

Week 9

Opponent: Florida Gators

Kickoff: 3:30 PM

TV: CBS



You knew that was going to happen at some point this season, I just don't think many expected it to happen against the defending national champions on their home field. It wasn't a perfect win, but it was darn close. Now comes the regular season game that folks have been talking about since the same game ended last year. Considering the two teams have a game (or more) advantage over the other teams in the East, this one is essentially for the SEC-East title and a spot in the discussion for the whole enchilada. Could this game be any bigger?

### About the LSU Game

I said last week that I thought our play would rise and fall based on the performance of Matthew Stafford. Suffice to say he exceeded expectations. After a couple of overthrown early balls, he settled into a rhythm that produced the kind of offensive performance that keeps opposing DCs awake at night. The issue opponents have with us is what we've known could be the case for a while now. Play to stop Stafford and Moreno will rip you apart. Stack the box and you're asking for trouble from Stafford and a WR corps that went from being a question mark about this time last year to a major positive now. Fun for us...not so much for them.



Moreno racked up another 160+ this past weekend. It's getting to be expected. This week was a little different though, as I didn't really expect him to rip off a couple of really long runs like he did against that speedy defense. That's the *other* risk teams run when they stack the box. If you do that and the play gets blocked perfectly, those deep safeties aren't there to limit that run. That's what happened to Florida last year on several of those long Moreno runs. Once he got to the 2<sup>nd</sup> level and made one guy miss he was free to rumble for a while.

It's impossible (although I've done a good job to this point) to talk about the success of the offense without mentioning the OL. Not only did they do a tremendous job of opening holes for Moreno, they also gave Stafford the time he needed to get the ball downfield. Ben Jones is playing well beyond his years (or would that be year?). Cordy Glenn played well enough for Danielson to call him out by name. They gave up one sack and largely kept Stafford from even taking many shots...this against a DL built to rush the passer. Just an awesome performance.

On defense, it was such a hot/cold performance. Gamble's play was obviously a high point, but for the first time all year we saw a team lean on us with the run and we didn't do a great job of answering. That massive OL seemed to wear on us all day. In the passing attack we did a good job at times but gave up some late yardage (albeit when the game was darn near out of reach). For the first time this year we got a little sloppy with tackling and that's a major concern considering the shifty gamebreakers we're about to go up against. One very big positive though was the emergence of a pass rush. We were only officially given 1 sack but we tackled their QB for a loss on a bumbled snap and Justin Houston had a huge intentional grounding play. Not our best defensive performance, but it's hard to argue when the D scores 2 TDs and contributes to us being up by 3 TDs in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

## Florida Offense

- Oh boy. The offense isn't just the Tim Tebow show anymore and as a result it's actually more efficient and considerably more dangerous. They have speed to burn all over the place and haven't seemed to miss the preseason loss of All-SEC TE Cornelius Ingram. This is an efficient bunch that can score quickly and in bunches. They've taken complete advantage of stellar special teams play and considerably better than expected play from their D to produce numerous scores from short field situations. They lead the conference in scoring offense at 42 ppg, nearly 8 points ahead of UGA (who is 2<sup>nd</sup>).
- What can you say about Tebow at QB? He's the reigning Heisman Trophy holder and with good reason after putting up numbers last year that many can't pull off on Playstation. I would say he's a LB playing QB but he's bigger than most LBs. He's got a funky throwing motion and (despite Gator insistence otherwise) isn't a great pro prospect, but he's absolutely perfect for this offense, providing the tough, bull rushing yardage that the shiftier UF backs can't. Passing the ball, he's an accurate thrower, completing 63% of his passes on the year (actually down from his career 66%). His attempts, both passing and rushing, are down this year considerably as UF has brought the running game more into play with actual RBs. Tebow hasn't been asked to do as much this year, don't mistake the drop in production for some kind of slump.
- Florida has actually used RBs this year. Novel idea. After Tebow easily led the team in rushing last year he's passed it off a bit and is now merely 3<sup>rd</sup> in rushing yardage, although his 82 carries on the season is nearly double the attempts of #2. USC transfer Emmanuel Moody was supposed to get the bulk of the carries and be the savior of the UF ground game (and Tebow's shoulders) but he's battled injuries and questionable talent since his arrival. He looked decent against UT in his limited action but the excitement in the UF ground game has come from two speedy freshmen. Chris Rainey, star of the UF spring game, is ridiculously fast and quick, and at 5-9, 185, he pretty much has to be to avoid getting killed in SEC contests. As fast as he is, true frosh Jeffery Demps is faster. At an even smaller 5-8, 176, the same rule applies...he has to be. Over a significant number of carries (30), Demps is averaging an absurd 11.9 ypc. Throw in Sr. Kestahn Moore for the occasional tough yard (or fumble) and you've got a solid RB corps with speed like you rarely see.
- At WR, Percy Harvin has returned from offseason heel issues to display his incredible speed (noticing a trend here?), open-field abilities, and multi-purposeness (just made that word up I think) to the tune of 26 catches, 429 yards and 6 TDs (all lead the team) through the air and 31 rushes for 212 yards and 3 TDs on the ground. At 5-11, 195, he's not as tall as he seems when watching him but he's got more bulk. Louis Murphy has been solid all year as a #2 WR. Carl Moore has yet to fulfill his considerable promise coming in but is a big body outside. He's got a knack for getting refs to give him bogus catches even after video evidence confirms he never had the ball...OK, so he only did that once, but it was big...against Miami. Yeah, that guy. Aaron Hernandez has done a solid job filling in for Ingram. A big time recruit out of CT, Hernandez has speed to get down field and could be a matchup issue for our LBs if they get stuck trying to find several of the little Gators running around at warp speed.
- The Gator OL hasn't quite lived up to the considerable preseason expectations this season but they've begun improving lately. They'll get back original starting LG Jim Tartt but it's unclear whether he'll immediately start, as Carl Johnson has started playing much better the last few weeks. Twin brothers Mike and Maurkice Pouncey man the OC and RG slots which has to help



