

# Growth

Continued from Page 1B

quarterback: Manning, Moore, Julian Sayin, CJ Carr, Darian Mensah and Trinidad Chambliss. Texas Tech's Brendan Sorsby, an established marquee figure whose eligibility was thrown into doubt amid the NCAA's gambling probe, also was left out.

With that in mind, here are our 10 candidates for quarterbacks who could enjoy a Mendoza-like rise in the 2027 NFL Draft.

● **Jayden Maiava, Southern Cal**

Lincoln Riley might soon be able to claim another NFL draft quarterback success story. Like Mendoza, Maiava more than clears the bar for a high-level pro prospect with his size (6-4, 230 pounds), quick release and precision.

The former UNLV transfer demonstrated an impressive handle of those last season to become one of the country's most efficient passers, posting a 157.8 rating while taking just 14 sacks on the season.

He'll have to show he can be a true catalyst for a passing game that lost its top targets in Makai Lemon and Ja'Kobi Lane. Still, if he can pull it off, Maiava's next sizable leap could put him in a coveted class.

● **Sam Leavitt, LSU**

Leavitt's sprint toward college football stardom came to an abrupt halt in an injury-marred sophomore campaign at Arizona State.

Now having recovered from his Lisfranc surgery and transferred to serve as the triggerman to Lane Kiffin's offense, he might not need long to serve up a reminder of just how prolific a passer he can be.

The 6-2, 205-pound signal-caller doesn't boast many premium attributes, but he can be a dynamic playmaker from the pocket or on the move. He's also capable of being aggressive without frequently putting the ball in harm's way. Kiffin's attack should allow him to post monster numbers and resume his rise.

● **Byrum Brown, Auburn**

At 6-3 and 232 pounds with outstanding arm strength and a 1,000-yard rushing season in his pocket, Brown is captivating when operating close to his ceiling.

Now after following coach Alex Golesh to Auburn, he has the chance to prove himself against pro-caliber competition. Brown's elongated throwing motion might become a point of contention in his draft evaluation, and his footwork and processing require significant



Oklahoma quarterback John Mateer looks to pass in the Oklahoma Spring Game on April 18 in Norman, Okla. KEVIN JAIRAJ/IMAGN IMAGES FILE

work.

The upside is readily evident, but Brown might have a more volatile range of possible outcomes in the draft than his peers on this list.

● **Josh Hoover, Indiana**

Curt Cignetti's hand-picked successor for Mendoza obviously warrants mention in this exercise. The 6-2, 200-pound TCU transfer doesn't have comparable tools to his predecessor, particularly when it comes to pushing the ball downfield or into tight windows.

He's a quick processor, though, who finds ways to keep the vertical game accessible to him. Turnovers are also sure to be a talking point after his exit prompted TCU coach Sonny Dykes to highlight that he was responsible for 42 giveaways in 31 starts.

Hoover might not have the typical profile of a passer likely to storm to the top of draft boards, but a strong senior season could be on tap as he takes over a potent offense that boasts two top targets in Nick Marsh and Charlie Becker.

● **John Mateer, Oklahoma**

Mendoza might not have a sharper contrast with another quarterback in college football than he does with Mateer.

Whereas the Heisman Trophy winner blossomed as a savvy distributor who unflinchingly remains on schedule, Mateer plays with a full-on embrace of entropy.

Breaking structure often provided some scintillating results, with the 6-1, 224-pound Oklahoma quarterback able to rip off dazzling off-platform throws as

well as some impressive runs.

But the all-out abandon with which he plays simply isn't sustainable in the NFL, where he'll surely be asked to safeguard against the turnovers and hits his reckless style invites. If he's able to institute some level of restraint, he'll be an intriguing option for an offense in need of a spark.

● **LaNorris Sellers, South Carolina**

In some ways, Sellers is the inverse of Mendoza. The 6-3, 240-pound QB offers athletic traits sure to tantalize NFL teams whenever he puts things together.

His expected liftoff didn't take place in 2025, however, as Sellers' efficiency as both a passer and runner took major hits amid South Carolina's wider offensive issues.

New offensive coordinator Kendal Briles could not only tap into his new quarterback's explosiveness but also help make him a more consistent operator from the pocket. Cutting down on unnecessary sacks will be an essential step to his development, as will be speeding up his internal clock.

