

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
September 12th Edition: Hosting South Carolina, The Gamecocks

Disclaimer #1: I've chosen to write this column under my *nom de plume*, The Dawgmeister, rather than my given name, Wally Butts, so that I can remain anonymous. If I listed my real name, St. Simons would be calling my house every hour and saying, [[[[[[45-42]]]]]] hahahahahahahaha. And who needs that? Besides, I've got a day job that takes up a lot of my time, and don't want to waste it reading the kind of email that shows up after a Tony Barnhart column on the web, e.g., St. Simons. I've already got a big enough ass—why have an even bigger one following me around?

Disclaimer #2: I am not a football expert. I once played 3 years of high school football, and 4 years each of track and basketball, and 1 year of college basketball; and coached 3 years of high school basketball and one of track, all long in the past and without distinction. I also coached a lot of youth league baseball/softball when my kids were young, which is even less relevant to my present status of dawg blogger. My high school actually ran the single wing when I was there, no kidding, even though it was anachronistic even way back then. The colleges I attended for undergrad and graduate studies were both Division 3 (small college); the school where I got my graduate degrees didn't even play football. So I have no greater expertise to back my opinions than.....well, the rest of y'all.

Disclaimer #3: These forecasts are for entertainment purposes only, and should not be used for the purpose of laying actual wagers.

The Forecast: It's hard to make this week's forecast without thinking back to the recent unpleasanties in Stillwater. Or the football game. I'm like just about any dawg fan in that after the first magnificent drive, I wondered what happened to our team. Here's my assessment, sent to a friend today after he sent me a link to [David Hale's report card on the game](#) (with some liberties taken for this column):

One reason I like David Hale is that he really works for his columns. I think the AJC guys are incredibly lazy in comparison (and I'm talking about you, Bradley and Schultz)-most of what they write requires almost as much thought as St. Simons puts into his online comments, or as [LeGarrette Blount puts into his postgame handshake](#). So even when I don't entirely agree with him (Hale, that is, not St. Simons), I think he's earned his opinions. He was at the game and all the press events so has a much better sense of things than I do from the couch. So I do respect that.

It's hard to disagree with any negative judgment too strongly when we lose and look bad doing so. Just some areas where I disagree, and you might not think much of my opinions here:

I thought that Samuel played well enough, and don't understand the negativity around getting 4.5 a carry, even if he wouldn't get many style point from those who prefer Reggie Bush or Knowshon Moreno. Change the context around his carries and people would be talking about how he moved the chains and ran tough between the tackles. He

also protected the ball well enough not to fumble, all running between the tackles (small consolation I'm sure, but critics on the web have been blasting him for using only one arm on the ball).

Hale was actually a bit generous to Cox, shifting blame to the coaches. I'm hoping that Joe C's play was a consequence of his illness and that he proves his doubters wrong on Saturday. The coaches have publicly expressed confidence in him and I hope it's well placed.

On coaching: I'm sure nobody's more disappointed in the coaching than the coaches themselves. An F- is a bit harsh but the results don't favor a high grade, even if it's offered from the sidelines by people who didn't play football (and I know you disagree with me on the value of criticisms of people who never played the game).

I think the D played well enough to win. End of story (for me, if not others).

So, as you can see, I feel as lousy as most in the Dawgnation about losing to OK State, and losing in a way that didn't generate much optimism. I wish we'd done some things differently, but there's not much we can do about that now that the game's over. I hope that I can persuade my dawgly readers that this game, awful as it might have been, does not doom the season. And who knows, it might provide the coaches and team with everything they need to know to get this thing right and get ready for the SEC schedule, beginning this Saturday. I can only urge dawg fans everywhere to get behind their team and coaches and believe that we can turn this season around, as we have done before.

I saw the SC win over NC State, and it was about as pretty a game as you could ask for, if you hate both teams. SC is one of the most puzzling programs in the country. They have had very few good teams ever, and yet their fan base remains incredibly loyal, packing a stadium every game that dwarfs T. Boone Pickens State University at T. Boone Pickens Memorial Stadium. No matter who their coach is—during my SEC tenure, Brad Scott, Lou Holtz, Steve Spurrier—they have terrible offenses, and that's with 2 offensive geniuses at the helm (Scott was a genius at FSU before disappearing at USC). But they've always had great defenses, as long as I've been in town. This year is no different. They looked tremendous vs. NCSU, which may not sound like much but I think is something that we should be worried about. Both of their DEs, Matthews and Geathers (who didn't play vs. NCSU), were heavily recruited by UGA; and probably other guys too, though I can't keep track of them all. I doubt if they'll give up a lot of points this year, even to good offenses, which presently we are not. (And speaking of DEs, I was happy to see Mike Lemon in the rotation and making a great interception for NCSU. I got to know Mike while he was at UGA and thought he was a great kid who internalized a tremendous amount of anger when his mom was murdered his freshman year that exploded in the worst of ways and resulted in his removal from the team. I'm sympathetic as hell for the kid he assaulted, but can only hope the best for Mike as he moves ahead with his life.)

