

**Week 11**

**Opponent: Auburn Tigers**

**Kickoff: 12:30 PM**

**TV: Lincoln Financial (Raycom, whatever)**



Alright, not a perfect game by any means, but maybe the perfect game to purge the memory of Florida from our collective heads at least for a little while. Now we get a wounded animal team in Auburn that is desperate for a win to provide some light in a lost season. Hopefully we can keep the offense rolling this week and get the defense on board to pull out a win.

### About the UKGame

What do you say about that game? After our last trip to Lexington this one felt like we just won the SEC. UK broke out all the stops offensively, utilizing some offensive packages we haven't seen and taking advantage of several special teams hiccups to put points on the board in bunches. Well, that and a defense that forgot to show up for a large portion of the game...at least they made it in time for the bulk of the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter or that would've gotten ugly.

What exactly went wrong on defense? My immediate reaction was that we got gashed repeatedly by a freshman QB on the ground and through the air. I was obviously happy with the win but it was a bit hollow because my obvious concern was that our defense was playing beyond poorly. Rewatching the game and looking into the stats removed a touch of the gloom. That UK passing attack that I had perceived during the game as an efficient machine barely threw for 100 yards (with over a quarter of that coming on one play) and a poor 5.3 yards per attempt. The 226 yards rushing given



up was obviously not ideal but it was on 56 carries, barely 4 ypc. The bottom line was that the defense was put in some really bad spots, with UK starting 3 drives inside the UGA 30, including 2 inside the 10. The thing that still stings though was the complete inability of the dawg D to hunker down. Maybe it's the absence of Munson but UK got into the UGA redzone 6 times and scored 5 TDs. The only time they didn't was when we intercepted to end the game, which I suppose the ultimate hunkering down, but the point is still valid. We've simply got to get better at playing defense under adversity. Getting better at avoiding self-created adversity wouldn't be bad either.

On the plus side though, our offense was stellar for the most part, hanging over 40 against a defense that (aside from their UF meltdown) had held teams to 24 or less. It was an inspiring performance from all of our stars. Amidst even more injuries on the OL, Stafford went for a career shattering 376 yards and 3 TDs, Moreno ran for 3 more, Massaquoi bounced back from a couple of fumbles to key the game winning drive and the present and future that is AJ Green made the game winning grab. It was a display of firepower. If we can put that same effort together on offense for 3 more games we've got an excellent shot at finishing up the year 11-2 with a solid New Year's Day bowl win. The fact that that is considered a potential consolation prize speaks volumes of the current status of the UGA program. Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, let's take care of a couple of rivalry games that are slightly meaningful...

