

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast:

Tony Barnhart: Georgia Tech is brimming with confidence as it goes for its second straight win over the Bulldogs. Georgia, meanwhile, just doesn't seem to have any answers after last week's meltdown against Kentucky. Athletically, Georgia should be able to hang around but there is no evidence that the Bulldogs can handle a tough, physical football game for four quarters. That is exactly what Georgia Tech will give them. **Georgia Tech 38, Georgia 21.**

Mark Bradley: Georgia Tech has played 11 games, Georgia 10. And I've seen nothing to make me change my mind. When they meet two days after Thanksgiving, Tech will win again. . . . The Jackets are going to score points on Georgia, a lot of points. Maybe not 45 again, but close to it. I don't see Georgia's defense being able to get off the field. Key numbers: Tech is 19th nationally in time of possession; Georgia is 90th. Tech will move and keep moving, and Georgia doesn't have Matthew Stafford and Knowshon Moreno to counter this time. . . . The Jackets will have the best pass rusher on the field in Derrick Morgan, and Georgia will, as we know, turn the ball over under duress. I don't see Georgia stopping Tech's offense, and I don't see Joe Cox and Co. being able to respond over four quarters. Georgia has had some inspired moments this season, but Tech has had an inspired season. I was impressed by Georgia against Auburn, but I've been impressed by the Jackets for nearly three months. It will be close for a half, and then it won't be so close. **Tech 42, Georgia 27.**

Jeff Schultz: PETA has had a busy week. You probably read that the organization wants Georgia to replace the late Uga VII with an animatronic dog or a costumed mascot, because apparently a real bulldog's heart just can't take it. Dudes, have you seen this team? No species can take it. It wasn't an asteroid that caused the extinction of dinosaurs, it was a Willie Martinez game plan. It's about to get worse. The Dogs had a better team last season when Georgia Tech rang up 45 points. Losing to Kentucky doesn't project improvement. Real research: 26 turnovers have led to 102 opponent points. Maybe it's cataracts? No matter. It'll be a Tech feast. Jackets cover 7.

St. Simons, St. Simons, wherefore art thou St. Simons?

Well now, that's more like it. I missed most of the Kentucky game, only getting back to my hotel room in time to see the fourth quarter when the wheels fell off the wagon. Mrs. Butts had set the game to record, but there was a malfunction and I didn't get to see the good parts, so I had to fire her. But I gathered from the fallout in the days following that the game epitomized the whole season of breakdowns, decision-making, game preparedness, and general lack of intelligence, knowledge of football, effective practice and game planning, tackling, blocking, intensity, focus, coaching, and playing. As Tony, Mark, and Jeff all attest, no way we were going to beat the mighty Pests from the Flats and their downhill running game at their magnificent stadium, which they might even fill for this showdown, provided enough UGA fans showed up.

The opening drive was one of my favorite parts of the season—don't even pretend you're going to pass, just rip off big gains between the tackles play after play. I'd have been happy if we'd run

on every play the whole game after watching us dominate the line of scrimmage as we haven't done against a real opponent (Tennessee Tech doesn't count) in forever, it seems. Said Paul Johnson on Sunday, "They beat us up pretty good physically (on) both lines of scrimmage. We've got a lot of guys beat up and banged up today." Even the penalty at the goal line on the opening drive was irrelevant, and I'm sure Dawg fans everywhere groaned that we had again shot ourselves in the foot with a dumbass play when we needed precision. But no problem, an untouched TD run on the very next play. It just don't get any better than that. Ditto the beginning of the second half when GT came right out and scored on a big play and people began rerunning last year's second half in their minds. But then Caleb blasted through the middle and left their secondary in his dust and we had our mojo back. I loved this game for so many reasons, and our intensity and resilience were a big part of it. This team has not had great four-quarter focus this year, and it's kept us from having a season to remember, but I do think that with so many guys returning on offense, we've got reason to be optimistic for next year. Make that great reason. The Dawgmeister's cup is always half-full, if not downright overflowing.

