

Week 8

Opponent: LSU Tigers

Kickoff: 3:30 PM

TV: CBS



It's hard to believe the season is already over halfway over. It flies by so quickly. Well, we're 6-1 and still in a good spot to meet all of our preseason goals. Unfortunately the schedule from here on out gets really, really tough. Put it this way, our easiest remaining game could very well be our trip to Auburn. That's never easy. Oh well, focus on them week to week, right? Up first...oh, just the defending national champions.

About the Vandy Game

It's still hard to wrap my mind around the fact that Vandy is a really solid football team. I still expect to see them fall apart and just roll over but they don't oblige. You could make a strong case that over the preceding two years they've played us tougher than any team outside of UT. Well, we gutted out a tough win against a very, very game Vandy team, something I assure you South Carolina and Auburn both wish they could say right now.



On offense we again displayed the balance that makes our offense so dangerous. Stafford channeled Mark Wholers for a couple series and had a few plays where he looked very 2006 era Stafford, but in all he showed that the developing relationship with Green and the old standby Massaquoi is becoming as potent a QB-WR bunch as we've had under Richt. The first TD from Stafford to Green was just NFL level good all around. Just perfect. Meanwhile, Moreno had the quietest 170+ yard day I can remember from a UGA back. He's electric (boogie-woogie-woogie).

The defense did a decent job although they still have room to improve. They handled the wrinkle Vandy threw at them quite nicely. If you missed it, they used All-SEC CB D.J. Moore on offense at WR a good bit and got the ball in his hands several times (end-arounds, etc.). They hadn't done that this year and we responded admirably. They even threw a double reverse flea flicker play in and we handled it well. We largely played very well on D, holding them to their lowest point total of the season (14 in each of the last 3 weeks actually). They did manage to score two passing TDs (both on Evans, more on him later) on pretty well executed plays, but in all we played better than we have against them the last two years and got a W over a ranked opponent. That's never bad.

LSU Offense

- The LSU offense hasn't been the picture of efficiency this year but that was largely expected after the offseason dismissal of expected starting QB Ryan Perrilloux. They've actually played better than many expected this season given the QB situation. A strong, veteran OL and a bevy of talented RBs and skilled, fast WRs certainly smoothes things out a bit. This is an interesting offense. They have the ability to move the ball well behind their strong OL but they don't really have the explosiveness you'd expect due to their limitations at QB. Still, a solid, solid SEC offense, ranked in the top 4 in the SEC in rushing, passing, total offense and scoring offense.

- QB has been a bit of a trial by fire this year with the departure of Perrilloux. The end result was a bumping up of the timetable for QB development for promising R-Fr Jarrett Lee. Lee is having a solid freshman season, completing right at 60% of his passes and throwing 8 TDs to 6 INTs. Not great numbers but not bad either. His first 3 SEC games were @ AU, MsSt, @UF and @SC...pretty daunting environments yet he managed to complete 60% of his passes and throw 6 of his TDs in those games. He throws a good deep ball, something our CBs will have to be aware of given our struggles to pressure. He's got a really quick, flicky release (which won't help the pressure issue). Also assured to see time under center is So. Andrew Hatch, the Harvard transfer that brings the running element to the position. Hatch isn't a particularly shifty guy, he just runs that Tebow style off tackle play a lot. He can also throw it around some to keep you honest, tossing their only TD pass against SC last week.
- The LSU running game relies on several guys to get the job done. Starter Charles Scott is a FB-sized bruiser at 5-11, 233. He's a beast that just flat runs downhill with solid speed. He's averaging over 6 ypc this year and just over 100 ypg (4th in the SEC). He's struggled a bit the last two weeks, getting a combined 96 yards in trips to UF and SC. He torched the stout AU and MsSt defenses for 273 yards though. Backup Keiland Williams is just as capable as Scott and is a little shifter. Hatch of course gets a ton of carries. The guy to watch closely though is the smallest guy on the field, 5-5, 164-pound flanker Trindon Holliday. He's a pure burner and LSU always manages to get him the ball in some interesting ways. If he gets a seam he's gone, and at his size, the seam doesn't have to be big. Their RBs have gone 432 carries without a fumble...(I'm trying for the jinx here).
- At WR, Brandon LaFell paces the team (and the SEC) with over 9 receptions per game. The 6-3, 209 pound speedster will be a tough matchup for our CBs. For that matter, most of the LSU WRs present a similar problem in that they are all big and fast. LaFell, Demetrius Byrd, Chris Mitchell and Terrance Toliver (their top 4 WRs) average 6-3, with Toliver being the biggest at 6-5. TE Richard Dickson is a major threat too, 3rd on the team in catches and tied with Byrd and LaFell for the team lead in TDs (3).
- Surprise, surprise, LSU has a great OL. Who saw that coming? The left side of the line is absolutely massive, averaging 350 a man, and experienced, averaging over 30 starts per man. This is an extremely veteran bunch, with 3 starters having 30 or more career starts and 1 more with almost 20. Impressive. They're big and mean and protect their QBs. On the year they're 15th in the NCAA in sacks allowed, giving up just 6 on the year.
- **Bottom Line:** Outside of Bama, this will be the most balanced team we've faced to date. If Lee had a year or more experience under his belt I'd say this group would be much scarier.



