

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
October 31 Edition: In Jacksonville, 1-AA opponent from southern locality

The Recap: So, you are not impressed with a win over Vanderbilt. If you think that winning conference road games is easy, then drop Jim Tressel a line and see what he thinks after losing to a team that entered the game 1-5 with losses to Northern Illinois and Northwestern ("The Vandy of the Big 10, the League with 11 teams"). Vandy might not be much of a team this year, but I'm putting this one in the W column.

The Dawgs are now 4-3, and mighty Oklahoma is 3-3. I haven't heard people in Norman screaming for the heads of Bob Stoops and all of his assistant coaches, and calling for them to be fired, burned at the stake, forced to read Jeff Schultz columns, and otherwise persecuted through painful and unspeakable means; and in Norman, they scream pretty loudly about these things. I just checked, and indeed, they are not as angry about their team as are UGA fans (see < <http://www.soonerfans.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?s=272af156acee70124218d29e0e86bf0f&f=2>>). You might say, but OU has lost its starting QB; to which I say, last year we lost one-fourth of our team to season-ending injuries and people called the season the greatest disappointment in the history of sports. All that for a 10-3 team, which is looking pretty good these days.

It was good to see Quintin Banks on the field yesterday. He's one of those guys who has been injured since he got here. If he can get healthy, he'll be a nice addition to the safety rotation, if his big hit in the second half is any indication of what he can do for us. I do hope that one day Akeem Hebron, a terrific kid who was in the wrong place at the wrong time and took his suspension, and then suffered a horrible ankle break last year, will be able to take the field for the Dawgs eventually as well.

Speaking of injuries, a lot of folks in the Dawgnation were very indignant last year when Stafford and Moreno left early for the NFL. The message board consensus seemed to be that they were carpetbaggers who just used UGA to prepare for the NFL and left as soon as they could, and thus were some sort of self-centered traitors to the cause. I wonder what Sam Bradford is thinking about his decision to return to college these days. He might not play again this season, and will probably have to return next year to get his credentials back for the NFL draft. Last year he'd have been a top 5 pick, possibly even #1 overall, and would have already bought mama that new house. So were Stafford and Moreno really such bad guys for leaving a year early for contracts that will set them up for life, assuming they don't have 10 children out of wedlock, get married without a pre-nup, buy 25 Lamborghinis, support an entourage that could fill Sanford Stadium, and invest with friends in exciting new business opportunities?

I watched the Florida-Arkansas game, while flipping to the USC-ND game during commercials. Briefly, on Matt Barkley, whom I saw for the first time: Based on his size and hype, I assumed that he was Stafford-esque in his ability. But he's got nowhere near Stafford's arm-strength. When I see a QB with a 7 on his back, I anticipate that the ball will really zip out of his hand, but Barkley was throwing more in the Joe Cox velocity range. Meanwhile, on the other side of the ball, The Emu appears to me to be the second coming of Brady Quinn, currently backup to Derek Anderson, possibly the worst starting QB in the NFL. Quinn, for reasons that remain

inexplicable to me, remains a front-page staple of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, which is amazing given how little he's done. I hope that The Emu's Heisman overhype will go the way of whatever evolutionary forebear from which his species has emerged, even as he still lumbers the earth.

The UF-ARK game was pretty interesting. First, Florida looked very mortal. The Hog defense really held their O in check. As they always do, Florida won because their defense is so fast and well-coached. I've seen Mallett play a few times and he's shredded every defense except Florida's and Alabama's. Florida made Mallett look shaky, even playing without Spikes, their best player (and taking into account that Arkansas played without Smith, their best RB). Florida's defense is just off the charts.

Their offense looked very mortal, however. All this with the Tebow Rules at work. First, his celebrations were even noted by the broadcasting team as being subjected to different officiating rules. I guess that St. Tim is just so excitable that we can't flag him for fist-pumping and, to quote Mr. Hale, when he is prone to "set off bottle rockets, do an Irish step dance and take a few swings at a Hog-shaped pinata." It wouldn't be fair to God and country to harness his great enthusiasm and holy spirit. But the rule does get enforced for Rantavious Wooten, who made a tremendous catch and assisted gravity by spinning the ball when he released it toward the ground. 15 yards, unsportsmanlike conduct. The excessive celebration rule has got to be the most unevenly enforced rule in college football and really needs to be re-examined. There also should not be Special Players who have their own set of rules because they are so special. During the Florida-Arkansas game, the broadcast team was even prepared to make this point, because after a Florida player incited the crowd after a good play, Danielson said, "I wonder what A.J. Green is thinking right now?" and they had his LSU TD catch and celebration penalty ready to roll to confirm his point that the rule is enforced idiosyncratically at best.

