

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
November 17th Edition: Clinching vs. Kentucky



“I can’t hardly think of another game that we played in this stadium where we played as well as a team on offense, defense, special teams. I think everybody kind of fed off each other.” ~Mark Richt

“We got beat at every phase of the game tonight.” ~Gene Chizik

The Recap: Last week, when the betting line on the game came out, I was pretty surprised to see us listed as 12½ point favorites, with a total over/under line of 53 points. Even with our impressive winning streak and national ranking, it was not clear how good we are. The SEC East was 0-18 vs. ranked teams and 5-11 vs. SEC West teams, with wins only over teams from The South’s Warmest Welcome State. (That’s Mississippi, for those of you who are not smarter than a 5th grader from Mississippi.) We’d taken out Tennessee and Florida, but who hasn’t? Not to mention Vandy, which everyone but Kentucky pencils in as a W in the preseason. And Coastal Carolina and New Mexico State, those barely count. Meanwhile Auburn had lost only to LSU, Clemson, and Arkansas, each a Top Ten team; is the defending national champion; and had taken out South Carolina, the last team to beat us. And we were listed as nearly 2 TD favorites? Surely you jest. Even Charles Barkley wouldn’t bet on Auburn losing by that much.

But what a day it was. I watched it at the stadium, then came home and watched it again on The Big Screen; and then I watched the Oregon/Stanford game just to watch our score scroll across the screen for a few more hours. At halftime at Sanford Stadium, I went and visited with The Scowlmeister. Now, the Scowlmeister is normally the Cheshire Dawg: Even when he leaves, his scowl remains. But goodness, he looked as though he’d just drunk a tumbler filled with Granny Butts’s special Potation of Joy, so giddy was he. And who could blame him? Running up points on New Mexico State is one thing. Beating the snot out of Auburn is another. Who’d have thought that in a game where the combined score almost hit the over/under mark of 53 points—the scoring in Saturday’s game totaled 52 points, for those of you who are not smarter than a 5th grader from Alabama—the Dawgs would rack up 45 of them?

I can’t decide which half I liked better, the first or the second. (That exhausts all possibilities, for those of you who are not smarter than a 5th grader from the greater Auburn-Opelika Metropolitan Area.) The first half was just a lights-out scoring orgy—the best kind, says Brother Willie—and I thought that I was dreaming that I was reliving the New Mexico State game, and hoped that when Auburn really showed up, we could play them toe-to-toe, mano-a-mano, grill to grill. After Auburn matched our opening TD drive with an impressive score of their own (challenge to Lou Holtz: Say “Uzomah to Lutzenkirchen” five times), I thought we were in for a typical

UGA/Auburn slugfest. But that was pretty much it for Auburn. Here is their offensive output for the game:

Auburn Drive Summaries						
START	QTR	POSS.	YARD	PLAYS	YARDS	RESULT
08:57	1	02:44	AUB 24	8	76	Passing Touchdown
03:02	1	03:10	AUB 22	6	19	Punt
13:16	2	00:07	AUB 44	1	-5	Fumble
09:41	2	01:49	AUB 38	3	1	Punt
05:00	2	01:20	AUB 27	3	-4	Punt
01:17	2	00:48	AUB 41	4	-5	Turnover on Downs
15:00	3	01:13	AUB 20	4	19	Punt
07:32	3	01:55	AUB 20	5	51	Fumble
14:49	4	01:27	AUB 31	3	1	Punt
05:59	4	03:37	AUB 20	8	35	Turnover on Downs

So, 76 yards on the first drive, 195 yards for the game. Check that 4-possession series where they ran 11 plays for -13 yards. We hammered them up and down the field in a way that made me wonder if anyone can beat us now, including any of those Titans from the West. We'll find out soon.