## AU Offense

- Man I certainly didn't expect the AU offense to look like this at this point. The offseason hiring of Tony Franklin to bring in his air raid system was in large part due to the success he had last year against UGA when coaching at Troy. To say that the pairing of Franklin's system to Tuberville's offensive philosophy went poorly is an understatement of the highest order. While it's highly debatable whether or not Franklin was ever allowed to truly institute his offense, the results weren't pretty to say the least and Franklin got canned halfway into his initial season. The resulting mishmash of an offense hasn't been any more effective, largely due to completely ineffective QB play. AU has put up some really bad offensive numbers...in fact, their 63<sup>rd</sup> national ranking in rushing yardage is the high water mark statistically. 99<sup>th</sup> in passing, 100<sup>th</sup> in total offense, 102<sup>nd</sup> in scoring offense, 91<sup>st</sup> in turnover margin, 108<sup>th</sup> in passing efficiency...not pretty at all.
- At QB, AU trots out Sophomore Kodi Burns, who has seen action in nearly every game this year including the lion's (tiger's?) share of QB snaps since the departure of Franklin. A mobile, athletic QB with questionable arm strength, Burns is nonetheless roughly equivalent to Cobb at UK who was able to hurt us on the ground. He's hitting on fewer than 55% of his passes on the year. In a controlled, short throw passing attack that's not good. Not Reggie Ball-bad, but certainly not as good as they've had the last few years. Burns has thrown 7 INTs on the year to only 1 TD but he's averaging over 5 ypc on over 70 rushing attempts (2<sup>nd</sup> on the team). Unfortunately (for us, or Auburn, I'm not sure), Brandon Cox and his 4 INTs in each of the last two games against us have moved on.
- Besides Burns, the Auburn ground game has several talented runners, paced on the season by Jr. Ben Tate's 663 yards. His 4.4 ypc leads the team amongst RBs as well but he's seen a sharp decline in carries since the Vandy loss. Sr. Brad Lester brings a quicker, faster element to the position though not as physical as Tate. Lester is a scrapper that really fights for yardage. Mario Fannin and, to a lesser extent, Eric Smith provide depth also.
- WR has been a letdown for the Tigers this year, with former walk-on Rod Smith leading the team in receptions and yards but no real secondary threats stepping up. TE Tommy Trott is 2<sup>nd</sup> in catches and 3<sup>rd</sup> in yards but there's a glut of WRs that was expected to make a move and hasn't really broken out yet. Smith is better suited to being a #2 WR than the lead guy. Tim Hawthorne was expected to become the big playmaker and his 27 ypc is impressive but it's on only 7 grabs. Chris Slaughter has talent but has yet to really develop into a true threat. Of course, struggles at the QB position have suppressed their receiving numbers. Kind of a chicken-egg scenario there, if the chicken had a bad arm.
- The AU OL was as young last year as UGA's and was supposed to see a marked improvement. The installation of Franklin's system set everything on its ear though. Somehow they start two seniors on the line, so the line isn't as young as some would lead you to believe. Upperclassmen on the OL...a luxury that UGA certainly hasn't had this year after losing its only upperclassman (a junior at that) to season ending ACL surgery. LT Lee Ziembra is a good one.
- **Bottom Line:** AU is really scraping at offense this year. Their scoring average of 19.5 dips to 13.3 in SEC contests. Since week 2, they've scored more than 22 just once and that was last week against lower division foe UT-Martin. After the success that UK had getting yards against us last week I fully expect to see them come out and try and pound it at us, using Burns' legs to continue



hammering our run defense. It's not often you see a team try and attack the nation's 13<sup>th</sup> best run defense via the ground game but the AU passing attack has been woeful this year.

- **Key Matchup to watch when they have the ball:** Rennie Curran really came on this time last year and after he went for a career high 15 tackles last week we could use another explosive effort against an AU team that will certainly run it at us. Curran has struggled against bigger OLs that seem to completely screen him and AU starts 3 OLs listed at 285 or under so he might have a big day.

