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Sources: Gobert has MCL sprain in left

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# What the data say about college football coaches on the hot seat





Despite credentials that would keep many coaches safe, Kevin Sumlin is perpetually on the hot seat.  
AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis



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Roughly one month ago, it was difficult to envision a scenario that had Kevin Sumlin coaching the [Texas A&M Aggies](#) in 2018.



The Aggies started 2017 with an epic meltdown at UCLA that prompted [all kinds](#) of [ugliness](#).



The Aggies followed that by struggling against FCS Nicholls State in a game that was tied 14-14 in the fourth quarter. Then they trailed at halftime the next week against UL Lafayette before flexing their muscles in the final 30 minutes and prevailing.

A month or so later, Texas A&M is 5-2, with its only loss since the Week 1 debacle a seemingly respectable one against Alabama and a remaining schedule that gives the Aggies a fighting chance of pulling out of the perennial eight-win status that was wearing on A&M supporters well before the UCLA collapse.

The wolves are no longer at Sumlin's door. That said, lose to Mississippi State at home this week, and you can bet they'll be summoned.

Whether firing Sumlin would be fair is in the eye of the beholder. Whether firing him would be typical is a question we designed a model to help answer.

- We examined every FBS/I-A coaching tenure since 1970, constructing a model to help determine the likelihood that every current FBS coach will be fired by this offseason.
- The model's most important factor turned out to be the difference between a program's strength prior to a coach's arrival and its current strength.
- Other predictors included team record, a team's presence in the rankings, championships and other milestones (e.g. 10-win seasons).
- Tenure has an impact on the model as well, but in a complicated way. Rarely are coaches fired after a very poor record in their first season, but that same poor record would probably get a coach fired later in his tenure.

In Sumlin's case, the model says a mere 3.8 percent of coaches with similar credentials have been fired in nearly the past half-century. Another recent hot seat occupant, Ed Orgeron at LSU, has a résumé with the Tigers that has been deemed worthy of firing in only 1 percent of cases. The model found surprising numbers on the other side of the spectrum as well.

David Beaty at Kansas is in just his third season, and despite the Jayhawks' struggles in a Power 5 conference, he has not been among the most prominent names mentioned on the hot seat. But Beaty's credentials to this point at KU have been deemed fireable in 72.3 percent of similar cases in college football.

Until we have a reliable, thorough way to quantify such elements, the model can't account for the fact that Beaty is under contract through 2021 or that he's largely considered to be recruiting well after having taken over a program in complete shambles after the Charlie Weis fiasco. It can't accurately account for fan or booster sentiment at Texas A&M or LSU or a potentially impactful AD change at Nebraska.

The model simply allows the numbers to speak for themselves. Speculating on the employment of hard-working people is a dark task, so the least we can do is carry it out responsibly. A look at the historic firing credentials of every current FBS coach with a firing probability of 5 percent or more, excluding interim

coaches, is in the table below. A closer look at some of the more prominent names on the hot seat list follows the list.

