

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast: AdvoCare V100 Independence Bowl Edition

Just a reminder of how seriously to take my forecasts: In my first column of the season, I said the following: “National Game of the Week: Alabama at Va Tech. Saban has never had back-to-back 10-win seasons and I think he won't do it this time either. While UGA is being demoted in the rankings after losing the starting QB and RB, the Tide lost QB Wilson and RB Coffee, who both might make NFL rosters this year; and yet they are consistently ranked in the top 5. I'm guessing that Wilson's loss has been underplayed because he was overshadowed by Stafford and others, but the guy produced and the new guy will need to show a lot to win 10 games. VT is tough at home and I think comes out the winner. Hokies, 21-17.”

Pretty good, huh? Glen Coffee was sure hard to replace in that backfield, and all Greg McElroy did was badly outplay the guy on Superman's pajamas when it mattered most. Saban's most cherished possession is his mirror, but it's hard to argue against his coaching ability. But no Oscar for his performance in *The Blind Side*—that goes to Ed Orgeron for Best Supporting Actor in an Ongoing Debacle:

“Comprised of 55 of the University of Tennessee's outstanding sophomore, junior, and senior students, the Orange Pride is a group whose primary duty is to promote The University of Tennessee—its strong academic programs, its rich traditions, and its winning athletic programs—to campus visitors and potential student athletes. Members of the Orange Pride welcome UT's guests, serve as tour guides, and assist the Undergraduate Admissions Office with student recruitment and the campus visit program. Orange Pride members are committed to recruiting academic and athletic champions!” Your daughter can fill out her application by going to <http://admissions.utk.edu/undergraduate/contact/applications/OrangePride.pdf>. Questions include:

1. What do you look like in a little black dress? (photo documentary evidence recommended)
2. How about an orange evening gown? (cleavage recommended)
3. How about neither?
4. What is the mileage on you, and how far will you go to get a commitment?

Much has transpired in the weeks since I last wrote. The fans got their way when Richt cleaned out the defensive coaching staff. I have no idea who's going to be running the D next year—if David Hale can only guess, what do you expect from The Dawgmeister?—but hope along with the rest of the Nation that we identify a guy who can do the job at a championship level. [Gary Gibbs](#), anyone?

Speaking of David Hale—enjoy him while you can, folks. It's hard to believe that he'll be a program beat reporter for Macon.com for the rest of his life. But the weather's a lot nicer down here than it is in Syracuse. Let's hope the AJC wises up and gets this guy on the payroll. If they're looking for ways to make cuts, [I can](#) recommend [a few](#).

And speaking of defensive coordinators, here's the announcement about Vic Koenning and Illinois: “Illinois has hired Kansas State co-defensive coordinator Vic Koenning to run its defense. Koenning said at a Friday news conference that Illinois has the talent to improve after

going 3-9 last season. The Illini defense also gave up a conference-worst 30 points a game. Under Koenning, Kansas State gave up 28.4 points and 349.9 yards a game last season. Koenning was 5-29 as head coach at Wyoming and he also coached at Clemson.” I don’t know about you, but I don’t get why this guy was regarded as such a catch. They fired a guy who gave up 30 points a game, and hired a replacement who gave up 28.4?? I wonder if K-State will replace Koenning with Willie Martinez, given that logic? In 2009 Georgia gave up an average of 26.4 PPG, below only the program record-high 26.6 in 1990. So, Koenning’s D gave up more PPG than the worst defense in UGA history, and we’re upset that he didn’t come to UGA? What am I missing?

The UGA running game is getting me pretty stoked. In case you’ve forgotten, check the highlight reel at [Washaun Ealey and Caleb King \(UGA\) vs. Georgia Tech](#) and tell me you can’t wait till next year, when these guys, the OL, and the OL reserves have had a year in the weight room, Sturdivant and Strickland are healed up and ready to go, A.J. is primed to raise hell in the secondary, and the Dawgs dominate time of possession and romp to the SEC title. It’s great to see Caleb King getting back the form that once had people wondering, [Is Caleb King The Next Herschel Walker?](#) Maybe not, but he’s sure looking good to me. Every time I watch his great 75-yard TD run vs. Tech, I marvel at how he simply picked his angle and turned on the jets—no jukes or spins, just burning through and past the Pest defenders in the open field. And Ealey looks tremendous out there and can only get better with experience and weight-room time. Go Dawgs!!! We run this state!!!! And this conference!!!!

