

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast  
October 23<sup>th</sup> Edition: Dawgs vs. the suddenly Riled, but not yet Reviled Cats

Weekend wrap-up: We had weekend visitors from Little Woolly's favorite uncle, my Brother Willie Butts, and his wife Fanny Butts-Cheeks. Mrs. Butts and Fanny stayed at home with Little Woolly during the game to help console Wags after he was inexplicably passed over for promotion to UGA VIII, and Brother Willie and I took in the action between the hedges at Sanford Stadium, neither of us having been trained in canine psychology. This was Brother Willie's fourth trip to Athens for a fall game, and his record is 3-1, the only loss coming last year when overzealous officials flagged A.J. for Reasonable Celebration after his tremendous game-winning catch and the Tigers rode a short field to a dubious and zebra-stained victory. Let's hope that Big Bad Bruce out-performs even Brother Willie as the season unfolds following our late 2-0 start.

The game began in a lackluster, incoherent, and incomprehensible fashion, much like a Jeff Schultz column. After 3 timeouts in the first 6 minutes, the fans were growing restless, booing, invoking debacles from games past, and calling for various coach's heads. The game went so slowly that it seemed we were going to watch a double-header before the afternoon was out. But then things settled down, we ran up a sufficiently large lead, and with all drama removed from the competition, the fans settled down for an afternoon of phoning people in other parts of the stadium to talk about homecoming festivities yet to come, or occurring in flasks throughout the stands. That's what the Vandy game is all about.

As usual, I have little to offer in terms of wisdom not already expressed in the Sunday coverage of the game or by the other 200 Dawg bloggers. I do have a few general observations of possible interest:

Here are some stats from the first 7 games:

Cumulative score in 3 UGA wins this season: 139-21

Cumulative score in 4 UGA losses this season: 101-69

Total average scores for UGA vs. opponents this season: 29.7-17.4

National rankings for UGA: Offense 51st, Defense 20<sup>th</sup>

Records of UGA opponents: 21-21 cumulative

Louisiana-Lafayette 2-4

S. Carolina 4-2

Arkansas 4-2

Mississippi State 4-2

Colorado 3-3

Tennessee 2-4

Vanderbilt 2-4

First, I'd say that 3 of the 4 losses came against pretty good SEC teams, with 2 of those coming on the road. Even though some called the loss at Mississippi State disgraceful, it's looking less embarrassing after they took down Florida in the swamp on Saturday. The Colorado game, well, I think most of us would like to have a do-over on that last drive, but I don't think that we're going to get it, and that's one we shouldn't have lost by any standard.

People are saying that the SEC is down this year, but I think it's more a matter of the lower-echelon teams becoming more competitive and nicking the traditional powers with losses. All those top-10 recruiting classes achieved by SEC teams over the last 5 years have not, I think, begun to produce mediocrity. Rather, it's just getting harder and harder to dominate the league, especially when the top assistants (e.g., Mullen at MSU) begin running the lower-tier programs and successful coaches (e.g., Nutt at Ole Miss) jump programs.

Second, it appears as though the offense is starting to gel around Murray's passing, aided considerably by the presence of A.J. Green, who is requiring teams to pull safeties out of the middle of the field, which opens up the running lanes enough to matter, a point made by Coach Richt on his postgame show. With the OL seeming to settle into a reliable starting unit and overall rotation, with Murray making great decisions and throwing very accurately, with Murray adding a new dimension with his scrambles, with the running game falling into place behind the passing game, and with a set of tall receivers who like to go up after the ball (of course A.J., but Durham yesterday as well), we might be positioned for an intriguing run following our slow start in the preseason.

Third, it seems that the defensive players are finally getting schematically oriented to the 3-4 and beginning to play more aggressively and with abandon. I don't know if this is exactly accurate, but it seemed that Vandy only crossed midfield twice during the game, once on their first possession and once very late in the game by virtue of a penalty. If the players are getting acclimated to the system and are playing this system with confidence and at full speed, then we could be trouble in the final run of games.

Of course, with suddenly vulnerable Florida, suddenly invincible Auburn, highly competitive Kentucky, thoroughly unpredictable Georgia Tech, and Boise-level cupcake Idaho State left, there's only one sure W ahead of us. So we could finish anywhere between 4-8 and 8-4, and the season could either sink into oblivion or be salvaged in a dramatic run that could even net the SEC East title, given that only Vandy and S.C. have as few as 2 losses with half a season to go, that S.C. has remaining games vs. Arkansas and Florida, and that nobody really thinks Vandy will finish anywhere but last.

Dawg Doots:

- Stat of note: 3-39. That's 3 penalties for 39 yards, with one coming very late by a reserve for 15 yards. We are seeing a much more efficient team this year than we have in the last two.
- One thing I've noticed from the critics in the stands: If we run a play and it works, the players are credited for executing it well. If we run a play and it doesn't work, the fans gripe about what an idiot Mike Bobo is.
- On Caleb King's arrest for missing a court date: You might have read by now that King's brother was pulled over for driving Brandon Wood's 1996 Ford Explorer, which set the wheels in motion for the dramatic capture and arrest of Caleb King for missing a court date following a speeding ticket he got driving to the birth of his sister's baby. Was the *Cops* film crew there to capture this great event in law enforcement history? A couple of observations: Neither of our primary running backs owns his own car. Just like at USC.

And they borrow old beaters from teammates to get around. Just like at Alabama, I'm sure. Second: People have been making up great excuses when pulled over for speeding ever since the car was invented. My favorite: Chris Tucker of *Rush Hour* fame got arrested for driving 109 mph on Georgia's I-20. His excuse: He was late to church.

