

Week 1

Opponent: Georgia Southern Eagles

Kickoff: 12:30 PM

TV: PPV only



Well, it's here...no need to say much here, we're #1 in the country. If we can somehow pull off a 14-game win streak we'll have a lovely crystal football as a parting gift. Is that too much to ask? According to national pundits if we win out we might play our way into the NFC playoffs due to our schedule strength, but a team bred in the heat of the SEC and particularly the SEC-East if nothing else should be ready for a tough schedule. It's going to be fun, sit back and enjoy...

About the preseason

For the first time ever we're ranked #1 preseason. What does that mean? Well, it certainly means we'll get darn near the best shot from every team we play this year. Everyone loves saying they knocked off the #1 team in the country, but few get to actually say it...mainly because most #1 ranked teams end up being pretty good. We have the team to win every game this year but the odds of it happening are slim. We're loaded across the board and if odds were set right now I'd think we'd be favored in just about every game. This year will be a battle, and not just because we play quite possibly the nation's toughest schedule. This year will be tough because everyone will be gunning for us and we won't be afforded that luxury of having the underdog motivation that's served us well for stretches of the last two seasons.



This preseason was a bit difficult because of some injuries to key personnel, but don't believe the talking head hype. We won't lose games this year because of injuries we've suffered to date. Teams ranked as highly as we are shouldn't have their entire season collapse due to the loss of a true-sophomore OL and a couple of backup LBs for the season. Media types have gotten carried away recently with the injuries/suspensions hurdles being too difficult for this team to overcome. Georgia is still a deep football team. Yes, we have questions (young OL, production at WR) but there is a lot of talent in place to answer them. Who knows how the season turns out but this preseason did nothing to shake my confidence in this coaching staff and its ability to get the considerable talent they have ready to play. That's why I'm far more excited than I am worried.

GSU Offense

- The Georgia Southern offense (or Hatch Attack as you'll likely hear a few times) is in a bit of a rebuild state...to put it nicely. Last year they had the DI-AA (FCS or whatever) equivalent Heisman winner at QB in Jayson Foster but he's moved on to the NFL. Despite being schooled in the Hal Mumme-style passing game and featuring a strong passing attack in his years at Valdosta State, Hatcher molds his offense to suit his personnel. Last year he ran the ball considerably more than he passed it. In their big win of the year last year over Appalachian State (the team that beat Michigan), they attempted 14 passes and 52 runs. Very Georgia Southern-like, not very Chris Hatcher-like. Look for a different offense this year (more passing).
- At QB, two guys are duking it out for the start and both will play. RS-Freshman Lee Chapple seems to have the edge to start. He played QB in HS at GAC and was the QB for Caleb King. Considering the fact that last year's QB (Foster) came into the year as a WR, who knows how

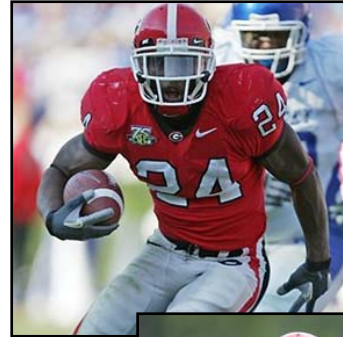
good Hatcher will do with an actual QB. The intriguing guy here is backup QB Antonio Henton. Henton, a Fort Valley native, transferred from Ohio State where he was slotted to be the backup this season. Henton is an active athlete for the QB position and certainly has the talent to cause trouble scrambling and with his arm. If Chapple has managed to hold off Henton, Hatcher obviously sees something in him.