Florida won the game because the officials threw two flags on their last TD drive that I can't imagine being thrown against teams not quarterbacked by St. Tim and played on his home field. The illegal hit called on the lineman was just absurd, because it was a fair hit and the Gator guy was about to level him; and nobody outside Gainesville is buying the interference call. Tebow played a pretty bad game (2 fumbles) but of course, who counts such things when it's the Mighty Tebow? According to ESPN, "The Superman nickname is getting old. How about a new one? Say, Mr. Fourth Quarter? He was at his best again in the fourth quarter Saturday in the 23-20 win over Arkansas, engineering a clutch drive in the final minutes for the game-winning field goal. The third-and-10 pass Tebow threw to Riley Cooper looked a lot like some of those precision throws he made in the SEC Championship Game last season. Tebow just has a way of willing the Gators to wins." And the refs just have a way of enabling that will.

Speaking of officiating, I'm getting really tired of seeing WRs plead for an interference call on every catch they don't make. I'd like to see a 15-yard penalty called when WRs make their "throw the flag" sign to get the official to call interference. I'm sure that all 3 of my readers will begin picking up this appeal and working toward positive change in society.

Last thing on the Tebow Rules: The broadcast team (which included Gary Danielson, who I think is the best college football announcer ever, although I like Blackledge too) noted that the

Mighty Tebow normally studies film for five hours a day, but during his recovery from his concussion, he neither watched film nor read, presumably his comic books. Football practice itself takes 20 hours a week, plus pre-practice taping and dressing, unofficial meetings, post-practice locker room stuff (loosely estimated at 2-3 hours per day total), and eating 3 meals (90 minutes conservatively). Oh yes, they play games too, which I'll assume consumes all day Saturday and half of Friday, plus Sunday for recovery. My question: Does this guy take any classes? Maybe he takes the class taught by famed UF professor John Hall (see <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1vrZTYyXTw>>), and maybe the Bong Hits for Jesus movement has more interesting origins than we previously suspected. But seriously, does this remind anyone else of Matt Leinart and his infamous Ballroom Dancing class taken as his only academic class during his final semester of eligibility? At least Leinart was a 5th year senior who was just hanging around to play football, but Tebow's supposedly still a college student. The announcers commented on his film study habits as praiseworthy, but I've got to wonder if Tebow studies anything other than football as part of his education at the University of Florida.

I'm guessing that, if there's a newspaper in Blacksburg, VA, St. Simons has already posted [[[[[[[[[[[28-23 hahahahahahahahaha]]]]]]]]]] (but really, there doesn't appear to be a daily newspaper left in the entire state of Virginia). This guy is like the dog whose selective diet of other dogs' turds gives his urine a unique aroma, and he goes about peeing on every tree in the forest to establish his territory. We can only hope that one falls on him, and no one will hear the sound.

Oops, sorry, I forgot that I was recapping the UGA-Vandy game. As always, I'll cede analytic authority to the experts. I know as much as football as I do about the economy. I watch football, and I apparently own some money, or at least some pieces of paper that say I do, but have no idea of how either one works, or why my money is worth one amount one month and a different amount the next, and has yet a different value if I try to spend it overseas. From my seat on the couch, I thought that the team sucked it up and played the game they needed to win. There was even a semblance of a running game, especially in the fourth quarter when we were playing ball control and needed one, although Vandy and Florida are two different stories. As always the Butler and Walsh combo executed well, and they are so reliable that I'm mystified as to how Blair missed a FG vs. LSU. One observation about our special teams: Even when he's not breaking long ones, Boykin is a remarkable kick return man. There are lots of fast and elusive guys on football fields, but returning kicks seems to require a unique ability to see the field and make snap decisions about when to use the burst, and he's got it. Even on his relatively short returns, he gets yards that don't seem available. He's a great asset to the team both on special teams and in the defensive backfield. Also, a shout-out to my Player of the Game, Prince Miller, who's taken a beating from writers and fans for his play vs. Tennessee, but whose punt returns Saturday gave us the field position we needed to put points on the board.

After A.J.'s great TD catch-and-run, I got a little excited and woofed a couple of times, but Mrs. Butts flagged me for excessive celebration and I had to watch the ensuing kickoff from behind the couch.

Football is such an incredibly emotional game, perhaps the most so of any sport. I still maintain that the celebration call against A.J. that gave LSU a short field, TD, and UGA a topsy-turvy

loss, led to the flat performance against Tennessee. Without that call, and assuming a longer field, LSU would need to have gone into drop-back passing mode, which is not their strength, and I don't see them scoring in the last minute. We then go to Knoxville with a winning streak and top ten ranking and plenty of momentum, and it's a different game. I'm not one to reconstruct a hypothetical history to replace the real one, but I don't think there would have been what has widely been described as a humiliation at the hands of the most egregious person in public life today. The team got its emotional mojo back yesterday, and apparently Bobo's move to the sideline helped get the team jacked up to play. I'm hoping that with two weeks to rest and prepare, and with UF playing a tough one yesterday and with luck a tough one next week, we'll have the proper mindset to take them on with passion.