Players of the game: Just about everyone, but a whole lot of guys stood out:

Caleb and Washaun, obviously. I saw Ryan Williams of VA Tech earlier in the day and he's terrific, but as true freshmen RBs go, I'm not trading Washaun for anyone. And does anyone out there still consider Caleb King a bust? The kid's been a warrior all season, from his broken jaw performances, to his pass protection pancakes, to his tough runs. Yesterday we saw the tandem at its best, and I think that the foundation for next year's run for the SEC East title is in place. Florida will lose a ton of talent all over their roster and will have to adjust to a very different sort of QB, so the Race to the Roof of the East will be wide open, and I like what we've got in place to get there. As we showed Saturday, we don't need David Greene or Matt Stafford back there when we can pound the ball between the tackles, so whoever wins the QB job can ease into it while we run the ball as the centerpiece of the offense.

Shaun Chapas: A big part of the success of the astounding yardage totals from the RBs. Shaun played about as well as a UGA fullback has played in the last decade, and we've had some great ones—all this with zero carries.

The OL: These guys really caught fire and gave the RBs the space they needed. They gave us the sort of dominating performance they've been building toward the last half of the season, and are the foundation for next year's run to glory.

The TEs and WRs for their blocking: Often overlooked, this part of our game had to click for the RBs to get yardage past the line of scrimmage. Great job. And I'm sure you've noticed that everybody on the O except Cox and Moore will return, and we beat Auburn and GA Tech without A.J. Green, the guy who opens up the running game by forcing safeties to the outside of the field. Kentucky, well, I didn't see the game but it was turnovers in the second half that killed us there, from what I hear tell. Fix that, and run the ball like this, and I like our chances.

The DL: These guys haven't allowed anything up the middle all year, and again shut down a big-time runner on Saturday—Dwyer is one tough honcho. We'll miss the Big 3 seniors next year, but have repped in a lot of young guys who should be ready for their turn.

Two other guys especially: Rennie Curran, whose tackling could serve as the basis for a training film. I fear he may make the jump to the NFL, and we should applaud him and thank him for everything he's done at UGA, instead of taking it personally that he might see the need to take care of his family rather than play another year between the hedges. (Red States are all about family values, right?) Reshad Jones also played a magnificent game. It seems that his entire reputation as a poor tackler is based on a single play in the GT game last year. He should have made that one, as he knows, but I think he's been an outstanding player for UGA on the whole, and yesterday he was tremendous. It'll be interesting to see what he decides for next year, and how the safety rotation shapes up this spring and next fall when Ogletree arrives. A special shout out to Quentin Banks, who hasn't played much because of injuries and was thrown into the mix when Evans went down, and held his own when it mattered most.

I'm pleased to say that since we never punted during the game, I can leave Drew Butler off the Player-of-the-Game list for once.

Coaching: Any complaints? Seems we hit on all cylinders with both game planning and game execution. We could have tackled Demaryius Thomas better, but then he's been breaking everyone's tackles all year. Still, all signs point to a shakeup in the offseason, although I think it will be less radical than some of the fan base believes is called for. David Hale provides yet another of his excellent reports on the future of the coaching staff at <http://dawg-extra.blogspot.com/2009/11/latest-on-coaching-rumors.html>, and I always defer to him on the details of just about anything Dawg-related.

One thing that nobody's said much about is how much the RBs have improved this year, and how that might be a function of the coaching. Bryan McLendon's head was on the fans' chopping block for much of the season, with claims that he was in over his head, which might mess up the "chopping block" metaphor, but this is a sports blog, so who cares? People have said that Mac is an illustration of Richt's poor judgment in hiring assistants, but it's hard to view B-Mac's coaching right now as anything but impressive. The RBs have improved dramatically over the course of the season, and he's the RB coach. Got to give B-Mac some credit for the performance of the guys toting the ball over the second half of the season, with an assist from Searels and his guys, even though many fans seem reluctant to recognize Bryan's coaching this year as an asset.

