS

**UCLA | Junior | Running back | 5'11", 195 LBS
294 rushing yards, one touchdown, 10 receptions, 3.6 yards per carry**
Jaivian Thomas has failed to replicate his production from last season at California.

The junior running back ran for 626 yards and seven touchdowns on a productive 6.3 yards per carry. However, through 10 games and 81 rushing attempts in 2025, the Cal transfer has posted just 294 yards and one score on 3.6 yards per carry.

Thomas boasts the speed and cutting ability to reach the upper levels of opposing defenses, but his RB1 potential has yet to emerge in Westwood.

Part of his reduced production is due to UCLA's committee approach to tailbacks, with redshirt junior Anthony Woods and redshirt senior Jalen Berger splitting touches with Thomas.

Woods' pass-catching ability and Berger's pass blocking and power back skillset cover the weaknesses in Thomas' game and have prevented Thomas from taking off in the Bruin backfield.

Add in a weak offensive line that allows defenders to reach the point of contact before Thomas even gets past the line of scrimmage, and he is already fighting an uphill battle.

However, Thomas' lack of production is not indicative of his skills. The tailback showed the explosion and efficiency he can muster last season at Cal, and with Berger exhausting all of his eligibility and Woods' status up in the air, Thomas could see an increased role next year with a new coaching system and offensive line.

But who knows if Thomas will be in Westwood come January?



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