

## **THE DAWGMEISTER'S WEEKEND FORECAST: DAWGS LEAP FRAWGS**

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### **SEPARATED@BIRTH?**



**THREW A PICK SIX  
SONNY CUMBIE**



**& STUPID PET TRICKS  
DAVID LETTERMAN**

#### **SEPARATED@BIRTH? ARCHIVE**

The fan base was as angry at season's end as any I can ever recall. And I'll confess: I'm as deflated by the Georgia Tech game, and the season, as most.

But I'm not as down on the coaches as are the masses, whose hopes have been revived by the recruiting news of December, yet who still think that one year into the Smart Era, we need to start planning for our next coach. You have undoubtedly seen the likes of Chad Seigler's social media post, "I thought we were gonna have ourselves a Nick Saban ... more like another Ray Goff." This sentiment summed up how many in the Dawg Nation feel about the 2016 season, which for many Dawg fans was even more disheartening than the rest of 2016 in general. And that's saying a lot.

I think that if two years from now we look like Texas in Charlie Strong's 3<sup>rd</sup> year, then writing off this coaching staff might be merited. But comparisons to Goff this early seem unwarranted to me. The defense was the strength of the team, and it played a lot of freshmen and sophomores. Smart and Tucker will always have that side of the ball ready to go, assuming that Ole Miss was an aberration the likes of which we'll never see again. And defense, they tell me, wins championships.

Our offense is harder to predict, although our punting game never helped us control field position. We had too many long fields, and our opponents had way too few. We ended up with a reliable kicking game from Rod Blankenship, and I hope he's here to stay. But just getting him into range was a problem for the offense, a puzzle considering the talent we had in the backfield and at tight end, and the handful of reliable playmakers on the outside.

But the puzzle wasn't so puzzling. Most people felt that the OL was too small. And it was, demonstrably, small by current NCAA standards. They could not protect or open holes consistently. The postgame guys following the Tech game were lamenting the play of the OL, saying that when you need 3<sup>rd</sup> and short in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter and can't get the first down, your line isn't getting it done. Given the precipitous drop in yards-per-carry and other indicators this season, it's hard to say that this judgment is harsh or overwrought.

Looking ahead, then, to 2017: For the second year in a row, the composition of the OL will be a major question and factor. Will Wynne, Sims, and Gaillard will return and play bigger than their size would predict? Will their elevated skills keep them on the field in spite of the coaches' preference for a great wall of power up front? Will Ben Cleveland justify his recruiting stars by next year? Will Pat Allen will show why he was priority recruit at the time? Will Solomon Kindley live up to his promise at his now-svelte 335 lbs.? Will JC transfer D'Marcus Hayes not only be the plug-n-play tackle he's hyped as being, but a dominant blocker on the left side? Will any of the other scholarship players and walkons emerge to compete for these jobs? Are the incoming freshmen as good as they are large, and if so, are they already better than who's already here, and ready to play next fall? Will the return of Chubb and Michel matter if there aren't 5 championship-level blockers available? I just don't know.

On offense, we just don't seem to run many plays that my high school team wasn't running in the 60s. The other teams seem to run all of the cool plays. We run between the tackles for medium yardage and throw some. I read that Chaney had to scale back the playbook in midseason. I don't go to practices or sit in film sessions, so I have no idea of how good the players are, how much of the playbook they can absorb, or anything else beyond what I see from my seat in the stadium and at home on the couch. I just can't get out of my mind the images of Bobo's teams going over 40 points routinely, including Hutson Mason's year. It's hard not to compare those offenses—about which there was constant complaining—to our current approach, which seems balky and has difficulty finding the end zone.

There's a lot of evidence converging on the fact that we had a lower talent base than did the competitive teams in the SEC: few (perhaps one: Greg Pyke of the perpetually struggling OL) projected to be drafted, no players named All SEC, an above-mediocre record, and a continual stream of negative judgment about the talent level from Coach Smart, who remains the public's primary source of information about the team.

The coach's negativity about what he inherited has rankled many in the Dawg Nation. Mark Richt won 10 games last year with this team minus a couple of great OLBs, the left tackle, and the team's most famous children's author. He also had Grayson Lambert at QB, and did not have Nick Chubb at RB for much of the season. He was considered to have a far greater challenge awaiting him at Miami than he left behind in Athens.