But then in the second half, we simply lined it up (often with 2 tight ends and a fullback) and pretty much announced, OK War Eagles, we are going to run it on every play—stop us if you can. And we just blasted them off the line of scrimmage play after play. That's as well as our OL has played in several years, and that's how championship teams play. And it was a welcome sight to see us run over Jeff Whitaker and Gabe "Nick Who?" Wright—GA kids who crossed the border to play at Auburn—on the majority of those plays. In the second half we did not have the scoring blitz of the first, but dominating the line of scrimmage is a beautiful sight. Wags's tail was oscillating furiously throughout the game, a sure sign that he's one happy bulldog.

When I watched the game on the Big Screen later that evening, I was more impressed with Crowell than I had been at the stadium. Isaiah ran hard, apparently heeding Danielson's challenge that he needs to watch film of Richard Samuel if he wants to develop into dominant SEC back. Both fumbles followed from mishandles on handoffs, rather than giving it up on a hit. When he got tackled, it was often on an exceptional play by a defender. IC, I think, is on his way to meeting his destiny as a historic back in UGA lore.

The Guy Who Sits Behind Me, Coach Knute "Bear" Lombardi, still found much to complain about—get Crowell out of there! Look at that hole in their defensive line, run it up the middle!—and little to admire, even as we piled up score after score. But he apparently was Raptured at halftime, and did not return for the second half. And so, for the first time this season, he does not win the Coveted Dawgmeister Sanford Stadium Jackass of the Week award, which goes to The Guy Who Walked Out of the Stadium With Me, who was complaining bitterly about the fact that we did not try to throw more passes in the second half in order to run up the score because last year, they ran it up on us; and even after our glorious beatdown of our hated rival, he began

arguing with a contrite Auburn fan about how dirty Nick Fairley was last year and how Auburn is a dirty team who will injure people just for the fun of it—all this after we beat the War Eagles up and down the field, often leaving them prostrate on the grass till they were helped off by their trainer. Congratulations, sir, and I hope you didn't kick your pets and children too hard when you got home. Sometimes a 45-7 win over Auburn to put us one win from the championship game just isn't enough.

Bobo haters must just be pulling their hair out these days. And soon they'll look more like Mike. He coached circles around the fabled genius Gus Malzahn, a favorite to take over at Ole Miss because of his uncanny play-calling wizardry and prowess at coaching up QBs. If Malzahn is a genius, then Mike Bobo is The Almighty Savant Himself. Exhibit A: well, pretty much the 2011 season, at least after the Boise game. I watched the game with Studs McMachoman, who played D-2 college ball and coached at the high school level for many years. Both of us are pretty mystified about the belief that Mike B is not an imaginative play-caller. Those plays seem to work pretty well these days. In contrast, Malzahn threw 50 versions of the bubble screen, giving up on running the ball before he even tried. Eighty-one of his QB Moseley's 140 passing yards came on two plays, meaning that otherwise, Malzahn's unstoppable offensive mind produced 3 yards per pass attempt, which perhaps is not a surprise given that we seemed to figure out his bubble-screen strategy before the first kickoff. His gimmick calls showed the danger of living by the sword and dying by the sword: They produced the TD on their first drive, but later contributed to fumbles, execution that would embarrass Rick Perry, and in general a thoroughly ruinous day for Auburn.

Studs and I also engaged in an extended discourse on the topic of whether or not Michael Bennett is a possession receiver. Usually, that's a guy who moves the chains but can't get downfield. I think that White Guys can be more than that, and Michael has become a terror going after the ball in the end zone. Now, there's a difference between his skill set and Malcolm Mitchell's. MM runs like a steroid-stoked jackrabbit after the catch, whereas MB looks more like Richard Samuel seeking defenders to run over before they get out of his way. I'm just glad to have them both, plus Third Amigo Chris Conley, on our side.

Overlooked on Bennett's sensational TD catch: Carleton Thomas absolutely stoned a blitzing linebacker to create the time for Murray to throw the pass. Well done Big Guy—looks as though all that practice in the dorm room is paying off. And a career day carrying the Rock as well, which is something I hope he is not practicing at home.