RK	COACH/SCHOOL	SEASONS	RECORD	% FIRINGS, LIKE CREDENTIALS
1	Paul Haynes, <a href="#">Kent State</a>	5th	14-40	92.9%
2	David Beaty, <a href="#">Kansas</a>	3rd	3-28	72.3%
3	Butch Jones, <a href="#">Tennessee</a>	5th	33-25	57.0%
4	Barry Odom, <a href="#">Missouri</a>	2nd	6-13	45.2%
5	Brad Lambert, <a href="#">Charlotte</a>	3rd*	7-25	44.7%
6	Derek Mason, <a href="#">Vanderbilt</a>	4th	16-28	41.9%
7	Bret Bielema, <a href="#">Arkansas</a>	5th	27-31	41.7%
8	David Bailiff, <a href="#">Rice</a>	11th	57-75	41.5%
9	Mike Jinks, <a href="#">Bowling Green</a>	2nd	5-15	41.0%
10	Kalani Sitake, <a href="#">BYU</a>	2nd	10-11	40.7%
11	Steve Addazio, <a href="#">Boston College</a>	5th	28-31	38.1%
12	Scottie Montgomery, <a href="#">East Carolina</a>	2nd	5-15	36.0%
13	Mark Whipple, <a href="#">UMass</a>	4th*	9-34	34.5%
14	Mike Neu, <a href="#">Ball State</a>	2nd	6-13	33.6%
15	Chuck Martin, <a href="#">Miami (OH)</a>	4th	14-31	33.4%
16	Lovie Smith, <a href="#">Illinois</a>	2nd	5-14	31.9%
17	Everett Withers, <a href="#">Texas State</a>	2nd	3-16	31.3%
18	Kliff Kingsbury, <a href="#">Texas Tech</a>	5th	28-29	31.0%
19	Mike Riley, <a href="#">Nebraska</a>	3rd	18-15	29.7%
20	Tony Sanchez, <a href="#">UNLV</a>	3rd	9-22	29.6%
21	Philip Montgomery, <a href="#">Tulsa</a>	3rd	18-16	24.9%
22	Larry Fedora, <a href="#">North Carolina</a>	6th	41-32	24.7%
23	Nick Rolovich, <a href="#">Hawaii</a>	2nd	10-11	23.7%
24	Pat Narduzzi, <a href="#">Pittsburgh</a>	3rd	19-15	23.1%
25	John Bonamego, <a href="#">Central Michigan</a>	3rd	17-17	22.5%
26	Jim McElwain, <a href="#">Florida</a>	3rd	22-11	21.8%
27	Paul Petrino, <a href="#">Idaho</a>	5th	17-38	21.0%
28	Mike MacIntyre, <a href="#">Colorado</a>	5th	24-35	19.5%
29	Bill Clark, <a href="#">UAB</a>	2nd	10-9	19.3%
30	Chris Ash, <a href="#">Rutgers</a>	2nd	5-14	17.8%
*includes FBS seasons only				

31	Lance Leipold, <a href="#">Buffalo</a>	3rd	10-22	17.5%
32	Jim Mora, <a href="#">UCLA</a>	6th	45-27	16.4%
33	Mark Hudspeth, <a href="#">Louisiana</a>	7th	49-35	15.4%
34	Matt Rhule, <a href="#">Baylor</a>	1st	0-7	14.9%
35	Todd Graham, <a href="#">Arizona State</a>	6th	43-29	13.7%
36	Rich Rodriguez, <a href="#">Arizona</a>	6th	41-31	11.0%
37	Joey Jones, <a href="#">South Alabama</a>	6th*	28-42	11.0%
38	Mark Stoops, <a href="#">Kentucky</a>	6th	24-32	10.4%
39	Craig Bohl, <a href="#">Wyoming</a>	4th	18-27	8.8%
40	Bob Davie, <a href="#">New Mexico</a>	6th	30-40	8.2%
41	Bobby Wilder, <a href="#">Old Dominion</a>	4th*	23-21	8.1%
42	Dana Holgorsen, <a href="#">West Virginia</a>	7th	51-33	7.6%
43	Dave Clawson, <a href="#">Wake Forest</a>	4th	17-27	7.4%
44	Doug Martin, <a href="#">New Mexico State</a>	5th	13-42	7.3%
45	D.J. Durkin, <a href="#">Maryland</a>	2nd	9-11	7.2%
46	Chris Creighton, <a href="#">Eastern Michigan</a>	4th	12-32	7.2%
47	Matt Viator, <a href="#">Louisiana Monroe</a>	2nd	7-12	6.8%
48	Brent Brennan, <a href="#">San Jose State</a>	1st	1-7	6.7%
49	Willie Taggart, <a href="#">Oregon</a>	1st	4-4	6.5%
50	Jimbo Fisher, <a href="#">Florida State</a>	8th	80-21	6.4%
51	Jay Norvell, <a href="#">Nevada</a>	1st	1-7	5.1%
52	Luke Fickell, <a href="#">Cincinnati</a>	1st	2-6	5.1%
53	Randy Edsall, <a href="#">UConn</a>	12th*	73-67	4.9%
54	Gus Malzahn, <a href="#">Auburn</a>	5th	41-20	4.7%