- Dear lord piecing together their returning experience at RB is an impossible feat since they seemingly have none. Foster was far and away their leading rusher last year, which makes sense considering he was a WR playing QB (to great effect I might add). The clear cut favorite at RB was Rs-freshman phenom Zeke Rozier who played in two games before injury ended his season in 2007. Rozier was, unfortunately for GSU fans, involved in the 8-man suspension and will miss the opener. In his stead will be a group of DI transfers that carry some impressive credentials, among them transfers from South Florida and UAB. Ricky Ponton at 5-11, 215 presents the biggest threat of the bunch but they'll trot out a bunch of different quick, shifty guys as well. A couple of 5-7, 180 type guys on the two-deep here. Hatcher himself said they don't really have a FB, so don't look for much smashmouth here, think more misdirection ground game.
- Actually a position of pretty good depth and experience for the GSU offense, a bit of a rarity. Top returning threat Raja Andrews is suspended, but there are several viable options behind him. None caught more than 22 passes last year though. One guy is listed at over 6-0 (Steve Cundari at 6-3) so our smallish CBs should be able to present a ...that and the fact they're really, really good.
- The GSU OL is a work in progress. They lost all 5 starters from last year and have a significant size disadvantage against the UGA DL. Hatcher joked that he wouldn't let his QBs see the tape of the UGA-Hawaii game last year but I'm thinking he did it more for the OLs. LT Cole Fountain weighs in at 6-3, 300 but the remainder of the line was pretty slight until the offseason addition of transfer Trey Dunmon from Georgia Tech. You might not recognize that name but Dunmon was the GT player that got tossed from the UGA-GT game last year for blatantly diving at Brandon Miller's knee as the play was whistled dead. The OL has a ton of guys that will be seeing their first game action so it should be interesting to see how they handle the strong UGA front 4.
- **Bottom Line:** This isn't the GSU offense of years past that would come in with a well-oiled triple option attack that could efficiently grind the clock and pick up yards in short 3-yard gut plays and occasionally pop one outside. This offense doesn't have an Adrian Peterson from the last time they were in Athens. What they do have is an excellent offensive minded head coach who has proven at multiple levels that he can manufacture offenses that put points on the board and crank out the yardage. Last year they led the nation in rushing offense at over 325 yards per game and were in the top 8 in both total offense (456 ypg) and scoring offense (36+ ppg). They didn't pass much but when they did it was efficient and they protected the ball. Look for them to keep the ball on the ground with misdirection plays, trying to use our speed against us while avoiding putting their OL in bad pass blocking positions. When they do pass, look for lots of bootlegs, rollouts, etc to try and slow our upfield pass rush.
- **Key Matchup to watch when they have the ball:** While I'm tempted to say watch Owens and Atkins and the boys inside, I'm going to have to go with Rennie Curran. For a large portion of the year last year he had no idea where he was or where he was supposed to be so he was just running around. Once he started figuring out the scheme he really started playing well. Now with a full year in the system and weight room, a stronger, more intelligent Rennie will be unleashed. Given his style of play, I fully expect to see him around the ball all day...it's the beauty of keying on Rennie...he's almost always right around the ball.



