

December 10, 2007

UGA IS A WINNER ON AND OFF THE FOOTBALL FIELD

Okay, Bulldog Nation, let's all get a paper bag and breath into it very s-l-o-w-l-y. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. Feel better? Good. Now turn off the whine machine, and let's talk. We need to accept the fact that the University of Georgia is not playing for the BCS National Football Championship in January. Maybe we got hosed, but the issue has been settled and it isn't going to change.

Had we beaten the Evil Genius and Tennessee during the regular season, we might be having a different conversation right now, but that didn't happen. Besides, the claims we make about deserving a title shot could be made by any number of other schools, including the one we will face in the Sugar Bowl, the undefeated University of Hawaii. As for me, I have no way of knowing who should be playing in the championship game because understanding the screwy BCS system is akin to deciphering Assyrian hieroglyphics.

So, let's get things in perspective. First, going to the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans on New Year's Day isn't exactly the worst thing that ever happened on God's Green Earth. We could be headed to the Pine Beetle Infestation Dot Com Bowl in East Boola-Boola, Idaho, to do battle with the mighty Fresno Raisins, like our friends over at the Sir Lucious L. Lightfoot Brand Alignment Center on North Avenue will be doing.

Second, we are playing one of the most exciting teams in the country, the Hawaii Rainbow Warriors and their run-and-shoot offense. It should be a whale of a game. And don't give me the "we-have-nothing-to-gain-and-everything-to-lose" malarkey. If we only play people when we have something to gain, we ought not to be playing at all. Quality teams don't think that way, and the Bulldogs are a quality team.

Third, there is not going to be a playoff in NCAA Division 1-A (or whatever they call it these days) in our lifetime, so the best way to ensure a slot in the BCS championship game is to whip everybody on the schedule. Sometimes, as the Auburn people will tell you, even that is not enough. Remember, Auburn was undefeated in 2004 and still got snubbed by the BCS.

But most importantly, remember why the University of Georgia exists. It is not to play football, even though we do a pretty good job of that. It is first and foremost an educational institution — and a damned fine one. If you want to expend energy on something having to do with the University of Georgia, I recommend that you forget being disrespected by the BCS nabobs and the talking heads on ESPN and get excited about what is happening academically in Athens.

Maybe you haven't noticed, but it is getting hard as the dickens to get into UGA these days. The private schools in the state that used to turn up their noses at the University of Georgia now have kids clamoring to get into UGA — and a lot of them can't. The SATs for this year's freshman class is 1282 and climbs every year. The current GPA for the freshman class is 3.67. This is not your granddaddy's party school.

The university recently announced two Rhodes Scholars, the only public university in the nation to do so. The other schools with two Rhodes Scholars this year include Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, St. Olaf and Columbia. That's pretty good company for UGA to be keeping. That makes 21 Rhodes Scholars for us, six since 1996. By the way, our two honorees are Deep J. Shah of Duluth and Katherine Vyborny of Washington, D.C. You should be every bit as proud of them as you are of Knowshon Moreno and Matthew Stafford. They had just as good a year.

So, Bulldog Nation, quit grumping about the BCS. There is always next year. Take pride in the fact that the University of Georgia is a winner in the classroom and on the athletic field. Not many institutions can say that. Most of all, be grateful that you don't have to head for the Pine Beetle Infestation Dot Com Bowl in East Boola-Boola, Idaho, to face the mighty Fresno Raisins. Now, that's something to really whine about.