

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
September 11th Edition: Hiking the Appalachian Trail to Columbia, SC

Weekend wrap-up: Well, how nice to open the season against a team from a directional conference, get the unies dirty across the roster, work out the kinks for the tougher road ahead, and give the home fans a fun show. Well done, Mississippi.

I'm sure that y'all saw our game too, and so there's not much I can add to the 2,000 stories already posted at The Dawgbone. Murray gave us much to like and much to work on, the D did what we expected aside from the one busted play that apparently Coach Grantham observed and inquired of his players about, Butler and Walsh were at their impeccable best, and we got to see some new guys and some old guys at their new spots. No complaints from me, even though the OL didn't open quite the gaping holes I expected against this caliber of competition.

Since the game was sold out and on TV, and since it was easy to digest, I'll spare you further obvious commentary. A few items that The Dawgmeister might have exclusive information on:

I talked for a bit with Richard Samuel before the game. He was sitting on the sidelines with his leg in a soft cast for a knee injury that, I gathered, was more from cumulative stress than any one particular hit or cut. He thought he'd be ready for Week 2. He's a terrific kid, and amazingly enough for a junior, still only 19 years old and won't turn twenty till around Signing Day. Heck, there are a lot of 19-year-olds still playing high school ball; and Justin "Bean" Anderson is also a junior, but is 22. Gotta really pull for Richard to recover quickly and work his way into the mix as the weakside inside LB. I asked him the difference between the two ILB positions, and he said that the strongside guy is usually bigger and more effective vs. the run, and the weakside is usually niftier afoot and more likely to drop back in coverage. Or maybe it was the other way around. One is Mike, and one is Mo. Let's hope that before long, one of them is Richard.

I also visited briefly with Nick Jones, ex-Dawg center now working with Coach Searels and the OL. He's down about 50 pounds from his playing weight and looks mighty svelte for a guy who's even now about 255 lbs. Yet another Damn Good Dawg back in the program, and one smart and dedicated enough for Coach Searels to agree to mentor him.

Recruits in attendance: Mostly it was guys already committed, and underclassmen. Christian LeMay was there and I can assure you that he's not thinking of changing his commitment, as internet rumor mills occasionally report. He seems to have the same sort of big and open personality that Aaron Murray has, and to have the kind of charisma that can really benefit a team in its QB. Speaking of future Dawg QBs, I had a long talk before the game with Ed Printz, whose sophomore son Eddie is the starting QB at Lassiter HS, where Dawg freshman Hutson Mason QB'd last year. Eddie is a good 6-3, 16 yrs old and still growing, so might hit 6-4 or 6-5 before he's done. Seemed like a great kid, and his dad agrees. Ed Sr. coaches youth football in the community and while we were talking, commits Corey Moore and Armerlo Herrera dropped by to chat—Ed had coached them in a 7 on 7 league and raved about what outstanding kids they are. Great to see such fine young men headed our way, and let's hope that their driver's licenses are up to date and they own their own motorcycle helmets. And don't be surprised if Eddie Jr. wears red and black in a couple of years.

Dawg doots:

