

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
October 2nd Edition: The Dawgs play in the Buff

Weekend wrap-up: Mike Bobo on whether or not things are bad: "Yeah, they're bad if you're 1-and-whatever the crap we are. We play to win the game and work hard and we're not getting it done. It's disappointing and I know the guys are frustrated. . . . We got beat on the field. We've got to go earn it and we haven't in the game. . . . We moved the ball. I didn't think they slowed us down in the first half at all and to only get six points, that's disappointing. You can't turn the ball over and you can't have penalties. That's coaching."

If you're looking for answers, I can't say you've come to the right place. Like anyone who saw the game and can read a stat sheet, I can only conclude that right now, We Do Not Run This State; or if we do, we don't run much when we play teams from other states, unless the 3.3 average per carry is a misprint. Actually it's inflated by Murray's scrambles; without his 4.6 YPC, we recorded 81 yards on 27 carries, or 3 YPC from the running backs. Not good. Whether that's the fault of Mike Bobo, Stacey Searels, Brian McClendon, the offensive linemen, the running backs, the fullbacks, or the quarterback is not something I know enough to explain. But I suspect that they would all agree that the performance is less than what is necessary to win in this league.

Our defense also seems to be performing at less than what we'd hoped, and you can't blame Willie Martinez. Someone wrote me after the Arkansas game to note that "We are holding teams to 15 points below the average of what we held them to last year. If we cut an average of two TD off every team we play, we'll win our share." And yet that share is low right now. Again, I'm no expert, but we are small in the trenches and teams have run the ball well between the tackles on us, especially with big backs (including Relf, the outsized MSU QB). That might be part of the recruiting gap between changing defenses and recruiting players for it, or at least so I hope, and I hope that the fan and booster bases understand that it's hard for even a proven coordinator to be an overnight sensation with a new system and old players (see The Tony Franklin Era at Auburn).

I do hope that the fans don't turn too heavily against the program for the bad start, although given the anger out there, I've probably already lost that battle. Guys who were great coaches just a few years ago (3 years ago, we finished with a #2 national ranking and most of us thought that we were unbeatable at the end of the season—ask Hawaii if they would disagree) are now thought to be bums on the hot seat, in spite of a decade-long body of work that suggests that Mark Richt is among the game's top coaches. I think that all programs have ebbs and flow over time—check the record of just about any coach in a competitive conference and you'll find that they have not won national championships or league championships every year. I have confidence enough in this staff to identify and correct problems and to recruit their way back into contention, but many fans want championships every year. Call me "Mr. Low Expectations" but I don't. Well, I'd like championships, but I don't expect them, because I'm aware that every program in the SEC except Vanderbilt has the same expectation.

I've had conversations in person and in correspondence with many people who follow the program and who are associated with UGA either as alumni or employees of some sort, and the

question arises regarding exactly what are appropriate expectations for a university like UGA with regard to competing annually for national championships. One guy expressed it well:

Given a winning, well-run, respectable program at a first-rate academic institution (which I can honestly say Georgia was probably not in 1973 when I graduated) or a football-centric institution where they can hang up a lot of gold but where the tail wags the dog, I go with the former. I just want to win my share, and whatever the outcome I want to see the team well prepared and playing hard. Your talk with the [UGA program guy with an FSU and Saban background I wrote about last week) goes directly to what my friend, a life-long Bulldog whose father was president of the President's Club, gave much money to the athletic program, is personal friends with Dooley and Hartman, has much leverage, means when he says he doubts UGA has the “institutional will” to have a “great football program” on the level of an Alabama.

I agree that UGA does not have the same institutional will as Alabama to have a great football program according to that standard, because here the football coach reports to the university president, not vice-versa. Whether or not you like Michael Adams, he runs this campus, not Mark Richt or Greg McGarity. As someone who values the academic life at UGA more than the success of its sports teams, I think that’s how it ought to be. I can say with complete confidence that Mark Richt runs the kind of football program I want at the university with which I have an affiliation. It’s highly competitive, wins championships often enough, and is run in a transparent and honest way. An institutional will to win in sports involves compromises that are the province of regional academic institutions, with the possible exception of Ohio State or Southern California where rules are meant to be bent at the expense of the university’s reputation and value of its degree. I would rather have it that a UGA degree is more comparable in value and prestige to Virginia’s than to Alabama’s. If the city of Athens decides to honor distinguished members of the town and university with sidewalk square commemorations, I hope that they recognize musicians, writers, teachers, and others who contribute to the life of the city outside the hedges, and not have them exclusively dedicated to football players, as they do in downtown Auburn.