*\*includes FBS seasons only*

### Other notables:

Kevin Sumlin, Texas A&M (3.8%); Bronco Mendenhall, Virginia (3.7%); Mark Dantonio, Michigan State (3.5%); Paul Johnson, Georgia Tech (3.0%); Tom Allen, Indiana (2.9%); Kyle Whittingham, Utah (1.9%); Tom Herman, Texas (1.9%); Mike Leach, Washington State (1.5%); Will Muschamp, South Carolina (1.5%); Dino Babers, Syracuse (1.3%); David Cutcliffe, Duke (1.2%); Clay Helton, USC (1.1%); Dave Doeren, North Carolina State (1.0%); Ed Orgeron, LSU (1.0%); David Shaw, Stanford (0.9%); Matt Campbell, Iowa State (0.7%);

Kirk Ferentz, Iowa (0.7%); Bill Snyder, Kansas State (0.6%); P.J. Fleck, Minnesota (0.6%); Jim Harbaugh, Michigan (0.5%); Bobby Petrino, Louisville (0.4%); Nick Saban, Alabama (0.4%); Gary Patterson, TCU (0.3%); Pat Fitzgerald, Northwestern (0.3%); Dan Mullen, Mississippi State (0.3%); Mike Gundy, Oklahoma State (0.3%); Brian Kelly, Notre Dame (0.3%); Urban Meyer, Ohio State (0.2%); Dabo Swinney, Clemson (0.2%); Jeff Brohm, Purdue (0.2%); Justin Fuente, Virginia Tech (0.1%); Lincoln Riley, Oklahoma (0.1%); James Franklin, Penn State (0.1%); Chris Petersen, Washington (0.1%); Charlie Strong, South Florida (0.0%); Kirby Smart, Georgia (0.0%); Paul Chryst, Wisconsin (0.0%); Mark Richt, Miami (FL) (0.0%); Lane Kiffin, Florida Atlantic (0.0%)

Here is a closer look at some of the more prominent names on the hot seat list:



## **Butch Jones, Tennessee Volunteers**

**Record with team:** 33-25 in five seasons

**Percent of coaches with similar credentials who have been fired:** 57

One validating event happened Oct. 9, when Oregon State parted ways with Gary Andersen. He was originally number three on the list, with a 66 percent chance to be fired.

Just below Andersen on the list was Jones. The Volunteers' loss to South Carolina on Oct. 14 catapulted Jones from 21st into his current position. In fact, there are two independently trained models that combine to create the overall probability of being fired, and one of them says he has an 83 percent chance. Five years into his tenure, Jones' teams have not accomplished much relative to the program's one-time national title pedigree. After two seasons of decline at a school with very high expectations, the writing is on the wall for Jones.



## **Bret Bielema, Arkansas Razorbacks**

**Record with team:** 27-31 in five seasons

**Percent of coaches with similar credentials who have been fired:** 42

Bielema is in a similar situation to that of Jones: In year five of his tenure, he has yet to produce anything better than the 8-5 season in 2015 that included a win in the Liberty Bowl. This season is expected to be his team's second consecutive year of decline since that campaign.



## **Lovie Smith, Illinois Fighting Illini**

**Record with team:** 5-14 in two seasons

**Percent of coaches with similar credentials who have been fired:** 32

Smith is well-known for his time as an NFL head coach, but that pedigree hasn't translated to success in the Big Ten, despite relatively low expectations. He's two years into a six-year contract, so he is likely safe, though the model suggests that cutting bait with Smith would be far from unprecedented.