- I wasn't exactly sure what a Gamecock is, so I looked it up. No, it's not what you're thinking—it's not a nickname for Little Woolly's favorite appendage. It's a chicken that tries to peck another chicken to death while surrounded by a mob of raving illiterate hillbillies. Apparently, S. Carolina adopted the name during a home game against Tennessee.
- On signing day in February, who'd have thought that of the Ogletree twins—ranked as the highest and lowest players in the class, and with the fan base believing that Zander was only offered in order to secure Alec—that the little guy with no position would be the one who saw the field first?
- Quote of the week: "I've found that prayers work best when you have big players."
~Knut Rockne
- Mrs. Butts recently taught Little Woolly how to scoop up the Kiffins left behind by Wags, the family bulldog, when he takes the pup out for a walk. It's harder to scoop the Petrinos because they're liquid, but if you use a fire hose and turn the pressure way up, they'll go away eventually, even if they might leave an unsightly stain and strongly malodoriferous residue.
- True confession: I like Dabo Swinney, the coach at Clemson. One reason is that he reminds me of Mark Richt in that he's really well grounded. He had a pretty unstable upbringing, but came through a pretty good guy as an adult. And who wouldn't like the origin of his name? He was christened as William, but when they were kids, one of his brothers always referred to him as "That boy," which in Alabamese comes out as "Dabo." I can't find this story anywhere online, but I heard him tell it on a TV show I saw last summer. (Don't ask me why I was watching a TV show about Clemson football in July, but it happened, and I apologize). The brother, incidentally, in spite of this fine contribution to American culture, grew up to become a raging alcoholic, like their father. More reason to admire Dabo for turning into a really decent guy.
- Both of my readers agree with me that the Bob Davie/Mark Jones broadcast team is hands-down the worst in college football. These are the guys who manufacture conversations about Facebook and coach's salaries during game-winning drives. Over the winter, I saw Jones do some basketball broadcasts where he was actually not half-bad. So I can only conclude that Bob Davie is so terrible that he makes the other guy in the booth much worse than he actually is. Thank God he doesn't share the booth with Jeff Schultz.
- Penn State started a freshman QB for the first time in 17 years. The last one before yesterday was Wally Richardson, now a key advisor in the Rankin Smith academic support unit for UGA, and all-around great guy.
- Between T.J. Stripling and A.J. Green, I think we'll block a few punts and kicks this year. Stripling's about a mile long, even if he looks mighty skinny out there.
- Dumbest play of the day (national category): Robert Marve, which rhymes with Favre, scored a late TD on a nice run to bring Purdue back into contention vs. Notre Dame, a team I've hated since I lived in Chicago and had to endure the reverential treatment accorded Touchdown? Jesus! by the local press. (For those of y'all who grew up on grits and biscuits, South Bend is a commuter-train ride away from My Favorite City.) Anyhow, Marve celebrated the end of the run by somersaulting into the endzone, which is an automatic 15-yard penalty on the kickoff (see overzealous SEC refs officiating

games vs. LSU in Sanford Stadium). The penalty created a field position shift that stayed in effect for the rest of the game. What a knucklehead. Looks as though not every QB from Plant HS is known for his savvy.

- If Michigan QB Denard Robinson plays with his hair on fire, that'll be one heck of a blaze.
- I didn't see true freshman Brandon Burrows mentioned all fall in any reports or blogs, and there he was on Saturday returning a short kickoff 24 yards. I met him during recruiting and was really impressed by what a bright guy he is. Looks as though he's good enough to play early too, in spite of missing his senior year of high school with a knee injury.
- It occurred to me on Saturday that if UGA were Boise State, we'd play Louisiana-Lafayette 10 times, plus maybe Georgia Tech and Auburn, and pencil in 10-12 wins every year, while playing on a red field. But what a bore to play such a non-competitive schedule, even if it does buy you a fraudulent top 5 ranking.
- I read in an interview with Todd Grantham that one thing he learned from Nick Saban was that he "really began to get a feel for taking people away, making people beat you left-handed." That's something I think that will be really different from recent years, where we tried to contain and limit what teams wanted to do, and they did it anyhow. The Dawgmeister has played and coached a lot of basketball in his life, and one defensive axiom he always followed was to never let the guy you're covering catch the ball in a position on the floor that he likes—you beat him to his spot and make him catch it further out. You will reduce his chances of doing his best work by forcing him out of his range and operating preference, and making him go to lower options in his repertoire once he catches it. I like what Todd's saying and look forward to games where every quarterback doesn't have a career day against us except maybe left-handers, which John Brantley isn't.
- On this note: Stephen Garcia scares me a little because he's a really good athlete and pretty talented in general, and athletic QBs (along with other kinds of QBs) have had great games vs. our defense in the last few years. With Grantham's comments in mind, and with Garcia's history of immaturity, I suspect that we will try to rattle him mentally, pressure him into bad decisions, and have Spurrier get in his grill, which will unnerve him further and upset his timing and decision-making as we keep the pressure coming. Grantham also talks about cutting off the head of the snake, i.e., getting the QB to play poorly. I think that will be at the center of our defensive strategy on Saturday. If Spurrier replaces Garcia with Connor Shaw, then the game's already over.
- One thing that's overlooked about our tight ends is the versatility they'll give us around the goal line. We can run sets with multiple blocking and receiving options, tight sets with A.J. split out, three tight end sets for punching it in with the RB, bootlegs with Murray, and sets with a whole lot of 6'-4" guys covered by 5'-10" guys. That should be a lot of fun to watch. I ran into Bruce Figgins on campus and he's just enormous—from a distance I assumed I was seeing a DL. And he's smaller than Artie Lynch.
- Silver Lining Award: "Ealey was driving the 2004 Chevrolet Impala owned by Margaret Hamilton when it hit the parking services truck." So, here we have an NFL-quality RB driving his roommate's mom's 6-year old Chevy, instead of a Land Rover SUV purchased by a local businessman (see Joe McKnight, USC [the one in Dollywood]). I always knew Mark Richt ran a pretty clean program, and in my mind, you couldn't ask