I prefer that my football program be accountable to someone beyond the walls of Butts-Mehr Heritage Hall so that there are checks and balances in place to keep the program honest. I would rather have our guys get the occasional arrest for misdemeanors than to have a program where nobody ever gets arrested because the chief of police reports to the head football coach. I would rather have one of our kids get caught selling a jersey for \$1,000 than be at a place where the athletes are so well compensated with SUVs and plasma TVs that \$1,000 is chump change that is beneath them to grovel after. Those who pine for the days of Dooley need to remember that the events that made Jan Kemp famous happened right under his nose, and that her decision to go public began a chain of events that changed the athletic culture for the better and some believe helped to launch UGA’s transformation from a regional college to one with national and international academic aspirations and accomplishments. That’s quite an achievement given that the culture of the SEC in general provides gravity to move in the other direction, where guys like Bobby Lowden pull the strings for an entire university so that once a decade, Auburn can win the SEC West.

Whenever my teams are doing poorly, my mode of action is to do the only thing I can in these circumstances: I try to support my team more wholeheartedly, and I try to do my own job better. These are things I can control. I have no power to affect games played by other people, no matter which t-shirt I'm wearing or whether my hat is turned to the back or front or how loud I yell from the couch. But I can continue to support people I believe in and hope that I help to create a better trajectory, and I can examine the holes in my own game and try to work on them so that I don't excessively disappoint the people who depend on me at home and at work. This season can be salvaged, but negativity over early games doesn't help, and getting down on the kids who wear the G makes the air toxic for everyone. It's time to hunker down, get behind the team more than ever, and help them pull through this difficult stretch of losses.

Dawg doots:

- Quote of the Week (Historical category): "Finish last in your league and they call you 'idiot.' Finish last in medical school and they call you 'doctor.'" ~Abe Lemons
- Quote of the Week (Current Events category, offered in response to Reggie Bush's decision to return his Heisman Trophy): "The colleges don't give us anything. If they give us a pair of sneakers, they get in trouble. Why can't an agent lend some money, and I'll pay him back when I graduate? . . . I think it's a travesty. All of these coaches and the NCAA are getting mad at these guys for taking money. I'm not trying to throw anybody under the bus, but players have always taken money from agents. You have to pay them back, but players have been taking money for years." ~ Charles Barkley
- Chutzpah Award of the Season: In a meeting of head coaches in the Colorado athletic department earlier this summer, a senior staff member asked former Boise State wunderkind and current Buff head coach Dan "18-34" Hawkins if there were one thing the department could do to help his program succeed this season, what would it be? He responded by saying the school should give him a contract extension.
- At least it rained.
- I thought that Tim Couch made some decent points during the broadcast, even if he did not always talk his English so good and Mrs. Butts had to cover Little Woolly's ears so as not to affect his standardized test scores. At one point Couch said that when a team is not clicking, it's often the accumulation of small things rather than one person's fault. I thought that made sense. In all of the losses, a few plays here and there would have changed the outcome of the game, or at least put us in a much stronger position to win. Unfortunately, Washaun Ealey is at the center of two of them in ways that I hope don't affect his confidence or the team's confidence in him. He was a great back for us last year and we need him to dig down and return to the mentality that made him such a tough and indispensable player over the last half of the season for us last year.
- Couch said on many occasions that Dawg fans need to be patient because we're a young team that needs time to develop. Dawg Defender though I might be, I must disagree—actually I think we've got a mostly veteran team, although one playing a new defensive scheme, with a young quarterback. So I don't think that explains our record any more than it could explain any other team's record.

The Forecast: Dawgs head to Colorado to play another team playing beneath expectations, although those expectations have dropped considerably for the Buff in the Hawkins Era. In that altitude, we will need depth and so I hope that we've got enough to rotate so that we're fresh in

the fourth quarter. We are assuming that having A.J. will help right the ship, and I'm sure that he will be eager to show what we've been missing. Happiest guy on earth in this regard: Aaron Murray, with Mike Bobo a close second. Let's hope that Shaun Chapas is also back and that Caleb King's ankle allows him to make his cuts with greater authority. Let's hope that Kwame Geathers has progressed enough to park his 330 lbs. in the middle of the DL and become an immovable object. It's against my DNA to pick against my guys, and I'm not contradicting Mother Nature this week. Dawgs address problems with penalties and A.J. opens up the field for the running game. Good Guys, 20-13.

National Game of the Week: Texas vs. Oklahoma in Dallas (I know, Alabama plays Florida this week, but Texas-OU has had national significance since World War II): Texas losing at home to UCLA was pretty stunning, and they got whopped pretty good, as they say in Texas and at Tim Couch's house. I think this game will be very competitive and a good entry in this great series, even if it lost national luster with the UT loss. I'm going to go with the Sooners in this one, 31-30, even though I have no idea of what I'm talking about and do not recommend wagering your hard-earned cash on such an outcome.