“It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again ... who spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly.”~ Teddy Roosevelt

“He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.” ~ The Birthday Boy

Every time I read an internet commentator talk about how Coach Richt has fallen out of touch and is slipping and we need to get somebody in there who has more energy and vim and screams and throws his headset on the sidelines and can relate to younger players and can take charge and win every game by 30 or more points the way Georgia used to, I’m reminded of something that happened in Oklahoma during Coach Bud Wilkinson’s 47-game winning streak. About three-fourths of the way through the streak, the team played Kansas and only won by about 10 points. Sure enough, a “fan” wrote into the “newspaper,”¹ saying, Okay, we’ve seen enough; if OU can only beat KU by 10 points, it’s obvious that Wilkinson isn’t getting the job done, can’t keep up with the game anymore, and needs to be replaced with a younger, more dynamic coach who can get the program back where it needs to be. The more things change, the more they remain the same.....

¹ A form of reporting “news” from the 20th Century consisting of words (often spelled and punctuated correctly) printed on a medium known as “paper,” which was a product made from wood pulp and actually delivered by a car right to your house.

Congratulations to the Dawgs who recently graduated, several in 4 years: Joe Cox, Rod Battle, Stephen Braue, Ricardo Crawford, Bryan Evans, Andrew Jensen, Prince Miller, Mike Moore, Jeff Owens, Vince Vance, Marcus Washington, Kade Weston, and Tony Wilson. Note that these are mostly scholarship players, not walk-ons of the sort that often inflate a team's GPA and graduation rate. I especially admire Tony Wilson because his career was ruined by injuries and he ended up with a dismissal from the program (not sure what he did), but he stuck it out and graduated—all this from a guy whose background did not predict he'd ever set foot on a college campus. He could have bailed on many occasions, but believed in earning his degree and ended up being on the dean's list a number of times and graduating in 3.5 years. He was always one tough honcho as a player, [even with a badly injured ankle](#), and I think he's going to make a heck of an adult and father. Well done Tony; and well done Coach Richt and staff for creating a culture in which graduation and growing into a responsible man are expected and fostered, no matter how difficult the situation a kid comes from.

Prince Miller on graduating in 3.5 years: "It's just all about staying dedicated to finishing. Having the drive in place to want to prove people wrong, all those who were negative or who doubted me. You've got to know how to keep your head down and just keep driving toward your goal. What you really come to college for is to graduate, and I know my family is very proud." That's one doggone good Dawg.

"God made some special people and Mark Richt's one of them. I don't believe I've ever been around a man that had his life in order much more than Mark."~Joe Kines

Anyone want to start a pool on when [Southern Cal](#) will go on [probation](#)? Heck, OU tossed [Rhett Bomar](#) off the team for not working at a car dealership; seems that at USC, the idea is for each player to own one. Who'll go first, USC or Tennessee?

Lesson of the week: [Never give up!](#)

Will he or won't he? Logan Gray to WR, or will he remain at QB? There have been some good position switches in the program—Jermaine Phillips came in as a WR and ended up being a head-banger of a safety; Sean Jones started at QB but now starts at safety for Philadelphia; Dave Pollack was a DT as a freshman before moving out to DE; Marcus Howard went from LB to DE; Kiante Tripp has played every position on the field and is still looking for a home. Most speculate that Gray will vacate QB to allow Aaron Murray to start (assuming that [Hutson Mason](#) or a reasonable facsimile thereof indeed signs with the Dawgs to provide a #3 at QB), and that Richard Samuel will move to LB or FB (wouldn't you love to see him clearing holes for Caleb and Washaun, without even having to change his style?). With our two fullbacks heading for senior seasons next year, and Charles White (the ex-LB) the only fullback left, we do need to fill that hole before 2011. Redshirt Samuel next year, and then have him blast holes open for two more weighing in at 245....I'm liking it.

