Texas Has Laugh At OU's Expense

posted: Saturday, October 8, 2005

DALLAS -- For a moment that Mack Brown had Texas go for it, and make it, on fourth down, on the first possession of a game that would quickly become a blowout.

Forget that Brown had Vince Young passing from near his own goal line. And that all week, Young said, relaxed players danced on the practice field and in locker rooms.

And focus, instead, on one play.

Focus on Young's 64-yard touchdown pass to receiver Billy Pittman that gave Texas a 24-6 lead before halftime. Entering the game, no Longhorn receiver had caught a touchdown pass against Oklahoma in six games.

This was one of three hauled in by Texas receivers on the day.

Final Score: Texas 45, Oklahoma 12. Irrelevant really, as the outcome of this game was clear when Pittman hauled in that pass. And there's the story behind the story.

Pittman had just been called for a false start on a play designed for him. Young knew that Oklahoma knew the call because Sooner defenders were screaming: "Sprint Left! Sprint Left!" as Young was under center.

So Young, the junior, evolving before the eyes of thousands munching on corn dogs at the Texas State Fair, decided he'd have a little fun.

"They know our play, fellas," Young said in the huddle. "So let's run it again. We're going to laugh when we score."

Tackle Jon Scott said Young briefly considered changing the call to a screen or a draw. "But Vince's thought was, 'They know our play, but they can't stop it,' " he said.

Exactly.

Young sprinted left, threw a beautiful -- not one of those typical three-quarter Vince slingshots, but an over-the-top bomb -- to a wide-open Pittman sprinting down the left sideline.

"We scored," Young said. "And we laughed."

They laughed all the way to the final cannon blast, fired postgame by reserve linebacker Nic Redwine, who had one assist -- make that two -- for the day.

They laughed as Young ran around the field for at least 15 minutes postgame, saluting every Longhorn fans, as what was a sea of crimson streamed into the parking lot, revealing rusty blue and white Cotton Bowl chairs.

After the game, Texas coach Mack Brown, who had lost five straight to Oklahoma, spoke for what seemed like hours with the media. The grin never left his face.

After the game, Young consoled Sooners redshirt freshman quarterback Rhett
Bomar, telling him what Brett Favre and Steve McNair had once told him -- that he has to be patient, that he has to be himself, that he has to allow himself to grow.

Bomar, pelted with questions about Jason White and his bad decisions and undigestible statistics, said he appreciated it. Bomar will be back. Young, a junior, might not be.

"Next year will be a lot different," Bomar said. "This was the first time here for a lot of us. This was the first time here for me."

Bomar had to try without stud sophomore Adrian Peterson, the wunderkind as a freshman held to mere mortal status now -- and three carries on Saturday -- because of a hobbled ankle.

Bomar was asked when he knew Peterson wasn’t going to start.

"Pretty much all week," Bomar said. "I knew how bad it was. I saw it."

Senior defensive tackle Rodrique Wright chugged 67 yards for a fumble-recovery touchdown to seal Texas’ onslaught. It was unnecessary, except to drive the dagger deeper into Bob Stoops’ two-win, three-loss season.

But it felt good for a player who had never beaten Oklahoma -- not even on PlayStation -- as he said.

"Played ‘em every year before the game and couldn’t beat ‘em," Wright smiled. "I won this year. Things are different now."

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**National notebook**

posted: Thursday, October 6, 2005

Headed to Dallas for Oklahoma-Texas. Before I board, I'll clean out the notepad.

CONCERN FOR MARSHAWN: California RB Marshawn Lynch said this week that he will play against UCLA with a cast on his left hand to protect a broken pinkie finger.

"I snuck the ball into my left hand a few times this week, but I'm going to try to keep it out of there," Lynch said. "They teach you to switch it and it's a natural instinct to switch it to my left, but I have to stop doing that."

Lynch ran for 107 yards against Arizona last week but did fumble when he took a shot to the left hand.

