

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
October 30th Edition: Gators don't know Jax

Weekend wrap-up: Is everybody happy out there?

This was a game that really worried me because I think that UK has developed a pretty solid program and they were on a roll and playing at home. Randall Cobb might be the league's second-best offensive player, and Hartline is a 6'-5" QB starting for his third year. The Dawgs had blown out two SEC teams in succession, but at home and against questionable competition; the road has been a different story for us this year, both in terms of the quality of opponents and our focus away from the hedges. Although I was worried, I was really looking forward to seeing how we'd perform against what I considered a quality opponent in their house. And today, I'm doing a lot of smiling over how we played.

The announcers kept making the strange observation that UK outgained us by so many yards but were way behind all night. They seemed to think that UK's turnovers were something they did to themselves, rather than something that we caused through smart, fundamentally sound, and aggressive play. They also tallied yardage without including Boykin's electrifying 100-yard kickoff return. But like a Michael Jordan thunderdunk, that play seemed to have much greater value than the points it produced. And it's hard to rack up tons of yardage when you start so many series on the opponent's side of the 50, or in one case, on their side of the 5. The Dawgs only required 90 yards to score its first four touchdowns, so why make the yardage comparison when the winner's determined by points? I had some pals over to watch the game on The Big Screen, and we were simply elated by the Dawgs' play on both sides of the ball, on special teams, and what the heck, on the sidelines. That was one fun evening.

Joker Phillips: Georgia was "the best pass-rush team we've seen, no question about it. They did win the physical battle. Georgia's one of the most physical teams that we've played this year."

I thought that the game plan was outstanding, although it's hard to know for sure how much of the offensive decision-making was shaped by our field position and early huge lead. I know that Mike Bobo is not everyone's favorite playcaller, and that pounding the ball between the tackles is not the sexiest approach around, but that's what we needed most, and that's what the OL and Washaun Ealey delivered. Little Woolly wanted to know if Washaun is a hybrid name, like Knowshon, but unless his mama hung the wash on the line when she was pregnant and found that pastime name-worthy, I think not. In any case, I think that Ealey got back whatever confidence he'd lost with his early-season fumbles and ran like a man on Saturday night. The OL started looking like the OL that we grew to love in the second half of the 2009 season, and even though Jeff Schultz feels that Stacey Searels has never ever done anything, I think he's done a magnificent job at UGA coaching these guys into the players we saw in Lexington, especially given the hole Neil Calloway dug in terms of recruiting before taking the UAB head coaching job (for a significantly lower sum than other coaches at a couple of other Alabama state universities are making).

But back to Bobo: He's an old-school SEC QB, and I think that has a lot to do with the pro-style sets we run, as opposed to the newfangled spreads and gimmicks that have overtaken the game.

The focus is on execution rather than elaborate scheming. For the most part, it's worked pretty well, even if the fans would rather see more pyrotechnics on the field. One thing his approach does is prepare us for long, clock-chewing fourth quarter drives, like the 8-minute drive on Saturday that put the game away for us. Nothing fancy, just a smash-mouth drive that occupied over half of the fourth quarter when we needed to put the game away. Calling play after play between the tackles might not get him featured on camera a lot, as Gus Malzahn is at Auburn. But it can win games when the execution is crisp, even when the other team knows that that's exactly what we're going to do.

Stats of note:

UGA: 4 penalties for 28 yards

UK: 34 rushing attempts for 70 yards (2.3 per carry)

UGA: 99.3 yards rushing allowed per game (leads SEC)

UK: third down efficiency: 9-15, and a whole lot of these were on 3rd and really long, which was the one area of the game where we struggled consistently. We stoned them on first and second down, and then they moved the chains with the passing game. The good news is that many of those drives eventually stalled, and you can't rely on hitting your 3rd and 12 plays all the way down the field over the course of a game. But still, that's something I'm sure the coaches know we've got to fix promptly.

Dawg Doots:

- Boise State had the weekend off, as they do every week.
- Jeremy Masoli was supposed to be a Heisman Trophy candidate while leading Oregon to the PAC-10 championship. But in the SEC, he's a 3-4 QB.
- Speaking of Oregon, a national championship game between the Ducks and Auburn would be a lot of fun to watch, wouldn't it? The only possible glitch is Auburn's forthcoming loss to UGA.
- I recall an ESPN talking head naming Josh Nesbitt as his Heisman winner in the preseason, but haven't heard that one lately.
- A guy on one channel said yesterday that Cameron Newton has played his way into Heisman contention. Huh? Is there anybody else even close? Gary Danielson yesterday said that after Matthew Stafford, he's the most NFL-ready SEC QB he's seen in recent memory, ahead of Jamarcus Russell, Tim Tebow, and anybody else you can name. I still wonder how he'll play when he can't use the run to set up the pass (his own run, that is), but I usually defer to Danielson when it comes to football expertise. And if Vince Young and Michael Vick can be NFL starters, why not this guy? Vince Young runs like a deer, and throws like one too. Newton's got great mechanics and a strong arm. If Tebow is a first-round pick, then Newton's a lottery pick.
- And as great as Newton is, he's not a whole lot better than Auburn DT Nick Fairley, who was in the backfield all night vs. LSU. LSU's QBs were mediocre enough without having that guy in their grill on every play. They may well remedy that problem next year if Zach Mettenberger accepts their scholly offer.
- LSU's biggest weapon vs. Auburn was their punting game, which consistently gave Auburn extremely long fields. With Newton taking snaps, no field is too long to score on, but it probably helps account for the gobs of yardage Auburn put up to score a relatively few amount of points. I'm guessing that Drew Butler will be a very valuable player when

we take on Bobby Lowder's Boys down the road. We also need to get Blair Walsh back in his normal groove and hope that the recent misses are anomalies.