with communication. This is a large OL, averaging over 310 a man, but thankfully we won't see anyone on the order of Hermann Johnson and his 375 pounds of mobile anger this week. The UF OL has done an OK job of protecting Tebow this year, giving up 10 sacks, but when you consider they're passing much less this year, maybe they'll be a little susceptible there. Both OTs are 5<sup>th</sup> year seniors.

- **Bottom Line:** Florida has serious speed on offense, did I mention that? They've moved away from an entirely Tebow-centric offense somewhat although he's still the hub around which the whole thing revolves. Tackling will be huge this week. We struggled somewhat against LSU with that and while they don't really have anyone (not named Tebow) that will present the tackling challenges of Scott, these guys ain't gonna be the easiest things in the world to catch. Looking at their season, in their two closest games (the loss to Ole Miss and the closer than the score would indicate win over Miami) I found it interesting that those were the two games where Tebow easily had his most pass attempts. In fact, his top two passing performances in terms of yardage were in those two games. The loss to Ole Miss saw Harvin catch something like 13 passes for 180+. Granted, other things were involved in those games but I think it's pretty clear that you stop the run and make Tebow beat you through the air. If you can do that and get some pressure (we suddenly started getting pressure in this game last year), you have a recipe for success. One thing that really concerns me with this route though is the fact that Meyer has done an excellent job in recent years of developing plays to get WRs wide open downfield on us. Last year Tebow missed on a couple of those but they were there. Given some of our issues with coverage, that should worry us all.
- **Key Matchup to watch when they have the ball:** Reshad Jones and CJ Byrd against Tim Tebow and the mighty mites. Jones has been largely inconsistent in recent weeks, at times looking ready to become the next great UGA safety, at times looking ready to be benched. Byrd has been steadier but doesn't have the high ceiling. This weekend we'll need big games from both to stop the big plays from UF, both on the ground and in the air. When Tebow starts scrambling (lumbering), safeties often end up involved. Let's hope they don't get burned on that whole Tebow two-step where he fakes a draw for a step, drops back and chunks it downfield, usually to great effect, typically against a safety who had rolled up.

## Florida Defense

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- The Florida D was supposed to be the major weak link to this team. So far it hasn't been. They've played well above expectations to date, ranking 15<sup>th</sup> nationally against the run and 17<sup>th</sup> against the pass. Their national total defense ranking of 13<sup>th</sup> is surpassed by their impressive scoring defense rank of 7<sup>th</sup>. The only problem? They've played a slew of really, really bad offenses. More to the point, they've played a slew of really, really mediocre QBs. Only one QB they've faced all year (Dick at Arkansas) was a starter a year ago, and he's in a brand new offense under a first-year coach. I don't know that UF has been tested to date and certainly not by anyone on the level of skill that UGA will be bringing to the game.
- The Gator DL was supposed to be a major weak point this season and while it hasn't been a world beater, it's been far more solid than preseason prognosticators within the SEC expected. GA native Jermaine Cunningham has played well at one DE spot. He's not the bulkiest of DEs but he knows how to get after a QB with 9.5 career sacks. The most interesting DE is the massive Carlos Dunlap at 6-6, 290. He's a freak of nature



with incredible physical skills...speed, power, etc. and he's still learning as a true soph. He leads the team with 4 sacks on the season. DT is probably the position that has played best with regards to preseason expectations. Lawrence Marsh has been the anchor inside with a rotating group of folks supporting him. True freshman Matt Patchan is undersized at 6-6, 270 but is athletic and aggressive. DT is a bit thin for them, as it was when we tangled last year.