If this is the sort of thing that strikes your fancy, Lynch said he gets fired up for every game by watching Popeye on the Cartoon Network. Seriously. And his cousin, Cal wide receiver Robert Jordan, watches too. They live together.

SHOCKLEY VS. CLAUSEN: Georgia QB D.J. Shockley said this week is an opportunity to bury Tennessee in the SEC East by handing them a second conference loss. "We know the importance of this game," Shockley said. "This can catapult us ahead ... and put them behind the 8-ball. We win and they'd have to wait and see, and hope." Shockley also said he expects his defense to show no sympathy for banged-up Tennessee quarterback Rick Clausen. Georgia safety Greg Blue, a fierce hitter, seems to back up that claim. Asked to describe Georgia's defense, Blue said: "We're tough, rugged and eerie."

CHARLES: SOMETHING TO PROVE: Texas offensive coordinator Greg Davis says freshman running back Jamaal Charles compares favorably to Cedric Benson and Ricky Williams at the early stages of their careers. But Benson, now with the Bears, said: "Jamaal hasn't done anything too amazing -- yet. We'll all find out how good a back he is." Against Oklahoma, that is.

TAYLOR: BACK OFF CALLAHAN: Nebraska quarterback Zac Taylor set records with 55 passes and 431 yards last week and he'll try to light up Texas Tech this week.

Taylor said he's often approached by people who question his coach, Bill Callahan. Taylor told a recent inquisitor: "Let go of the option offense. Let it go. My coach knows more about the game than anybody I've met in my life." Taylor says he's inspired by Dave Matthews, for whatever that's worth.

WHAT'S UP, MARCUS? Just days after Virginia Tech QB Marcus Vick said he's on a straight line, Vick flipped off West Virginia fans in the Hokies' road win. Vick apologized. Virginia Tech athletic director Jim Weaver said: "The fans were brutal to Marcus, but he needs to rise above that." West Virginia coach Rich Rodriguez said he thought Vick also made intentional sideline contact with a Mountaineers assistant. As a sidebar, Weaver said he met with coach Frank Beamer to discuss a contract extension at the end of this week.

HARRIS POLLING: Traditional powers Notre Dame, Penn State and Alabama are all explosive through four games, and the best m be still to come.

Pasquarelli: Change for the worse
History shows that making an in-season coach change usually doesn't help.

+ Tip Sheet Notes
back in the polls. The bad news? This week, one Harris Poll voter wrote in the same team twice. Another didn't vote at all. Baffling BCS commissioners now is the revelation that the company monitoring the poll can add points for teams they believe were inappropriately left off ballots. Penn State coach Joe Paterno said this week: "We lost the last good Pole with the Pope." Funny.

Q&A with Joe Pa

posted: Wednesday, October 5, 2005

I had never spent considerable time with Joe Paterno and really had no idea what to expect. But I knew this week's interview in Happy Valley would be comfortable when Paterno settled into his chair and started telling me he'd once dated Joe Torre's sister.

"Yeah, then she became a nun," Paterno laughed.

Torre attended St. Francis Prep, my high school, and one that used to be in Brooklyn where Paterno prepped. And so we were off. Candid, engaging and witty, the 78-year-old showed me why he's not ready to retire. Here are some excerpts:

Question: "What does this start say to the people who thought the glory days of Penn State had past?"

Paterno: "Well, people have short memories. You know, we had a heck of a football team in 2002. We just had a little slump because we didn't have the skill people we needed to win in this league."

Question: "What has adding this speed meant to your football team?"

Paterno: "I didn't recognize exactly how quickly we were going to have to move to more speed to make big plays. The Big Ten is so physical now it's tough to sustain drives. We were a little slow in getting some speed."

Question: "What are you playing so many freshmen?"

Paterno: "'Cause they're the best we got. I mean, I wouldn't play freshmen if I felt we had some people who were better, or even close. I mean, the kids we're playing are just so far ahead of the other kids, you'd have everybody thinking you're nuts if you didn't play them. They think I'm nuts anyway."

Question: "What was that 6-4 game like last season?"

