

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
October 16th Edition: There's a reason we schedule Vandy for Homecoming

Weekend wrap-up: Let the Kenarious Gates era begin.

Well now, that was fun, wasn't it? The second week of October is a late date for the start of the college football season, but we're now 1-0 and things are looking up. Gorgeous afternoon, Dawgs start strong and never take the foot off the pedal, Da'Rick Rogers records 1 catch for minus 3 yards (that's 3 yards fewer than Mrs. Butts picked up through the air), and the other team's guys make all the critical mistakes this time. UT looked like a pretty bad team, which doesn't upset me much at all, but they played LSU toe-to-toe just a week ago, and LSU took the Gators in the Swamp last night, so don't tell me that this SEC win is meaningless. They're all meaningful. I talked to Wally Richardson before the game, and he was the QB at Penn State when they made the transition from Independent status to the Big Ten. Conference games are just tougher, he said, than games that don't count in the standings.

Here's what I like especially about the game: Aaron Murray is beginning to look like one of the better QBs in the SEC. Let's say that the top tier includes Ryan Mallett, Greg McElroy, Stephen Garcia, and Cam Newton, and maybe that rent-a-QB at Mississippi. Does Murray belong in that group? I think that right now he's playing as well as McElroy and Garcia (and I say this with the belief that Garcia is the league's most underrated player). Mallett and Newton have such enormous physical advantages that it's hard to compare them to anyone, and Newton can run to boot, so let's say that they occupy the very top rung of the ladder. After that, is anyone really playing better than Murray? Certainly not John Brantley. And he's getting better every week.

Aaron's development is allowing Bobo to call a much wider and deeper playbook (and it does help to have #8 suiting up, even as we seem to be down a new WR every week, e.g. Marlon Brown on Saturday). Even though we ended up running the ball 36 times and throwing it 25, it seemed that we were a pass-first team on Saturday—we did a lot of the running in the fourth quarter while mercifully playing Clockwork Orange to keep the score down. We still do not run with authority, and I'm just as surprised by that as anyone. Something's missing from Ealey's game this year. During the pregame stretches, I saw that Ken Malcome was stretching with the second team, and Washaun seemed to lack his normal fire before the game. I assumed that Malcome had passed Ealey on the depth chart, but Ealey got the carries and got under 3 yards per tote. I'd love to see the guy who carried us during A.J.'s absence last season return to form, but I think that Murray's arm, not to mention his feet, will set the tone and direction for the O for the next 3.5 years or so. Meanwhile, I read a remark by Coach Richt to the effect that the OL is presently better at pass blocking than run blocking. So, as usual, there's more than one explanation for a complicated process.

This does seem to be that time of year when the freshmen start to catch on and move up. Alec Ogletree got a number of snaps at safety yesterday, Gates moved past a whole lot of guys into the starting OL, and Murray is looking like a veteran. October was when Matthew Stafford took the starting QB job a few years back, and when Ealey broke in last season. With Sturdivant and Gates now starting on the OL in place of Josh and Chris Davis, we have only one senior starter (Bolling, now at RT) on the line. So they give us something to look forward to as the team

continues to grow. Gates has really impressed, especially for a 3-star guy who was the odd man out in our OL recruiting last year until a late defection opened up a spot for him and he was offered a scholarship the night before signing day and switched from UK to UGA.

It's time for my weekly lecture on why we would be crazy to even think of dumping Mark Richt because we got off to a bad start this year. The two winningest coaches of all time are Joe Paterno and Bobby Bowden. Total national championships between them: 4 in a combined 85 years of coaching. As much as I admire Paterno, he got a lot of wins against the likes of Temple, Rutgers (long before either of those programs experienced their current upswings, when they were pathetic doormats), Lehigh, Central Michigan, etc. before PSU joined the Big Ten, and even there had Indiana, Northwestern, Illinois, etc. to beat up for dependable wins every year. In 18 seasons in the Big Ten, Paterno has won one outright league championship, and has shared it twice (no playoff in the Big Ten)—Coach Richt has two SEC championships and one championship game loss in about half that time in a much tougher league. Bowden has spent the majority of his career in the ACC, and most of that occurred before it added VaTech, Miami, and BC to make it somewhat more competitive. Meanwhile, Coach Richt has built one of the nation's finest records during the most competitive decade of the nation's most competitive conference's history.

