



Notre Dame will face at least one uncommon opponent during the 2013 football season - Arizona State. When the Irish and Sun Devils meet at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, TX on Oct. 5 it will be the first meeting between the two since 1999 at Notre Dame Stadium. The only other meeting between ND and ASU came a year earlier when the Irish won 28-9 at Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe.

Arizona State is coming off an 8-5 season in the first year under head coach Todd Graham, who bolted Pittsburgh after just one season as head coach. ASU had targeted a few more marquee name candidates during its coaching search before hiring Graham, who warmed up to the Sun Devil faithful after his arrival.

"Graham was accepted hesitantly after the coaching rollercoaster we were on with Kevin Sumlin, Larry Fedora and June Jones," said David A. Bowers, who covers the Sun Devils for [Bleacher Report](http://bleacherreport.com).

. "When Graham took over, he hit the ground running and impressed the heck out of everybody."

Graham's head coaching career began with one year at Rice in 2006, which was followed by four seasons at Tulsa (including a 28-27 win over Notre Dame in 2010). The one season at Pitt in 2011 earned him somewhat of a carpetbagger reputation, but Bowers says Graham did his best to win Arizona State fans over after his arrival in the desert.

"He did his homework and learned all about the school, it's people and traditions," Bowers commented. "He implemented a new atmosphere and culture of accountability and discipline that had been sorely missing. His recruiting class looks to be a good, solid effort and there are only a few left questioning his desire to stay at Arizona State."

Graham should be feeling good about staying at ASU. His Sun Devils finished with a 5-4 mark in the Pac-12 that was good for a second place tie in the conference's South Division. They capped their season with a 62-48 win over Navy in the Kraft Fight Hunger Bowl and return a solid nucleus from that team.

### Offense

Arguably, the most important player coming back for Arizona State is quarterback Kelly Taylor. The redshirt junior was a first-time starter in 2012 after sitting for all of 2010 and playing only sparingly in 2011. Taylor had at least one touchdown pass in 12 of ASU's 13 games last season. He completed 67% of his 359 pass attempts for 3,039 yards with 29 touchdowns and just nine interceptions, while his 159.9 passer rating ranked second in the Pac-12 and ninth in the nation.

While Taylor is back, he does lose a few weapons and protection around him heading into 2013. Wide receivers Rashad Ross and Jamal Miles, running back Cameron Marshall and offensive linemen Brice Schwab and Andrew Sampson must all begin to be replaced this spring.

Schwab and Sampson represent the right side of the Sun Devils' offensive line and finding their replacements this spring will be a priority.

"Whenever you lose an entire side of a line that has been playing together for years there will be a learning curve for the new guys coming in," Bowers said.

Marshall was his team's second-leading rusher in 2012 with 583 yards (4.3) and nine touchdown carries. ASU returns top rusher Marion Grice though. He was also ASU's second-leading receiver with 41 catches and a team-best eight TD receptions. Ross (610 yards

and six TDs) and Miles (373 yards) must also be replaced, but top receiver, Chris Coyle (696 yards, five TDs) is back along with D.J. Foster (533 yards, four TDs).

"There will be a lot of jockeying among the wide receivers during the spring," Bowers said of the competition at the position.

### Defense

The Sun Devils lose just four starters from a defense that ranked 40th in the nation in 2012 while allowing 24.3 points a game. The top loss is linebacker and captain Brandon Magee, while cornerback Deveron Carr and safety Keelan Johnson.

Bowers expects the Arizona State defense to be "incredibly strong" heading into 2013. Pac-12 Defensive Player of the Year and consensus All-American defensive end Will Sutton will be the anchor as he returns for his senior season. Sutton led the Sun Devils with 13.0 sacks and an amazing 23.5 tackles for loss. He ranked third and second, respectively, nationally in those categories last year.

The Sun Devils also have several fresh replacements coming in next year to add depth.

"They added three of the top junior college players in the country," Bowers said.

Those players are defensive lineman Marcus Hardison, defensive back Demarious Randall and linebacker Antonio Longino. Returning cornerbacks Osahon Irabor and Chris Young and safety Alden Darby each received Pac-12 accolades in 2012, so the losses on defense appear to be minimal.

### Special Teams

## ASU 2013 Spring Preview

Written by Sean Stires

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There will be some jobs to fill on special teams this spring. Punter Josh Hubner, who averaged 47.1 yards on 52 kicks, has graduated. Miles also handled both punt and kick return duties. He averaged 8.8 and 21.8, respectively, on those returns last season. Bowers expects those jobs to be wide open this spring.

### Coaching Staff

Graham has already seen slight turnover in his coaching staff after just one season in Tempe. The most recent addition is that of new defensive line coach Jackie Shipp, who joins the Arizona State staff after 14 seasons on Bob Stoops' staff at Oklahoma. He was also a 2009 finalist for the national Assistant Coach of the Year Award.

The other change is the addition of running back coach Chris Thomsen. He takes over after Larry Porter left to take the same job at Texas.

"I believe Thomsen is a solid coach," Bowers said of Thomsen. "He originally signed on when Graham came to ASU. He was lured away to Texas Tech by Tommy Tuberville. When Tuberville left for Cincinnati, Thomsen coached the Red Raiders to a bowl victory. When Porter left, Thomsen was the only person Graham called and he immediately accepted."

Thomsen was a Division II head coach at Abilene Christian prior to last season. He led the Wildcats to six consecutive Division II playoff berths.

Arizona State's spring practice begins on March 19 and concludes with its spring game on April 13.