- The star of the D resides at LB where MLB Brandon Spikes is an All-SEC level performer and probable early entrant to the NFL. He's a prototypical MLB at 6-3, 245. He leads the team in tackles and is the emotional leader of the entire D. He's a stout physical presence and, while not the speediest LB in the league, does a good job of getting to holes and plugging them up. OLBs AJ Jones and either Dustin Doe or Ryan Stamper (pretty interchangeable there) provide solid athleticism outside.
- The Gator secondary is a young one. Last year Joe Haden started at CB as a true freshman. This year Janoris Jenkins does the same thing opposite him. Haden and Jenkins are both in the 5-10, 185-pound range, so not huge CBs, but very fast and very skilled. After starting all of last season, Wondy Pierre-Louis (who had a pick-6 against us last year) provides great CB depth. Safety has been a bit of an interesting spot for UF, as nearly all of their offseason injuries seemed to hit here. They still retain hard-hitting sophomore Major Wright, who really hits harder than his 6-0, 200-pound listed size. He's a good all-around safety, physical with a nose for the ball. Opposite him is the Tra Battle sized Ahmad Black, who moved over from CB in the offseason and has managed to hold off big-time recruit Will Hill, who provides depth.
- **Bottom Line:** UF has done everything they should've to this point, holding all of these offenses in check that they've faced. Last year they struggled mightily against the pass but we came in with a gameplan that saw us ignore the expected, line it up and run straight at them over and over, eventually working in some play action but largely just dominating them on the ground. This year they appear to be equally adept against the run and pass, so who knows what we do. The thing is, like I said earlier, they haven't faced a QB as experienced as Stafford or with the weapons he has at his disposal. I loved how we stayed with the run Saturday, willing to take 1 or 2 yards on first down, content that it would pay off eventually (it did, in spades) while feeling comfortable that Stafford and company could execute on subsequent downs to move the chains. We seem to have gotten well away from the Moreno screen pass, using him more often as a decoy out of the backfield. Given the success he had against them last year it wouldn't shock me at all to see more of that, as you know UF will key on him. After seeing the little wrinkles we've added to that bubble screen to Green/Moore, look for some more of that. Heck, we've shown so many formations and different wrinkles, I fully expect to see us try some new things out of those looks Saturday, it'll just be a matter of execution. Stafford will have shots downfield, the questions will be can he hit them as well as he did last year.
- **Key matchup to watch when we have the ball:** Watch Chapas and Southerland against Spikes. Chapas has stepped nicely into the role handled so well by Southerland the last few years. It's allowed Southerland to move around some in some kind of hybrid H-back type role on occasion. Either way, those two will have their hands full with Spikes and company. If they can have some success neutralizing arguably the SEC's best LB, Moreno could have a big day.



## The Florida Game Overall

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It's a testament to how truly dangerous this Florida team is that arguably the best aspect of their team has gone completely unmentioned to this point. Special Teams. Regular readers know I usually don't

get into special teams, but the Gators' group is really special. We've seemingly faced a top notch punt returner every week (Moore at Vandy, Arenas at Bama, Holliday at LSU) and we've handled them fairly well. Florida's Brandon James could be the best we've faced. Couple that with a punt rush unit that blocked two Kentucky punts in the first 5 minutes of the game last week and you get a real glimpse into how Florida's been able to pound people this year. UT was a prime example. Before they even knew what happened UF had scored a couple of times driven two huge special teams plays and had them completely out of sorts. Mimbs has played really well all year with the exception of those two really bad attempts in the Bama game. High, long punts will be important, as James can make you pay in a hurry.

Obviously turnovers would be a major concern in this game. UF's only loss saw them fumble the ball away 3 times to Ole Miss. I think it clearly goes without saying that we can't be loose with the ball. A team as talented as UF will pounce on mistakes like that and turn them into points in a hurry. I expect both teams to move the ball fairly efficiently. For years this game was characterized by low scoring slugfests. I don't expect that to be the case Saturday as these two offenses are simply too potent.

Given the considerable emotional baggage both fanbases are bringing to this game, I can't imagine how hard it's going to be for the players to avoid getting caught up in it. This game has a lot going on. After the emotionally charged contest last year it'll be even more important for the dawgs to come out focused and under control, playing with their emotions in check and just executing what the coaches have drilled them on. Florida coaches have had this one circled since last season. The media has been talking about it since then too. It's essentially for the East title. Florida fans can complain all they want about last year's game but one thing it certainly did was return this rivalry to the forefront of the national consciousness. Just the way it should be.



