NEW YORK (UPI) — It'll be "bombs away" on many a college football field again this fall if the coaches want it that way.

Fifteen of last season's top 24 forward passers are back for another year of collegiate flinging. They have the arms. They'll throw plenty unless their coaches have had a change of heart — and offensive systems — in the off-season.

Statistically, the leading returnee is Don Strock of Virginia Tech, no. 2 last year with 17.7 completions per game. Gary Huff of Florida State, no. 1 in total offense and no. 4 in passing percentage, also is back on the collegiate scene with a shot at edging some of the glamor boys for All America honors.

Among the more famous names likely to be heard again are Sonny Sixkiller of Washington, Dan Fouts of Oregon, and Joe Ferguson of Arkansas.

If you're outside the area in which these lads already are well-known, you may get to know them better as the season goes on: Dennis Morrison of Kansas State, Tony Adams of Utah State, Todd Starks of Tulsa and Gary Danelson of Purdue.

Others expected back from last year's top 24 passing leaders are Carlos Brown of the University of Pacific, Joe Pisarcik of New Mexico State, Doug Shoher of Temple, Eddie McAshe of Georgia Tech, Gary Keithley of the University of Texas at El Paso and Jay Cruze of California.

Only 10 of the top 24 receivers, led by no. 4 Mike Repond of Arkansas, are expected to return and that may create problems for leading throwers who lost their favorite targets. Still, getting the ball into the air with some degree of accuracy is at least half the battle and it's probable that teams with experienced passers have been grooming replacement receivers.

Oklahoma's Greg Pruitt, no. 3 in rushing a year ago, is the leading ball carrier returning to the campus. He is one of 10 eligibles from last year's top 18 rushers, indicating the 1971 running teams have the legs to keep on running.

Despite the spread of the "wishbone T" and variations featuring pass-run options, the prolific thrower still is with us on many fronts.

Florida State's Huff, though no. 4 in average completions per game, led the nation in passing yardage last season with 2,736 on 184 hits in 327 shots (.563 average) and led them all with 23 aerial touchdowns. Okay, he lost a few yards on bunted pass plays or unsuccessful rushes but he wound up as no. 1 in total offense with 2,653 yards for an average of 241-2 yards per game.

The only passers ahead of Huff in completion averages were Brian Sipe of San Diego State (gone), Virginia Tech's Strock, and John Reaves of Florida (gone).

Strock, only one-tenth behind no. 1 Sipe with a 17.7 completion average, connected on 195 of 356 attempts for 2,577 yards. That passing yardage production was second only to Huff and put Strock at no. 3 in total offense.

Nos. 5-6-7 on the 1971 passing list were Pat Sullivan of Auburn, Gary Fox of Wyoming and Don Bunc of Stanford — all gone. But the next eight, starting with no. 8 Ferguson of Arkansas, are expected to return this fall.

Ferguson led the southwest with 14.5 completions per game on a total of 160 strikes in 271 attempts for 2,203 yards. That, plus a few rushing yards, earned him the no. 7 slot on the total offense.