Paterno: "Yeah, Iowa beat us 6-4. A heck of a hockey game!"

Question: "How did losing affect you?"

Paterno: "Losing didn't affect me as much as it affected the fans. Obviously we would have preferred to win. I just kept thinking, 'If I had two or three of these players last year, we would have had a heck of a year.' If we were overwhelmed, or if I was confused, maybe it would have affected me that way. But I really always felt that we were very close to having a pretty good football team. And we're a pretty good football team. We're not a great football team."

Question: "Why do you say 'good'?"

Paterno: "Well, we haven't done anything to say we're great. It's one thing to say it. [Paterno pounds his chest and makes a roaring noise]. Until somebody comes up [Paterno pounds his chest again] and knocks you on your backside. I think we have a bit of a ways to go yet."

Question: "What do you make of traditional powers resurging?"

Paterno: "It was good to see Oklahoma come back, Southern Cal back. I grew up when Southern Cal was right there on top. It's good to see Notre Dame come back. Notre Dame, you know, when I was a kid I can still remember the Ohio State-Notre Dame game, when [Bill] Shakespeare played ... listening to the radio in my house in Brooklyn."

Question: "Do you find all the polls now confusing?"

Paterno: "You know, when we lost our Pope, that was the last great Pole I saw."

Question: "On the voicemails you left [wide receiver] Derrick Williams when you were recruiting him, what did you want him to know?"

Paterno: "I said, 'Look, we're going to be OK, but we need a couple of you guys. And you guys are gonna come in and re-create Penn State success that we've been accustomed to.'"

Question: "How do you hope your career will end?"

Paterno: "I don't know ... when I'm alive. You only have so much time. And if you start getting out of focus then you're all confused. If I go to bed at night worried about where my career is going to end instead of how I'm going to handle those two outside linebackers at Ohio State, then I'm in trouble."

Question: "If you didn't know how old you were &"
Paterno: “Sure I get aches and pains like everybody else when I horse around with the kids on the field. Once in a while I go home and say, ‘How dumb can I be?’ My arm hurts and the leg hurts. But I feel really good. I enjoy coaching. I enjoy getting out on the field. I’ve got a lot of energy yet. So it’s fun. Somebody said, ‘Gee wiz, don’t you want to do this or that?’ I said, ‘Well, what do you want me to do? On Saturday, cut grass?’ I haven’t cut grass all my life, all right. And my wife wouldn’t know what to do if she didn’t have to cut grass. So I don’t want to spoil her life. And I don’t want to spoil my life.”

A few leftovers from my trip to State College, Pa.:

BLOOD AND SWEAT: Linebacker Paul Posluszny had a cut on the bridge of his nose that just won’t heal. He predicts it will start to bleed on the first play of Saturday’s Ohio State game. “It’s not bad during the game,” Posluszny said. “You don’t even notice it. It won’t happen. But it’s like, who cares? It’s no big deal.” Here’s Posluszny on Ohio State linebacker A.J. Hawk: “He’s better than me. I’m not going to lie. He’s a first-team All-America. He’s going to be a first-round draft pick. My goal is to eventually be where he’s at right now.”

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, RECRUIT: He’s not much for technology, but it turns out Paterno has been singing, among other things, “Happy Birthday” to recruits for years now. At least five years, according to quarterback Michael Robinson. “He sang me ‘Happy Birthday’ and it was crazy,” Robinson recalled. “I was like, ‘Who is this singing?’ Then he said, ‘This is Coach Paterno.’ Then he said something. I don’t know what he said. It was like, ‘Blah, blah, blah, hopefully you’ll come here.’ That just goes to show you what kind of man he is. A man with his legacy, to be able to sing to a 17- or 18-year-old, you know, a high schooler, to get him to his university? He’s definitely a great person.” Though freshman Derrick Williams didn’t recall, rumor has it Paterno left singing voicemails for the freshman. Williams did say Paterno would leave jokes for his mother.

