

Florida State at Alabama

Florida State Visits Alabama in Tuscaloosa

A Week 3 rematch and economic outlook for Tallahassee and Tuscaloosa

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Florida State visits No. 10 Alabama on Saturday at 3:30 p.m. Eastern on ABC, in the return leg of a home-and-home that Florida State won 31-17 in Tallahassee last season. It is Florida State's first trip to Tuscaloosa since 1974. Alabama is looking for payback. The Seminoles are looking for proof that last August was not a one-off. The line has drifted to about 20 points in Alabama's favor, and Florida State is still searching for the road win that has eluded the program since 2023.

Our two passions are economics and football. The two communities that host these programs are the real subject of this report, and lately they have been growing at different speeds. Tallahassee and Tuscaloosa are both university-and-government towns of similar size, but Florida's statewide labor market has softened through 2026 while Alabama's has kept adding jobs, even as both states' campus economies look more alike than different up close.

Key takeaways	
Last week	Our call favored East Carolina at home; Appalachian State won anyway, 27-24, surviving a furious ECU rally with a fourth-quarter interception. It is the Mountaineers' second win of the season and a materially better start than we projected. The Mountaineers are also favored this week at home against Charlotte.
The game	Florida State travels to Bryant-Denny Stadium on Saturday, September 19, at 3:30 p.m. Eastern on ABC, completing a home-and-home that opened with FSU's 31-17 win over then-No. 8 Alabama a year ago.
The records	Florida State is 1-1 after beating New Mexico State and losing to then-No. 19 SMU. Alabama is 2-0 and ranked No. 10 after wins over East Carolina and Kentucky. SMU has since moved up to No. 16.
The line	Alabama is a 19½- to 20½-point favorite with the total near 49, up from an opener around 15½ and from 17½ when this preview was first drafted. FSU was a 13½-point underdog in Tallahassee a year ago and covered easily.
The history	This is Florida State's first trip to Tuscaloosa since October 12, 1974. Alabama leads the six-game series 3-2-1.
The economies	Tallahassee and Tuscaloosa both run on public payrolls and higher education, but Florida's statewide labor market has softened this year while Alabama's has kept adding jobs at a solid clip.
Our call	Alabama by two scores, inside a number that has already moved toward the Tide. Saturday is a litmus test for Florida State and a referendum on where the ACC stands without a healthy Clemson.

Table 1. Key takeaways, Florida State at Alabama, September 19, 2026.

-20 Alabama point spread	49 Posted total	100,077 Bryant-Denny Stadium capacity
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Closing the Book on Week Two

Our own call on East Carolina at Appalachian State went the wrong way, and it is worth saying so plainly before moving on to this week. We made the Pirates a clear favorite at home off their better 2025 season. Appalachian State built a 24-10 lead early in the third quarter in Greenville, watched East Carolina claw back twice, including a Ja'Keith Hamilton touchdown catch that cut the margin to a field goal with 21 seconds left, and closed it out 27-24 after the Pirates' onside kick went out of bounds and Dre Walker intercepted Mitch Griffis earlier at the Mountaineers' own 9-yard line with 2:16 to play.

Malachi Singleton threw for 267 yards and ran for a touchdown without a turnover, and Appalachian State held the ball for more than 36 minutes and still needed the defense to finish it. It is the Mountaineers' fourth straight win in the series and their second win to open the season, and it reframes the outlook for Dowell Loggains' rebuild after a 5-8 finish in 2025. A team we, and much of the preseason consensus, penciled in for a step back has instead opened 2-0, the second win coming on the road against an opponent that finished 9-4 a year ago. That is a materially better start than the one we projected for App State a week ago and they go into the weekend as favorites against Charlotte.

What Happened Last Year

Florida State opened the 2025 season as a 13½-point underdog against a Crimson Tide team that had been picked as a College Football Playoff contender in year two under Kalen DeBoer. The Seminoles were coming off a 2-10 collapse, the steepest fall of any preseason top-10 team in nearly seventy years. What followed at Doak Campbell Stadium was not a fluke late score. Florida State led 24-7 after three quarters and closed it out 31-17.

Tommy Castellanos, a Boston College transfer making his first start in garnet and gold, completed 9 of 14 passes for 152 yards and added 78 rushing yards and a touchdown on 16 carries. Micahi Danzy, Caziaiah Holmes and Gavin Sawchuk also ran for scores. Florida State finished with 382 yards, 230 of them on the ground. Alabama managed 341 yards, but only 87 came on 29 rushing attempts.

