

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
September 25th Edition: At Mississippi State

Weekend Recap: "Did we get better? Yes, we got better," Richt said. "Did we fight valiantly? Yes, I think we did. Did we finish? No. We've got to get better at that."

Like most UGA fans, I thought the first 59 minutes of the game were fabulous. Murray led a tremendous comeback that didn't look possible with a sputtering offense and inability to shut down Mallett for the first three quarters, then suddenly everything came up UGA. And then that last minute happened, and it was last year's LSU finish all over again, minus a bad call to blame the loss on. I don't know the game well enough to understand the x's and o's of their success, but I caught Eric Zeier on the postgame show on the drive home, and he talked about the underneath crossing patterns and a shift in coverage on the TD pass that Mallett recognized and exploited. In their pregame routines, Arkansas worked a lot on crossing patterns and ran them with incredible precision, and indeed that accounted for a lot of their yardage yesterday.

Mallett walked past me early in warm-ups, without his pads on yet, and the guy is gigantic. I was surprised at how thick he is in addition to being 6-7; before I realized it was Mallett, I thought he was a defensive lineman. I think at some point, he must have swallowed Jared Lorenzen. Some web commentators said before the game that he lacks agility, and he's no Aaron Murray in that department, but he's agile enough, and I'm sure more agile than the people who question his agility. He's an amazing specimen with a tremendous arm. It'll be interesting to see how the Heisman and NFL chatter changes as he maintains this pace and guys like Jake Locker fade (he had a hideous game to thwart my upset forecast). If there's good news to report, we've played 3 games and have already faced the best QB (Mallett) and RB (Lattimore) we'll play all year.

Different people are pointing fingers at different people for the loss. Jeff Schultz blames Mark Richt, Stacy Searels, and Todd Grantham. I don't know this for a fact, but I suspect that Coach Searels thinks that Jeff Schultz is a blithering idiot and lets him know it, Coach Searels not being given to subtlety in such matters. Personally, I blame the loss on Jeff Schultz, because this is my column, and I can.

And of course, Mike Bobo is a favorite and easy target. But I don't think he had much to do with Arkansas going the length of the field in 3 plays on their final drive; and his playcalling might have had something to do with our magnificent comeback. If the D hadn't been reduced to swiss cheese in the last minute, or if Dent or Gamble hadn't dropped a likely pick-6 earlier in the game, or if their punter hadn't bobbled that early snap and run for a first down which was followed by their first score, Bobo might be looking pretty good today, and Dawg fans would have been dining on pork chops and bacon on Sunday morning. But all these things did happen, and the fans need someone to blame.

Bobo said after the game that Murray needs to release the ball more quickly to avoid the sacks (6 vs. Arkansas), and that is probably true, even though he played well otherwise, aside from the pick that began the second half (which fortunately didn't produce points for Arkansas). From my seat in the stands, Aaron looks small in the pocket—and not just in comparison to Mallett, who casts a shadow over everyone—which has got to affect his vision of the field. If I have a question

for Bobo, and this is strictly a fan's confusion, it's whether Murray might be more effective rolling out where he doesn't get engulfed by bigger bodies who block his view of the receivers. Aaron is nifty afoot and would be a threat to run or throw with a clearer view of the field if the pocket moved to the outside. But then, I don't watch practices or break down film, so may not be privy to informed reasons for keeping him in the pocket. Perhaps if he released the ball sooner as Bobo is coaching him to do, he wouldn't need to roll out because the pressure wouldn't be in his grill when he sets to throw the ball.

Some people blame A.J. Green for selling his jersey and depriving us of the right to watch him play, all for the filthy lucre of \$1,000, which is probably a lot of cash for a family that lives off a rural route somewhere out in the remote Piedmont of South Carolina; some blame the NCAA for enforcing their rules on a quiet country kid who has otherwise never been a problem of any kind for anybody. Wags, the family bulldog, blames the problems on UGA VII.V, Russ, for not having the proper bloodlines, although he disagrees with PETA, who believe that a robot possibly built by the nerds at Tech is the best solution.