HE’S GOT CORNER COVERED: Senior cornerback Alan Zemaitis says freshman Justin King may be primarily a receiver now, but his pro future is at defensive back. “Defense, defense,” Zemaitis said. “The way he plays, you guys haven’t really seen a lot of the way he plays defense. He is a prototypical corner. This is a phenomenal player who in a couple of more years is going to be going some high places making some money. There’s really not that much more you have to teach him.” Scary.

TAKE THESE DIRTY SHORTS: Freshman receiver Derrick Williams is so popular that a woman had been begging him for an autographed copy of his game-worn compression shorts. Williams actually obliged after the last home game. “I signed it with a marker,” Williams said. “Just, ‘Derrick Williams.’ ... Yeah, very crazy.” Williams rationalized: “You’re living in a spotlight, so you have to do everything to maintain the spotlight.” I suppose.

Wolfgang's homecoming

posted: Wednesday, September 28, 2005

I had to make sure Florida wide receiver Chad Jackson was actually saying what I thought he was saying. Jackson had said that after a frustrating freshman year at Florida, he almost transferred back home. A native of Hoover, Ala., yes, that meant he almost transferred home to Alabama.

“Yes,” Jackson said Wednesday, three days before he makes a homecoming as Florida’s leading receiver, in a game at Alabama. “That’s the school I probably would have gone to.”

Amazing.

Jackson, having grown up a Crimson Tide fan, said he expects to get booed for betraying the school most everyone expected him to go to. Even his high school teachers, he said, put pressure on him to play for Alabama.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been booed,” Jackson said. “I don’t know how I’ll react to it. I won’t take it to heart. I know where they’re coming from.”

Fun fact you may not have known: Jackson's middle name is "Wolfgang" and some of his friends have taken to calling him "Wolf."

Maroney: Not me for Heisman

Minnesota running back Laurence Maroney ran for more than 200 yards last week and leads the NCAA in rushing. Maroney is a rising Heisman trophy candidate.

In our minds.

In a conversation this week, Maroney told me even his ballot right now would be: Reggie Bush, Matt Leinart and Vince Young.
"They will never look this way," Maroney said of voters. "They will never look Minnesota."

Maroney, by the way, told me he gained weight in the offseason with the aid of cheeseburgers, his favorite food. It doesn't seem to have hurt his speed.

**Vick: I'm not running?**

Virginia Tech quarterback Marcus Vick has been compared to his not-mentioned-here-by-name older brother since birth. But Marcus said this week that he's not going to run as much.

"I'm trying to save my body and make it through the whole season," Vick said. "I don't want to have any freak injuries and have somebody else come in and hurt my team."

Hmmmm.

Vick, who may be a more accomplished passer at this stage than his not-mentioned-here older brother, did say it's not easy to suppress his instincts to run.

But he will try. Beginning this week. At rival West Virginia.

**Hagan confident**

Derek Hagan called to say he loves USC. Or not. The Arizona State wide receiver, a stud whose home is in California, is still miffed the Trojans never offered a scholarship.

"You could say I'm an SC-hater," Hagan said this week.

Nice.

Hagan also added that USC is the second-best team in the Pac-10.

Hey, what would you expect him to say?

And that he's taken notice of the Trojans' depleted secondary.

"I think I'm No. 1," Hagan said when asked who the best receiver in the nation is.

"There are great receivers out there. They all have great skills. But I have the best game."

**This and that**

Florida's Urban Meyer said he regrets having true freshman quarterback Josh Portis run back onto and off the field at Kentucky after he hung his head after a mistake last week. Meyer said: "I've gotten a lot of calls about that. I probably should not have done that. This isn't Bowling Green anymore." ... Seconds after Meyer made that comment, former Florida coach Steve Spurrier joined an SEC teleconference. ... Miami Dolphins coach Nick Saban, formerly at LSU, said Tuesday he sent an e-mail to his former players after their crushing home loss to Tennessee, saying that he felt bad about how the game played out, but that he was proud of their efforts. ... Michigan State offensive coordinator Dave Baldwin said Drew Stanton reminds him of John Elway. "I coached with Jack Elway for 11 years," Baldwin said. "He had an incredible arm and feet. And what they both have is great leadership. When Drew Stanton is in a huddle, people believe." ... Penn State coach Joe Paterno, asked if he has pulled quarterback Michael Robinson aside about his recent propensity for turnovers: "When I see him at practice, I say, 'Hold onto the ball today, kid,'" Paterno said. "What do I do? ... Invite him to my confessional?"