## AU Defense

- The AU defense started off the year like world-beaters and had the considerable hype that surrounded a veteran unit coming off a solid season. Strong up the middle and with solid LBs, the unit as a whole took a hit preseason with the loss of their top CB. Despite a hiccup against WVU (34 points), this group has largely played close to expectations. They are dominant early, only giving up 13 points in the first quarter all year...and 7 of those came on a muffed AU punt recovered in their own endzone, so really only 6...all season. These guys have put up solid numbers (26<sup>th</sup> in total D, 13<sup>th</sup> in scoring D) while getting virtually no help from their anemic offense.
- The AU DL is paced by two fierce competitors in DE Antonio Coleman and DT Sen'Derrick Marks. Both have missed some time this year but are dominant DLs cut from the same cloth that has sent several DL to the NFL from AU in recent years. Coleman's 10.5 TFLs and 6 sacks easily lead the team. Marks chimes in with an impressive 9 TFLs. Production from the other DLs hasn't been as good as hoped but it's hard to make plays when Marks and Coleman make them all for you. I think their other starting DT, Tez Doolittle was signed in the same signing class as Takeo Spikes.
- The AU LB corps has been up and down. They got gashed by WVU's quick, shifty backfield but they've largely played well. The 4 guys slotted to play the 3 LB slots rank in at numbers 3-6 on the season tackles list and are separated by 7 total tackles, so relatively interchangeable. Former top recruit Tray Blackmon has missed large parts of the season and has apparently been dismissed. The "lil' ball of hate" never really developed into the game-changing LB he was tabbed as coming out of LaGrange HS, but he did have a decent, if controversial, career.
- The AU secondary is led by two physical sophomore safeties that lead the team in tackles in FS Zac Etheridge and SS Mike McNeil. Both are excellent defenders and are developing into future stars. They only have 1 INT on the season and are more inclined to be up near the line. A pair of junior CBs holds down the coverage job. Each has 2 INTs on the year. They have decent size to match up with some of our length at the WR position.
- **Bottom Line:** AU has been good against the run but really good against the pass. That's mostly because they've only played two pass offenses ranked in the top 60 (Ark at 27 and Southern Miss at 33). AU has an excellent defense and it'll be a challenge to score with the efficiency we have at times this year. Our balance on offense will again be our strength as we won't lean on one or the other too much, rather letting each make the other better. After Saturday though you have to feel good about our ability to not only move the ball but score against a good defense...and while AU is a step up from UK, it ain't as big a step as it used to be...more that UK has stepped up considerably on D than AU's stepped back.
- **Key matchup to watch when we have the ball:** With the loss of Bean at OT, we'll be going with Josh Davis and Kiante Tripp there to get the job done. Look for lots of TE and RB help to control the edge rush. If we fail to pick up yards on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> downs and start leaving ourselves



in consistent 3<sup>rd</sup> and long, obvious passing downs, AU has some fast, athletic DLs that can get to Stafford. We've done a very good job recently keeping him upright, with the one game that opponents really got to him being the UF game, not so coincidentally his worst game of the year. Watch whoever ends up manning RT on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6 or more, it could be huge.

## The AU Game Overall

---

Yes, Auburn doesn't have a great offense, but UK didn't either and they managed to hang 38 on us last weekend. The best way to make a bad offense really effective is to help them through special teams' mistakes and turnovers. Defensively right now we're not exactly playing like our hair was on fire. If we execute on special teams and do a decent job of moving the ball while not turning it over, effectively making Auburn have to drive long lengths to score, I think we'll be pleased with our results. If however we revert to our Bama or UK special teams and start handing the ball over like we did against UF, that Auburn offense that has struggled for much of the year will start to look just as good as the UK offense we just got done with.

Going into the season, this was the game many circled as the most likely one to drop as it was at the tail end of a 4 week road trip against a tough opponent that traditionally plays us close, even if we do tend to play better over there than at home. Once the season started and Auburn started faltering with increasing regularity, the game seemed to lose some of its luster. Then came the mauling at the hands of Florida, which brought the realization that the SEC title was out of reach, not to mention the national title. As those things have mounted, the Auburn game sat there, nearly forgotten. Our oldest rivalry, our closest rivalry, one we've controlled the last two years but one that has marked more misery over our 100+ year history than any other.

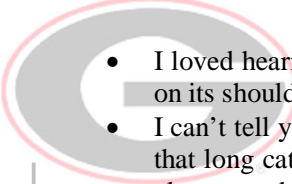
With that in mind, it's hard to imagine that we'd need to focus our players on this game but it's true. It's been a long season and our goals have been adjusted already pretty severely. Meanwhile Auburn rolls into this game off the sting of a shattered season and two consecutive ugly losses to UGA. To top all that off, their team and fans seem completely irate about the Soulja Boy drum beat (remember, no lyrics) that was played during a timeout in Athens last year. They took it as a complete affront and if the UF game was any indication as to how teams handle perceived affronts, we might want to bring our A-game. Heck, given the history of this series, we'll likely need our A-game anyway.