GSU Defense

- The GSU defense overall was expected to be much better off in terms of experience but the 8-man suspension really set back depth...at all levels, as DE, LB and DB were all hit. Last year's GSU defense wasn't exactly stellar, finishing 90th out of 116 teams in FCS in total defense and 84th in scoring defense. Last year they held only 1 opponent to under 21 points (17 to a stronger than usual Citadel team) and gave up 34 or more 7 times out of 11 games (only 1 of which came against a DI school...Colorado State). Given the loss of a few seniors and the suspension issue, this defensive unit will be hard pressed to deal with one of the more balanced offenses in college football. Judging by their depth chart, GSU plays a 3-3-5 which could make for difficult matchups for them in the running game.
- Given our somewhat unsettled OL situation, the GSU DL would have to be considered one of the areas of concern. DE was hit hardest by suspension with 3 different DEs sitting this one out, including projected starter Damon Suggs. Nose tackle presents some bulk in the Ricardo Crawford, Ken Veal, fire hydrant mold, and some experience. Larry Beard is the star of the line at 6-3, 250. He's listed at DT, which is pretty slight for a true interior guy but my guess is this is the interior guy that lines up with no DE on his side.
- LB would have featured 3 upperclassmen starters but the suspension of WLB Terrione Benefield removed an experienced player. MLB Quentin Taylor and SLB Harland Bower come in in the 235 pound area, huge for FCS. The likely replacement for Benefield is EJ Webb who had a great true freshman season last year. Taylor struggled with injuries last year but still managed to average nearly 10 tackles per game over the last half of the season. Bower started most of last season as well so this is a position of strength. Despite the loss of Benefield there's actually some depth here as well.
- GSU plays with 3 safeties similar to the defense the SC ran a few years back with the "spur" position. Suspension took out one of the safety starters in Jr. Ronnie Wiggins but a pair of talented offensive players-turned-safeties return in Chris Covington (All SoCon and honorable mention All-America) and Chris Rogers. Both are incredibly athletic and have a nose for the ball. If Stafford gets sloppy with the ball over the middle, look for one of these guys to make him pay. A group of inexperienced guys and former walk-ons will compete for Wiggins' vacated spot. Not much info on the CBs frankly as the published depth chart from July lists only two guys and recent news indicates that the starting jobs are taken by juniors Darrel Pasco and Brandon Echols.
- **Bottom Line:** This is a defense looking to prove themselves in a big way. The GSU offense last year was prolific. The defense...not so much. To their credit they had several guys in the secondary playing defense for the first time. This year, with more experience and more depth, they should be a better, more effective unit. They'll be trying out a different scheme than we're used to seeing but given the weapons we have on the ground and in the air, if we're nearly as good as most think we are, we should be able to move the ball and put points on the board.
- **Key matchup to watch when we have the ball:** Normally I'd say to watch Josh Davis in his first start at RT but this will be a good game to watch the freshmen. Yes, true freshman Cordy Glenn will be one slot over at RG but it's pretty tough to get fired up about watching interior OLs. Watch AJ Green, Richard Samuel, Tavares King, etc. They shouldn't disappoint and should get a good shot at PT starting fairly early.



The GSU Game Overall

For all the talk of our off-season issues, GSU's 8-man suspension was devastating. They were already a young team and those 8 guys consisted of 3 seniors, 4 juniors and their most dynamic RB. Not

exactly the scenario you want to be trotting into to play the #1 team in the country (have I mentioned that yet?). Of their 44 players on the two-deep, 30 will be playing in their first college game. That's a tough road to hoe.

Yes it's nice to know we're ranked #1 but we'll be taking shots all year. That's fine. You're going to play a tough season every year in the SEC. Add in a tough non-conference game from another region and you'll get the media talking about you. That's exactly what happened. All you've heard in recent weeks (since the rankings) about UGA is that while they have one of the most talented teams in the country (several talking heads say the "most" talented) our schedule is simply too tough to tackle. That's perfect. Now if we navigate it unbeaten or even with 1 or 2 losses (hey, it happened last year) we should have those same pundits in our corner against teams of equal record. Think we don't need them? Don't forget last year's campaign for inclusion in the title game by the folks at ESPN.



Sorry for the soapbox moment...back to this game. By all rights this shouldn't be a real game. Despite a great, up and coming coach in Hatcher, GSU simply doesn't have the talent to pull an upset on the order of App State-Michigan. What GSU does have going for it is unpredictability. We don't really know exactly what they'll be doing on offense or defense. While that sounds great, it will also work against them as they don't have the experience with the systems they'll be unveiling that they'd like. Look for UGA to get up early and play lots of guys. Richt has never been one to run up the score, so don't expect a massive lopsided blowout unless things just go really, really well...from the UGA perspective.

Positional Notes

- I knew the coaches were pretty high on the kid, but Cordy Glenn has to be considered the surprise of Fall coming in and earning a starting spot on the OL...without the benefit of spring practice. That's impressive. We've got some serious young talent on the OL.
- Staying on the OL, I've been incredibly disappointed with the number of media people that reference Sturdivant's injury as being devastating because we'll now be starting a guy in Tripp who we apparently just moved over from defense. Do some research guys. Tripp moved over to offense over a year ago and he played the position in high school. To hear them talk you'd think we just randomly started inserting guys.
- Marcus Downtin might be the surprise of the freshmen on defense. He's currently ahead of Akeem Hebron at WLB to back up Rennie Curran. If he's good enough to get on the field in that crowded LB corps he's got to be talented.
- Usually I go over the injuries here and who should miss time or be limited. I'm not afforded that opportunity this week as we've had more guys get healthy this week than any one week I can remember. A week ago we had one (of eight) DE practicing. Now we have all but one. Amazing what happens when game week gets here.
- I've been re-watching some of last year's games and I'm nearly convinced that a screen pass to Moreno is unstoppable. Stafford does a great job of selling it and fitting passes into odd angles (a la Favre) and in open space Moreno is like Bo Jackson on Tecmo Bowl (for those of you who don't know what that is, think really, really hard to tackle). We probably won't utilize it much this week but screens are great with young, athletic lines that can get after people in space.