Ty Simpson, in his first career start, completed 23 of 43 passes for 254 yards and two touchdowns. Germie Bernard caught eight balls for 146 yards. After a 16-play opening drive that chewed nearly nine minutes and produced a touchdown, the Tide offense stalled. Alabama's 23-game streak of season-opening wins ended, as did a run of regular-season wins over unranked nonconference opponents that dated to 2007.

The result did not define either season. Alabama recovered to finish 11-4, won a College Football Playoff first-round game at Oklahoma 34-24 and lost to eventual

national champion Indiana 38-3 in the Rose Bowl. The Tide closed the year ranked No. 9. Florida State faded after the opener, finishing 5-7 and 2-6 in the ACC, and lost 40-21 at Florida to miss a bowl. Mike Norvell was retained for 2026. The home-and-home, however, was always going to reconvene in Tuscaloosa.

Series History

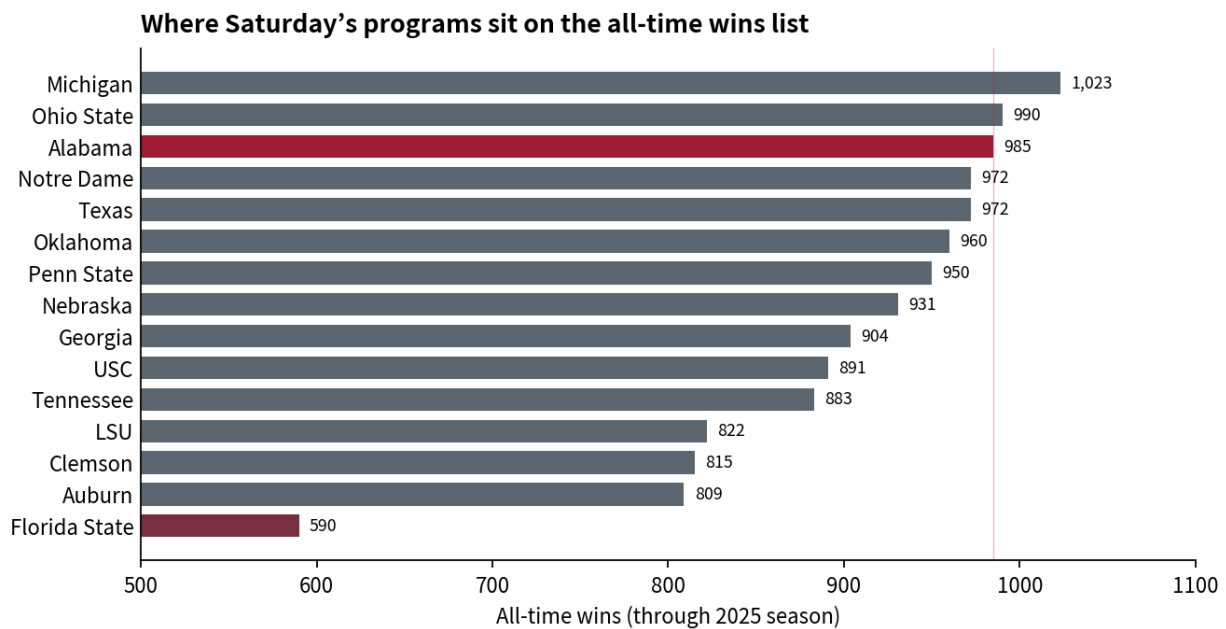
Alabama and Florida State have met only six times, a surprisingly thin ledger given the national profiles both programs have carried since the 1960s. The Tide lead 3-2-1. Neither side has won consecutive meetings. Saturday is the first game in Tuscaloosa since Bear Bryant's 1974 team escaped with an 8-7 win.

Date	Site	Result	Notes
Oct. 23, 1965	Tuscaloosa	Alabama 21-0	Homecoming; three rushing TDs
Sept. 23, 1967	Birmingham	Tie 37-37	Played at Legion Field
Oct. 12, 1974	Tuscaloosa	Alabama 8-7	Last FSU visit until 2026
Sept. 29, 2007	Jacksonville	FSU 21-14	Neutral site; #22 Alabama
Sept. 2, 2017	Atlanta	Alabama 24-7	Chick-fil-A Kickoff; #1 vs. #3
Aug. 30, 2025	Tallahassee	FSU 31-17	Snapped UA's 23-game opener streak

Table 2. Six meetings between Alabama and Florida State. Sources: University of Alabama Athletics; Florida State Athletics; Associated Press.