## Positional Notes

---

- Given the complete absence of Tripp from the OL rotation since the SC game, don't be surprised to see him play sparingly Saturday too. Josh Davis has actually been playing in rotation for a while now and he did start the opener so he should be at least passable.
- Knowshon really sent a message about taking himself out of games by playing in nearly every snap of the game on Saturday. I think the results spoke for themselves.
- AJ Greene is really experienced far beyond his years. He completely understands his role in the offense and is content to block for large parts of the game and make the most of his chances. Catching the game-winner on 3<sup>rd</sup> down in the last 1.5 minutes on the road in the SEC is an excellent way of maximizing your chances.

- 
- I loved hearing the words from Corvey Irvin about the defense playing with more fire and a chip on its shoulder. Hopefully we'll see the results on Saturday.
  - I can't tell you how great it played out for Massaquoi to get the shot at redemption by bringing in that long catch to start our final drive. After the two fumbles, it was the chance a senior doesn't always get but he certainly hopes for.

### Random Thoughts

---

- The way this college season has unfolded is particularly unnerving for two fanbases and those two will be meeting on Saturday. As much as UGA fans don't want to see UF get a shot at another national title in Meyer's brief tenure, AU fans are struggling much more with the re-emergence of Bama. The Florida season has been a bad dream for us but the Bama season is like a recurring nightmare for AU fans.
- The news that ESPN is bidding on taking the BCS from Fox is interesting. My first thought was that I'm thrilled that Fox and its 8-hour telecasts for the BCS games might be getting out of CFB. My 2<sup>nd</sup> thought was that it would be an ideal time for ESPN to take over the BCS as they pick up the SEC in their coverage.
- The Penn State loss means we don't have to put up with hours on end of "let Paterno have one more shot" as if the man hasn't had enough already.
- I doubt most of you have noticed but the Atlanta Hawks actually appear to be pretty good. I think the fact that I knew that probably indicated more than anything that our season hasn't quite lived up to its potential.
- It's going to be difficult for USC to get into the title game, that's why you heard Pete Carroll come out against the BCS this week. That's tough because I think they're probably the most talented team in the country and stand the best shot of beating UF (who I think rolls Bama in the SECCG) but as of right now they don't even control their own destiny in the Pac-10. That'd be Oregon St., who has 3 losses, only one of which is in-conference. If they win out, look for a stellar Oregon St.-Penn State Rose Bowl...which would be a rematch of a game they've already played this year. Awesome. Whatever screws the Rose Bowl after last year.
- Raycom has really become odd. In the Macon area they finally got the Raycom game in HD so it looks good, but the volume is about double every other channel which is just awesome for channel surfing. Add in the fact that Dave Neal seems to have just stopped trying to do research for these games (AJ Bryant?...Sr. QB Matt Stafford?...come on) and you've completely flipped the table on the old Jefferson Pilot games that seemed to have good commentary but looked like absolute crap. Maybe it's just me.
- Yeah I know they stopped playing defense in the Big XII a few years back but OU is likely a win over TT and OkSt away from a shot at Missouri to get them into the BCS title game. Given the way they've played so far, I'm not sure they don't stand a good shot of winning it. Stoops needs it given some of the eggs his teams have laid in recent bowl games.
- I can't figure out whether to rejoice or experience a little sorrow at the ending of the Fulmer era. They are one loss away from an 8-loss season. UT has never had an 8-loss season. They face 2 teams in Vandy and UK that are dying to tag them with that distinction and after a 13-7 loss to Wyoming, there's no way they'll be favored in either of those games.
- Speaking of grossly overweight, underachieving coaches, it's fun to watch Notre Dame flop after signing Weis to that huge contract. With any luck they'll lose out and come after Urban Meyer. That's the best case scenario...ever. Urban would repaint his head on Touchdown Jesus. You know he would.

Have a safe weekend,  
Jody

[Viewfrom336.com](http://Viewfrom336.com)