The Stegosaurus Comes to Life: A very impressive win for Mark Fox's team over Illinois. OK, so I didn't actually see the game, but I did read about it and watched the Mark Fox Show where a lot of highlights were featured (at least for now, [the Athletic Association also has a highlight](#)

[reel](#)). Illinois is an outstanding program, with the Chicago metro area as its prime recruiting ground, and taking them down is a real achievement. I lived in Chicago for quite a few years and can testify that basketball in that area is as good as it is anywhere. We knocked them off with mostly young Georgia kids: Ware, Thompson, Price, McPhee (who's really developed into a good player), Leslie, Barnes, Mayfield, & Anyaora all in-state kids. As many have noted, Felton never got the cream of the crop from the state. If Fox can do it with the team he inherited, and ramp up the in-state recruiting, he might do here what others have done at nondescript programs, e.g., Billy Donovan at Florida.

In the last few years my interest in UGA basketball has waned. Felton's teams were so hard to watch, and I was always worried that Felton's leg would explode when he stomped it into the floor, which happened about 100 times a game. The basketball program has been very frustrating to follow, because the two great coaches we've had either (1) left a place where he was revered for a place that never loved him and is now waist-deep in snow (Tubby) or (2) regarded The University of Georgia a rather a nuisance that got in the way of his pro basketball team (Harrick). I met Mark Fox briefly before a football game and one thing that struck me was that he immediately makes and maintains eye contact—he's really connecting with the person he's speaking with, even if it's a relatively obscure person in his universe like The Dawgmeister (incognito at the time, wearing only my Wally Butts name badge). I hold season basketball tickets but have only gone to a few games the last couple of years, but intend to fill my seat whenever Mrs. Butts allows me out of the house, after a semester's worth of strict devotion to Dawg football. If only to watch Travis Leslie dunk—he's developing into the player that Mike Mercer might have become, minus the terrible shot and life selection—and Trey Thompson's impeccable fundamentals, fans might actually head to Stegeman this winter to support their Hoop Dawgs.

The Forecast: Everyone's predicting a lot of offense, given that A&M scores points while also yielding them, and (ironically) we will coach the game without Willie Martinez and so will be minus our coordinator. If the Tech game was any indication, the Dawgs' running game has found its traction, and that's how we'll go for it. Says Coach Richt, "The longer we can hold the ball, the better we'll be." Remarkably, we have developed a dominating running game without having a gimmicky running offense—no spread, no option, just power running between the tackles. And oh yes, we get A.J. Green back for the bowl game. People seem to have overlooked the fact that we went 2-1 against some of our most dangerous opponents without A.J.; and I'd sure like to replay the Kentucky game with #8 out there. A&M has had some astoundingly bad losses: 47-19 vs. Arkansas, 62-14 vs. Kansas State, 65-10 vs. Oklahoma (combined record of these opponents: 20-16). "The Aggies start a sophomore and a freshman at cornerback and rank 111th among the 120 Bowl Subdivision teams in pass defense, allowing 262.75 yards a game," says somebody out there on the web. Now, maybe the reason they give up so many points is that they play in the Big 12 with the many powerhouse offenses. But then, scoring seemed way down in the Big 12 this year, which doesn't give either A&M or Vic Koenning a pass. Whatever A&M can do offensively, I think we can match; and our All American punter and All American-to-be placekicker, if not our future All American RBs, WR, OL, and QB, will make the difference. Much has been made of A&M's rapid-fire offense, but the problem with that approach is that if you don't get a first down, the O is off the field in 40 seconds and the D gets run ragged. In a fun game to watch, Good Guys win, 41-31.

National Championship Game: Can't bet against the SEC. Alabama's domination of Florida was very impressive. Now, a lot of teams have dominated in November and had trouble getting going in January, so I don't see their relatively easy championship game and UT's lucky win over Nebraska to provide the basis for understanding this game. But if they can get Terrance Cody to do his best Ndamukong Suh imitation, they should give the Horns a lot of trouble. And the Tide RBs are almost as good as King and Ealey. Alabama, 31-21.