The Coveted Dawgmeister Good Guy of the Week Award goes to Bryant Gantt. Bryant was a Dawg linebacker in the 1980s and now works as a program coordinator at the University's Athletic Department and a recruiting assistant for the football program. Bryant seems to have a tremendous amount of trust from everyone in the athletic department and from the coaches in terms of organizing game day events and in general making sure that things operate on schedule and with smooth efficiency. Whenever the camera pans to Coach Richt during a game, Bryant is always in the picture making sure that if something needs to get done, it gets done. You might also recall that [Bryant was instrumental in the surrender of cop-killer and all-around bad guy Jamie Hood](#), serving the Athens community well beyond his role in the football program. Great work on all counts by a great guy and worthy recipient of the Good Guy of the Week Award.

Dawg Doots:

- If Ben Jones doesn't play a good while in the NFL, I'll be surprised. He's the unsung hero of the team, bringing MoFo intensity, savvy, and tremendous skills.
- The sideline reporter interview with Coach Richt at halftime provoked his comment that the biggest play of the first half came from Quintavious Harrow's huge hit on an Auburn kick return where he crushed a full-speed return man dead in his tracks. You will recall that Q's scholarship offer was viewed as a cynical move designed simply to help Isaiah Crowell choose UGA on signing day. But like Zander Ogletree before him, he's showing that he's got enough skills to serve the program well beyond bringing someone else along with him. Zander got a lot of snaps at fullback on Saturday and played well. These buddy 'ships often pan out better than the ones offered to high-profile studs who end up transferring after a couple of years.
- There was an interesting Publix promotional gimmick that they ran during a timeout: They set up a large plastic sheet with a hole in it, and Auburn quarterbacks were given a chance to throw a football through a hole in it from a series of five-yard increments to win a prize. The prize remains available.
- This week's most extraordinary entry in Dawg coverage: The King of masochistic schadenfreude, [Sports & Grits, has written a column about the need to beat Auburn and shut down the idiots who make a living criticizing Mark Richt](#). The comments are well worth reading.
- The season's greatest mystery: Kolton Houston's eligibility issues that have kept him off the field this season. Really, is it so complicated that they haven't sorted it out yet? The NCAA continues to baffle when it comes to making decisions on eligibility. As they say, The Lord is not the only one who works in mysterious ways.
- The post-game crew on 960 was raving about the OL, especially Chris Burnette, in dominating the line of scrimmage. They saw us having tremendous success running off right guard behind Chris, and I'm sure it didn't hurt to have Bruce Figgins blasting whatever effluvium was left after Chris took care of the first level. And Danielson also noted that we were pulling the LG, Gates, a lot into the same hole. Maybe our coaches watch film after all, in contrast to what the Sanford occupants who surround me seem to believe at times.
- Speaking of TV guys, I had one of those moments before the game that was one of life's pleasant surprises: Someone asked me to take a picture of him standing with someone, and I looked up to see him standing with Gary Danielson, the greatest college football broadcaster ever. So I got a pregame handshake with GD and an opportunity to tell him how great a job he does. One for the scrapbook, even though I didn't take up his time for a photo op with me as well. I didn't want him to be distracted during the broadcast by the warm glow of having met The Dawgmeister before the game.
- Best name of the week: Auburn's Eltoro Freeman, although at times he and his teammates appeared to be playing matador defense.
- The Military Times news service reported that in Afghanistan, the Marines have ordered U.S. troops to restrain their audible flatus, because Afghan soldiers and civilians complained of being offended. However, passing gas by front-line troops is "practically a sport." Little Woolly is inquiring into the possibility of a Junior Olympics team and believes that his achievements will qualify him for a spot on this elite unit.

