

The Dawgmeister's Weekend Forecast
October 15th Edition: Gloria, Gloria to Old Vanderbilt; or, She Came in through the Bathroom Window, and Left through the Commode Door

The Recap: During the second half of Saturday's game, I was haunted profoundly by a wailing sound that began deep in the Throbbing Bowels of Unmerciful Pain, resonated through the Crooked Spine of Suffering, emerged in a wretched shriek from the Tortured Larynx of Doom, and arose high above Athens before descending upon her residents with a pall that sank slowly into our fertile Red Clay, perhaps lingering yet as the weekend turns to dust and Vandy week begins. I had trouble deciphering the exact nature of this agonizing scream of horror and misery, until I made out the words as the sound echoed throughout the cosmos and its meaning appeared in a burning bush that excreted the scroll of revelation: It was the Scowlmeister, howling toward the heavens: "Third and 57!?!?"

Mrs. Butts and I took the occasion much more calmly, figuring that it's much better to ruin a single series than distribute the penalties over four different possessions and dash them all to pieces upon the rocky shores of Lost Drives. We knew that Tennessee could not penetrate our defense enough to get back in the game, even though they did finally score a TD in the game's waning moments before booting the onside kick out of bounds and allowing us to run out the clock and come home as winners from Rocky Top.

Last week, *Sports Illustrated* called Alabama's defense the greatest in the history of college football. On Saturday, during the LSU/Florida broadcast, one of the announcers said that LSU has the best defense in the SEC. As of October 2 (which is the only listing I could get before going to press, whatever that means in the world of sports blogging), the top ten in Total Defense in the nation were, in this order: Michigan State, UCF, Alabama, Virginia Tech, Penn State, FSU, Florida, UGA, LSU, and Wisconsin (and the Owlmeister, in addition to being most pleased about Temple's big win on Saturday over Ball State, is just as delighted to note that after Vandy at #11, the Owls were #12). I'm guessing that there'll be a little bit of reshuffling of this deck after Week 6, what with games having been played and all, and with Vandy having been hammered by Alabama, VT having yielded points and yards to Miami, Florida having been routed by LSU, FSU having been torched by Wake Forest, etc. My point is that if Alabama and LSU are the best defenses in history and in this year's SEC, respectively, then UGA is playing at one mighty high level. And if the question is "What have you done lately?" I think we're playing about as well as anyone, given that our stats include the first game when we let Kellen Moore rip through us like Barbara Dooley slicing up the Lamestream Sports Media, and the second game where Spurrier got a good game out of Stephen Garcia to put up points and yards.

Great to see Blair Walsh straighten out his kicks. With his mechanics and his confidence restored, I think that his blip of inconsistency is behind him.

Aaron Murray played a whale of a game on Saturday. The OL struggled at times (see above, or call the Scowlmeister yourself), Crowell played the whole game in a lot of pain, Mitchell went out with a tight hammy and left Murray without the day's most dynamic threat, and his deep throws to King were timed for Mitchell's speed. But in the third quarter Aaron put it all aside

and led two huge drives, first a short-field, 8-play drive and then a lightning-strike 3-play drive of 93 yards. Aaron hit 9 different receivers, none of them RBs who tend to inflate completion percentage stats (7 of UT's 22 completions were to RBs). We played conservatively in the fourth quarter with a good lead and a stifling defense, and I do believe that I heard The Guy Who Sits Behind Me saying, "We couldn't beat Prince Avenue Christian today" because we played for the win and only held UT to -20 yards rushing. I put this one on Aaron's shoulders. Tyler Bray might look more impressive walking down the ramp, but blow the whistle and I'll take our guy any day. And of course the victory was the work of our magnificent defense, which is currently playing at levels achieved by van Gorder, Russell, and other great coordinators of yore.

A Coveted Dawgmeister Game Ball goes to Coach Mark Richt for his 100th career win, one of three coaches in program history to reach this mark. All the best, coach, for the next 100 wins between the hedges.