## **Kliff Kingsbury, Texas Tech Red Raiders**

**Record with team:** 28-29 in five seasons

**Percent of coaches with similar credentials who have been fired:** 31

Kingsbury seemed to be finding his way off the hot seat when Texas Tech (now 4-3) made an appearance in the rankings two weeks ago, but back-to-back losses to West Virginia and Iowa State (at home), with a road date at Oklahoma up next, seem to spell peril for the former Red Raiders star.



## **Mike Riley, Nebraska Cornhuskers**

**Record with team:** 18-15 in three seasons

**Percent of coaches with similar credentials who have been fired:** 30

Another victim of high expectations at a one-time powerhouse is Riley, who is currently 19th on the list with a 30 percent chance of being shown the door. It's his third season of mediocre accomplishment, and the current season (the Huskers are 3-4) is projected to be a stark decline. His seat might be hotter than

estimated here; Nebraska athletic director Shawn Eichorst, who hired Riley, was recently ousted.



## **Jim McElwain, [Florida Gators](#)**

**Record with team:** 22-11 in three seasons

**Percent of coaches with similar credentials who have been fired:** 22

The national titles won by Steve Spurrier and Urban Meyer help ensure that expectations will remain exceptionally high in Gainesville. McElwain predecessors such as Will Muschamp (28-21 in four seasons) and Ron Zook (23-14 in three seasons), both of whom were fired after failing to get the Gators into the national title picture, are a good proxy for what McElwain is up against.



## **Jim Mora, [UCLA Bruins](#)**

**Record with team:** 45-27 in six seasons

**Percent of coaches with similar credentials who have been fired:** 16

Mora's place on the list has undergone some fluctuation, with last week's win over Oregon moving the Bruins to 4-3 on the season and helping Mora's standing in the model improve by double-digit percentage points. That aside, UCLA comes off a 4-8 season in 2016, and another shaky finish will undoubtedly see Mora's number swell from the current 16 percent.



## **Jimbo Fisher, [Florida State Seminoles](#)**

**Record with team:** 80-21 in eight seasons

**Percent of coaches with similar credentials who have been fired:** 6

The Seminoles dropped to an unthinkable 2-4 after last week's loss to Louisville, and [last week's run-in with a fan](#) makes it worth considering how unprecedented it would be for a national title-winning coach such as Fisher to be shown the door. Well, national titles don't give coaches so much equity -- you



might remember [Auburn's Gene Chizik was fired](#) less than two years after winning the BCS crown -- but in this case, Fisher should be helped by a longer, consistent run of success than Chizik had. Only 6 percent of coaches with Fisher's credentials have been fired, per the data.



## Kevin Sumlin, [Texas A&M Aggies](#)

**Record with team:** 49-23 in six seasons

**Percent of coaches with similar credentials who have been fired:** 3.8

Sumlin's fate in College Station might have more to do with how he fits into the school's grand ambitions for its program than with purely wins and losses. Whatever the intangibles, as things stand, it would be atypical for someone with his profile to be let go.



## Ed Orgeron, [LSU Tigers](#)

**Record with team:** 12-4 in two seasons

**Percent of coaches with similar credentials who have been fired:** 1

Despite being in his first full season, Orgeron has been mentioned in connection with the hot seat for a school with among the highest expectations in the country. That seat has cooled since Orgeron followed an embarrassing home loss to Troy with wins over Florida, Auburn and Ole Miss in a three-week period. Then there's the fact that first-year head coaches are rarely fired; only 1.5 percent of those in the data have suffered that indignity. The model doesn't deviate far from the baseline rate, estimating that Orgeron has only a 1 percent chance to be fired, but a shaky final month could reignite talk about Coach O's future.

*For more from ESPN Analytics, visit the [ESPN Analytics Index](#).*