OK, for all you Spurrier haters: I actually like the guy and always have. Who couldn't love a guy who assessed a fire in the Auburn library that destroyed 20 books by observing that "The real tragedy was that 15 hadn't been colored yet"? (Apologies of course to Auburn grad David Ching,

who along with Hale beats the snot out of any AJC sportswriter.) Anyhow, it's mystifying that a guy whose receivers were always 10 yards open at UF has yet to generate a passing attack at SC, even while putting WRs into the NFL who are as good as his UF WRs (Sidney Rice, Troy Williamson).

The good news is that I think our D is comparable to SC's. The DL bottled up the OSU playmakers pretty well except when the O or kickoff coverage team gave them short fields, or when Bryant made the kind of catch in the endzone that earns him All American recognition. All this has been rehashed so much over the internet that it's pointless to review again here. But the dawg D is coming to play and I think will again hold down S. Carolina's woeful O.

That brings us to offense and special teams, neither of which looked crisp on Saturday. I'm not sure what to expect of our O. Caleb King is returning, which is good news, even for everyone out there who's expressed negative views about Caleb's prospects for starring at UGA. I'm guessing that the coaches have talked about the limited number of WRs who played and the way we got away from the run (that's the maligned Samuel, who is also faulted for running too much). I'm sure they've told Cox to throw the ball away instead of running out of bounds with it when he's 10 yards behind the line of scrimmage. I think that a lot of soul-searching will take place this week and the team will dedicate itself to playing better. So let's hope that between film study and sheer will and dedication, the offense plays at a higher level this week than last.

For the team wearing white this week, I have no idea of what to suggest. I just don't think they've recruited offensive players so well. Garcia, for all his vaunted talent, looks like Zac Robinson lite—a nice athlete but not at this point a great quarterback, or even a very good one; and he's by far the best they've got. I don't see a lot of points coming from that O vs. our D.

Special teams: I doubt if Branden Smith will run balls from halfway back in the endzone on kickoff returns from now on. Butler may be the best in a long line of great punters we've had in the last decade or so. I was happy to see my guy Blair Walsh boot a long field goal, and if you've ever been in an Oklahoma wind (I used to live there, thus my dim view of OSU), you know it couldn't have been too easy. We're still not icing kickoffs by putting them in the endzone, and still not blocking well on kickoff returns, so I hope that improves. On the whole, I think our special teams showed improvement over last year and hope to see it continue to get better, online nattering to the contrary.

The Big Picture: I am pretty disappointed in the way the Dawgnation has handled this loss. **These are our guys, and we need to be behind them.** I think we'll take SC in a game that will lack offensive beauty and be won between the tackles. Every year this game is close, hard-fought, and low-scoring, no matter who's coaching or playing. Same this year, but even more so. So get out there in your red t-shirt and holler your lungs out (but please, all y'all who sit around me, have some respect for the women and children); these guys need to know that we have unconditional love and support for them and will scream like the dawg-hounds of hell unleashed on Saturday. Good Guys, 13-7.

National Game of the Week: USC (the other one) vs. OSU (the other one): Well, I don't like either program much. Carroll feasts on terrible competition in a rinky-dink league and still

manages to lose games while bragging about his team constantly (and by extension, his coaching) and getting unfailing love from writers and talking heads; and Tressell covers up sleazy methods and standards with a sweater vest and wire rimmed glasses. I've hated OSU much longer, going all the way back to the Woody Hayes era, when I attended a small Ohio college. But that doesn't matter, I've got a game to pick. Unless Barkley is a 30 year old disguised as a teenager, he will make mistakes playing against an actual defense in a really hostile environment. I think the advantage goes to OSU, playing at home vs. a guy who probably isn't any better than Stafford was as a rookie at UGA and so should find that defenders can indeed pick off his passes. So, let's take the Buckeyes.....27-21.