Where These Programs Sit in History

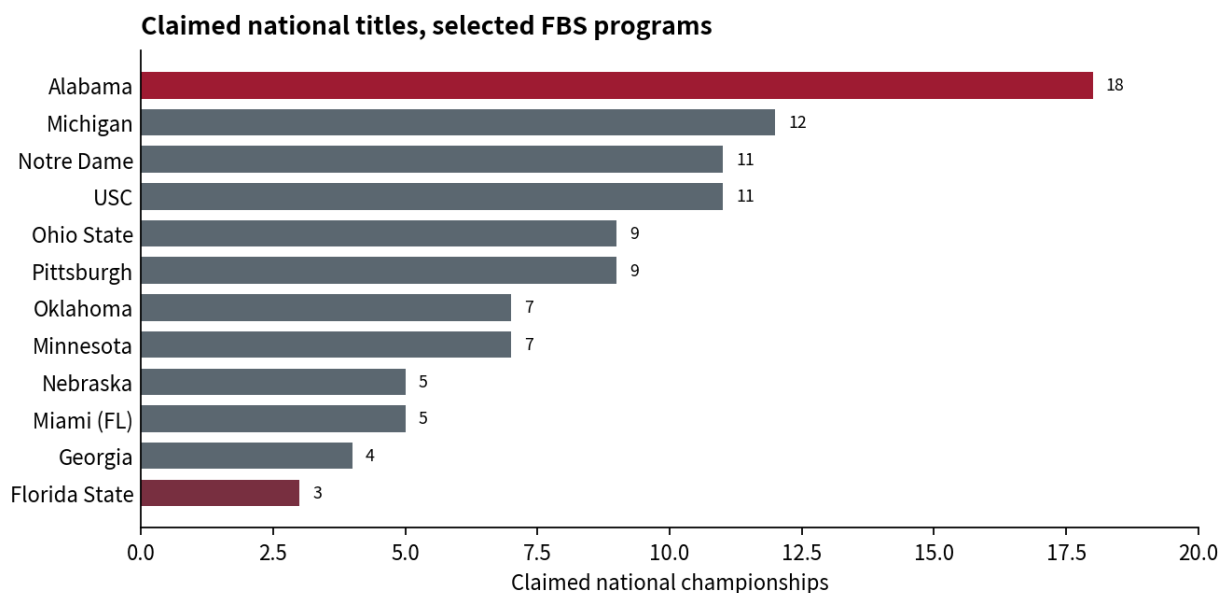
Alabama is not just this week's favorite. Through the 2025 season the Crimson Tide sat third all-time in FBS victories with 985, behind only Michigan (1,023) and Ohio State (990) and 13 wins ahead of Notre Dame and Texas (972 apiece). Florida State, a much younger program that did not play a varsity schedule until 1947, has 590 wins and three claimed national titles (1993, 1999 and 2013). That is a respectable modern résumé. It is not the same historical weight Alabama carries into Bryant-Denny on Saturday.



Sources: NCAA / Wikipedia all-time wins through 2025; Winsipedia (Florida State). Vacated games treated per official records.

Figure 1. All-time FBS wins through the 2025 season. Alabama is third; Florida State is well down the list because the program is decades younger.

Titles tell the same story with a sharper edge. Alabama claims 18 national championships, more than any other FBS school, including six under Nick Saban between 2009 and 2020. Michigan claims 12. Notre Dame and USC claim 11 each. Ohio State is at nine after the 2024 College Football Playoff. Florida State claims three. Pre-poll selections inflate some of those older totals, and reasonable people argue over 1934 and 1941 in Tuscaloosa, but even if those two are set aside the Tide still lead the poll era. That gap is why a 20-point home favorite against an unranked ACC visitor still feels, to Alabama's audience, like unfinished business.



Sources: School claims. Alabama 18; Michigan 12; Notre Dame and USC 11; Ohio State 9 after 2024; Florida State 3 (1993, 1999, 2013). Pre-poll claims included as schools list them.