Are we really ready to chuck that success and start completely over? Ole Miss tried that in firing David Cutcliffe and have mostly stunk since; Texas A&M got tired of 9-win seasons under R.C. Slocum and now has 6-win seasons under a succession of replacements; etc. I think that Virginia Tech's decision to go with Frank Beamer is a much better model: find a great coach and stick with him even if not every season produces a championship run. For that matter, consider the Vince Dooley model of sticking with a guy for 25 years even though he had some lousy seasons amidst the occasional conference championship. I think that a program is in much better shape when it's stable than it is when it goes through coaches and systems in search of the magic winner who rarely works out any better than his predecessors, and contributes to poor records by installing new schemes for the previous guy's recruits every few years. I might be an IDIOT! but I do know that constant changes at the top are more often counterproductive than they are successful.

Why ignore Richt's outstanding body of work because one season got off to a poor start, and another produced "only" 8 wins, as though UGA has historically been a 10-win-a-season program, which it hasn't? Would you prefer the next Ed Orgeron, or Brad Scott, or Lou Holtz, or Ron Zook, or Woody Widenhofer, or Lane Kiffin, or Sylvester Croom, or Mike Price, or Gerry DiNardo, or Mike Shula, or Dennis Franchione, or Brian van Gorder (recall his disastrous job at Georgia Southern), or other guys too obscure to recall, all in the remote hope that you'll land the next Urban Meyer or Nick Saban—keeping in mind that Meyer may explode any day now with no Tebow to lean on, and that Saban would never fit at UGA because he answers to no one? Not me and my fellow IDIOTS!

Dawg Doots:

- For Kiffin haters, here's the LA Times story on their loss to Stanford:
<http://www.latimes.com/sports/la-sp-1010-plaschke-20101010,0,1429082,full.column>

- Speaking of people we all hate, here's Jeff Schultz's opinion of Coach Richt: http://blogs.ajc.com/jeff-schultz-blog/2010/10/04/georgias-players-arent-following-leader-and-thats-on-richt/?cxntfid=blogs_jeff_schultz_blog. Here's my opinion of Jeff Schultz: He is the worst sportswriter since Pliny the Tiny covered the Olympics in 770 B.C. and chiseled columns about how everyone but him was an idiot, even though he had never actually played any sports himself. Little known fact: Pliny began his career at the original *Athens Banner-Herald*, and then moved to the *Atlantis Journal-Constitution*, shortly after which the continent sank to the bottom of the ocean under the weight of his leaden prose.
- And it appears as though the Red & Black has someone interning to be the second coming of Jeff Schultz; see <http://www.redandblack.com/2010/10/03/playcalling-on-offense-is-the-true-problem-for-dogs/> and <http://www.redandblack.com/2010/10/04/richt-to-blame-not-scapegoats/>.
- On the drive home I heard Coach Richt on the postgame show talking about how UT's strategy for holding down A. J. was, well, to hold him on every play. They finally got called in the second half on a play where it didn't matter. But expect other teams to decide that it's better to hold him on every play and get caught once than not to hold him and watch him dancing in the endzone all day.
- Here's something from November 1, 2009: "Georgia leads the Southeastern Conference in penalties (74) and penalty yardage (610) through eight games. Coach Mark Richt promised during the summer to correct the problem after the Bulldogs led the SEC in penalties (112) and penalty yardage (938) in 2008." So, that's about 9 penalties a game for about 75-80 yards per game over the last 2 years. So far this year, the team has recorded 37 penalties for 269 yards, averaged to about 6 penalties for 45 yards per game. So the penalties have been reduced by about one-third between this season and the last two.
- I don't have stats for special teams play, but I'm pretty confident that our kickoff coverage is also vastly improved. It seems that teams are starting their drives from about the 20-25 yard line, as opposed to the 35 yard line which seemed to be the opponents' starting point fairly consistently in the last couple of years. I think that we can safely conclude that although Jon Fabris was a great DE coach and one intense and perhaps a little nutty guy, his special teams strategies were less effective than Warren Belin's have been for us.
- I've heard much hand-wringing about the recruits and their true commitment to the program. If they're wavering, then it's hard to understand why they keep coming to the games, as many of them consistently do, and bonding with one another as future teammates. I think that if we hold this staff together, then we hold this class together, and we win in the end. Otherwise, in a couple of years we'll look like Tennessee.
- I talked with someone who talked with Aaron Murray about Caleb's late fumble vs. Colorado. According to this chain of information, King never really had the ball; a defender penetrated so quickly and deeply that the handoff was disrupted and the ball popped out.
- I read that Isaiah Crowell now favors Alabama (see Chip Towers's update at <http://blogs.ajc.com/recruiting/2010/10/05/rb-isaiah-crowell-says-alabama-now-leads-georgia/>) in part because UGA is "losing a lot of games and have a lot of people have been getting in trouble." Now, I don't quite believe that Alabama has recruited choir boys