**Tough Loss for Louisville, Big East**

posted: Monday, September 26, 2005

Big East commissioner Mike Tranghese says he's been receiving calls all day Monday "that make it seem like this weekend was the end of the world."

Tranghese says Louisville's 45-14 loss to South Florida on Saturday is not the end of the world, even if the Cardinals were, and still are, the Big East's only ranked team.

"Maybe short-term this is a negative," Tranghese said. "But long-term, it's not. As we've rebuilt this conference, we've said we have a number of programs with great potential. I talked constantly about South Florida and some people thought I was nuts."

The Big East has added Connecticut, Cincinnati, Louisville and South Florida in the wake of losing traditional powers Miami, Virginia Tech and Boston College to the ACC.

"We lost three teams that are ranked in the Top 25 in the country," Tranghese said. "We're not going to solve this problem with the outcome of a single football game.
We've been getting bashed by a lot of people. But this is a marathon. Not a sprint."

Louisville began the season ranked 12th and some experts predicted the team would roll to an undefeated season. But the Cardinals fell to 24th after they were blasted by their former Conference USA rival.

On Monday, Louisville coach Bobby Petrino said people would have to "wait and see" if South Florida's victory was in the best interest of the conference. Petrino also declined to accept the notion that Louisville was "torch bearer" for the Big East, a league whose automatic BCS berth is being questioned.

"My disappointment is that I didn't have my players ready and focused," Petrino said. "We have to take a look at that." Pittsburgh began the season ranked 23rd, but lost its first three games under first-year coach Dave Wannstedt before defeating Youngstown State on Saturday.

Tranghese said numerous coaches and athletic directors, including Louisville's Tom Jurich, recommended the addition of South Florida to the Big East.

"Location," Tranghese said. "It's a vibrant community. Look at what Coach [Jim] Leavitt has done with that program. They've been operating out of a trailer since 1997 and are just now operating in a new facility. So today is not the end of the world, just because Louisville lost. One game and one team are not going to determine whether this conference succeeds."

Tranghese added that he'd like to see the West Virginia-Virginia Tech series, a traditional rivalry slated to end after this season, continue.

"And I believe West Virginia would too," Tranghese said.

Tranghese also said he has "no negative feelings at all toward Virginia Tech."

"Schools have a right to leave," Tranghese said. "My bone of contention was how certain people handled it. But [coach] Frank Beamer and [Athletic Director] Jim Weaver all notified us that when the whole ACC situation was evolving, that they would have to get aggressive and try to get in. So they told us up-front. I have no ill will toward them. I have talked to them. And they are friends. I don't think this game is about Virginia Tech having left the Big East. I think it's about the rivalry and the fact that they're ranked third in the country."

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**Elvis, Guy Lafleur and bullies**

posted: Friday, September 23, 2005

Some notes heading into a big Week 4. Keep the mail coming ...

**LEINART: "EXPLOSIVE?"**

USC quarterbacks coach Steve Sarkisian says the most underrated aspect of Matt Leinart's game is his ability to SCRAMBLE. "Everyone talks about how smart he is and how he throws, but Matt is a very good athlete," said Sarkisian, adding that Leinart will "shock you" with his ability to explode out of the pocket. And I don't think he was kidding.

Also, Sarkisian said there is no need to apologize for the fact that he and Leinart call each other "friends." Sarkisian said Leinart called him two or three times a week for advice during last season.