But defensive coordinator seems to be the big question mark, and even Martinez doesn't sound too confident he'll be in that role next year. A couple of possibilities if he gets dismissed or demoted: Move Garner up to the coordinator's spot. RG is a pretty smart guy and is as hard-nosed as they come. He's a terrific recruiting coordinator and position coach. I don't see myself as having any credentials for criticizing the coaching of someone who actually understands football, which I don't, but if I have a complaint about Martinez's approach, it's that he seems cautious. We rarely blitz, relying instead on the front four for pressure and dropping guys back into coverage. That's great when the front four get to the QB, but when they don't, there's no pressure, and it seems that we've gotten burned when we don't pressure the QB. So I wonder what kinds of conversations go on in the meeting rooms about that strategy, and whether Garner as a DT guy would do things differently than does a DB guy like Martinez, given how differently they might see the field from their positions and how they're played. The other possibility seems

to go outside and bring someone in, with Kirby Smart being an obvious guy to go after. I do trust Damon Evans and Mark Richt as people and as sports and football guys and think they know what they're doing, so keeping an eye on this situation will be a big part of the down time between now and signing day.

Dawg Doots:

With A.J. missing three games, I have to reshuffle my Heisman ballot and put Colt McCoy at the top. He's had a great career, broke David Greene's record for winning games as a starting QB, and finished strong. Seems only fair to give Tebow, Bradford, and McCoy one apiece; I don't see Tebow having done so well this year that you'd give him a second Heisman. His stats get inflated because he throws so many shuttle passes for TDs, but they're effectively handoffs that he gets credit for as TD passes. So Colt gets my vote, and I say this as a guy who pulls for Oklahoma. Now all I need is for someone to count it.

I find Urban Meyer's weepy appearances over Tebow's departure to be a bit weird, and wonder how he'll respond to the poor schmucks who play QB and don't convert heathens in the offseason or get first downs on third and short or whatever else makes Tebow so special that Meyer breaks into tears just thinking about him.

Joe Cox is a good QB when everything around him is clicking. Actually I suspect that he's no worse than Buck Belue, even though people consider Buck to be one of the All-Time Dawg Greats, because he had Hershel Walker in the backfield with him, much as people consider Ringo Starr to be a great drummer because he was in the Beatles. If Hershel had signed with Auburn, I think that Buck and Joe would be regarded as roughly even. Joe sure looked good yesterday handing off to guys who got 339 yards running between the tackles.

Southern Cal beat 6-6 UCLA, which means they should be back in the Top Ten next week, and preseason #1 for next year.

On Saturday, Oklahoma beat their hated, nationally-ranked in-state rival to salvage a disappointing season and end at 7-5. The Sooner National really really hates losing, but instead of burning their coach in effigy and insisting he be fired, they're hoping he won't leave for Notre Dame.

Actually, an OU-UGA Bowl matchup would be a smart pairing, in whatever bowl game accommodates a pair of 7-5 disappointments, if existing conference arrangements don't preclude such things.

The Dawgmeister's 2009 Media Awards:

TV Colorman:

Best: Gary Danielson, followed by Todd Blackledge. Worst: Bob Davie, nobody even close, although my runner-up has to be Craig James, because he always tries to force the appearance of having a rapport with other announcers by laughing too much and calling them Pardner.

TV Play-by-Play:

The best of these guys are simply innocuous, but they all try to interject themselves into the part of the broadcast that involves expertise, so there's no winner. Worst: Tie between Mike Patrick (never to be forgiven for his atrocious performance during last year's College World Series; even UGA fans wanted to stone him to death for retelling, over and over and over, the story of Gordon Beckham making the last out at the CWS as a freshman and Perno telling him he'd be back blah blah blah) and Mark Jones, who brings out the worst in Bob Davie while being terrible on his own.

Newspaper writers:

Best: David Hale, with no one close.

Best Editor: David Ching (with a lifetime pardon for having attended Auburn)

Worst Writers: Jeff Schultz, followed closely by Mark Bradley

The Forecast: Alabama vs. Florida: Most people seem to be picking the Tide, although if Ingram is hurt, the task gets tougher for Saban. Outside Lane Kiffin and Bobby Petrino, Meyer and Saban are my least favorite coaches in the nation, and they're tied in my rankings, so I need to look for a tie-breaker to decide which team to root against, since I can't imagine myself in any world pulling for either of them. Just to shut up people who think that Tebow is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, I'll go with Bama. Tide, 23-21. But not for wagering purposes.