● **Drew Mestemaker, Oklahoma State**

The North Texas transfer has already traveled a good distance in his meteoric rise from high school backup to the Football Bowl Subdivision leader in passing yards (4,379) in 2025.

After following coach Eric Morris to Stillwater, he'll now test himself against a significantly higher level of competition.

If he continues to dazzle, NFL teams will surely gravitate toward the 6-3, 211-pound signal-caller, whose arm strength and athleticism easily exceed what one would expect of a former

walk-on.

Still only set to be a redshirt sophomore, Mestemaker could add serious juice to this class if he fares well enough to become an X-factor in an already deep group of passers.

● **Drake Lindsey, Minnesota**

As a former three-star recruit who's stuck by a program with limited national visibility, Lindsey hasn't received the fanfare that most of the candidates on this list have. But the traits for a breakthrough all look to be in place.

The 6-5, 230-pound passer deftly delivers downfield strikes from the pocket, and his size and arm strength are sure to be major selling points whenever he turns pro. That might not be for a little while, however, as he will only be a redshirt sophomore this fall.

More consistent results on the field also are needed for an ascent, as Lindsey eclipsed 250 yards in just three games last season in an offense that didn't provide him many opportunities to shine.

● **Nico Iamaleava, UCLA**

Returning the former five-star recruit to his former glory might be a tall order. But perhaps new UCLA coach Bob Chesney can work a little bit of Indiana coach Curt Cignetti's magic after following him up at James Madison.

With a rare package of arm strength and mobility at 6-6 and 215 pounds, Iamaleava won't have a hard time catching NFL teams' eyes if he makes substantial progress as a passer.

He still has a long way to go to deliver on his tantalizing potential, but having a full offseason to get a grasp on the offense should make a significant difference after his messy departure from Tennessee last summer.

Iamaleava also should have a much better supporting cast, thanks in large part to the arrival of running back Wayne Knight and more transfer portal assistance up front.

● **DJ Lagway, Baylor**

The former five-star recruit mirrors Iamaleava as a reclamation project at this point in his career. Despite the ultra-promising flashes that emerged early in his career, Lagway couldn't make things work at Florida amid a rash of injuries and an avalanche of turnovers that derailed his development.

Now at Baylor, he still has to demonstrate he can be a consistent presence behind center. If he does establish some baseline of efficiency as a passer, the 6-3, 247-pounder will become a serious draw, as few players are capable of uncorking deep balls and off-platform throws the way he does.

Yet, even with a breakout campaign, Lagway might be best served by sticking around for another year and polishing up the less refined elements of his game.

# K-State

Continued from Page 1B

FanDuel sets the Wildcats' win total over/under at 8.5, tied with the over/under for BYU and Utah, while Texas Tech is at 10.5. Expectations for the Red Raiders have remained high, even with the uncertainty at quarterback after Cincinnati transfer Brendan Sorsby entered a gambling addiction program and could receive punishment from the NCAA after reportedly betting on Indiana while redshirting for the Hoosiers as a true freshman in 2022.

Kansas State's favorable schedule, on paper, will be a major talking point as the season approaches.

The Wildcats open with five of their

first six games at Bill Snyder Family Stadium. Five of their nine conference games are against teams whose championship odds are among those in the back half of the league. Their two most difficult games, according to Big 12 championship odds, are both at home: against Houston and Arizona.

At the same time, the Wildcats' two FBS non-conference opponents, Washington and Tulane, both have new head coaches and major roster turnover. K-State opens the year with FCS Nicholls, which is coming off a 4-8 season.

*Wyatt D. Wheeler covers Kansas State athletics for the USA TODAY Network and Topeka Capital-Journal. You can follow him on X at @WyattWheeler\_, contact him at 417-371-6987 or email him at wheeler@usatodayco.com*

# Peterson

Continued from Page 1B

would finish 24-11 overall. The Jayhawks reached the semifinals of the Big 12 Conference tournament and the round of 32 of the NCAA tournament. There were moments where Peterson looked like he should be viewed as the No. 1 pick in the 2026 NBA Draft, and KU a national title contender, but the issues Peterson had with his availability and Kansas' own inconsistencies as a team limited the success he and the team would enjoy.

