

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
November 7th Edition: Homecoming

The Recap: It's pretty obvious that the best team won the game. The question is, how did they get to be the better team? I've confessed many times that I don't understand the complexity of football nearly well enough to explain the actions and outcomes of the game. But I've got some help this time from Gary Danielson, who showed again on Saturday why he's the greatest color commentator in the history of the college game. Mrs. Butts was out of town, so I had the opportunity to have a day of guilt-free football watching. I flipped around to other games, watched OU-KSU, USC-OR, and UT-OSU among others, and the quality of the commentary was always much lower, focused on how a guy blew a coverage or which receiver the QB should have thrown to. But Danielson calls games on a much higher level so that I understand the game better, and not just the previous play. I'll amplify some of his observations to see if I can figure out what's going on here.

Early in the game, Danielson noted that UF had studied UT-UGA game film, because they were successful on misdirection plays to the outside. That helps explain a few things that I hadn't quite put together before. People have complained that they don't hear the names of our DTs enough, and have concluded that the DTs are overrated and not performing well. But Danielson helped to put that belief to bed. The DTs do control the center of the field, where nobody has run well on us this year, but teams are beating us by going wide and using misdirection to do so. They are avoiding our strength and finding weaknesses on the flanks. And they're doing it game after game.

So, that leads to the next question, why are we repeatedly prone to the same strategy? This question leads to an age-old dispute about what matters in football, schemes or basic blocking-and-tackling. If you watch an NFL game called by Tony Siragusa, he'll always say the game is simple and that it's about blocking and tackling—spoken like a true lineman. This guy played a dozen years in the NFL and has a Super Bowl ring, so I'll accept his view. But other commentators who also played the game talk about schemes—the spread, pro sets, cover 2, blitz packages, etc.—and how coaches win games with their scheming and play-calling within schemes. If Siragusa is right, then the schemes won't matter if we block and tackle better; that is, if we execute. But Danielson seemed to suggest that that won't matter if they're running plays toward a weak area and we aren't adjusting—spoken like a true quarterback. So, are our outside LBs and safeties losing games by covering poorly and not tackling, or are we in schemes that teams can take advantage of? Keep in mind that Rennie Curran is one of those outside linebackers.

And, I have to ask, why do too many QBs have career days against our defense? I assume that Willie Martinez knows more about football than I do, but I also assume that these are his questions to ask of the defense. I also assume that he does ask them, because the results have been poor and the fan base has been unhappy with the defense. I also know that what you and I write in blogs and comment sections of websites, and what others say to call-in shows, has little to do with internal conversations among the coaches. But donors are a different story. They lean on Damon Evans when they don't like what they see, and Evans has access to Richt. This is not to say that the boosters unduly influence the coaches; we're not at Auburn. Damon's his own

man and makes his own decisions, and ditto for Richt. But there is a vehicle through which influence may pass from the general fan base and its perspective down through the coaches, because it involves money, and the Athletic Association needs money to provide our teams for us. So I'm guessing that if Gary Danielson can make this observation on national TV, and the TVs are on in the luxury boxes, then the boosters are getting the same information I'm getting and are worrying that we are vulnerable in ways that we might be able to fix, but aren't.

A second way to understand why Florida is better is to look at the troubling pattern in penalties, which is hardly a unique observation. All teams commit penalties, and it's understandable when a true freshman tight end jumps before the snap count in a noisy stadium. But the dumbass personal fouls are starting to make me wonder. I have every confidence that the coaching staff is telling these guys not to hit people after the whistle or out of bounds, but our upperclass veterans and leaders continue to do this stuff. It's agonizing and mystifying to me and is obviously costing us too much yardage and the team too many opponents' gift first downs, and it's equally obvious that nobody's more perplexed than the coaches about why it continues to happen. The stadium steps are only so high, and you can run them only so often. How do you get kids to stop doing things that they've been coached not to do?