for better proof that his players are not on the take. I'll take a player who does occasional dumb-ass things over a coach who teaches his players how to do illegal things any day.

The Forecast: Every year I say the same thing as everyone else: Expect a hard-fought, low-scoring, tight game when USC (the one with a real football coach) and UGA (the one with the real university) hook up. Last year that kind of thinking got us a final score of 41-37. My sense from occasionally reading the Columbia "newspaper" is that SC will rely on their running game and their outstanding defense. They showed vs. S. Mississippi that they hit the field in high gear this season and have both a strong D and some weapons, and that maybe Garcia is maturing. But he really wasn't pressured much, and our pressure is, we hope, what will alter the pattern of the CWM years of allowing QBs to play to their strengths instead of being forced to play to their weaknesses.

Keys to the game: our OL vs. their front 7, their RBs vs. our 3-4 and how ready the D is to play it at full speed against SEC talent. A strong running game can help to negate the opponent's home field advantage, which will help us out all season and help extend Coach Richt's history of success on the road. Murray looked pretty polished on Saturday, which perhaps is not saying a lot given that we played a middling team from a weak conference whose best defender broke his hand in the first half and didn't return. Aaron threw one unspeakably bad pass that their guy inexplicably dropped—I think he was trying to throw it away and into the hedges but the wind held it up—but otherwise played smart. I actually think that having A.J. sit out was a blessing of sorts in that it got the other WRs involved and accustomed to the idea that they are targets too. Before the game I thought that we'd run a lot more than pass this year, but it appears that we'll have a balance similar to last year's distribution; Murray threw a handful of inaccurate passes, but was mostly sharp. The big difference next week is how sharp he'll be against much stronger pressure.

I think that we have a couple of advantages that will tilt the game in our favor: A.J. Green (no explanation needed), the tight ends (both for blocking and catching), the pressure on Garcia, and our kicking and punting games, which will create advantageous field position for us and put a few points on the board when the O stalls inside the forty. Walsh just seems to be automatic on anything inside 55 yards, and likely from 55-60, and with Butler we will always put teams on the wrong side of the 50 and in most cases inside the 20 to begin their drives. Give them long fields, and us relatively short ones, and we come home 2-0. Good Guys, 27-23.

National Game of the Week: Some pretty good games to pick from: Penn State at Alabama, Florida State at Oklahoma, Central Michigan at Temple. But the highest combined ranking goes to Miami at Ohio State. It's hard not to go with the home team in all 4 of these games, and not just because they're higher ranked and at home. *Sports Illustrated* has picked Temple to finish with a better record than UGA, and when was the last time they were wrong about anything? But getting back to the Hurricanes vs. the Buckeyes: OSU (the one not owned by T. Boone Pickens) has recruited better for longer than Shannon has at Miami (the one Eric Beverly didn't play for). Shannon has done a nice job in the time he's been at The Yew, but he hasn't been there long enough. OSU has quite a QB, and UM has a pretty good one of their own. But not good enough to overcome the talent differential in the upper classes and the Horseshoe Advantage. Bucks, 31-24.

Note: The Dawgmeister's forecasts are not to be used for betting purposes.