As it stands, I think our best hope lies in trying to present schemes that confuse Lee and/or Hatch. LSU will try to get their ground game going behind that massive OL and rely on quick, high percentage passes much like Bama did. I look for us to load the box and basically make Lee beat us. SC used a similar tactic last week and managed to hold Lee to his worst stats day (although he had a couple long balls that were dropped). The only real weakness this offense has is in relative inexperience at QB so I look for us to go after that. We desperately need for someone to step up BIG to get pressure. We haven't had any luck there this season, especially from the DL and although it defies all logic and reason that we'd get some against this group, weirder things have happened...I think we sacked Tebow more last year in our game than he had been all season.

- **Key Matchup to watch when they have the ball:** Obviously there will be all the big matchups of our LBs against their RBs and our shorter CBs against their long WRs, but I think one really

telling factor will be how well our DTs hold up to their OL. If by some means Atkins, Weston and Irvin can manage to collapse the pocket a bit and continue their stellar play against the run, we could have a real shot at slowing their offense.

LSU Defense

- This LSU defense hasn't been as impressive this year as in recent campaigns. Similar to us in a lot of ways. We gave up 41 to Bama, they gave up 51 to UF. They have a solid run defense, 16th nationally and a so-so pass defense, 51st nationally and 9th in the SEC. They give up yards and points at about the same clip, currently 9th in the SEC in both total yardage and scoring defense. To their credit they have played the last two games without their best defensive player. It's a bit surprising looking at the 21 they gave up to Auburn until you remember that AU had an INT for a TD and really only scored 14 points via the offense.
- Typically when a DL loses someone of the caliber of Glen Dorsey you see a dip in production. Not so much with this bunch. Interior man-children Charles Alexander and Ricky Jean-Francois do an admirable job of filling in for the departed All-American Dorsey. Jean-Francois has battled injuries and missed the last two weeks but should be ready to go (surprise). DT is a deep position for the tigers. Marlon Favorite, Drake Nevis and Al Woods have all started a game there this season and will all play significant minutes Saturday...not a group you wear down. Jean-Francois gets the pub but Nevis leads the group in TFLs with 4.5. DE is deep as well where massive Sr. Tyson Jackson runs the show. His 4.5 sacks leads the team. DE is a deep enough position that against SC they unveiled a formation they called the Express, where all 4 linemen are DEs. The formation must've worked as their DEs tallied 4.5 sacks in the game.
- MLB Darry Beckwith is the only listed starting LB that didn't play for Stephenson HS...the one in GA. OLBs Perry Riley and Kelvin Sheppard both starred there a few years back. Beckwith missed a couple of games this year and is thus a ways down the team tackles list. Riley and Sheppard are actually the top 2 non-DB tacklers on the team with 28 and 18 tackles respectively.
- The LSU secondary hasn't been quite as good as in years past, due in large part to the departure of several all-conference level defenders to the NFL. Coleman and Taylor form a solid, upperclassman safety tandem. Coleman leads the team in passes defended while Taylor is tied for the team lead in INTs. LSU plays several CBs and uses a large amount of nickel formation. All of their CBs are involved significantly in run support, as all 3 starting CBs (counting their nickel back) are in the top 6 in tackles.
- **Bottom Line:** While this group hasn't been as productive as that dominant group that Bo Pelini led last season they still have a ton of talent. When Saban and Muschamp headed up this group they played a ton of man outside and blitzed like crazy. Up until last week that wasn't the case with this group. They largely stayed back and were content to try and get pressure with their front 4. Considering they have a front 4 with probably 6 guys who will be playing on Sundays in a few years, that decision makes a lot of sense. Last week though against SC, they brought the heat...a lot. I'm assuming they did this because of a variety of reasons...SC's total lack of a running game, SC's porous OL and the incredibly inexperienced Stephen Garcia under center. While our OL is pretty patchwork they've done a good job of picking up blitzes and Southerland and Chapas really excel there as does Moreno. Stafford is adept at seeing most blitzes (except for the