Figure 2. Claimed national championships at selected FBS programs. Alabama's 18 is the FBS high; Florida State's three arrived in 1993, 1999 and 2013.

The 2026 Season So Far

Florida State opened at home against New Mexico State on August 29 and won 34-17. Transfer quarterback Ashton Daniels completed 17 of 27 passes for 202 yards with a touchdown and an interception and ran for another score. Ousmane Kromah rushed for 115 yards. The Seminoles piled up 419 yards and 217 on the ground, enough to improve to 1-0 without looking settled.

Labor Day night against then-No. 19 SMU was a different game. A lengthy power outage delayed kickoff. Kevin Jennings threw for 430 yards and three touchdowns, including scores of 79 and 50 yards. Florida State kept finding ways back, tying the game at 24-24 on a 39-yard Daniels-to-Samuel Singleton Jr. strike with 8:17 left, then giving up a 20-yard field goal with 21 seconds remaining. Final: SMU 27, Florida State 24. Kromah ran for 120 yards. The Seminoles are 1-1 and 0-1 in the ACC. SMU is 2-0 and ranked No. 16 after beating UC Davis, which means Saturday also decides how much Labor Day result says about SMU.

Alabama opened as the No. 13/11 team and handled East Carolina 48-10 on September 5 in front of a sellout at Bryant-Denny Stadium. Keelon Russell, a young quarterback stepping into the job after Ty Simpson's 2025 season, threw for 256 yards. The Tide scored 38 points in the first half. A week later in Lexington they had to work. Kentucky led 17-13 at halftime after an interception return and a 20-yard touchdown pass. Alabama scored 32 unanswered points after the break, finished with 343 yards to Kentucky's 209 and won 45-17. Daniel Hill ran for 104 yards and a touchdown. Russell completed 16 of 23 passes for 188 yards with a touchdown and two interceptions. DeBoer, 22-8 at Alabama including that Saturday, had been 0-7 when trailing at half before Lexington.

The Associated Press poll released September 13 moved Alabama from No. 12 to No. 10 after the Kentucky win. Florida State remains unranked. Miami sits at No. 5, SMU at No. 16, Louisville at No. 23 and Virginia at No. 25, so the ACC still has a presence in the poll. It does not have Clemson in it. Consensus books have the Tide as a 19½- to 20½-point favorite with a total near 49, a line that has moved about five points toward Alabama from an opener around 15½.

Two Programs on Different Clocks

Kalen DeBoer is in year three in Tuscaloosa, and the program has already cleared the bar the previous two seasons could not. The 2024 team finished 9-4 and ranked No. 17. The 2025 team reached the playoff and finished 11-4 and No. 9. That is short of the Saban standard, which is the only standard that registers with a large share of the Alabama audience, but it is a program that has already been to the Rose Bowl in the new 12-team playoff and is 2-0 to start 2026. The remaining slate is severe. Georgia, Texas A&M, Tennessee and LSU are still ahead, and the SEC is now playing a nine-game conference schedule.

Mike Norvell is in year seven in Tallahassee and 40-36 in that span, a record with a familiar shape. The arc is familiar to anyone who has followed the program: 3-6 and 5-7 in the first two seasons, 10-3 and 13-1 in 2022-23, then 2-10 and 5-7. The 2023 team won the ACC and was left out of the four-team playoff. The 2024 team became the first

preseason top-10 club in nearly seventy years to win fewer than three games. Norvell was told he would be back for 2026 after last November's loss at NC State. A win in Tuscaloosa would change the temperature around the program overnight. A lopsided loss would not end the season, but it would leave very little margin before Virginia, Louisville and Miami arrive in October. Those three, along with SMU, are now the teams to watch in the ACC.

The Seminoles have not won a true road game since November 25, 2023, a 24-15 win at Florida, and Bryant-Denny is a hard place to snap that streak. That is 1,028 days as of Friday. They were 0-4 on the road in 2024 and 0-4 again in 2025. Alabama is 2-0-1 in games played in-state against Florida State and has never lost to the Seminoles in Alabama.