There have been coaches who've won big primarily by getting the best players. Barry Switzer comes to mind. How he got them ended up being problematic, but he could

really recruit, and he won a lot. Coach Smart is doing an impressive job of targeting and reeling in talent, and talent is a great predictor of winning.

But some have tired of hearing him continually speak of the lack of talent among the players he inherited. They have begun to compare his first season to the last one of the last guy, who won with it. It wasn't pretty, but it gave us more points than the other guys for the most part. That discrepancy in the results from essentially the same talent pool seems to bother a lot of fans, especially when they should have improved with age and coaching, and when the talent question keeps getting amplified by the coaches themselves. It seems to be a way of avoiding accountability for the differential results of the independent variable here: the coaching staffs.

Someone wrote that it's fine to be gruff and imperious if you never lose. Nick Saban gets away with it annually. But it wears thin fast if you don't always win.

I haven't been around Coach Smart, but he does seem to have adopted Saban's brusque style in public. Coach Smart has imported an approach that has worked pretty well for the coach he's interned with for most of his adult life. Perhaps a terse public persona came along with the package. He's accustomed to things being done a certain way and with a high level of performance, which this year's team did not produce. Is this a problem with his coaching, or just a predictable problem of any coaching transition, even one from a 10-3 season to a new and improved regime? I have no idea.

I think that Coach Smart deserves a chance to sustain the program to see if he can make his approach work at UGA. My best hope is that the personnel problem was real, that we're resolving it through recruiting, that these coaches will be more effective when they get to work with their own guys, and that championships await us when the Smart administration is able to put it all together. I have had to accept that the approach he was hired to implement will be a bit more cold-blooded than what we've grown accustomed to this century. But it's what we've got, and I hope that we start to see results before long.

 A Coveted Dawgmeister Game Ball goes to new UGA alumnus Verron Haynes. As the headline said, [he finished the drill](#) and got his degree.

### **DAWGMEISTER GOOD WORKS OF THE WEEK**

*The Weekend Forecast is offered as a free service to its readers; neither the Dawgbone nor The Dawgmeister profits financially from its publication. If you read the Forecast and want to contribute something back to our communities, please consider making a donation to this week's featured Good Works service. There are many people living in needy circumstances, and every dollar helps to support them through another day, week, month, and year. This week's featured Good Works organization is*

***The Charles Johnson Foundation, whose mission is two-fold: To provide opportunities for under-serviced youth to reach their full potential through athletic, recreational, and educational programs and initiatives; and to provide support for single African American mothers through proven***

**programs and initiatives. The Foundation's geographic focus area is Middle Georgia.**

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## **DAWG DOOTS**

- ☞ The Day Job has me in Mexico every so often. They say down there that since Americans have elected Trump to build the wall, the Mexicans are going to elect El Chapo to dig the tunnel.
- ☞ Does I-Mac have a future in the NFL? There's a nearby precedent:
  - Taylor Gabriel, Atlanta Falcons, 5'-8", 165 lbs.
  - Isaiah McKenzie, UGA, 5'-8", 164 lbs.
- ☞ Against Georgia Tech, we threw a fade route, a play we haven't seen in a few years. The receiver was Isaiah McKenzie.
- ☞ We used to throw the fade to guys like A. J. Green, Fred Gibson and Chris Conley, guys who were tall and long and strong. Little Woolly wants to know: Why I-Mac instead of Wims or Nauta?
- ☞ Much has been made of Coach Smart's release of Toneil Carter from his offer. I think that if the goal is to win championships, then you have to get the very best players, even if you have to turn away some guys that you once believed you needed. Kirby learned how to do that at Alabama, where oversigning, greysirting, and ultimately transferring are a way of life. It can be ruthless at times. But it is what you do if you want to win championships in today's SEC. And that's what he was brought in to provide.
- ☞ All the best to Toneil Carter at Texas, where he will surely start a pipeline from Houston to Herman and help make Austin a football town again.
- ☞ The Scowlmeister and I shared an awful confession: that we pull for Alabama when we watch them, because they are just so good. It'd be nice to pull for UGA, which we do anyhow, and also have a team that just blows the other team off the field. We are starting by bringing in the best players possible.
- ☞ "I didn't want to be just another number. I needed to go somewhere I knew that I could lean on the coaches if I ever needed something." ~recent UGA target and Kentucky commit Lonnie Johnson
- ☞ If you're going to have a corporate sponsor for your stadium, it's hard to beat Mercedes-Benz.
- ☞ But if you're playing in the Motel 6 Bowl, does that mean you have to stay in a Motel 6?
- ☞ I noticed that the NFL's Walter Payton Man of the Year does not have a corporate sponsor. I hope that in the not too-far-off-future, they will rebrand it the Abundance Bowl Buddy Bran Wafers Walter Payton Man of the Year Award, or other suitably dignified name.
- ☞ Unfortunately, we Fake Sports News writers don't get SEC Coach of the Year votes, but if I had one, it'd be a tie between Mark Stoops and Derek Mason. Those guys took historically bad programs and made them competitive.