frontside CB blitz for some reason) and certainly has the experience as a junior to know where to go and with Moreno and King we certainly have a better than average running game, so I don't see them pinning their ears back and going at us. Look for noise to possibly be a factor for our suddenly young again OL (3 freshmen, 2 sophomores), although they handled Columbia well. We haven't used the RB screen much lately so I expect to see that some as well as some more of those quick drop checks to Green that are good for 5 yards anytime the CB plays off. As an aside, look for a pump and go off of that play at some point this season as CBs start to creep up on that. Look for us to continue working the boundary on the running game, taking advantage of our mobile OL as well as our FBs and (what's left of our) TEs with sweeps and off tackles. I loved us re-incorporating the sprint draw into the offense last week...it was perhaps an overused staple a few years back but was incredibly effective Saturday.

- **Key matchup to watch when we have the ball:** Wow. Where do you start? I think we live and die by Matthew Stafford this week. After not throwing an INT through 4 games, he's thrown 5 in the last 3. In this environment, turnovers will just feed that raucous crowd into a frenzy. If Stafford is able to keep us in the right play and correctly play the cat/mouse game on a few screens, he could have a big day against this secondary. He'll need time though, and while we haven't given up a sack in the last two games, we'll be up against a whole other animal this week.

The LSU Game Overall

How do you even begin to figure out what's going to happen this weekend? The two teams have had fairly similar tracks to this point in the season. Both of us have 7 point wins over SC @SC. Both of us have a really ugly loss on the year. Both of us have had stretches of being really impressive and stretches of really underperforming. We're pretty evenly matched although their considerable advantage of DL versus our OL has me worried.

With that said, I've got to admit that I'm shocked at the virtually unanimous media selection of LSU to win this game. It seems that after the Bama debacle UGA has been completely written off as being relevant to anything. Herbstreit is already saying the only way Bama could trip up is against UF in the SECC. Hmm. With that sentence he's managed to overlook both LSU and UGA. As much as we think this game means to us (as UGA supporters) it means more to LSU. We can still lose this game and make it to Atlanta by beating UF next week and taking care of UK and AU. If LSU loses this one they'd need to not only beat Bama but have someone else beat them also.

Usually closely matched games like this come down to special teams play, or better yet the absence of a special teams mistake. LSU is a hot/cold special teams team. They are last in the SEC in kickoff returns (cold). They have a senior kicker (hot). They have a dynamic punt returner (hot, but I think every team we play seems to have one of those). If you kick it to Holliday enough times he'll burn you. Aside from the Bama meltdown, Mimbs has done a good job of holding returners in check so we could use another week of that. Hopefully we won't be relying on our punter to win it for us...but it's nice to know that if we have to, we can.



Positional Notes

- OK, this is getting ridiculous. TE Aron White strains his shoulder and is out. Tripp Chandler is questionable for the game but is the #2 TE behind a guy who 2 weeks ago was strongly

considering season ending shoulder surgery. Given the high likelihood of needing a TE to help with protection, I fully expect Chandler to give it a shot. We haven't thrown to the TE in a while and I wouldn't expect it much Saturday either.