Then of course people blame the OL for not being as productive as anticipated. Few beyond Jeff Schultz are blaming Coach Searels for what the fan base sees as the OL's disappointing production, even as they immediately jump on Bobo for problems emanating from the QB position. The only change in the lineup is Tanner Strickland replacing Chris Davis (see below), and now Trinton Sturdivant subbing in at left tackle (presumably a good thing, even though he limped off the field on Saturday and I think didn't return, but apparently is not seriously injured). But Strickland brings about 40 more pounds to the position than Davis and, as a program guy explained to me before the game, size matters in the trenches—he thought that part of Lattimore's success a week ago came from the SC OL being substantially larger than our DL, allowing them to pin our guys down to provide Lattimore with the space he needed to get to people his own size who had trouble bringing him down.

But getting back to the Arkansas game: One of the guys in the program confirmed before the game that teams are stuffing the box to stop the run in order to force Bobo to call passing plays for Murray, and will continue to do so until Aaron shows them he can shoulder a passing attack. Murray threw most of his passes in the second half, which is predictable when a team goes down by 2 TDs by the fourth quarter. He threw well but got sacked a lot, so it was a mixed performance. It's a shame he's had to start the season without his most feared weapon, but that's the hand we've been dealt, and so the hand we must play.

I think that it's important to identify problems areas and address them, but not to make any one person (e.g., Bobo, if you find him inadequate) the only one responsible. With Chapas out, the blocking for both passing and rushing goes down a notch, and after Munzenmeier the backup is a walkon (Charles White, I learned on Saturday, has been moved back to defense). With A.J. out, safeties don't need to cheat so much to the outside, which congests the running game between the tackles. With a freshman QB, in spite of his great upside, you can't get too deep into the playbook because that adds risks and turnovers, which even Matthew Stafford couldn't avoid with his top-pick talent. With Caleb King out, our blitz management is less effective and we lose one heck of a runner as well. All that adds up in a game where the outcome depends on a few plays and a few inches here and there. If you think that Mike Bobo can just call whatever plays

he feels like when his options are limited, then I think you're underestimating how complicated the game is. If you think the answers are simple, then you're revealing that you probably never played the game.

Injury update: Chris Davis spent the afternoon on the sidelines wearing a baseball cap. Apparently his hip (especially) and knee problems are too severe for him to play. I was told by a program guy that he's destined for surgery, and possibly hip replacement, after the season. Chris is a warrior, and it's sad to see his senior season and pro potential so badly limited by injuries. Chris might have been too "small" for the NFL (a few corn dogs under 300 lbs.) as an OL, but has been a program stalwart since starting as a RS freshman, and I hope that he's got some snaps left in him before his final year is done.

Also on the sidelines: Shaun Chapas, Richard Samuel, Caleb King, Branden Smith, Justin Anderson, Marcus Dowtin...that's all I remember at the moment. I talked to Richard before the game and he's not sure when he'll be back. But given the position change and likelihood of rustiness following the injury, I suspect he'll redshirt this year (that's my uninformed guess, anyhow, given that the perfectly healthy Bruce Figgins sat out the year after missing the first half of the season with a suspension). Anderson has a toe problem that's keeping him off the field, and it seems that we could really use a guy with his size out there; as of Monday morning, he and several of the others look good for next Saturday. A program guy told me that Geathers is getting more game-ready at NT, and he got some snaps when Tyson got shaken up. Those guys would have helped in the last two games, but I assume that Garner and Grantham know their personnel's readiness better than I do, that they want to win, and that they're putting their best guys out there on the field.

Dawg Doots:

- Those Arkansas fans waving red panties were not, it turns out, providing a political commentary on Damon and The Bimbo. It was a hot day, and that's how the ladies summon the cold beverage vendors in The Natural State. Little Woolly now wants to move to Fayetteville, but Mrs. Butts and I do have standards that cannot be compromised.
- Heading into the Arkansas game, Georgia ranked first in the SEC in fewest penalty yardage, with an average of 27.5 yards per game. I think we got that much in facemask penalties alone on Saturday, or would have if one of them hadn't happened at the goal line and so only cost us a few inches.
- At least Notre Dame also lost and is now 1-2.
- We now know that Aaron Murray can throw a football about 75 yards, if he's allowed to wind up.
- I talked at length with a program guy with a Florida State background before the game. He said that Jimbo Fisher has dismantled pretty much everything that Bobby Bowden established there and replaced it with a Sabanesque system from their days together at LSU. As my confidante described it, Saban always talks about his "infrastructure," which refers to a tightly controlled, top-down, well-insulated program in which the head coach controls absolutely everything and nothing leaves the building. Internal compliance people who get too nosy are run off—this is Alabama, and the football coach who wins needn't be bothered by nuisances such as university presidents, police officers, etc. So you can sign 30 guys a year, operate your own policing system (when was the last time