- Speaking of Tebow, last weekend his first NFL TD was shown on ESPN many times, as if anyone cares about a backup QB scoring on a 5-yard play that was so well blocked that Granny Butts could have scampered into the endzone, walker and all. On the season, he has 8 carries for 25 yards. No passes attempted. Meanwhile, Granny Butts' playstation stats are off the charts.
- In anticipation of my forecast, I think it's appropriate to look at why Florida has lost three straight games in the absence of the poor man's Cam Newton. First, the SEC is just one tough league. What's amazing is that somebody somehow manages to run the table most years, as Auburn might do in the West aside from their upcoming loss to UGA. I guess I'm surprised that there aren't more years like this one in the SEC East where teams keep beating each other—if you haven't noticed, all 3 of UGA's league losses have come against teams that have been ranked, Mississippi State now being a top 20 team. But back to Florida: I think that Urban Meyer is having a hard time adjusting to not having Tebow around. I thought this would happen even when Tebow was a freshman and sophomore because it was so obvious how devoted Meyer was to him and how dependent he was on him. I'm no M.D., but I wonder if Meyer's esophagus attack was not just about losing a game, but losing Tebow to graduation. And now, this year, he's taking a dropback QB who is no threat to run the ball and making him run Tebow's plays, because they worked so well for Tebow. So I think that investing so much emotional energy in one guy has left Meyer pretty depleted in the aftermath of Tebow's graduation, and it's showing in his team's performance this year.
- Speaking of Florida, I'm sure that everyone has noticed that, following 3 losses, Meyer has turned to forgiveness and reinstated Chris Rainey, described as follows: "One of Florida's more dynamic players, Rainey was arrested Sept. 14 and charged with a third-degree felony for allegedly sending his former girlfriend a threatening text message that read, in part, 'Time to die ...' Meyer dismissed him from the team the next day, saying Rainey violated the program's core value regarding violence against women." Core values, Schmore values—who needs values when you've lost 3 straight? Meanwhile, Zach Mettenberger got the permanent boot from the Dawgs' roster for making unwelcome advances on a young woman, although apparently not threatening her life. Whose program's core values do you support? Make sure that you take a good long and loving look at your daughter before you answer that one. Congratulations to President J. Bernard Machen of the University of Florida for showing that you have the institutional will to compete for national championships.
- To honor Urban Meyer and his core program values, I'm going to write a check for \$25 to my local battered women's shelter, and I hope you do to. Information is available at <http://www.usattorneylegalservices.com/women-shelters-georgia.html>.
- I've heard people say how much better Murray is than Matthew Stafford during their freshman years, and I love Aaron and what he's doing for us. But he redshirted and Stafford didn't, and in his second year in the program, Matthew led us to a final ranking of #2 nationally and set up those expectations for his junior year that were thwarted when one-fourth of the team was lost to season-ending injuries. So let's support and appreciate Murray, which I surely do, without forgetting how great a player Stafford was for us, which I also do.

- Sanders Commings sure has developed into a playmaker for us. In fact, every time I looked out onto the field, I saw tons of guys who'll be returning next season, and the one after that. We will lose some terrific players in Dent, Gamble, Wood, Dobbs, Tripp, Bolling, Durham, and maybe some early-outs in Houston, A.J., and Boykin—well, OK, that's a lot of important guys. (I have no idea of what Boykin will do, but Asher Allen was 3-and-out for UGA and now starts for the Vikings, and the comparison is pretty close.) But most of the players who matter will return next year and the guys I've just listed are rotating with a lot of returnees because Coach Richt has always played well into the 3-deep on defense and as deep as he can go with the offensive rotations. And in addition to the redshirts and recruits, we'll have Richard Samuel and Jarvis Jones pushing to play at ILB. So this mid-season turnaround will, I hope, be a preview for a big season in 2011.

The Forecast: Dawgs vs. Gators in Jacksonville. Not quite the national marquee game it often is, but a huge game for both teams. I've got to think that the Dawgs will be mighty stoked to go after a wounded opponent, and that their confidence in the 3-4, in the running game, and in Murray's QB-ing are on the rise. I also think that UF will be retooling mightily in their off-week after finding that John Brantley can't run Tim Tebow's offense. One of Meyer's most impressive adjustments at UF came during a bye week when he decided he needed a fullback to compete in the SEC, and that change caught us off-guard and produced some effective offense for them in a game they won. So I suspect that they'll have a different look on Saturday. I'm sorry to say that my Day Job will have me in Washington, DC in meetings all day Friday and Saturday so I'll need to shield my innocent eyes and ears from all news about the game and then catch the replay on The Big Screen late Saturday night when I get home. And that's when I'll watch the Dawgs take it to the Gators, 21-17.

National Game of the Week: Probably the most anticipated games next weekend are Missouri at Nebraska and Michigan State at Iowa. For the record, I'll take Nebraska and MSU in those games. But the one I'm looking forward to is—no, not Boise hosting Louisiana Tech—but Oregon at Southern Cal. Kiffin haters all around the galaxy will be anticipating a monumental blowout, and that's what I'm predicting will happen. Let's say that USC will have a home-field advantage worth two touchdowns. That will scale down the rout a bit, but not enough for Pat Haden to stop looking through his rolodex for his next coach. Ducks (and I don't mean the Verne Lundquist family), 49-21.