

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
October 3 Edition: Hosting the Bengal Tigers of Louisiana State University

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

Disclaimer #2: Apply Disclaimer #1 in particular for my National Game of the Week forecast because, in fact, I really don't know what I'm talking about.

The Recap: Well it was quite a day at Sanford Football Stadium and Water Theme Park. First, a tip of the hat to the folks who maintain the football field. The field took so much water that I wondered if anyone would be able to get any kind of footing at all, but for the most part guys seemed to be able to make their cuts and pivots without falling down or slipping, i.e., without looking like me out there. The main problem following from the rain seemed to be the slippery ball. So a big round of applause to the field crew and all the work they have done to establish such an excellent drainage system between the hedges. And the stands drained remarkably well too, as evidenced by the lovely waterfall effect down all of the staircases, which I thought might wash me away when I headed for cover before kickoff. So along with the great beauty of Sanford Stadium, the infrastructure is in great shape, and all of the electronic gizmos reminding us of the stadium sponsors performed flawlessly. A great performance by the Stadium and all who designed it and maintain it.

The Crowd: Another impressive performance by the Dawg Faithful. First of all, they showed up on a night when it looked as though the stadium might float away, and stayed through the last play. Even when we fell behind and there could have been a lot of grumbling and moaning, the crowd really stayed behind the guys and I think helped to elevate their play when they needed to make something happen. Stick with these guys and they will reward you, so keep up the good work. Apparently the call-in shows were full of the nattering nabobs of negativity afterwards, but at least during the game, the Faithful were behind the team, where they belong.

The Game: This was not one of the program's greatest performances of all time. It was a much tougher game than I think most of us anticipated. Obviously the weather is a great equalizer and so can neutralize whatever advantages the team with the better players might have. And maybe the footing at the line of scrimmage was not so great; it's hard to tell from my seat. But we just had trouble getting traction offensively and so had to tough out a very difficult win against an opponent that came to play.

But we showed the trait that I think might make this team special, and that's resilience. Once again we fell behind and came back to win. We again blocked a kick that would have changed the game. Not everything worked to perfection, but we're 3-1 and there are not many unbeaten teams left, even at such an early stage of the season when most contending teams have been feasting on cupcakes. If you think that wins are automatic just because you're ranked higher or favored, how about checking in with Cal, FSU, Ole Miss, Miami, Penn State, and a whole lot of others and seeing what they think. Scholarship limits really do even out the talent base and make every team competitive. So I take my wins and am pretty happy about them, even as many Dawg fans who surround me complain that we don't win with the right style points or point spread. Just

about every team has good coaching and good enough players to win just about any game, as S. Cal shows annually with their roster full of NFL coaches and 5-star recruits and losses to bottom-dwelling teams.

On the way out of the stadium an ASU fan reminded me that they'd made the trip without their regular kicker, and AJ's block of the field goal was one of his many plays-of-the-game. Sorry to seem unsympathetic, but we're playing without our starting left tackle and a top reserve OL and starting DE, and last year lost over 20 guys to season-ending injuries. That's why you keep recruiting—you never know when a guy will go down and somebody will have to step up. Same goes for Tebow. I always hate to see guys get hurt, but if he has to sit, then his team needs to play without him, same as we did last year with so many guys out, and same as we are doing this year with guys out. If it's not an excuse for us—any many of our fans were very unforgiving for not going unbeaten last year because we had Stafford and Moreno but 20+ guys out with injuries—then it can't be for other programs either.

The Heisman: This year is shaping up interestingly Heisman-wise. Sam Bradford essentially hasn't played yet. Tebow has put up pedestrian stats, and it's a stat-driven award (though people seem to make an exception when it comes to Tebow); and now he's banged up. Colt McCoy is playing well and might have begun to establish himself as the frontrunner, although we'll see how he does once the competition ramps up. Best, the Cal RB, had some followers but Cal got killed by a run-of-the-mill Oregon team. My Joe Cox campaign might have gotten derailed by the ASU game, which was solid but included 2 picks. Eric Berry is a fantastic player but DBs almost never get serious support, and UT appears to be in for a long and mediocre season. So: What about A.J. Green? He dominates every game (not the OK State game where Cox was having trouble getting him the ball following the opening series and the flu started to kick in). He's thrilling to watch and makes catches other guys can only make in their dreams. Why not AJ? He's the best player I've seen this year and I think may be the most dominant player in the country; he's really carried our team and we're winning. AJ for Heisman? Let's start talking about it.