- ☛ On Westworld, how is it that, in the world's most advanced technology lab, they don't seem to have any security cameras?

### **THE COVETED DAWGMEISTER GOOD GUY OF THE WEEK AWARD**



When your role model is Malcolm Mitchell, your life is surely headed in the right direction. **Terry Godwin** committed to the **G** in the hopes that Brian Schottenheimer would turn him into the next Tavon Austin. His high school achievements sure suggested that he'd taken the right path: a consensus five-star prospect, national top-five ranked athlete, three-sport star and Braves draftee, two-way player in football, and as many All State trophies as can fit on the family fireplace mantle. Schotty had trouble designing a downfield game for Greyson Lambert that showed off his skills, however, and Jim Chaney hasn't yet tapped into Terry's enormous potential. His best football is surely ahead of him. He's a competitor of whom Coach Smart said, "He plays with a swagger and toughness you want." But there's more to this guy than what happens between the hedges. As a son, he helped his father battle colon cancer at a time when his high school athletic achievements were the stuff of celebrity. Once on campus, he saw that life is good when you give to others. Malcolm Mitchell's efforts to promote literacy became a national story, and he's continued with his campaign now that he's earned a spot in the WR rotation in New England. But instead of losing a champion, we've gained another in Godwin. Terry, along with WR compadre Isaiah McKenzie and Athens-Clarke County police officers led by Lee Crosby, have taken up Malcolm's mission, reading to kids in an Athens apartment complex, and doing no doubt more community service that has gone unnoticed by the press and public. In a time when tensions between African Americans and police are great, it's heartwarming to see members of each community working together for the common good. Terry's done well in the classroom, now having been named twice as a recipient of the Mobley Family Football Scholarship. With such a great family foundation and all the right moves on and off the field, I think we have a lot to look forward to in Terry's future.

**GOOD GUY ARCHIVE**

### **THE FORECAST DAWGS VS. TCU**

It's hard to say how we'll play on offense. I think our defense will hold TCU to about 21 points. But can the offense put up 22? We usually end up with enough yards, but too often, not quite enough points. Field position is part of the problem, but we don't finish

drives the way we should. I hope our guys are mentally ready to play, and that's the scenario I'm buying. Dawgs 24, Horned Frogs 21.

## **NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP PLAYOFF**

### **ALABAMA OVER WASHINGTON**

Maybe I'm remembering how Southern Cal handled Washington, and how their freshman QB outplayed the Heisman candidate from Washington, and how Alabama massacred USC 52-6, but I just can't see Alabama losing this game. Sure, those games were awhile back. But damn. I'll take the Tide, 33-17.

### **CLEMSON OVER PENN STATE**

Out here in my world, you can't finish second in your division of your conference, even a really good one, and be one of the Final Four. With 5 power conferences available, and with Oklahoma getting left out of the playoff, how on earth does a second-place team land in the playoff? So to me, it's Clemson vs. Penn State, the Big Ten Champions, in this semi-final. Since it'd be hard to put Penn State in the championship game, I'll take Dabo's boys from up the road. Tigers 35, Lions 31.

## **NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME**

### **ALABAMA OVER CLEMSON**

Last year, Deshaun Watson ran Clemson up and down the field on Kirby Smart's defense, but came up short. This year Alabama's defense is better, and their offense tore it up too. Kiffin is a good coordinator and play-caller, no doubt. Gotta hand it to Dabo, he lost a ton of talent in the draft, and here they are back again. But here, Alabama just has too many good players. One after the other. Dabo's got a bunch too, but not as many as those other guys. Alabama, 38-35