

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast Bowl Game Preview

Please, be patient with me
God is not through with me yet.
Isaiah 1:1

I imagine that there's been more written about Isaiah Crowell this season than any other player on the UGA football team. From outside the program, the consensus is that he had a fantastic year in which he met each lofty expectation that accompanied his commitment to play between the hedges: SEC Freshman of the year, Freshman All-American in just about every listing, the team's leading rusher by nearly 500 yards, a [national top 4 freshman regardless of position](#), and [enough dazzle to make plenty of highlight films and have the people in Sanford stadium giving high fives and whooping it up](#).

If you'd told me before the season began that Crowell would produce to such acclaim, I'd have thought, Heck, with that performance, we might win 10 games, win the SEC East, and play in a meaningful January bowl game. And what a great season that would be for our beloved Dawgs. We had big dreams for Crowell, and according to the national press, he made them all come true. Ray "The Pastor of Disaster" Drew, who came in with nearly as much hype as Crowell but played sparingly in a backup role, can only dream of the accolades accumulated by Isaiah in his first year in the program.

But Ray Drew, in spite of being a reserve who watched another rookie SEC East DE/OLB, Jadaveon Clowney, become a national sensation, still seems to be in the fans' good graces. Nobody is angry with Ray Drew. In contrast, over the course of the season within the Dawgnation, people got down on Isaiah Crowell to the point where he got booed during the SEC championship game by his own fans while trying to run the ball against LSU's NFL-esque defense, all on a badly turned ankle. After his suspensions, people started saying that he was soft, filled with a sense of entitlement, lacking in dedication, fragile, headstrong, cocky, immature, and a guy people think of in the way that they think of Michael Dyer at Auburn: talented, but without the mental makeup to be a respected team member or leader, a guy with elite ability but an attitude problem that is detrimental to his career and his team.

Now, I often think that fans whip off judgments about players based on rumor, misinformation, disinformation, innuendo, and poppycock spread anonymously over the Internet. If I don't hear it from somebody inside the program, I tend to wait till I know more before forming a judgment about a kid, coach, or other Dawg program member.

Something really caught my attention, though, that suggests that people inside the program think that Crowell's maturity level has not caught up with his talent: the release of the team's Newcomer of the Year Awards at the Gala. Those recognized as the team's top newcomers include Michael Bennett, Chris Conley, Malcolm Mitchell, Amarlo Herrera, John Jenkins, and Quintavius Harrow. There's one huge omission in that group, and it's the guy who, based solely on what he accomplished on the field, was viewed as the league's top freshman and nation's best freshman RB. Especially remarkable is that Harrow, Crowell's best friend who was presumably

offered a scholarship solely to get Isaiah's signature on signing day, got recognized for his special teams work while the jewel of the recruiting class went home empty-handed. That's some pretty deafening silence from his fellow players and his coaches on his stature within the team.

So, I have to conclude that Isaiah is one talented kid who is still in the process of growing and maturing, both physically and mentally. As both of my readers are aware, I think that Gary Danielson is as astute an observer as college football has ever had, and he's called Crowell out during broadcasts for different shortcomings. During the Florida game he said repeatedly that Crowell needs to observe Richard Samuel for lessons on how to run hard in the SEC; and during the LSU game he noted on a number of occasions that Crowell was out of position for his blocking assignments, especially on pass plays. Game 13 is pretty late in the season to be in the wrong spot or employ poor technique against the nation's most ferocious pass rush. When Danielson speaks, I listen, and I sense that he feels that Crowell remains a work in progress at this point, albeit one with a ton of talent to work with. Isaiah got knocked up a lot this year, although most tailbacks do; and he deserves credit for getting 4.7 yards per carry while playing hurt for the most part. But he does not seem yet to have the respect, patience, and discipline to listen attentively to those in authority, from the Rankin Smith Center staff to the dorm monitors to the coaches. And he'll pay the price if he doesn't get his head screwed on the way the team's Newcomers of the Year apparently have.