Dawg Doots:

- During the day's early broadcasts, the announcers kept emphasizing how young Texas is and how their youth made it impossible to keep up with OU's experience; and then during our game, Tennessee's youth again was offered to account for their shortcomings. But are these teams much younger than UGA, where we are supposed to win the national championship every year (unlike, say, Texas and Tennessee)? You can play Where's Waldo? looking for seniors on our team: a couple on the OL, one DT, one DE, one corner. But otherwise we're playing underclassmen, and a lot of freshmen are playing key roles. So don't pull that youth BS on me. You play the team you recruit and live with the consequences. Will Muschamp is playing Urban Meyer's recruits, and most coaches would kill for that bunch. Mack Brown is playing his own recruits (and always has a top 5 class wrapped up by July), and so I don't get the idea that he's somehow playing a bad hand that is out of his control. And whatever Kiffin's many faults, he did leave a team full of athletes when he snuck out of Knoxville and took his Tour of Shame to USC.
- The OU/Texas game matched Willie Martinez (OU D-back coach) and Stacy Searels (UT OL coach), and Willie's guys sure looked better than Stacy's.
- How is it that LSU keeps getting these tough-as-nails running backs year after year? That Spencer Ware is one tough hombre, and I'd have to lift him past Rainey in the SEC hierarchy of top RBs. Rainey is fast, but Ware, that guy's a beast.
- Nice game by Chase Vasser subbing for Cornelius Washington at OLB. We didn't quite get the same pressure on Bray as we might have with CW on the edge, but Chase was in on a lot of plays and played his position well, as did Reuben Faloughi in a nice stint off the bench. I did notice Ray "The Preacher" Drew in as well, especially toward the end when UT had to pass to try to catch up. What I haven't seen much of is TJ Stripling or Dexter Morant, two 6'-7" OLBs who came in with great acclaim but who haven't played much this year. Stripling may still be hurt—he was in last year's rotation more than this year's before getting injured—and he doesn't seem to be in there on opponents' field goal tries, where his length seemed to make a difference last year. Let's hope that these guys do what's necessary to contribute (Stripling still has one string bean of a frame) and finish out strong for the Dawgs. Keep in mind that one of this year's big contributors is Carlton Thomas, and about 6 weeks ago a lot of Dawg fans thought he'd never see the field.

- Vasser in for Washington; Herrera in for Ogletree; Gilliard in for Robinson; it doesn't seem to make much of a difference in the total play of our defense. We don't appear to be quite as star-studded or hit as ferociously as Alabama, and don't seem to have the dazzling team speed of LSU. But we play just about as well as a team, which in our case appears to be more than the sum of its parts. That's some fine coaching out there, Dawg fans, and some coachable kids. The purge of dissidents from the summer seems to have really improved the team's chemistry and commitment to the program.
- There's a www.firemarkricht.net website and yes, a Fire-Mark-Richt Facebook page. I couldn't find one for Mack Brown, although a lot of Texas fans are posting such sentiments on their web boards. Be sure to check out www.firenicksaban.com, The Fire Les Miles Facebook page, the Fire Mike Gundy Facebook page, the Fire Jimbo Fisher Facebook page, www.firewillmuschamp.com, the Fire Steve Spurrier Facebook page, www.firechrispeterson.com, the online petition for firing Joe Paterno, the Fire Bob Stoops Facebook page, www.firegarypatterson.com, the Fire Bobby Petrino Facebook page, etc. etc. etc. Get rid of them all, because they just can't coach a lick, and we've got someone in the wings who'll be a whole lot better. Who knew that Sports & Grits followed so many teams? On the other hand, there's a Fire Lane Kiffin Facebook page, so don't say there's no common sense on the Internet.
- During the Florida/LSU game, Gary Danielson observed that Florida didn't have the personnel to run plays that would work against LSU's defense. That's amazing, but true. UF has had top 5 recruiting classes going well back into the 20th Century, but this year they lack sufficient personnel to compete against top teams. I think that part of it's the seismic changes in schemes: from spread option to pro sets on O, and from 4-3 to 3-4 on D (or so it looked to me from the couch). Moving from the 4-3 to the 3-4 requires the whole front 7 to learn new positions, and it just can't be accomplished in one season. We learned that last year (Grantham always said, "It's a process" when asked how the defense was coming along). This year we're seeing the effects of the transition. But UF is not likely to have completed it this season.
- Poor Kirby Smart. No matter how well he coaches up Alabama's D, Nick Saban will always be given (and will always take) all the credit.
- The new rules on hitting and celebrating are making the game of football more gentlemanly, and the safety of players and their modesty and restraint following big plays will be an improvement over the tendency toward maiming, showboating, and taunting opponents. But the enforcement of the celebration rules remains pretty uneven. The LSU punter got a major flag for an "egregious" violation by doing the [Big Arms](#) on his way to the endzone following a fabulous Les Miles call on a fake punt, but all day I saw guys jumping around and gyrating over far lesser plays without getting [flagged](#).
- Speaking of "egregious"—and the announcers talked about this term as if it were as exotic as "arachibutyrophobia"—I also heard announcers use "temerity" and refer to a "Pyrrhic victory" during Saturday's games. Well done, gentlemen. Start your thesauruses.
- On several occasions during Saturday's broadcast, the ESPN producers provided time for Tennessee polish up the turd that is their brand. Cuonzo Martin was interviewed to talk about how the shameful Bruce Pearl era is long gone and how the program is now as spotless as Mrs. Butts's wedding silver, and Derek Dooley was described as the only man alive honest enough to steam-clean the Kiffin stain from the university's logo. I'm not sure how much UT paid for those spots, but I don't think they fooled anybody.

