

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast  
September 19<sup>th</sup> Edition: Visiting Arkansas, the Razorbacks

Disclaimer #1: Please do not confuse any of the following with information that could usefully provide the basis for a wager.

Disclaimer #2: The Forecast is not the place to go to hear moaning and groaning, grumbling and mumbling, gnashing and bashing, retching and kvetching, wailing and railing, or haters and Gators. This spot is for dawg lovers only. Some people see the glass as half-empty; some see it as half-full. I see the glass a filled to the brim, and please bring me another one while you're up. If you're looking for some hate, go read Jeff Schultz. Or read my view of Bobby Petrino (below).

The Recap: Whew! What a game. I found so much to be joyous about that I watched a tape of the game again on Sunday on the big screen at home. Lots of great news, to wit:

1. In spite of the safety on the punt snap, and one lengthy kickoff return by USC, and Branden's muff on his first kick return, and the successful fake punt that SC pulled off, the special teams looked pretty special to me. Boykin is a gamebreaker, but you don't need to be John Madden to figure that one out. But nobody returns a kick in a vacuum; a lot of effective blocking, and a lot of dedicated reps in practice, have to occur to provide the openings for the return man. The fact is, I've never seen an opponent fear our kick return game so greatly that they start to pop kickoffs to our up-men and give us the ball at the 35 rather than risk a long return. Also, Blair Walsh had an outstanding game. He's becoming automatic on field goals anywhere inside 55 yards, and was really hammering his kickoffs. And, of course, Tyson's block on the extra point was huge. So one of the team's biggest worries, special teams performance, was a major advantage for the Good Guys on Saturday.
2. The offense came to play. We only punted once (twice, counting the safety) the whole game. Aside from occasions when we turned it over, we got points on every other possession. Kudos to Joe Cox for playing very well outside the pick-6. And for all you Richard Samuel haters, I'd sure hate to have to tackle the guy head-on. Give it a try some time yourself; the aspirin and neck brace are on me. And, of course, A.J. was tremendous, fumble aside. Not just the catches, but he also drew interference calls and opened up the middle of the field by drawing the safety on every play. Hanging 41 points on SC is no easy task, so there's much to be happy about there.
3. I've heard some grumbling about the D. Keep in mind that 10 of the 37 SC points came on the pick-6 and safety. Also, I'll have to tip my hat to Garcia, who I thought played a splendid game. He evaded a good rush for the most part and hit his guys underneath the zone. He was very accurate all day, albeit with a mostly short passing game. The short passes might have been a consequence of the consistent pressure from the DL, which got a couple of sacks while chasing this very athletic kid all over the field on a very humid day. He may be among the better QBs we face this year; I was more impressed with him than I was with OSU's Robinson. And don't forget that the feller on the sidelines wearing the visor has been known to call a good play now and again.
4. Bad news in losing Rod Battle for the season; by all accounts, a heck of a kid and a solid DE for the Dawgs. Still, I think that with Dobbs and Tripp vs the run and Cornelius Washington and Houston on passing downs, we've got a good set of DEs to work with,

even to the point where Marcus Washington and other LBs have been moved back to their original positions. With Tyson rotating in with the Fearsome Threesome DTs of the senior class, I think it's easy to see why we're so hard to run the ball on. And let's not forget the 4<sup>th</sup> senior in there, Wheeler, who's earned playing time from Rodney Garner, and that's not easy to do.

5. I was also very happy with the crowd. The fans were behind the Dawgs the whole game, even when we looked sloppy early. It sure makes a difference, both to the players and the recruits, when the stadium shows the team their love and support and doesn't take it as a personal affront when one of our guys gets beaten on a play. So all out there in the Nation, keep up the good work and you will be well rewarded. There's a lot to be proud of with this program and little that requires screaming profanities at teenagers or insisting that the coaches be fired when a play doesn't work. Thinking about how to do your own job better is a much more productive way to think about who needs to improve about what.

The one area where we need to sharpen our game is reducing penalties, and I'm sure nobody knows that better than the coaches.

The Forecast: Dawgs head to Hogtown to take on Petrino's Pigs. I'm like just about everyone in the state of Georgia: I hate Petrino for the way he set fire to the Falcons and walked away. I wish him nothing but the worst. We'll see how he fares in the SEC, where there are so many great coaches it's ridiculous; this ain't no Big East he's coaching in. I think that Arkansas took a step down when they ran off Houston Nutt and yelled Soueeeeee for Petrino to drop his bacon sandwich and come running home to Fayetteville. I mean, this is the place where Nutt got in trouble because some overrated kids' parents came in and whined because, e.g., Mitch Mustain was required to hand off to Darren McFadden and Felix Jones instead of passing the ball 40 times a game as a true freshman. I know that sort of thing happens in high school where whiney parents with a sense of entitlement can lobby the boosters club to get the coach fired, but in the SEC?? Well, OK, maybe at Auburn. But in Fayetteville, it looks as though Casey was not the only Dick in town. Meanwhile, watch for Mustain's clipboard-holding technique, which has improved greatly since he transferred to S. Cal, and remember that he was rated ahead of both Stafford and Tebow coming out of high school.