What Saturday Is Really About

Alabama, and Alabama's audience, will treat Saturday as payback. Last year's 31-17 loss in Tallahassee was the first season-opening defeat since 2001 and the end of a 23-game streak of opener wins. DeBoer's team recovered and reached the Rose Bowl, but the afternoon did not leave the building. A home rematch against the same opponent, with a two-touchdown line, is the sort of game this fan base has historically used to close an argument. Anything short of a clear win would reopen it.

Florida State already has the tape that says Alabama is beatable. The Seminoles ran for 230 yards in Tallahassee a year ago and led 24-7 after three quarters. They do not have to invent a theory of the case. They have to do it again, on the road, with a different quarterback, against a Tide team that has spent a year hearing about that afternoon. For Mike Norvell, in year seven and 40-36 in Tallahassee, this is the cleanest remaining chance to show the program can still be taken seriously before Virginia, Louisville and Miami arrive in October.

The Labor Day loss to SMU is part of that test, not separate from it. If Florida State beats Alabama on the road, SMU's 27-24 win in Tallahassee starts to look like a signature result rather than a messy Monday night against a team that could not close. If the Seminoles are run out of Bryant-Denny, that SMU game recedes into the pile of close home losses that have defined the last two seasons. Saturday writes the footnote either way.

The ACC has a stake in the result as well. For most of the last decade the conference's national reputation in football ran through Clemson, with Florida State as the other program that could still sell a playoff case. That is not the 2026 picture. Miami is 2-0 and ranked No. 5. SMU is 2-0 and ranked No. 16 after the Tallahassee win. Virginia and Louisville are in the Top 25. Clemson is not.

Clemson's 1-1 start, including a 51-10 loss at LSU that was the worst of Dabo Swinney's head-coaching career, leaves the conference looking for someone else to carry the brand. Clemson is a short favorite at home against North Carolina on Saturday, not the September heavyweight the league has leaned on for a decade. If Florida State can take a Saturday in Tuscaloosa, the ACC's résumé looks different overnight. If the Seminoles are overwhelmed, the league's early story is Miami at the top and a lot of unsettled business behind it.

Football Snapshot

	Florida State Seminoles	Alabama Crimson Tide
Conference (2026)	ACC	SEC
Head coach (2026)	Mike Norvell (7th season)	Kalen DeBoer (3rd season)
2025 record	5-7, missed a bowl	11-4, CFP first round, lost Rose Bowl
2026 starting QB	Ashton Daniels (transfer)	Keelon Russell
2026 record	1-1 (0-1 ACC)	2-0, AP No. 10
Home stadium	Doak Campbell (~67,300)	Bryant-Denny (100,077)
Last meeting	Aug. 30, 2025 (won 31-17, home)	Aug. 30, 2025 (lost 17-31, away)
All-time series	Trails Alabama, 2-3-1	Leads FSU, 3-2-1
Saturday	Road team, ~20-point underdog	Home team, AP No. 10, ~20-point favorite

Table 3. Sources: ESPN, the Associated Press, school athletics, VegasInsider, DraftKings and Southeast Economic Advisors. The betting line was recaptured September 18, 2026.

Tallahassee and Tuscaloosa: Campus Towns with Different Engines

Florida State and Alabama are the dominant institutions in metros that still run on public payrolls, and the resemblance ends there. Tallahassee is a state capital whose private sector has always sat in the shadow of state government, FSU and Florida A&M. Tuscaloosa is a university town that also sits inside Alabama's automotive corridor, a cluster that did not exist in anything like its present form when these teams last met on this campus in 1974.

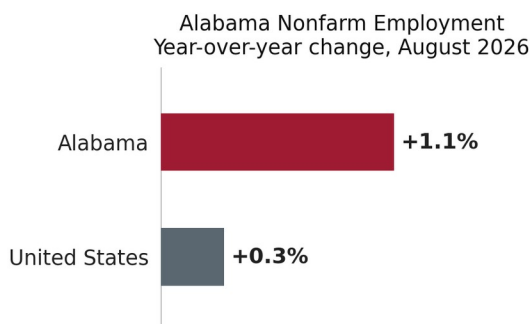


Figure 3. Alabama payrolls rose 1.1% year-over-year in August, more than triple the 0.3% U.S. pace.