A third possibility concerns the difference in QB play. I'm obviously not the Tebow worshipper that the press seems obligated to be, but he's a good player. Danielson again was very illuminating on this subject. One reason I like him so much is that he doesn't mince words when it comes to a player's weakness, even Tebow who gets a free pass on just about everything from everyone else. Danielson said at one point that he thought the UF no-huddle approach was a bad idea because if he were coach, he'd want Tebow to directly address his players in the huddle before every play because he's a riveting and commanding leader. I agree with that; the other teenagers in the huddle do see him as a transcendent athlete whose mental toughness can be transmitted in a huddle (which does not excuse 50-year-old men like Mike Patrick, who say things like, "All you have to do is spend a few minutes with Tebow, and you're a better person."—really, Mike, you need to spend more time around people who aren't athletes or broadcasters. Tebow is not Gandhi.).

But Danielson also can explain why Tebow's pro potential is pretty limited by showing how low he drops the ball when he throws it and how NFL defenders will strip it so often that he'll be too risky to put on the field except in wildcat formations. Good QBs cock the ball by their ear and throw it with limited motion, but Tebow has to really rear back to make the throw. So Danielson can admire Tebow's qualities without overlooking his limitations, and do so without being disrespectful.

As much as I hate to say it, because he seems to be such a great guy, Joe Cox has not taken over the QB position the way we'd all hoped. He's got too many things working against him—too small to see the field or throw over linemen (Drew Brees can do it at about the same height, but has other qualities that compensate), not enough arm to hit the deeper throws when he needs to, not nifty enough to be a threat as a runner (some nice runs Saturday notwithstanding), and other limitations. So, I begin to wonder, what next for Cox and UGA in 2009? Next up is the Homecoming cupcake. We've effectively got another bye week with a scrimmage to see what we've got left for the season—4-8, or 8-4? Richt lifted Cox on Saturday before the game was out

of reach, so it's clear he's finally ready to consider options. Gray didn't look too good, although neither did Landry Jones in his first game for OU and now he's winning games for them. I don't attend practices or watch film (I do have a day job), so I don't know how well Gray and Murray and Mettenberger run a huddle or the offense. I do wonder, though, if the time has come for Richt to consider changing the QB, since Cox just isn't moving the team consistently and throws too many interceptions to rely on him to win games at a high level, which is now the expectation at UGA. On one of Cox's passes to the wing that got tipped—I can't remember whether it was the pick or not—Danielson said that the formation was correct but it's the QB's job to get the pass past the defender, and there were at least two times when this basic pass got tipped and according to Danielson should have made the throw. We've started several different tailbacks, and other positions have changed hands, even with high-profile players (e.g., Weston for Atkins). So is it time to see if someone else can play the position, thank Joe for his services to the program, and start looking at building momentum for next year, even if it means that Murray's season will only be a few games long? Stafford didn't really take the position until about November of his freshman year, and it laid the foundation for the following season where we were ranked #2 at the end and most of us feel should have been #1. Richt said over the weekend that it would be unfair to seniors to use the remainder of the season to lay next year's foundation, and that all decisions would revolve around winning games this year. But at 4-4, the team's not quite tearing it up under Cox, and 3 of the 4 remaining games are losable. We're in "stay tuned" mode, and it'll be interesting to see what the head coach decides is best for 2009.

I don't know about who should be the QB, only the coaches can say, and really only Richt can say. One of his greatest qualities is his loyalty and integrity. That's worked great when the wins seemed so easy and those qualities seemed to be part of why the team played so well. But something's not working this year, and the coordinators and QB are easy people to look to for blame. I think that Richt is in for some deep soul-searching between now and signing day. I'm glad he doesn't have the sort of revolving-door coordinators the way some coaches do (see Tuberville); I firmly believe that continuity breeds success (see Paterno). But if the continuity isn't realized in wins, then you have to figure out why and fix it. I'm sure nobody knows that better than Mark Richt, although the fix will require him to do something that goes against the strength of the relationships that are so important to his success.

Random thoughts:

Is it just me, or does Brandon Spikes look 35 years old?