- In other injury news, Akeem Hebron goes down for 4-6 months with a dislocated and fractured ankle. He never made the impression on the depth chart I expected this year and was supplanted by the very impressive freshman Marcus Dowtin but you have to hate it for Hebron, who is the 3rd LB this year to go down to a season ending injury.
- AJ Green is amazing. As talented as he is, I'm impressed with the little things. In rewatching the game on TV I was impressed with seeing him after his TD grab, engrossed with Massaquoi and Durham in an in-depth dissection of the play. He's just soaking it up. It was also impressive watching how upset he was with himself for not properly finishing his block 20 yards downfield on one of Moreno's long runs. Not your typical freshman WR. When you consider he put up the numbers he did Saturday against one of the SEC's best CBs you get even more excited.
- How about a round of applause for Darius Dewberry? Great coverage on his 1st career INT and he nearly got another one later off a tip. Not only that but he blitzed a couple of times and looked really, really good doing so. He never got to the QB but he flat manhandled a TE into the QB once. At his size he could be a real threat off the edge if we elect to use him in a standup LB role flanking a 3-man front.
- OK, Bryan Evans. I was sorely disappointed by the reaction of some of the fans to Bryan Evans' play Saturday. Yes he's had a large number of passes completed in his direction but it's often nearly impossible for the average fan to discern if it was his actual responsibility to make the play, as it could easily have been a safety or LB who missed their coverage responsibility and left him to look bad. Saturday was different though. He was clearly the responsible DB on the two TD passes. The fact is though, if you rewatch those two plays with an open mind you can't help but be impressed with how good the coverage actually was. Yes, on the first one he was initially out of position but not only did he close the gap, he actually had his hand on the ball for a split second. The 2nd one was absolutely perfect coverage and Champ Bailey himself couldn't have played it any better. My point? Lay off the kid. He's had a string of bad luck in coverage but it's not like he's falling down out there or running the wrong direction. Not only is CB one of the most difficult positions on the team to play, it's also one of the most visible.
- Shaun Chapas has brought his play to a level that I really did not expect he could this early in his career. I think the return of Southerland has really made him step up even more.
- Asher Allen is having an amazing year. How on earth that official made that pass interference call against him I'll never know. Perfect coverage.



Random Thoughts

- Has 1 half of football ever swayed public opinion more than the first half of the UGA-Bama game? We lost that game by 11 points to the #2 ranked team in the country. OU lost by 10 to #1 yet only slid to #4/5 (we've fought back up to #9 from #11). USC is already back in the top 5 despite losing to an unranked Oregon State. Same with Florida. Oh well, we've been told all year that if we win it'll take care of itself and I guess the next two weeks pretty well determine the season anyway. We'll see.

- Yes we reduced penalties this past weekend, but it's important to note that during the UT game we ended up with 11 penalties...of those, 3 were called by Richt (delay of game to burn clock, etc.) and 3 were bad calls as determined by the SEC office in their review of the game. With that said we've managed to have only 5 "real" penalties in each of the past two games. Getting better.
- One thing I'd be interested to know though is when was the last time an opponent was called for offensive holding against us? I don't remember it happening in the last 3 games. You mean to tell me that teams are just blocking us THAT well? Guess so...nope, no holding there.
- Yeah, it would've been nice to punch in a TD on that late drive last week instead of settling for a FG but I think in the long run it might've helped us more to nail that FG though. I say that because, while a 14-pt win would've been nice for the style points, don't underestimate how nice it is to get another make from your freshman kicker, who had missed two already, before we send him off to Death Valley, where Billy Bennett himself had a ROUGH day our last trip over there. The Blair Walsh Project has largely been a massive success to this point and it's not like his two misses were bad. He pulled the first one by about a foot and the 2nd one couldn't have hit the uprights more solidly.
- This matchup of the dominant SEC teams of the last 7 or 8 years is an odd series. Yes, the last 4 matchups have been split 2-2 but they haven't exactly been nailbiters. Yeah, the 2003 game was an epic 17-10 LSU win complete with a 93-yd TD pass to tie it in the 4th quarter and a winning answer from an eventual national champion, but the next 3 were pretty large blowouts. LSU steamrolled a crippled UGA team in the 2003 SECC, 2004 saw perhaps the most impressive win of the Richt era in a blowout in Athens, and 2005 was a UGA romp in the SECCG over a considerably more highly ranked LSU team. With that last game in mind I leave you a few images...



Have a safe weekend,
Jody

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