Good news: A big shout out to Josh Davis, who returns this week after rehabbing his shoulder for 9 months. With Sturdivant and Strickland out for the year, Coach Searels has had a 6-man rotation, with only Chris Davis off the bench; the other guys just aren't ready yet to meet SS's very exacting standards to get on the field. I love Josh—a truly great kid and great Georgia Bulldog. He had far fewer recruiting stars by his name than Mitch Mustain did, but has played his way past a lot of guys who had scout.com drooling. He's smart, dedicated, accepts coaching very well, and is highly admired within the team and coaching staff. And he's on track to graduate. Stacy Searels is a very demanding OL coach and you won't play for him just because you're big and strong and were a hotshot recruit. So I hope that folks out there appreciate what any OL needs to accomplish in order to earn playing time here, and give Josh a hand when he gets his name called on Saturday. It's a long way to Fayetteville, but he'll hear you.

Arkansas had last week off after feasting on their cupcake, 48-10 over Missouri State. I'm guessing that their opener is just as significant as Tennessee's great triumph over whoever they

played before losing to UCLA last week. It's tough to see a great guy like Lane Kiffin lose at home to a mediocre team from a cruddy league, but I know that the Tennessee fans are very forgiving about these things.

Oh yes, Arkansas. I'll confess that I don't know a lot about them except that their coach is a turd, that they've got a good little running back, that they've got a 6'-7" quarterback who really put the wood to Missouri State, and that Bobby Jr. and Nick Petrino are on the team and I'm sure don't get preferential treatment. Nutt left Petrino a pretty solid program, so I'm sure that he will have a decent talent base to draw on; this is not the usual rebuilding job that accompanies a coaching change, although any new coach will have a new system that requires a different sort of athlete from the ones he's inherited. (Note that I thought it would take Paul Johnson a few years to get guys who could run his option offense, so this rule can get you in trouble.) Their depth chart is listed at <http://cfn.scout.com/2/865562.html> should you care to familiarize yourself with their complete lineup. They appear to be small in the middle of their D, so I'm guessing that Samuel will do well running between, through, and beyond the tackles.

At the heart of it all, I think we've got better players than Arkansas has, and better coaches. We made a huge leap between week 1 and week 2, and some of our rookies are starting to get settled in, although I'm like most in that I can't wait to see Marlon Brown get some throws. If you want to see what kind of athlete he is, check out his youtube basketball reel at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kD4kmbzGCzk>. And while you're at it, search for Brandon Boykin's dunk contest videos. One of my favorite things about a new season is seeing who emerges from the redshirt and true freshmen, or older guys getting their first chances to play a lot. So seeing Smith, Charles, Boykin, Cornelius Washington, Artie Lynch (no catches yet but already a beast of a blocker), Samuel, Thomas, and other guys starting to break out is really fun and exciting to follow—and Joe Cox too.

OK, the Forecast: Although I've heard complaints about the playcalling and the defense, I think that the team is heading in the right direction. I actually thought that Bobo called an excellent game. Most of us could call the play known as "throw it to A.J. Green" pretty easily, but you can't do that every play, and he's always got a corner and a safety on him. I thought the run/pass mix was good and that the ball was distributed nicely. From what I can tell, opposing teams actually scout us and prepare for our tendencies, and so some of the plays we run don't work every time. So I don't expect touchdowns on every play, or every series. I expect that over the course of a game, we'll run plays that move the chains and give us a good chance to win.

Branden Smith has got to scare the daylight out of any offensive coordinator, and I'm guessing that the fun's just beginning with him (he takes a ton of snaps on D as well and is on all the special teams, and each of these positions requires reps in practice). On defense, we've stopped little guys like Michael Smith pretty well—Jevon Ringer and Kendell Hunter come to mind. Petrino's no Steve Spurrier, so I don't see Arkansas's offense running up too many points. So, I'm taking the Dawgs over the Hawgs, 34-24.

National Game of the Week: It looks to be a quiet week in terms of big matchups. The only game involving ranked teams is GT vs Miami. The most compelling game in the state of Pennsylvania is Temple at Penn State. The game everyone in the South has been waiting for since January is

Tennessee at Florida. The question is this: Whom do you hate more, Kiffin or Meyer? I hate both, though have hated Meyer longer. I want them both to lose every game they play. If Casey Dick has moved to Knoxville or Gainesville, or wherever Jeff Schultz lives, then he's got family around. The winner of this one's not too hard to pick since Tennessee is mediocre and UF has Charlie Strong, which I believe has had a lot more to do with UF's success the last few years than either Meyer or his quarterback, Jesus Christ. The biggest question is, how many timeouts will Meyer call in the last minute of the game when he's ahead by more points than UT will score all year in SEC games? So, I'll take the Gators, 49-3.