That Riley Cooper is terrific. The one-hander in the endzone was an NFL catch. Interesting that he's probably a better NFL prospect than his more famous roommate.

It seemed at the beginning of the game, the broadcasters were prepared to feature A.J. Green at the expense of what was actually happening on the field.

Ignorance is bliss, which means that the happiest guys on earth right now are Jeff Schultz and Mark Bradley, who now have a week's worth of material for their snide, lazy, half-assed columns.

Would someone please tell Vern Lundquist to forget about the duck and learn how to pronounce Washaun?

Don't look now, but the Dawgs are tied for 2nd place in the SEC East, with two league games remaining. Last year, with the best QB and RB in the nation (and 20+ season-ending injuries), we also finished second in the SEC East.

Much as I hate to admit it, I thought that Tennessee's Halloween uniforms looked pretty cool. But I still hate Lane Kiffin.

Both Temple and Rutgers are now bowl-eligible. I say this because I used to live in that area and have friends who root for them, and because both programs were absolutely hopeless doormats before their current regimes arrived. I lived in Oklahoma when Bill Snyder turned Kansas State from the nation's worst team to an annual top-20 program. Now, Snyder did it in a way I don't like, which is to rely on junior college players who never graduate and couldn't get into a place like UGA. But he did it within what the rules allow. Always good to see someone walk into a hopeless situation and change expectations in short order, the way Schiano (RU) and Golden (TU) have done.

I noticed that Tebow is going to graduate in 3.5 years with a 3.66 GPA. As I pointed out last time, he does this without having any time to study (other than his 5 hours a day studying film).

Our kicking game again was terrific in every regard, but so was UF's, and they worked from better field position and so were able to pin us deep while we are primarily able to kick out of trouble.

I'll confess I was happy to see OR beat USC, just so we won't have Pete Carroll saying that when all's said and done, USC is simply the best team in the country, even though they have lost to a cupcake. It's beyond me that even when they lose to a cruddy team, they still are the top-ranked 1-loss team. Now they'll be the top-ranked 2-loss team I'm sure, even though they got destroyed by OR.

People seem bent out of shape by the black helmets and pants. To me, it was a gamble that didn't work. Lots of mine don't work either, but I don't have 10 million people watching my failures every day online and on ESPN.

David Hale is the greatest sportswriter in the state of Georgia, but really needs to explain why he thinks Andy Reid is a lousy coach. He sure gets good results. David, what about all that Brotherly Love?

Speaking of the Eagles, they have quite a nice collection of ex-dawgs: Chris Clemons, Reggie Brown, Will Witherspoon, Sean Jones, Max Jean-Gilles. I also caught glimpses of Danny Ware (Giants) and Asher Allen (Vikings) on Sunday. Jarius Wynn also plays for the Packers, but I didn't notice him in action. Conclusion: Root for the Eagles.

The Forecast: Tennessee Tech provides an interesting opportunity to see what we've got for the rest of the year. I'm not exactly rooting for a QB change, but if we're going to do it, this is the time, so that the QB can have some game experience before the tougher games arrive. Richt once replaced good-guy senior Tereshinski with young gun Stafford (albeit through the vehicle of an injury), so he knows how to make this decision. He seems unusually loyal to Cox, given that he's really let him run the team, even with mediocre results and lots of interceptions. But it's hard to say he's earned the position without reservation, or that it's not now time to look at alternatives, with a scrimmage vs. TTU to work out the kinks. In any case, Dawgs should stroll in a game that has little significance. Good guys, 45-10.

National Game of the Week: LSU at Alabama: In my Heisman ballot, I had Terrance Cody listed second after A.J. Green. I mean that sincerely. I think he's such a load that teams just can't get through the middle of the field, which means they must go elsewhere (and I do realize that this sounds like my earlier assessment of UGA's D, except that we have trouble covering the flats while AL has guys who apparently can shut down the whole field). It's also hard not to notice that ex-UGA player and assistant coach Kirby Smart is their defensive coordinator, and that they win on their defense. I think that LSU's O is a bit too spotty to outscore Alabama. Tide, 24-17.