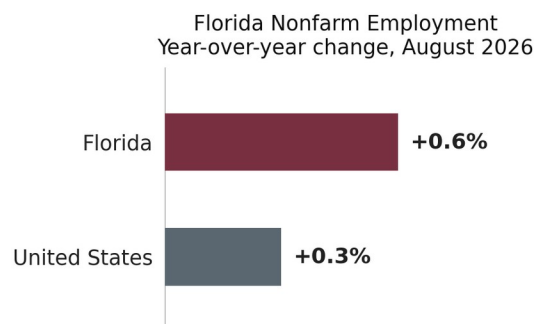


Figure 4. Florida payrolls rose 0.6% year-over-year in August, double the U.S. pace, but well behind Alabama's.

~200,500 Nonfarm jobs, Tallahassee, August 2026	+1.3% Employment growth, year ago	4.9% Unemployment rate, August 2026
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The Tallahassee MSA employed just over 200,000 on nonfarm payrolls in August, up 1.3 percent from a year earlier, while the unemployment rate eased to 4.9 percent from 5.1 percent in July but stayed above 4.5 percent a year earlier. Government remains the largest sector at 59,400 jobs in July, but that total was down 2.1 percent over the year, a reminder that state and local payrolls have cooled after the post-pandemic hiring wave. Leisure & hospitality was the offset, up 6.8 percent. Education and health services rose 1.9 percent. Professional and business services

added 2.0 percent after a soft stretch earlier in the year. The capital city's economy is not sliding. It is not generating much net hiring either, which fits the broader capital-heavy, employment-light expansion we have been describing at the national and regional level.

That fits a longer pattern in Tallahassee's own numbers. It is one of Florida's 22 metropolitan statistical areas, and it has been a modest but consistent grower among them rather than a boom-or-bust one; its population rose 3.4 percent from 2020 to 2025, a much slower pace than the state's fastest-growing metros posted over the same span.

Tallahassee's metro population is just over 400,000, a fraction of Florida's large coastal metros and a long way from South Florida, where more than a quarter of the state's residents live. That geography is a 19th-century artifact. When East and West Florida were stitched into a single territory, legislators split the difference between **St. Augustine** and **Pensacola** and put the capital in the red hills. At that time, the bulk of Florida's population resided in the northern reaches of the state, which is why the state's two principal universities are both located there. Even the University of South Florida, founded in 1956, is located in Tampa, which is closer to the center of the state than its southern reaches. Florida's demographic and economic weight later shifted south. The political and university weight did not. Florida State now enrolls more than 44,000 students and remains one of the region's largest employers. Doak Campbell Stadium, opened in 1950 at 15,000 seats, has since grown and then shrunk again, down to about 67,300 seats after a \$265 million renovation this year that traded seating capacity for premium suites and club space. Saturday's crowd will be in Tuscaloosa, however, not on Doak's west side.

Statewide, Florida finds itself in usual territory where it is the softer half of this weekend's pairing of economies, and more so than the Tallahassee numbers alone would suggest. The state's unemployment rate climbed for most of 2026 before easing to 4.5 percent in August, down a tenth of a point from July's 4.6 percent but still half a point above 4.0 percent a year earlier. The climb was steeper earlier in the year: March's rate of 4.7 percent was a full percentage point above March 2025's 3.6 percent, and Florida's own labor economists tied part of the increase to new entrants needing more time to find work and to rising retirements rather than to layoffs. The payroll count has turned less discouraging since the spring slowdown: seasonally adjusted nonfarm employment rose 21,800 in August and is up 59,000, or 0.6 percent, over the year, with gains led by education and health services (+39,600) and professional and business services (+25,200) and continued softness in financial activities (-14,300), government (-4,900) and information (-3,900). This is a state that spent most of the last five years near the top of the national growth rankings now settling into the middle of the pack.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Florida Trend; CoStar; Florida Department of Commerce.

117,400 Nonfarm jobs, Tuscaloosa, August 2026	+1.1% Employment growth, year ago	3.9% Unemployment rate, August 2026
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The Tuscaloosa MSA employed 117,400 in August, up 1.1 percent from a year earlier, with the unemployment rate at 3.9 percent, down from 4.3 percent in July but still above 3.4 percent a year earlier. Manufacturing, the sector that distinguishes this metro from Tallahassee, employed 19,400, down 1.0 percent over the year. Leisure & hospitality rose 8.4 percent over the year, a slower pace than July's 15.5 percent gain but still consistent with a campus-and-gameday effect as much as a tourism story. Government rose 1.6 percent. County-level QCEW data through March showed

Tuscaloosa County employment off 0.5 percent over the year, so the summer rebound in the household and payroll surveys is welcome and still thin.