- Brother Willy and I watched an incredible WAC game when we got home in which Auburn outscored the Mallett-less Razorbacks, 325-299. Part of our enjoyment came from getting the Gary Danielson experience from the broadcast booth and learning something about football just by watching the game. They showed a graphic comparing Cam Newton and Tim Tebow's Heisman year stats at a similar point in the season, and they are nearly identical. But the Gators, people seem to forget, lost 4 games that year in spite of Tebow's great stats, and in spite of having a tremendous defense. I credit the perception that Tebow had a great year to Urban Meyer's love of Tebow and his stats and his tendency to keep Mighty Tim in games long after they were over. Newton is a lot like Tebow, only with good throwing mechanics and quite a bit more speed and wiggle. If anything, he's an even scarier runner than Mr. Third-And-Short because he also runs like a runaway train on third and long. I don't see him playing QB at the next level, but as a college QB, he's one big load. And he is unbeaten so far on a team with a really terrible defense.
- You may have noticed that both of Nick Saban's former teams, Michigan State and LSU, are undefeated. Meanwhile, Alabama has lost a game. Time to fire the bum.
- A coveted Dawgmeister Game Ball has been awarded to former Cal Bear hoops player and current UGA doctoral student and Rankin Smith academic advisor Solomon Hughes, who passed his comprehensive exams recently and is now gearing up to write his Ph.D. dissertation.
- From Monday's ABH: Georgia quarterback Aaron Murray is now 18th nationally in passing efficiency. "Just looking at some stats, I didn't realize he has only three interceptions," [Joker] Phillips said. "That's a (redshirt) freshman quarterback that's thrown for 1,600 yards and 12 touchdowns and only three interceptions. That's big."
- Something interesting I learned on Saturday: Until about 1980, college football teams didn't have strength and conditioning coaches. Lifting, etc. was all done informally. One of the pioneers in the field was (and remains) our own Dave van Halanger, who played for Bobby Bowden at West Virginia, then played with the Falcons, and ended up with Bowden again at FSU before following Mark Richt to UGA. Among the more unsubstantiated complaints I've heard about the team recently is that their strength and conditioning program is lacking and causing us to lose games to bigger, stronger teams. This is the exact same program that the fan base was ecstatic about when Coach Richt first arrived in Athens because of the obvious increase in strength and quotes from NFL scouts who declared that UGA players were much more NFL-ready body-wise under Richt than they had been under Donnan. If this program is indeed sinking like a stone, then people need to explain why (1) the players continue to break weight lifting records (e.g., Brandon Wood's 715 lb. squat, which Little Woolly refers to as "some real deep doo doo," and (2) Coach Van has more wins to his record than any other strength and conditioning coach in the 30 or so years that the field has been in existence.
- If I had a vote in the BCS poll, I can't imagine giving a high ranking to Boise State just because they are strolling through a ridiculously easy schedule. Their Big Statement Wins came vs. Oregon State (3-3) and VTech (5-2 vs. a weak schedule). But without

their playing a competitive league schedule, I can't imagine jumping them over teams like Ohio State and Alabama, even if they have lost a game. And the BCS voters apparently agree, given that they jumped Oklahoma from #6 to #1, over Boise and TCU, even though Auburn, Michigan State, and LSU for some reason still are ranked behind two teams that don't play anybody.

- I've seen Coach Fox on the sidelines before every game, accompanied by very tall young men of approximately high school age. We lost Julian Royal to GT last week, but I still think he'll reel in enough talent to make us a strong team over time.
- Speaking of recruits, people familiar with the program say that this group of 2011 football commits is the tightest class they've ever seen, and includes guys with great leadership potential. The recruits have bonded with unusual enthusiasm and friendship and can't wait to get here to wear the red and black.
- The early word on Greg McGarity is very positive. He has a decidedly non-imperial style, going out of his way to make low-salaried employees throughout the athletic department feel welcome, valued, and rewarded.
- I ran into Kent Hannon, author of *Damn Good Dogs!* (Hill Street Press, 2002), before the game. He was on the sidelines with a photographer doing work on a new version of the book. Probably not ready for your Santa list this year, but keep an eye out for it.

The Forecast: Dawgs head to Kentucky, conqueror of S. Carolina on Saturday and UGA last season in Athens. UK is 4-3 and I suspect will be pretty stoked for this game after their great comeback win. I also suspect that they believe that they have as good a shot at the SEC East as anyone right now. Mike Hartline, their QB, is from Canton, OH where they take football pretty seriously, and enters the game with a season 149.72 QB rating, which is hot enough that Brett Favre would consider it worthy of texting to your daughter. We've blown out 2 SEC teams in the last couple of weeks, although it's not clear whether we are in a mighty groove or whether we've played a couple of teams on our field who are spiraling southward. Let's say it's a combination of playing two less competitive opponents just as we are getting it in gear on both sides of the ball. And let's say that the S.C. win will have enough hangover effect to cost UK a wee bit of focus, as we meanwhile got everyone's uni dirty in a romp vs. Vandy and so will hit the ground running in practice this week. We won't pitch a shutout in Lexington, but we'll come to play. Good guys, 27-21.

National Game of the Week: Quite a few top-25 matchups on the board, but none of greater local interest than LSU at Auburn, both unbeaten and ready to sort the standings in the SEC West. This one should be interesting because LSU has been winning for years on its D, and Auburn has a human wrecking ball with moves taking every snap. Meanwhile, Auburn took some grief from Danielson on Saturday for its poor defense, which got torched all day long by Mallett's backup, who looked terrific until he started throwing to the wrong team when it mattered most. So let's expect fewer points than Auburn is accustomed to putting up, and more points than LSU has scored in SEC games of late. But not enough to take down the Tigers. Or is it the War Eagles? Anyhow, Auburn over LSU, 33-24.