And that's why we keep recruiting tailbacks. Injuries and suspensions had us playing guys so deep in the depth chart that many people didn't even know they were on the team. Most of them played pretty well, and for that we should be grateful and acknowledge the good job that Brian McClendon did with a unit where, after his #1 and #2 backs were gone before the season began, he had to play the next 6 guys, only 2 of whom had ever carried the ball at the college level before the season began—and of those two, Samuel had switched positions and Thomas hadn't shown much in his first three years in the program. So McClendon took a pretty ragtag group and turned it into a productive unit that, when we had the lead in the fourth quarter, kept pounding out first downs and running down the clock. Credit the OL of course, but somebody was toting the rock back there and moving the chains.

B-Mac is also a terrific recruiter, and if you don't think so, ask Keith Marshall and Derrick Henry, who will give us the nation's #1 RB recruit for 3 straight seasons; and for what it's worth, [Marshall](#) may be the second coming of Percy Harvin, and [Henry](#) brings a talent level reminiscent of Adrian Peterson. That's not excessive hyperbole; these guys occupy the same position on recruiting boards coming out of high school that Harvin and Peterson did, and those guys are now NFL stars, albeit on a bad team. That's some serious talent headed to UGA's backfield over the next two years. The only time Mac whiffed was at the beginning of his appointment when Mack Brown, his top recruit, picked Florida and we took Ken Malcome. This year Brown was the 6th leading rusher on UF with 12 carries for 42 yards (3.5 YPC); Malcome was our #5 rusher with 30 carries for 123 yards (4.1 YPC). That's a standoff, I think, although Ken finished pretty strongly and probably has generated more optimism for down the road, the better competition at the position at UGA notwithstanding.

Still, even with 5 scholarship RBs returning and Marshall on campus in January, the coaches want to sign another in the 2012 signing day class from the elite group of Gurley, Davis, and

others; and are also looking to sign a second RB to go with Henry for the 2013 signing day class. These guys get injured, neglect their studies, fire up the wacky tobaccy, drive automobiles into fixed objects, and break internal rules to the point where they find themselves in street clothes during games, and as much as I like and admire Kyle Karempelis, we've got to have more than just him in reserve. So keep 'em coming Brian, and may the best men play.

And so, to complete the lyric from above:

Please be patient with me,
God is not through with me yet.

Please be patient with me,
God is not through with me yet.

When God gets through with me,
when God gets through with me,
I shall come forth,
I shall come forth like pure gold.

For Isaiah Crowell's sake, let's hope so.

A Coveted Dawgmeister Shout Out to the Owlmeister for Temple's blowout win in the New Mexico Bowl. With Penn State and Pitt presently in disarray (Pitt just hired their 5th coach in 16 months; Penn State has problems you may have heard about), and with the Big East (Pitt) having given up on the idea of having a regional identity, the Owls might be on the move for that abundant Pennsylvania and New Jersey talent. And in case you missed it, here's the text message that Todd "What a Guy" Graham had forwarded to his Pitt players when he took the Arizona State job after one year as a Panther:

I have resigned my position at Pitt in the best interest of my family to pursue the head coaching position at Arizona State. Coaching there has always been a dream of ours and we have family there. The timing of the circumstances have prohibited me from telling you this directly. I now am on my way to Tempe to continue those discussions. God Bless. Coach Graham.

First Tebow, and now this. The Almighty is having one strange year, and still needs to help Coach Graham with his subject-verb agreement issues. Well, at least Mark May will now have someone to hate even more than he hates Georgia. God Bless.

The Coveted Dawgmeister Good Guy of the Week goes to Coach Mark Richt. In a sports world rampant with corruption, Coach Richt is about as fine a person as we could ever hope for to lead our program. There are many false prophets out there, and this year their worlds came crashing down around them. Some were accidents waiting to happen, like the pious Jim Tressel, who cut every corner imaginable when he thought God wasn't looking. Some were absolute stunners, like the beatific Joe Paterno, who went from saint to pariah almost overnight after overlooking the most ghastly behavior imaginable on his staff and emerging under the national microscope as a

guy whose reality was far from his image. If Coach Richt eventually turns out to be a creep like these guys, then I'll eat Les Miles's hat, and have Nick Saban's shoe lifts for dessert. From selling his vacation house so that he could donate the proceeds to charity, to building houses for people through Habitat for Humanity, to paying over \$60,000 in bonuses to his staff out of his own pocket when the Athletic Association declined to reward or compensate them to his satisfaction, he pretty much embodies his Savior's hope for the human condition, and I'm proud to be associated with the university where he leads the team on the field and sets the example for how his players and staff (not in the Sanduskian sense) should conduct themselves off it.