an Alabama player got arrested?), control your players' engagement with the academic arm of the university (and when was the last time one had trouble with grades?), etc., with complete autonomy. I can't say for sure, but I doubt that Trent Richardson and Mark Ingram are driving their roommate's mom's old Chevy around campus, as Washaun Ealey has to do. Expect the same at FSU, unless of course Jimbo gets blown out a few more games as the Seminoles of Free Shoes University did at OU a week ago.

- I hope you had a chance to read the terrific article in the *Red & Black* on Demarcus Dobbs (<http://www.redandblack.com/2010/09/16/breaking-down-walls-demarcus-dobbs-does-it-on-the-field-every-week-%e2%80%94-but-had-to-learn-how-off-the-field/>). I think that out here in Dawgland we often forget what difficult lives some of these kids have led. Occasionally, as in the case of DeAngelo Tyson, Montez Robinson, and Mike Lemon, their life stories become public—for Montez and Mike, the revelations became amplified when they acted out against others and were dismissed from the team. If you grew up in the same sort of intact middle-class family, rooted in working-class values, as I did, you just can't fathom what these guys have had to overcome to succeed in games and in the classrooms of the state's greatest university. So let's make sure that we understand that these kids are a whole lot more than guys wearing helmets with G's on them who we think owe us something on the field. Sometimes they screw up and get in trouble, or are out of position on the field, and the celebrity magnifying glass makes their actions look larger than they would be for the rest of us. But the players also make the honor roll, which doesn't make the headlines. I submit that our players are complicated people who deserve our thanks, support, and respect for representing us and UGA on the gridiron and as lifelong representatives of the university. Keep that in mind before you post your next rant under an anonymous name on a web board or boo a kid from the stands or the couch for making an error on the field.

The Forecast: Dawgs head to Mississippi State to take on the other Bulldogs. The Mississippi state insect is the honeybee; the Georgia state insect is not the yellow jacket. In fact, it is also the honeybee. And therein the similarities end. Mississippi State is in Starkville, and UGA is in Athens. At the Starkville city website home page at <http://www.cityofstarkville.org/section.php?p=6>, this is one of the choice scenic photos that they provide to attract new residents to the city's charms:



Well, enough of living the good life in Starkville. There's a game to be played, and like all league games, it won't be easy, especially on the road, at Davis Wade Stadium at Scott Field with its expanded seating capacity of 55,082, which means about 110,000 cowbells. It will be interesting to see if, as promised, the team will be penalized if the fan base cannot refrain from ringing them at non-designated times. I saw a bit of the Texas/Texas Tech game Saturday night

and cowbells were ringing throughout play, so the refs were not enforcing it in scenic Lubbock (“The Starkville of Texas”).

MSU had a 44:18 rushing:passing ratio in their loss to LSU, so they will run the ball, and we will work on our tackling in practice this week. This is our last game without AJ, and it’s good to see guys like Kris Durham picking up the slack. But even as well as Kris and others are playing, they are never going to command the kind of coverage that teams must devote to AJ, and as a result teams can dedicate more intensive attention in the middle of the field and greater focus on stopping the run. I think we’ll continue to open up the playbook for Aaron, focus in practice on getting quicker releases in his progressions, and hope that some of the injured guys can return for the game. MSU is also 1-2 although has been less competitive in their losses. But they are at home with their cowbell ringing supporters and I think will come to play. Not, however, well enough. Dawgs, 28-17.

National Game of the Week: Alabama at Arkansas: It’s mighty hard to pick against Alabama these days. And it’s also hard to imagine wagering hard cash on anything that I am predicting these days. Alabama’s RBs are as ridiculously good as Mallett is at QB, so perhaps that’s a standoff. But Bama has recruited so well and abundantly that I just can’t imagine that the rest of the rosters are even. Tide, 31-24.