Peterson averaged 20.2 points and

4.2 rebounds per game. He made the all-freshman team for the Big 12, and was a second team honoree in the league overall. He'll be one of the top picks of the upcoming NBA draft, it's just a matter of in this pre-draft process if he can do enough to shake off the doubts that came with how his freshman year at KU played out.

*Jordan Guskey covers University of Kansas Athletics at The Topeka Capital-Journal. He was the 2022 National Sports Media Association's sportswriter of the year for the state of Kansas. Contact him at jmguskey@gannett.com or on Twitter at @JordanGuskey.*

## SPORTS ON TV SUNDAY, MAY 17 (ALL TIMES EASTERN)

**AUTO RACING**

**1 p.m.**  
FS1 — NASCAR Cup Series, All-Star Race, Dover, Del.

**COLLEGE LACROSSE (MEN'S)**

**12 p.m.**  
ESPN — NCAA Tournament, Quarterfinals, Penn State vs. Princeton, Newark, Del.

**2:30 p.m.**  
ESPN — NCAA Tournament, Quarterfinals, Georgetown vs. Duke, Newark, Del.

**COLLEGE SOFTBALL**

**10 a.m.**  
ESPN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**12 p.m.**  
ACCN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**1 p.m.**  
ESPN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**2 p.m.**  
SECN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**2:30 p.m.**  
ACCN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**3 p.m.**  
ESPN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**4 p.m.**  
SECN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**5 p.m.**  
ESPN2 — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

ESPN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

SECN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**5:30 p.m.**  
ACCN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**7 p.m.**  
ESPN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

ESPN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

SECN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**8 p.m.**  
ESPN2 — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**9 p.m.**  
ESPN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

ESPN — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**10 p.m.**  
ESPN2 — NCAA Regionals, Teams TBD

**COLLEGE TRACK AND FIELD**

**1:30 p.m.**  
BTN — Big Ten Conference, Outdoor Championships, Lincoln, Neb.

**FISHING**

**9 a.m.**  
FS1 — Bassmaster Elite Series, Santee Cooper Lakes, S.C.

Final Round, Newtown Square, Pa.

**3 p.m.**  
GOLF — LPGA Tour, Kroger Queen City Championship, Final Round, Cincinnati

**HOCKEY (MEN'S)**

**6:20 a.m.**  
NHLN — IIHF World Championships, Group A, United States vs. Great Britain, Zürich, Switzerland

**10:20 a.m.**  
NHLN — IIHF World Championships, Group B, Sweden vs. Denmark, Fribourg, Switzerland

**2:20 p.m.**  
NHLN — IIHF World Championships, Group A, Latvia vs. Germany, Zürich, Switzerland

**HORSE RACING**

**12:30 p.m.**  
FS2 — America's Day at the Races

**3 p.m.**  
FS2 — America's Day at the Races

**MLB BASEBALL**

**12:15 p.m.**  
PEACOCK — Miami at Tampa Bay

**3:10 p.m.**  
ESPN UNLIMITED — Arizona at Colorado

**4:05 p.m.**  
MLBN — San Francisco at Athletics

PEACOCK — L.A. Dodgers at L.A. Angels

**NBA BASKETBALL**

**TBA**  
AMAZON PRIME — Playoffs, Eastern Conference, Second Round, Cleveland at Detroit, Game 7, if necessary

**TBA**  
NBC/PEACOCK — Playoffs, Western Conference, Second Round, Minnesota at San Antonio, Game 7, if necessary

**SOCCER (MEN'S)**

**9 a.m.**  
CBSSN — Scottish Premiership, Kilmarnock at Livingston

**SOCCER (WOMEN'S)**

**6 p.m.**  
ESPN2 — NWSL, Angel City FC at Portland FC

**TENNIS**

**6 a.m.**  
TENNIS — Italian Open, ATP/WTA Doubles Finals

**11 a.m.**  
TENNIS — Italian Open, ATP Singles Final

**UFL FOOTBALL**

**1 p.m.**  
FOX — Columbus at Birmingham

**WNBA BASKETBALL**

**1:30 p.m.**  
NBC — Las Vegas at Atlanta

**6 p.m.**  
PEACOCK — Seattle at Indiana