**ELVIS, ELVIS**

Louisville opens its Big East schedule Saturday at South Florida. Defensive end Elvis Dumervil, the NCAA's sack leader with a record nine in two weeks, said this week his advice for the tackles trying to stop him: SHUT UP. He was taunted by Kentucky and Oregon State players and had six and three sacks, respectively.

He doesn't like Elvis, by the way. Says he prefers G-Unit. Dumervil is from Miami. He'll have 25-30 family members in Tampa for the contest. Dumervil would have liked to have gone to Miami or Florida. He was leaning toward Steve Spurrier, but when Ron Zook arrived, Dumervil said: "Me and Ron Zook didn't see eye-to-eye."

**DANDY VANDY**

Vanderbilt is 3-0 for the first time since 1984. Chancellor Gordon Gee (think Guy Lafleur) said he was stunned to see people scalping Vanderbilt football tickets this week. Gee on what people thought when he dissolved the football program into the university in the middle of last season: "We heard all of our coaches would leave, all our students would transfer and we would be forced out of the SEC. None of that has happened. We extended all of our coaches' contracts and we're building an integrated program the way it should be for all programs across the country. We're building a football team that our university can be proud of. Not a university that our football team can be proud of."
Vandy QB: Bring on GameDay
posted: Thursday, September 22, 2005

Vanderbilt is 3-0. No, seriously. OK, so here's the deal. Their quarterback, Jay Cutler, is a legitimate first-round draft choice who returned to Vanderbilt because he wanted to play another season for coach Bobby Johnson. It gets better.

The Commodores could go 5-0 with home dates against Richmond and Middle Tennessee the next two weeks. Granted, this is a team that hasn't gone to a bowl game in more than 20 years. They're 2-0 in the SEC for the first time since 1956. Seriously. This week, Cutler was interviewed by the New York Times, Sports Illustrated and USA Today. Oh yeah, and us, at ESPN. He said he thought posting this interview would be a good idea.

So, here it is:

**Question:** "If you start 5-0, can we bring GameDay to Nashville?"
**Cutler:** "Bring it on, baby. We'll show you a good time. It would be great for the fans. We haven't packed it out like this in a while. But first, we have to start 5-0."

**Question:** "Vanderbilt's chancellor, Gordon Gee, is quite a character, huh?"
**Cutler:** "Unbelievable. At the last game, he had these blue dress pants with Gold V's all over them. You've never seen anything like it."

**Question:** "What was your honest reaction when Chancellor Gee dissolved the athletics department into the rest of the university?"
**Cutler:** "We were worried because we were going to be different than the way everyone else had it set up. It had everyone upset. But we really haven't noticed any changes. It's been fine."

**Question:** "What's it like in Santa Claus?"
**Cutler:** "Oh, I knew this was coming. It's nice. I mean, it's a small town in Indiana."

**Question:** "Why not Purdue?"
**Cutler:** "They wanted me to play defensive back. So did Illinois. They offered me. Then they gave it to some kid from California. I have no idea where he is today."

**Question:** "When you came back for a senior season did you think this was possible?"
**Cutler:** "Yeah, I mean, we were really close to this last season. We knew our skill level would improve. Now, could I tell you we'd be talking right now? I can't sit here and tell you I thought I would."

**Question:** "How did you feel when people said, 'Jay who?' When coaches chose you over Florida's Chris Leak as the SEC preseason first-team quarterback?"
**Cutler:** "I knew that was going to happen. I knew there would be a media backlash. I knew the coaches would pick me because they have a lot of respect for me. They tell me they don't like going against me. Last season, I threw it for more than 300 yards and Tennessee's defensive coordinator [John Chavis] says, 'You know, you're a pretty good player.' "

**Question:** "Tennessee's game at LSU this week was just postponed. Maybe the Vols' fans will come root for you against Richmond?"
**Cutler:** "Uh ... no. They're not coming to root for me. They only say nice things
about the Vols. That's what makes them what they are. Vols fans."

**Question:** "So, 20 years without a bowl. What were you doing in 1984?

**Cutler:** "I was one. I don't know what I was doing. Probably eating some baby food. Probably learning to walk. You know, in Santa Claus."

