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But his move might be among the most consequential for next year's draft. In leaving Cal for Indiana, Mendoza departs a program that was sapped of its top talent - the Golden Bears lost five running backs to the transfer portal as well as their No. 1 receiver and tight end, among others – for one infusing its roster with even more promising players.

After helping develop another tall, strong-armed transfer in Kurtis Rourke last season, Indiana coach Curt Cignetti should be well-positioned to guide the progress of his new 6-5, 225-pound pass-

Mendoza can operate far more quickly and with more precision (68.7% completion rate last season) than Rourke did, but he'll need to better navigate pressure after taking 41 sacks last season.

Sawyer Robertson, Baylor

The Mississippi State transfer didn't receive widespread recognition in 2024, as he only took over as starter three games into the year.

Now, however, Robertson could be in line to receive his proper due. The 6-4, 220-pound signal-caller is one of the country's most precise downfield passers, and his heady play helped propel the Bears to a 6-0 run to end the regular season before the team fell to LSU in the Texas Bowl.

His prototypical build and arm strength are major pluses, but his ability to balance an attacking mentality while infrequently putting the ball in harm's way reveals that he's more than merely just a package of traits.

He looks like exactly the kind of quarterback who can raise his profile with another impressive campaign.

Eli Holstein, Pitt

After leaving Alabama following just one season spent redshirting, the former four-star recruit acclimated nicely to his new setting, throwing for 15 touchdowns in his first five games.

The Panthers' up-tempo offense under new coordinator Kade Bell hit a midseason snag, however, with the team dropping its final six games after starting 7-0. Holstein's health played a major fac-

tor in that unraveling; the 6-4, 225-pounder missed almost the entirety of Pitt's final four contests due to leg and head injuries.

With ample arm strength to push the ball downfield, the redshirt sophomore should have little trouble catching scouts' eyes, whether for the 2026 draft or be-

Holstein will need to stay healthy and prove he can hold up against top competition after feasting on the leaner part of last year's schedule, but if he's afforded better protection along with more playmaking support at the skill positions, he could resume his ascent.

Nico lamaleava, UCLA

True scorched-earth scenarios are few and far between in the NFL draft - at least for players of a certain level of abil-

That's the silver lining for Iamaleava as he navigates the fallout from his unceremonious split with Tennessee following a practice no-show and widespread reports of a clash over name, image and likeness pay.

The 6-6, 215-pound passer still has considerable work to do to deliver on the immense potential he teased as the former No. 2 overall recruit who built an immense buzz before even taking the field.

But if he can elevate an offense that ranked in the bottom 10 in the FBS for scoring (18.4 points per game), Iamaleava can put the focus back on his physical tools and quiet - at least temporarily the discussion about off-field matters.

Dante Moore, Oregon

Iamaleava isn't the only former fivestar quarterback from the 2023 recruiting class in need of a do-over. Moore joined the Ducks last year after an inauspicious freshman campaign at UCLA in which he completed just 53.5% of his passes and threw for 11 touchdowns with nine interceptions.

After sitting for a season, he'll take over an offense that boasted Heisman Trophy finalists in each of the last two years with Bo Nix and Dillon Gabriel who were both fellow transfers as well. Moore will have to reaffirm the poise and precision that made him such a highly sought-after recruit, but Oregon should equip him with the proper schematic and personnel support to allow him to flour-



After an unceremonious split with Tennessee, Nico Iamaleava faces the challenge of bringing UCLA out of the bottom 10 in FBS scoring offense.

SAUL YOUNG/KNOXVILLE NEWS SENTINEL FILE

Miller Moss, Louisville

Few players in the transfer portal era have exhibited the patience of Moss, who spent three years as a backup before getting his shot to become the starter at

After setting a Holiday Bowl record with six touchdown passes in place of Caleb Williams and then opening last season with a dazzling win over LSU, everything seemed to be falling into place for him to be Lincoln Riley's next prized

But Moss was benched after nine games, and now he's taking over for the team he torched in his first career start.

But in teaming up with one of college football's most acclaimed offensive minds in coach Jeff Brohm, Moss could be poised to follow his predecessor's path with a reset that allows him to get his development back on track.

Austin Simmons, Mississippi

Placement on this list might seem farfetched given that Simmons has yet to make a single start in his career. But after skipping two grades in high school and graduating from Mississippi earlier this

month at 19, the 6-4, 215-pound lefty who also was a relief pitcher for the school last year before deciding to focus on football – is a clear outlier.

Simmons gave a glimpse of his capabilities when he stepped in temporarily for injured starter Jaxson Dart to complete five of six passes for 64 yards in the Rebels' upset win over Georgia last year. Now, he'll be counted on to keep Lane Kiffin's high-powered offense running strong after Dart's handle on the system helped him become a first-round pick.

Given his inexperience and age, Simmons might be a name to watch further down the line. But if he proves himself comfortable against top competition, he's shown he has no problem operating ahead of schedule.

Taylen Green, Arkansas

It doesn't require a deep dive to see the pro potential of a 6-6, 230-pound passer who ran for more than 600 yards last season. Still, despite starting two years at Boise State and making the jump to Arkansas last season, Green has yet to put everything together as a passer, with his ball placement, pocket awareness (32 sacks taken last season) and decisionmaking all requiring refinement.

But between his superlative raw arm strength and rare running ability, he can tax defenses in a manner that few other signal-callers can. If Green overcomes an exceedingly difficult schedule and an overhauled receiving corps that lost goto target Andrew Armstrong, he'll pique plenty of teams' interests, at least as a developmental prospect.

Aidan Chiles, Michigan State

In following coach Jonathan Smith from Oregon State to Michigan State in December 2023, Chiles gave the Spartans some much-needed hope as they looked to turn the page on the Mel Tucker

Yet nothing came easily to a program stuck in transition, and the former fourstar recruit threw for just 13 touchdowns with 11 interceptions as his team stumbled to a 5-7 mark. Tamping down on his turnover-prone ways will be a vital step in Chiles' development this season.

But with his often dazzling deep balls and abundant athleticism, the 6-3, 217pounder will capture plenty of attention if he can boost his efficiency and consistency.

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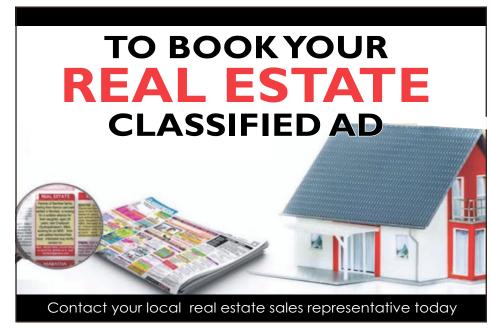
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