Random Thoughts

- It's always fun to get back to Sanford for the opener, but this year promises several things to get really excited about. I can't imagine the reaction when the announcer goes over the PA system

telling everyone to get on their feet and “make some Sanford Stadium noise for your #1 ranked Georgia Bulldogs”...the place will come unglued. Too bad a chunk of the students will miss it (yeah I’m talking to you, upper deck northeast corner).

- Saturday also presents an opportunity for the UGA faithful to welcome (and see) the new Uga. Uga VI will be hard to replace as he was a good dog (damn good). I think it’s pretty safe to say that VII will be smaller than VI was even when he’s full grown. VI was a beast of a dog. They’ll do a video tribute to VI at 12:15 with the introduction following.
- One more thing to look forward to this year is the pregame videos. They really ramped it up a notch last year with some high quality stuff. Normally the thought of hearing Nickelback makes me want to jam sharp objects into my ears but they did a pretty good job mixing the music in with highlights. Given some of the plays they can pull from the second half of last season, it could be pretty cool. I don’t see how they could top the Back in Black they pulled on us right before kickoff against Auburn though. It might sound a bit NFL-ish or even Arena football-ish but if you were there you know it rokked (I spelled that with 2 k’s on purpose).
- It must be close to the season opener, everyone in Georgia is ticked off at ESPN. Yes, it’s hard to argue with the fact they haven’t been to Athens since 1998 while they’ve been to nearly every other top program a handful of times; yes, it seems that Lou Holtz and especially Mark May rarely have a kind word for the dawgs; and, yes, they fired the one guy who seemed to like UGA (Trev Alberts) and hide the other UGA guy (Jim Donnan) so you only see him on ESPNU at some odd hours. The conspiracy theorists are going to be in a bind now though. ESPN has arranged some mega-deal to purchase all the SEC football television rights not owned by CBS. Basically they paid a large chunk of change for all the SEC games (except the best one each week). You think any other conference could pull that off? Basically Slive came off like he was represented by Donald Trump in this deal. ACC, Big East...not so much...they appear to be represented by infomercial guys. You think Gameday pops up at a few more SEC games over the next 15 years?
- It probably went largely unnoticed but senior DT Jeff Owens had a great comment earlier this week in reference to a walk-through at Sanford for the GSU game. He made the comment that he was going to soak it up because he was only going to be in Sanford a few more times as a player. Comments like that make me realize we’ve got some quality leaders on this team that are going to do their best to keep these young kids’ heads on straight.
- After this last month I’m pretty sure they need to have the Olympics every year. The last month before Gameday has never passed so quickly for me.
- Watching the last few weeks of the Braves’ season is like watching a dying, out of water fish flopping around. You know its going to end poorly but it never seems to end. Looking back on the Braves’ season I suppose you could say we should’ve seen this coming. A rotation of guys with either major injury issues or incredible age was one of those things that could’ve gone right but was likely to go wrong. That’s the way this schedule feels to me. If it goes right it could be really, really special. If it starts going wrong, it could get ugly. Just a moment of pragmatism before I sign off.
- Last thing: the writeup is changing this year. As you can already see it’s in pdf format. That’s to keep the file size smaller. After week 1, I won’t likely be emailing it out anymore, instead it’ll be up for download on my new blog. So next week, some Thursday morning, you’ll head over to Viewfrom336.com and download it from there. As for the blog, I can’t say how much I’ll be blogging during the season outside of the writeups (they seem to soak up all of my free time), but check in periodically and I’ll try and have stuff up.



Have a safe weekend,
Jody