Just two brief shout-outs: To Blair Walsh, for his deep kickoffs, flawless fieldgoals, and icy demeanor under pressure. All of y'all already know about him, but he's a great guy and I'm really happy for him personally and for the team that relies so heavily on him. And also to Brandon Wood, #97, who got his first action of the year. Another terrific young man with a smile that lights up the room. Brandon came in as a stud DE recruit, national top 5 and one of our very first commits in his class, but has been hurt a lot since arriving. He's also a bit of a 'tweener in terms of size and shuttled between DE and DT (mostly to fill a need inside, like any good team player) before accepting his status as a reserve DT. I thought he might actually sit out the year following shoulder surgery in the spring, but there he was in the 4th quarter when we needed stops and he helped to get them. Welcome back B-Wood, and let's hope that you continue to make big contributions to the program.

The D: I hope that Saturday helped to quiet the Free Willie chatter for a while. An outstanding job all night by the D, even though that ASU RB had some nice runs in there. I don't know how good ASU really is on O, and the conditions undoubtedly kept both O's from opening up, but once again the D really clamped down in the 4th quarter when we needed it most. So

congratulations to Coach Martinez and the boys, and let's hope that they've found the right personnel and schemes and are ready for the rest of the league schedule. We do seem to have some emerging stars—Bacarri Rambo sure seemed to be everywhere making plays. Also lots of action for Nick Williams, Sanders Commings, and a few other guys who've played their way into the rotation.

The O: The OL didn't really seem to be opening holes, even though Caleb King got 5 yards per carry and, aside from the fumble, ran hard and tough. Samuel is not what you'd call a fancy runner—it's straight ahead for whatever he can get. King seems much better able to find or even create a hole. It'll be interesting to see how they juggle the RB rotation, not only this year but in the next few, given that we have no juniors or seniors in the rotation and there are other guys trying to play their way onto the field. I thought the OL protected Cox pretty well in general, but thought they'd do more for the running game. I'm sure that Coach Searels has taken note and will adjust for next week. Coach Richt called the OL out for under-performing vs. ASU, so I'm sure they'll have an educative week of practice preparing for LSU.

On the sidelines: We did not have a great number of recruits at the game, but then we don't need many at this point. Guys I saw included Michael Bennett, Brandon Burrows, and TJ Stripling, all already in the fold. Also Jawuan James, a recent Alabama OL decommit who I think is now very interested in UGA. Christian Green, the all-world WR from Tampa was here, and I have it on good authority that, contrary to internet chatter, he is not a silent UF recruit but is very open among all his finalists, and Saturday was an official visit to UGA. Another guy who may not yet be widely known is Dominique Swope, a junior RB from Sequoyah who's getting a lot of interest from our coaches and who's been at both home games this year. And Conner Boyett, a DE from Madison County who's been offered as a preferred walkon for next year while also considering full scholarships from a few other places.

Rumor of the week: Michael Adams will replace Myles Brand in the NCAA office, and he will be replaced as UGA president by "Sonny Do" Perdue. As with my other forecasts, this one's not for wagering purposes. Can Zell Miller as System Chancellor be far behind?

The Forecast: A confession: I think pretty highly of Les Miles. This admiration goes back to well before T. Boone Pickens rebuilt the OK State stadium in his own image and it was one lumpy little set of facilities, and Miles came in as their coach and almost immediately had a very mediocre program competing with OU and beating them. The initial impression in the SEC was that he won with Saban's talent and so people wondered if he could really coach, but in my view he'd proven that long before going to Baton Rouge. He's a tough, smart guy who can recruit and get his guys ready to play. The national impression is that Boone bought their success, but it started with Miles before they could afford better players.

LSU had their own squeaker last week, and Coach Richt has said that both teams have a lot to prove next weekend. LSU seems to have their usual strengths reversed, with their D vulnerable but their O putting up points. Their QB throws a nice deep ball and their RBs have not really dominated, which is not good news for the Good Guys unless this week brings some major adjustments. The upside for UGA is that Justin Houston really looked good vs. ASU, and that makes quite a difference in what opponents need to do in terms of double-teaming our DL

elsewhere. With a dryer field, Cox should grip the ball better. He said he's got small hands which affects his passing, and on Sunday Troy Aikman said how poorly even he threw a wet ball, and Tom Brady obviously had trouble with it as well vs. the Falcons. I'm hoping that the dryer conditions help Joe return to form. Teams that don't double cover AJ are crazy, which will open up the field for some of the guys who are starting to make impressions, like Wooten. It'll be a tough game, or my name's not Wally Butts. I'm taking the Dawgs, with Blair Walsh tipping the advantage to us, 30-24.

National Game of the Week: OU at Miami. At OU they're still honked off about losing to Miami in the Orange Bowl 25 years ago—sorta like the way that ESPN's Mark "Hawaii over Georgia" May still hates the Dawgs over a game from 30 years back. I picked Miami to beat VT last weekend and they proved me wrong, and they'll drop another one to the Sooners. OU, 31-21.