

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
September 4th Edition: Gaugin' the Cagin' of the Ragin' Cajuns

Welcome back! First things first: a note of thanks to Deke and all the crew at the Dawgbone for allowing me another year of space at Stop #1 for Dawg fans on the web. And thanks for all three of my readers for checking back for yet another season of thrills here at the Forecast. If you're new to the column, this is not the place to go for people who are Down on the Dawgs. The Dawgmeister sees the world through Dawg-colored glasses—every game's a win, and if you want something else, go read Jeff Schultz. If you've really got your negative on, read him twice. Mrs. Butts was remarking just the other day about how well the tomatoes came in this year right about where we buried his columns in the spring. The neighbors all think they grew so well because Little Woolly and I worked so hard to nurture them, but we all know that a fertile, fecund growing medium is the key to success in the garden.

The Dawgs take on the mighty Ragin' Cajuns from Louisiana-Lafayette University, a university in Lafayette, Louisiana. As required by Louisiana state law, they have players named Gautier, Derousselle, Guilbeaux, Thibodaux, Thibodeaux, and Desormeaux. And they come from places like Comeaux, Fontainebleau, Breau Bridge, Baton Rouge, and Gautier (not where Gautier the player is from). With that roster, why are they the Ragin' Cajuns, and not the Surrender Monkeys?

OK, I've just exhausted my knowledge of this week's opponent. Where's David Hale when we need him? If Hale were still blogging about the Dawgs, we'd know whether it's Thibodaux or Thibodeaux who watches Top Chef, how it went when Guilbeaux got his beaultox treatment on Extreme Makeover, and whether Derousselle thinks that Kate, Sun, Claire, Shannon, or Ana was the hottest babe on Lost.

Anyhow, it's nice to open this season with this game so that Coach Richt will have one week's respite from the Ragin' Fan Base in Sanford Stadium and from Mark Bradley's in spiteful observations, honed from years of expanding his ample Kiffin across the couch. A good game for suspending players for dumb-ass stuff they did over the summer and during fall camp, and for getting the timing down, the uniforms dirty, and the baton twirlers coordinated for the bigger games down the road. Scheduling a lower division foe worked for Michigan vs. Appalachian State a few years ago, and it seems the basis for a sound scheduling strategy to me.

Dawg Doots:

- My advice to you fellas out there: If she's wearing a blue dress and red panties, leave it alone.
- As often seems the case, the guy with the greatest influence on the Bulldogs' depth chart this year is Jimmy Williamson.
- Guys I'll Especially Root for: Now, if you've actually read The Dawgmeister's Forecasts before, then I probably know you personally. You also know that I love all Dawgs unconditionally and root for every guy on the team to play well and graduate. Make that graduate and play well. But anybody can pull for A. J. Green and Justin Houston—that's the easy part. There are guys on the team every year, though, who've developed more

slowly, gotten injured, had NFL guys ahead of them, and in general waited 4-5 years to get significant playing time. Guys like Brandon Wood, Akeem Hebron, and Kiante Tripp. B-Wood made headway last year after his shoulder injuries finally started to clear up and worked his way into the mix, and now is in the second rotation of the DE group. Tripp as we all know has been a victim of his versatility and is also working toward PT as DE in the 3-4 after playing DE, DT, TE, OT, and maybe punt returner and gunner on special teams and helping Kathy Richt with the water cooler on the sidelines in the last few years. Hebron got caught drinking beer at the wrong time and place, got suspended and spent time abroad for a season, then returned only to break his ankle in what the coaches consider one of the most horrifying and gruesome injuries they've ever been around. This guy could have quit the team a dozen times and nobody would have been surprised. But who was that guy leading the team in tackles and scooping up fumbles during scrimmages in August? Who is that guy now listed in the top 4 of the middle linebacker rotation? If I pull extra super hard for any guy out there this year, it's Hebron, who may be the team's biggest surprise after having fallen off everyone's grid since arriving as an Army All-American out of high school. #37 has been off the field for a few years now, so let's let him hear it when he takes his position on Saturday.

- Beautiful campus reminder: Really, folks, the UGA campus is as beautiful as it gets. Don't turn it into Woodstock on Saturday. Bring along some hefty bags and take advantage of the dumpsters, although not for what you're thinking about. Even Little Woolly knows enough to park his willie when he's out in public.
- I think we'll have truly special special teams this year. Everyone knows we've got the best kick/punt tandem in the land, and the best kick returner in Boykin. Kickoff coverage was a problem last year but this year we'll get so bored watching Walsh boom kickoffs into the endzone that we'll long for the excitement of yesteryear. If Smith can show Gray-like acumen on punt return management and hold onto the rock once he accelerates, those offense/defense transitions could become our favorite part of the game. Don't be surprised if we return a few on Saturday.
- Count me among those who don't believe that "starter" status is all that important. Does it matter if Smith or Cuff starts? Anderson, Geathers, or Tyson? Hamilton, Williams, or Williams? Gamble or Washington? What matters is that we've got strong rotations full of guys who play with their hair on fire when they hit the field with the G on their helmets. (OK, that scenario might cause some problems inside the helmet, but you get my drift.) You can't reload after graduating your stars if the other guys don't get their snaps, and you can't play in this heat without a good 2-3 deep across the board. So let's get our attention on what matters, which is Dawgs getting the job done as a team. Woof Woof!
- I'm hardly an Auburn booster, but they got screwed out of the 2004 national championships twice: first in January 2005, and then in August 2010 when USC's bogus title was vacated and no winner was named.
- I think a major key to the team's success this year will be how well the NTs plug the middle of the field. Anderson's rapid development in fall camp is perhaps the major story for this year's team.
- Just a reminder that DGD safety Shawn Williams and family lost their house to a fire, and that you can help them out by donating to a special account at the Bank of Early, PO Box 527, Blakely, GA 39823, Attn: Andy Smith. Even the NCAA has agreed that this idea is a good one.