- Coveted Dawgmeister Insider Recruiting Tidbits: [Derrick Henry](#), our 2012 RB who is about to break the Florida single-season rushing record as a junior, was on the sidelines. He's already 6-3, 225, with no body fat and looking lean and sculpted. This kid will be a terror. For those of you worried that it's a long way to February, 2013: He and John Theus are very close friends, and there's a possibility that Big John will be starting on our OL next year—he seems to be one squared-away kid (although that's true of other OL in the program as well). I think Derrick's rock-solid, and I suspect that Saturday's game only solidified his goal of becoming a Dawg. And who wouldn't want to run behind John Theus? John seems to me to be one of those “magnet” recruits who is at every game with his dad and who is extremely gregarious, much as Aaron Murray and a few others have been during recruiting: a guy other guys want as a teammate.
- Also on the sidelines: Tramel (pronounced Truh-MELL) Terry, the 2012 SC WR who committed along with Henry and Brice Ramsey, then backed off. I talked with his dad for a while, and his dad's a huge UGA fan, presently completing his career in the Navy in Jacksonville. Tramel was decked out in UGA gear and looking right at home. So we still hold the advantage with this one, I think.
- Final prospect update (although there were so many prospects at the game that I could spend a few pages on this topic): I talked for a little while with under-the-radar duel-threat QB, [Faton Bauta](#), who said he's going to choose from among UGA, Purdue, and Mississippi State and enroll in his school of choice in January. All fall we've heard that we aren't signing a QB this year, but Faton has narrowed 20+ offers to these three, so I'm assuming we've offered and are interested. Faton wants to play QB in college and has had to deal with a lot of duplicitous coaches who are telling him he'll be a QB but are angling to shift him to a skill position once on campus. I think his skill set is best suited for MSU because Mullen runs a spread-option. But I did alert him to the fact that a lot of people in our program think that Mullen is one of the game's giant bung-holes, and that he'd better do his homework on the coaching staff before going there. On the other hand, I could sell Mark Richt to just about anyone, because he's one of the good guys, and as this week's events have proven once again, good guys who are great coaches are hard to find out there.
- I finally got my first good look at Andrew Luck, called by many the best-prepared QB to come out of college since Peyton Manning. First, the good news: He's shaved off that nasty beard. (The bad news: Aaron Murray is growing one.) But the best since Manning? Now, keep in mind that the Lamestream Sports Media anoints someone in this fashion every year—see Stafford, Bradford, Newton, and many others. So these accolades are always inflated. But Luck sure didn't impress me as the must-get player in this draft. The TV guys showed a graphic quoting a couple of guys, including the redoubtable Phil Simms, saying that he did not have a big-time arm and that Matt Barkley is a better pro prospect. This opinion was rebutted resoundingly by the highly doubttable Brent Musburger. Never heard that one about the insufficient arm-strength about Matt Stafford. It'll be interesting to see how this guy works out in the long run. I'm pretty happy with Aaron Murray these days, hirsute adornment notwithstanding, and wouldn't trade him for Andrew Luck or anyone else right now.

The Forecast: Dawgs host Kentucky and secure their trip to Atlanta to face down LSU and give Coach Richt his third SEC championship in a season where he was, just a couple of months ago,

assumed to be dead meat hanging from the clothesline, waiting for the buzzards to nibble him into oblivion and for Sports & Grits to devour their vomit. UK is having a dreadful year and teams like that tend to give up when they fall behind, which they will surely do. It's hard to say just how big this spread will be, but I'm going with UGA, 52-7, under the assumption that without a play-calling genius on the order of Gus Malzahn, the Wildcats won't score more than one TD.

National Game of the Week (2 ranked teams): It's a surprisingly un compelling set of matchups for this point in the season, with only a few top-25 matchups. So I'll go with OU over Baylor. Oklahoma's home loss to a terrible Texas Tech team is increasingly incomprehensible, and I suppose should alert us to the perils of the Kentucky game. But anyhow, they seem to have recovered from taking a week off during a week when a game was scheduled, and I think they'll beat the Bears, even though the Bears' QB might win a Good Guy award for his citizenship contributions. Sooners, 48-35.

National Upset of the Week (unranked team over ranked team): Ohio State over Penn State. I don't know how the Lions can keep suiting up after last week. They managed a competitive game against Nebraska, but they must be emotionally drained. Ohio State's a mess, but Penn State's a bigger mess—and at this time last year, these were two of the game's most hallowed programs. Buckeyes, 13-10.