## Positional Notes

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- No new injuries...hooray.
- Ellerbe may play, he may not...as of this writing. Despite the great game from Gamble last week, Ellerbe would be a big addition this week covering those little RBs out of the backfield. As of now it sounds like he might be able to go.
- Unclear also whether or not Tripp Chandler will be able to go this week. Figgins is the premier blocker of the group and if his lone reception is any indication, Aron White will be quite the weapon at some point in his career. That catch wasn't nearly as easy as he made it look. First, it had some heat on it. Second, he had just made his cut and cleared a LB (or safety) and had no time at all before it was on him. Lastly, it was his first career catch. Solid. Way too solid.
- I can't tell you how relieved I was to see that AJ Green had slipped on the tunnel screen, leading to that drop. In the 3 or so seconds between the play and the replay my mind was already flipping to "oh no, another hands issue" mode. Of course, the next play completely alleviated all concerns. Yeah, it was the long TD.
- Good to hear that Tavares King will be applying for a medical redshirt due to his ankle. He's far too talented to lose an entire year for only 2 catches (I think he only has 2).

- Sounds like Evans is crosstraining at S behind Reshad Jones. He got several snaps there Saturday and provides some serious speed and a bit of depth there, much needed.

### Random Thoughts

- I get so tired of hearing how much better the NFL does things than college. Yes, their method of play-clock produces a more consistent means of time between plays and was a good move by the college game to adopt, but in the interest of improving both levels I think the NFL should closely observe the college replay system. Atlanta got hosed on Sunday by a bad call that couldn't be reviewed due to the fact that Atlanta had no timeouts and it was outside the final two minutes. The call was blatantly bad, if you missed it, it was a punt that the ATL return man backed away from as it bounced, with officials ruling that he touched the ball. While I'm convinced college replay officials are merely watching the telecast and not truly reviewing every play, it's still a far superior system because the primary goal is to get the call right. The reviews seem to be quicker in college as well.
- For as much credit as he gets for being such a great leader, Tim Tebow does not possess a 4<sup>th</sup> quarter comeback in his considerable resume as a starter. Surprising? And has anyone figured out why the media is so utterly fascinated with the Tebow jump pass? Continuing the Tebow train, has anyone ever seen Tim Tebow and Brendan Fraser together? Are they the same person? The only way to know for sure is to have Brendan Fraser attempt a circumcision...or make out with Tony Joiner in pads. Then we'll know for sure. Or maybe we could have Tebow woodenly deliver some lines in an action movie...tell me you couldn't see that happening. I'm pretty sure they are brothers at least.
- Say what you want about Penn Wagers as the head official for this game but I'm probably more pleased that he is. He'll make it clear pregame that he'll want no shenanigans going on. If anything, after that defensive holding debacle in our game earlier this season where they admitted a major mistake, we might get a fairer than normal shake. Hopefully our coaches have drilled the team on not doing the gator chomp, although I think it's still a bit ludicrous that one team can do that motion and the other team can't.
- Yes, media members usually fawn all over themselves at the mention of Tim Tebow but I can't imagine an announcer being more infatuated with a player than Gary Danielson is with Matthew Stafford right now. I haven't seen Danielson this excited about a player since Reggie "the Eraser" Nelson. Whenever our offense had the ball it was just one glowing remark after another, at one point even admitting being envious of the kid's abilities. Every time folks start spouting off about Stafford not being very good I always wonder what they are thinking during these instances. Look for a few on Saturday.
- Staying on Danielson, that guy is the best in the game in my opinion. Very, very insightful and he just has a real knack for calling plays before they happen. Yeah, I'd imagine we'd probably all do the same thing if we had spent as much time around football as he has, but I'm always impressed at the level of preparedness he brings to the table. Very thorough.
- What did catch me off guard from Danielson was the line about his parents. You know, the one where he said...one more play like that and there might be another Matthew on the way. Wonder how Matt handled that if he watched the DVR copy? Do players even do that?
- Under Meyer, Florida is 27-1 when they score first. They are 10-8 otherwise. Wait, there's hope. If UF does manage to score first, we'll need to get the lead by the half. Under Urban, UF is 33-3 when leading going into the half, 4-6 when either tied or trailing.
- Last stat...under Meyer, UF is 7-7 on fake punts. Just saying...



- Between College Gameday and the CBS coverage, how many times on Saturday do you think we'll hear mention of, you know, that moment in last year's game? After all the ridiculous over-analysis of it last season I vowed to avoid it if at all possible. Maybe I'll blog about it. Just know that it'll be a big deal.



- Oh, and Verne, Moreno doesn't have great speed, but he's got really good speed, and that's enough...apparently.

Have a safe weekend,  
Jody

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