The industrial story is still Mercedes-Benz. On April 1 the company marked five million vehicles assembled at Mercedes-Benz U.S. International in Vance, premiered the new GLE and GLS on the plant floor and committed \$4 billion to the Tuscaloosa operation through 2030, including the addition of GLC production late next year. MBUSI employs about 5,800 and exports roughly 60 percent of its output. That announcement was the largest single capital commitment in the plant's 30-year history and a continuation of the strategy that brought Honda, Hyundai and Mazda-Toyota into the state after Mercedes arrived in the mid-1990s. Alabama now regularly produces more than a million vehicles a year and hosts a growing list of suppliers.

Tariffs are a direct reason that GLC line is moving to Vance rather than staying in Germany. Mercedes-Benz has told investors it is absorbing roughly \$1.2 billion in added costs from U.S. tariffs on imported vehicles, on top of a steep, well-documented sales slump in China as domestic brands take share from foreign automakers there, Mercedes and its German peers included. Assembling the GLC in Alabama sidesteps the tariff on the finished import and hedges against a China market that is no longer the growth engine it was for Mercedes. None of that changes who runs the American car business day to day: Mercedes-Benz USA's corporate headquarters is in Atlanta, not Vance, and the company also builds Sprinter vans at a separate Mercedes-Benz Vans plant in North Charleston, South Carolina. Vance and Tuscaloosa get the vehicle assembly and most of the jobs; Atlanta gets the sales, marketing and, increasingly, the research-and-development functions Mercedes has been consolidating there. The old Daimler family of companies still has a large North Carolina footprint even after the 2021 split of the truck business from the passenger-car business. Freightliner and Thomas Built Buses, now under Daimler Truck North America rather than Mercedes-Benz Group, employ thousands in Cleveland, Mount Holly, Gastonia and High Point, where Thomas Built, founded in 1916, has built buses since 1936 and now employs about 1,900.

The other local factory headline cuts the other way. Michelin said in June that it will close the 80-year-old BFGoodrich tire plant in Tuscaloosa, a move that affects about 1,200 jobs, with production winding down by the end of 2028. That is a real loss in a metro of 117,000 payroll jobs. It does not erase the Mercedes commitment, but it is a reminder that legacy manufacturing and the newer transplant assembly plants are not on the same trajectory. University of Alabama enrollment is another partial offset. Fall 2025 headcount reached a record 42,360, up from 40,846 the prior fall, with students from all 67 Alabama counties, all 50 states and 99 countries.

Statewide, Alabama's trend runs the other way from Florida's. Employment was up 0.7 percent over the year in the March QCEW reading, and the more current household survey shows the state adding 22,100 nonfarm jobs over the year to August, with construction and manufacturing workers both earning record average weekly wages, \$1,487 and \$1,415 respectively. The state's unemployment rate held at 3.4 percent in August, unchanged from July but still up from 2.8 percent a year earlier, and that reads more like a labor-force story than a hiring one: a state that keeps adding jobs while its jobless rate sits above year-ago levels is pulling in workers faster than it can immediately place them, not shedding them. We have Alabama gross state product rising about 3.0 percent in 2026 with a modest payroll gain, a capital-spending story more than a hiring boom. Huntsville continues to pull away on population and defense-and-space work. The metro added about 14,000 residents in 2025, a 2.6 percent gain that ranked sixth among U.S. metropolitan areas, and the city itself has added more than 34,000 people since

2020. The other fast lane is the Gulf. The Daphne-Fairhope-Foley MSA reached 267,800 residents in 2025, up from 261,700 a year earlier, and Foley was Alabama's fastest-growing city of 10,000-plus for a second straight year after an 8 percent gain. A large share of that in-migration is retirees and remote workers priced out of Florida's coastal markets, trading a higher Florida tax and housing bill for Baldwin County beaches and a lower cost of living.