- Here's something I don't get: Every time I check the AJC football blogs, no matter what's reported, a bunch of Tech fans sign in and do some fearsome trash-talking about how they're going to lay a huge whoop-ass beatdown on UGA come November. I don't know if they've been paying attention, but aside from an occasional exception, we've thrashed their nerdy Kiffins pretty handily for the most part in the last decade or so. I sure hope that Dawg fans aren't going to Florida message boards and ranting about how the Gators are pathetic weenies and how we're going to maul them back to the Stone Age in Jacksonville. (The Dawgmeister has a day job, and so doesn't have time for reading other teams' discussion boards.) I think you've got to win a few in order to scorch your opponents with your mighty verbiage.
- My nomination for Father of the Year: Antonio Cromartie. Size does indeed matter.
- I've read a bit about Aaron Murray this fall—about his family, about his preparation, about his nimble footwork, and so much more—but one thing that's missing from all the anticipation of the new QB is his charisma. I saw him interact with other recruits when he visited as a high school senior and the kid's just got it. He's a magnet for other players and a guy with tremendous leadership skills. He might make a few rookie mistakes this year but one thing I don't doubt for a second is that, even surrounded by upperclassmen, he will run the show.
- Our OL situation is very interesting, I think. One thing that I've concluded about Coach Searels is that he values guys who have good football minds. Josh Davis, for instance, is probably not among the 5 most physically gifted OL on the roster, but everyone learned last season how valuable a player he is. One reason is that he's a smart kid who is highly coachable and understands the offensive concept. I've noticed that the last couple of years, Coach SS has signed guys with high GPAs coming out of high school. I suspect we'll be seeing that from now on; I think he finds coaching big brutes who can't remember the plays to be pretty frustrating.
- Speaking of The Greatest Offensive Line Coach on Earth, I've also noticed that he's actually talking to the press on occasion. Probably not Jeff Schultz, though.
- There sure does seem to be a built-in bias to football rankings. A couple of years ago, UGA began the season ranked #1. After the first weekend, in which Southern Cal beat a low-tier team from a second tier league (Virginia, ACC) while UGA hammered Georgia Southern 45-21, USC jumped the Dawgs in the rankings because of their "quality win," which perhaps was a justifiable claim only because USC plays in the Pac-10, where apparently UVA would be a powerhouse contender. And now this year: Oklahoma and UGA both finished 8-5 last year. This year, OU is a consensus top ten team while UGA is a consensus end-of-top-25 team while returning its entire offense minus the QB. OU meanwhile lost guys drafted in the #s1, 3, and 4 positions in the draft. So much for the sanctity of the "human element" that people cherish so greatly in the BCS rankings.
- On a number of occasions, I've gone to the Denver Post website to check up on Knowshon and Champ, but all they seem to write about out there is some third-string quarterback with bad mechanics. When he announced that he was a virgin, who knew that he was talking about the fact that that he's never taken a direct snap from center? He's also wearing one hideous beard of late. Personally, I prefer the whiskers sported by Ben Jones:



The Forecast: This one's all about getting traction for the S. Carolina game. I see us pounding the ball between the tackles, throwing WR screens to open up the middle of the field, hitting the TEs on crossing patterns, and controlling ball and clock. The D might be out of position a time or two as they finally put this thing together at full speed, but should make up for it with sheer athleticism vs. UL-L. This is a game to get out there with that new red t-shirt, make sure the grill's working, enjoy the benefits of your latest \$20,000 donation to the Athletics Association, and make sure you don't get too much sun or lose your voice hollering when A.J. hauls in the throws from A.M. It's hard to say how the game will go after the scoring gap gets too large, and we know that Coach Richt likes to play the ball boys and cheerleaders if he can get them in the game when the team gets far enough ahead. So I'll take a conservative approach and say Good Guys, 45-10.

National Game of the Week: Boise vs. VT in MD. The Bois in Blue are ranked as a top 5 team with a 2-game schedule. After Oregon State 2 games later, they play the J.V. schedule the rest of the way. VT is in the ACC and so not exactly playing the Monsters of the Midway, but at least their opponents wear this year's equipment and, except for GT, play in stadiums where the stands aren't held up by scaffolds in case anyone shows up. I can't shake the image of Boise coming into Sanford with ESPN hacks screeching about how they'd take us out, and watching them get mauled from beginning to end as we ran their much-vaunted QB completely off the field. I know they did beat Oklahoma a year or two later in a bowl game, but I don't see that carrying them to such lofty rankings with that pitiful schedule, not to mention their odious blue field. I'm taking the Hokies in this one, 30-17.