**Question:** "Who did you root for?"

**Cutler:** "Notre Dame, of course. But they don't want Indiana players. Maybe now with [Charlie] Weis that will change."

**Question:** "How close did you come to leaving for the NFL?"

**Cutler:** "At one point during last season, I was 95 percent gone. There were a lot of low points. But I didn't want to rush that decision. Why did I come back? For my teammates. And my coaching staff. I felt that I owed them another year."

**Question:** "How has the tragic loss of Kwane Doster [who was shot to death in the offseason] impacted the team?"

**Cutler:** "It's had a tremendous impact on us. He was one of the most colorful players on our team. His passing really affected a lot of people. We take time in every game to remember him and to remember what it was like with him. At the last game, his mother and family were there. And at the end, we raised No. 1 [his number] for him."

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### Making conversation

posted: Wednesday, September 21, 2005

When I was a kid, I'd pick up the receiver in my mom's bedroom and listen to her conversations. I could roll out some actual conversations I've had with cool people this week. But I thought it might be more fun to roll out some conversations I imagine may have taken place:

Dave Wannstedt: "So, let me get this straight, you've been calling plays that are designed for narrow hashmarks?"

Matt Cavanaugh: "Yup."

Jamaal Charles: "Selvin?"

Selvin Young: "Yeah?"

Jamaal Charles: "I got it from here."

Pete Carroll: "So, which one of you was on a cell phone during the Arkansas game?"

( Player raises hand)

Pete Carroll: "So, which carrier do you use?"

Tyrone Willingham: "You telling them all that stuff about how it's not me versus you?"

Charlie Weis: "Yeah. You think they're buying it?"

Walt Harris: "Did you say you were sorry?"

Steve Spurrier: "Yeah. Did you?"

Andre Caldwell: "You know, I was starting to like this spread offense."

Ray McDonald: "And I was starting to like defensive end."

Dallas Sartz: "You think our 'D' will hold up?"

Terrell Thomas: "Man, we got too many All-Americans not to."

Quinton Porter: "Why'd you have to sell me out like that? I mean, I didn't really mean you guys weren't special."

A.J. Nicholson: "Well, I am, Quinton."

Matt Leinart: "Tough night, man. Me and Ashton caught you on the tube."

Omar Jacobs: "Forget the Heisman. I'm thinking combine. You know I'm gonna be drafted ahead of you, right?"

Ted Ginn Jr.: "How many touches do I have?"

Steve Breaston: "How many touches do I have?"

Cody Hodges: "I swear, we can score 100 on Indiana State."

Larry Bird: "I can score 100 on you, fool."

Phil Fulmer (on TV): "It's not about Rick Clausen not being a good quarterback. We love Rick Clausen."

Jimmy Clausen (into Fulmer's ear piece). More, coach. More...

Laurence Maroney: "You know I should of had more carries than you last year, right? You know I'm better than you, right?"

Marion Barber III: "Yeah, I know man."
John L. Smith: "Now, fellas, it wasn't really smart to run out there and put that flag out there on that Notre Dame turf. We gotta play those boys in the future."

Drew Stanton (a junior): "Uh, some of us do, coach."

Elvis: "Can you leave me some tickets?"

Elvis Dumervil: "For the last time, I don't even like Elvis."

**Love, funk and mohawks**

posted: Friday, September 16, 2005

I have been told my mailbox is open. So please, please flood it. Apparently it was jammed. But click on that feedback link at the bottom of this blog and let at it. I'll try to incorporate your insights.

Cleaning out the notepad ...

**QUINTON PORTER WANTS SOME LOVE**

Boston College quarterback Quinton Porter has heard enough about the Patriots and Red Sox. "It's time to get some Boston fans excited about us," Porter said this week. "Step a mile away from campus and nobody cares."

**FRED ROUSE IS THE FUNK**

We may have another Deion Sanders on our hands at Florida State. True freshman Freddy Rouse, a receiver and punt returner. Said Rouse: "I am smooth. I don't get nervous. Quite frankly, I am THE FUNK."