while UGA has been recruiting trouble-makers. Rather, I think that Nick Saban is the sheriff in Tuscaloosa and his players just don't get arrested, because if a cop arrests one of his players, Nick will run him (the cop, that is) out of town.

- Not to beat a dead bronco, but I can't help but comment on Boise State's schedule once again. Alabama just went through a gauntlet of Arkansas, Florida, and S. Carolina before finally losing one. Florida has now lost to Alabama and LSU. Meanwhile Boise is beating up on the Toledo's of the world, weak after weak (next up: San Jose State, Louisiana Tech, Hawaii, Idaho, Fresno State, Nevada, and Utah State). Tennessee is unbeaten vs. their Boise-esque nonconference schedule, winless in the SEC and other BCS team on their schedule; Kentucky is 3-0 vs. Boise-esque opponents, 0-3 in the league. Etc. etc. etc.
- One badly overlooked part of Mike Bobo's QB coaching is his ability to teach ball-handling skills. All of his QBs have carried out their fakes extremely well, and on Saturday Aaron pulled off a nifty ball-hiding-on-the-thigh trick for an important gain.
- Some guys behind me at the game were complaining about (of course) Mike Bobo's playcalling. So we had the ball close to the goal line, third down, and they predicted we'd run the fullback because we're so predictable. We ran the fullback and he scored. And they concluded that it was a terrible call because it was predictable. Running exotic plays designed in the dirt in the huddle has a certain romantic appeal, but running well-repped plays seems to be the preference of our staff because they rely on execution rather than design.

The Forecast: Dawgs host Vandy, a team that seems to be competitive but not quite there yet. Little Woolly keeps asking why a team would use the Commodore Doors for their mascot, and all I can tell him is what Grandpappy Butts used to say: that The Lord is not the only one who works in mysterious ways. They did beat Ole Miss, but then so did Jacksonville State. (Ole Miss did, however, destroy Fresno State, who awaits Boise, and even has an SEC win over Kentucky.) Vandy just hammered 0-6 Eastern Michigan (0-18 including last year) for their second win. But I don't see them coming in here and beating our newly-hungry team at Homecoming. I think that Airin' Aaron has another excellent game and we continue to work out the kinks in the 3-4 scheme. Dawgs, 38-17.

National Game of the Week: There are a couple of good ones. Arkansas goes to Auburn, and Ohio State goes to Wisconsin. Games that include unranked teams feature Texas at Nebraska and, in a game where We are All Bears, Cal hands the Kiffins their 3rd straight league loss. I'm going to forecast that yet another #1 team will go down at Camp Randall. I can't say I know a ton about Wisconsin other than the fact that they run the ball well. But they are at home and OSU, well, I just can't send them to another national championship game for a whupping. Badgers, 27-24.