- Every time I saw a guy from California in a game yesterday, the announcers made sure that we knew he was “laid back.” My best friend from college lives in the Los Angeles area, and he’s about as laid back as Urban Meyer after a big pot of coffee and a curious reporter’s question. Really, these guys need some new clichés; the old ones are getting pretty clichéd.
- I noted that play-by-play man Mark Jones is now paired with Ed Cunningham rather than Bob Davie, and he’s a better announcer for the change. Jones is like tofu: he takes on the flavor of whatever he’s cooked with. With Davie he was.....egregious. With Cunningham, he’s palatable.
- Which brings me to my final Doot, which is the observation that NFL announcers are a whole lot better than college announcers. Pretty much every NFL announcing team is pretty good, even if you, like Little Woolly, find Joe Buck to be a bit of a prude. But the college guys, there are some real losers who get these gigs year after year, most notably Bob Davie and Craig James. But some of the others are pretty mediocre too. It’s hard to believe that they can’t find anyone else to call the games when there are so many guys who played or coached who would love the work and do it well.

The Forecast: Dawgs go to Vandy a bit beaten up, with Crowell under 100%, Mitchell out, Washington out, Ogletree out, and the OL as nicked up as usual and doing a few extra drills and stadium steps I’m sure to remind them that it’s not nice to get 60 yards of holding penalties on consecutive plays. Vandy started out the season impressively but has hit league play and is faltering. That’ll continue next Saturday. Our D is playing well enough to secure this game for us while the O puts enough points on the board and the hobbled guys rest up for Florida. I’ll confess that I was a bit surprised on Saturday that we did not go to the slant passing game that worked so well vs. S. Carolina; with Crowell banged up, and with that attack pretty effective, it seemed the way to go, at least to me from my perspective on the couch. But we clearly thought we could beat them deep, and had Aaron been in better synch with King, we might have hit a lot of bombs. Anyhow, I think we’ve got enough in the toolbox to win this one, although we’ll be at less than full speed. Good Guys, 23-10.

National Game of the Week (involving 2 ranked teams): Who knows who’ll be ranked by Monday morning, after my column has been submitted to the Dawgbone? If Texas and Florida are, then the Lamestream Sports Media has gone too far in their affection for their favorite teams; and if FSU remains ranked at 2-3, the polls should be shut down altogether. So let’s go with two teams guaranteed to be ranked, ASU at Oregon. I would prefer ASU here because Oregon will suit up just about anyone who’s not actually in handcuffs or behind bars (the steel variety, not the ones they frequent before driving 118 MPH). LaMichael James appears injured; don’t know if he’ll suit up. So let’s go with ASU, coached by Dennis Erickson, once considered to be even more of a sleazebag than Chip Kelly. Sun Devils, 42-39.

Upset of the Week (unranked team over a ranked team): Michigan State over Michigan. The Spartans play good D (see above) and I think it’s time for the annual Big Blue bubble to burst. I lived in Ohio in my errant youth, during the days of Woody Hayes and Bo Schembechler, and I hated them both, and have never warmed up to either program since. I do like Denard Robinson, though, even though I know I shouldn’t. Anyhow, I’m taking the Spartans at home, because they are the inspiration for the Athens Academy Spartans. MSU, 21-17.