Mobile and Montgomery have been less even on the current jobs numbers, despite landing the kind of projects that take years to show up in a payroll count. Mobile County landed a \$1.2 billion ArcelorMittal electrical-steel mill, expected to add more than 200 permanent jobs and as many as 1,300 construction jobs before it starts production in 2027. Montgomery landed a \$77.6 million expansion from DAS North America, an automotive and advanced-manufacturing supplier that has operated in Montgomery since 2012, adding 100 jobs by 2028. Tuscaloosa sits in the middle: a university that is still growing, a massive auto plant that plays a key role in Mercedes North America strategy just received a multiyear vote of confidence, and a tire plant that is going away.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; BLS QCEW; Alabama Department of Labor; Office of the Governor of Alabama; Montgomery Regional Chamber of Commerce; Mercedes-Benz Group; AutoNews; Tuscaloosa Thread; Tuscaloosa News.

Tallahassee and Tuscaloosa, Side by Side

Indicator	Tallahassee, FL	Tuscaloosa, AL
Nonfarm employment (August 2026)	~200,500	117,400
Employment change, year ago	+1.3%	+1.1%
Unemployment rate (August 2026)	4.9%	3.9%
Metro population (2025)	~400,000	281,850
Anchor university enrollment	44,000+ (Florida State)	42,360 (Alabama, fall 2025)
State unemployment rate (August 2026)	4.5% (Florida)	3.4% (Alabama)
Statewide employment trend	+59,000 jobs (August, year over year)	+22,100 jobs (August, year over year)
A note on comparability. The two state figures describe far larger, more diverse economies than the two university metros above them, and are included to show direction, not to be read as metro-level comparisons.		

Table 4. The two host economies. Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau, Florida State University, University of Alabama and Southeast Economic Advisors.

The Outlook for Saturday

Alabama should win this game. The Tide are deeper, fresher after a road test that turned into a second-half rout, and playing in a stadium Florida State has not visited in 52 years. A 20-point spread is a large number in September, but it is consistent with how the two rosters have looked through two weeks and with FSU's long drought away from Doak Campbell. Last year's result is the reason the number opened closer to two touchdowns than three, and the reason it has kept moving toward Alabama all week.

The path for Florida State is narrow and familiar. The Seminoles have to run the ball well enough to keep Russell off the field, avoid the explosive plays Jennings used to

beat them on Labor Day and steal a possession or two. Ashton Daniels has shown he can move the pocket. Kromah has been the most reliable piece of the offense. That is not a formula that travels to Tuscaloosa against a defense that held Kentucky to 62 second-half yards. If Alabama's running game, which produced 184 rushing yards after sacks at Kentucky, gets going early, the Seminoles will be chasing the game in a place that does not give those games back.

We expect Alabama to win by two scores and to land inside a number that has already stretched from 15½ to about 20. There are still lingering questions about whether this year's squad is up to traditional Alabama standards. The Tide suffered an unusual breakdown in discipline during the first half at Kentucky, with turnovers and penalties that would be expensive against a team that can run. The condition that would break that view is another slow start combined with an FSU rushing afternoon that looks like August 30, 2025. That is possible. It is not the base case. For Norvell, a competitive loss keeps the season intact heading into Central Arkansas and Virginia and does not answer the larger question. For DeBoer, anything short of a clear win would reopen a conversation that the strong second half in Lexington had started to quiet.

The Bottom Line

This is a rematch between two programs on different clocks, in a building that has not hosted Florida State since 1974, and it is a larger game than the records imply. Alabama is building on a Rose Bowl season and looking to settle last August. Florida State is trying to prove that result was a floor, not a ceiling, and that a program coming off 2-10 and 5-7 can still be taken seriously. An FSU win would re-rate SMU's Labor Day night and give the ACC a September result it can take on the road. An Alabama win that covers, or comes close, would leave the Seminoles where they started the week and leave the conference leaning on Miami. We expect the market's number to hold up, Alabama's building and roster edge to show up in the fourth quarter, and Florida State's road drought to reach four years. Tallahassee and Tuscaloosa will keep growing at different speeds regardless of Saturday's score, and that gap is the more durable story of the two.

About this report

This Week 3 preview is published by Southeast Economic Advisors and pairs an on-field preview with an economic outlook for the two communities that host the participating universities. Economic figures come from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Alabama Department of Labor and the sources cited in each section, and are subject to revision. Metropolitan employment totals are seasonally adjusted; industry detail and the unemployment rate are not. Football statistics reflect the completed 2025 season and the first two weeks of 2026. Odds and totals are as of September 18, 2026 and move daily. The Associated Press poll cited is from Sunday, September 13, 2026.

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