Bonus: The Dawgmeister's Midseason Heisman Trophy Ranking

I've filled out my ballot, and am waiting to be included among the official Heisman voters as an unaccredited and unread blogger. Perhaps my unique perspective, unbiased perspective, and infallible reasoning process will earn me an invitation. Not to be used for wagering purposes.

1. A.J. Green: The best player in the best conference.
2. Terrence "Commander" Cody: The most dominant defender in the best conference
3. Rennie Curran: Because this is my list, and I say so
4. Colt McCoy: Because he's got such a cool name
5. Jacory Harris: Because he's a big reason Miami is back
6. Ndamukong Suh: Because he probably goes by "King Kong" in Nebraska, not "A Boy named Suh"
7. Tyrod Taylor: Saturday's loss to Tech definitely sinks his case, but I think he's pretty under-rated
8. Eric Norwood: Because he's a beast
9. Drew Butler: Because he's the nation's best punter, on a team that needs it
10. Greg Paulus: Because he's the best ex-Duke point guard currently playing QB at a major college, and because it will really piss off David Hale, if he actually stoops to read The Dawgmeister

When UGA played Purdue in a bowl game several years back, and the QBs were Quincy Carter and Drew Brees, if you'd told me that one of them would eventually be an NFL Hall of Famer, the last guy on the field I'd have picked would have been Brees. Yet another reason the Dawgmeister's forecasts are for entertainment purposes only.

The Forecast: The Dawgs are off this week, and so am I. Your Dawgmeister does have a day job, and he will be out of town from Thursday-Tuesday and pretty jammed up before and after the trip. So there will be no forecast issued during the bye week. In honor of Urban Meyer, the Dawgmeister will refer to himself in the third person for the remainder of the Forecast. The Dawgmeister sees the off-week as a big advantage for the Dawgs, both for the R&R (and, thank goodness, no one was injured in the Vandy game) and the preparation time. Arkansas's defense gave UF's offense all it could handle, and they're not better than we are. (Incidentally, the SEC is the only conference in the nation with two defensive coordinators named Willie: Martinez and Robinson of Arkansas). So The Dawgmeister believes that we can give UF the willies along the same lines that Arkansas did. Hitting Tebow does seem to be the key to slowing UF down, and

we've got plenty of time to study how other teams have attacked them and gameplan a strategy that enables pressure on the QB and stopping the dive play. Our offense vs. their defense is the hardest part of this game to predict optimistically. The key to our success will be to punt long and give UF long fields; avoid turnovers; perhaps create some, which we've had trouble doing yet which UF generously provided vs. Arkansas; get good field position with our own return game; and have Walsh convert when we're past their 40 and can't get into the endzone, something that Arkansas didn't have and that cost them a win in Gainesville. With all that working, the Dawgs take it, 16-14.

National Game of the Week: Tennessee at Alabama: These games really force the Dawgmeister to think which coaches he hates the most. On Saturday, for instance, he found himself rooting for Arkansas, whose coach's guts he decidedly hates, to beat Florida, whose coach he hates considerably more. And now it's Kiffin or Saban. This one's not even close, even though the Dawgmeister can't stand Saban. When Saban left the Dolphins for Alabama, the Dawgmeister heard an interview with a Miami reporter who is reputedly the Voice of Reason in South Florida, not a guy to rant and rave or go to extremes. He said that Saban was despised in the Miami area because he came in talking all about accountability, and then bolted blaming everyone else for everything that went wrong. He's hated every place he's left: Michigan State, LSU, and Miami, regarded as entirely self-serving and egomaniacal. Just as surely as he's worshipped everywhere he goes. But compared to Kiffin, he's Mother Teresa. According to Sunday's AJC, "**Tennessee's Lane Kiffin overshadows high school games:** Tennessee coach **Lane Kiffin** was the biggest story in metro Atlanta football Friday. Fresh off last week's blowout win over UGA and a declaration of a recruiting war for the state's top high school talent, Kiffin hogged the spotlight while visiting recruits Friday. He landed in a red helicopter in a field next to the Stephenson-M.L. King game on ESPNU." Really, how dickish is this guy? And he says he does all this to take pressure off his team? Tide, 35-14.

National Game of the Week, Oct. 31: USC at Oregon looks to be the week's biggest game not played in Jacksonville (runnerup: Texas at OK State). The Dawgmeister is going to take the Ducks because the Dawgmeister is tired of USC losing games and immediately vaulting back into the top 5 ahead of a dozen other 1-loss teams that play tougher schedules, so the Dawgmeister hopes that Oregon whips them, and whips them good, as Devo would surely say, and takes USC out of the BCS, unless Carroll goes on a campaign to get them included because, really, nobody can beat them. Oregon, 28-24.