Coveted Dawgmeister Game Balls go to December Dawg graduates Justin Anderson, Housing; Nic Clemons, Child and Family Development; Candler Cook, Management; Eric Elliot, Risk Management and Insurance; Demetric Evans, Child and Family Development; Bruce Figgins, Communication Studies; Ben Harden, Housing; Josh Sailors, Biology; Richard Samuel, Sport Management; Trinton Sturdivant, Finance. Congratulations gentlemen, and may you represent your alma mater proudly and with distinction.

And now, the 2011 Coveted Dawgmeister Awards for Media and Related Achievements:

The David Hale Award for Best Dawg Coverage is a tie between Chip Towers & Michael Carvell of the AJC and Leather Helmet for their Recruiting Updates by Socrates and other useful information. There are some other good sources, but these are the ones I tend to go to, in the absence of spending Little Woolly's lunch money on subscription sites.

The Jeff Schultz Award for Worst Sportswriting, Print Medium, goes to Jeff Schultz for somehow managing to keep the dream job of about 100,000 people without having any talent or any understanding of athletes or sports.

The Mark Bradley Award for Worst Sportswriting, Online Medium, goes to Sports & Grits for writing about a thousand nauseating pieces saying what a lousy coach Mark Richt is, and then when the Dawgs hit a winning streak, writing about how unfaithful and negative Dawg fans are.

The Bob Davie Award for Worst Broadcasting of Games goes to Craig James in a unanimous vote, which I can only hope predicts his success in his bid for a U.S. Senate seat.

The Gary Danielson Award for Best Color Commentary goes to Gary Danielson, from whom I learn more about football in one sentence than I ever will from most of the rest of the broadcasters out there combined.

The Lou Holtz Award for Worst Studio Anchor is a tie between Lou Holtz and Mark May for wearing Snuggies on TV in an effort to appear lovable, which they are not.

The Dawgmeister Lifetime Achievement Award goes to Larry Munson. Thanks for making something great sound even greater, Big Guy.

The Dawg Fan of the Year goes to the Scowlmeister, whose irrepressible negativity began to shift in mid-season and who was, if only briefly, spotted smiling during the Auburn game and

thereafter. Got to crawl before you can walk, and I'm expecting leaps and bounds in his disposition next year. Welcome home, Prodigal Son, and Walk in Victory; and may ye remain in the flock and drink the blood of the lamb. Well, probably a bad idea there, but welcome home nonetheless.

Best Site for Dawg Fanatics: The Dawgbone. What else?

Each recipient of a Coveted Dawgmeister Award will receive 5 Orvis catalogues from the mile-high stack that Mrs. Butts received in the mail in the month before Christmas Day.

The Forecast: Dawgs vs. Spartans. Seems that we did this recently, didn't we? I'll confess that I probably know more about the Athens Academy Spartans than the MSU Spartans, so don't have any particular insights here. But I do know that Coach Richt has an outstanding Bowl Game record and that we are an SEC team and they are not, and that's good enough for me. I think Crowell starts his image rehab with a strong game that sets up our national championship run in 2012. Murray begins his Heisman campaign by leading the Dawgs to a W, while MSU finds out what it's like to try to move the ball against a top-tier SEC defense. Got to like the Good Guys in this one: Dawgs, 24-13.

National Championship Game: I'm pretty sick of hearing about how great Nick Saban is, and I hope that this is the game that establishes him as the #2 coach in the SEC West. I think that LSU is playing better than ever with Jefferson really asserting himself at QB. The defenses will cancel each other out, but I see the Tigers finishing an unbeaten run because Jefferson will manufacture points and Richardson will not break loose: LSU, 17-14.