**DESHAWN WYNN RISING**

Florida running back DeShawn Wynn has been in countless doghouses. But with 101 yards last week, he showed why he's been compared to Ahman Green. "DeShawn has the speed, size, power and vision you expect from a pro back," Florida running backs coach Stan Drayton said. "He has the ability to be one of the premier backs in the country."

**SECRET FAMILY WEAPONS**

Casey Clausen was 2-0 as a Tennessee starter against Florida in Gainesville. Now, as a graduate assistant at Mississippi State, Clausen has been studying Florida tape and trying to share secrets with Rick in telephone conversations every night. But Florida starter Chris Leak has his own secret weapon. Older brother C.J. is a Florida grad assistant.

**THE BOSWORTH BOYS**

When Oklahoma pounded UCLA in 1986, Brian Bosworth said the Bruins played "girls football" and "I know I wouldn't wear pastel blue, I'd transfer." Now, Bosworth attends every UCLA practice, watching nephews Kory and Kyle, freshmen linebackers for the Bruins, who host the Sooners on Saturday. "When we were small, we had mohawks," Kyle Bosworth said. "Maybe one day we'll have them again."

**MAURICE DREW**

UCLA running back Maurice Drew will be playing with a "heavy heart," as his coach Karl Dorrell said. Drew's grandfather died in the stands after suffering a heart attack at Pasadena last weekend. UCLA is 2-0 in large part because Dorrell has grown closer to his players, who asked him to ditch his pro mentality. "They're so big and strong and fast," Dorrell said. "Sometimes you forget they're only 18 years old."

**OLD QUARTERBACKS WIN**

Here's a shocking thought: Turns out experienced quarterbacks play well and win. The top four quarterbacks in the NCAA in pass efficiency are seniors: Matt Leinart, Cody Hodges, Paul Pinegar and Drew Stanton. Stanton, who starts at Notre Dame this week, has averaged more than 500 yards of total offense in nine career starts. In those starts, Michigan State is averaging 263.4 rushing yards, 252.1 passing yards, 515.6 total yards and 34.9 points per game.

**CHARLIE WEIS EXCITEMENT**

Notre Dame athletic director Kevin White said this week: "What Charlie has been able to accomplish here already is both exciting and amazing. He is bright. He is determined. He is a great anticipator. He never allows himself to not think about the next move. He's authentic. He speaks from the heart. Everybody has taken to him already." Think White's a happy guy right now or what?

**AIN'T EASY LEAVING PROS**

In the offseason, Pitt coach Dave Wannstedt said one of the things he was enjoying was all the time he had with coaches while players were in class. But the former NFL coach acknowledged this week: "It's not what the coaches know, it's what the players can absorb." Pitt plays Nebraska this week. Think Bill Callahan can relate to that notion?

http://insider.espn.go.com/espn/blog/index?name=schad_joe
SPEAKING OF NOTRE DAME

Notre Dame is 2-0 and former coach Ty Willingham is 0-2 at Washington. But new Washington athletic director Todd Turner said: “If a man of Tyrone Willingham’s coaching ability and character can’t be successful at Washington, that is a tragedy. He can coach. He coached BCS teams. He is a superb football mind and he is going to be here for the long run. Hopefully he will finish his career here.”

Don't Be Cruel

posted: Wednesday, September 14, 2005

I met Clemson quarterback Charlie Whitehurst for the first time at ACC media days this year and there are two things I vividly recall. First, he didn’t mind that I said he sounds like Elvis. Really, he does. Second, he admitted that he “sucked” last season.

Who doesn’t appreciate honesty like that?

So Whitehurst got this new offensive coordinator -- a guy they call the “Mad Scientist” -- Rob Spence of Toledo, and all of the sudden his team is 2-0 and he’s completing 78 percent of his passes.

“I knew it was something like that,” he said Tuesday.

Whitehurst and his new strategy -- don’t force passes (Clemson has zero turnovers headed into this week’s game at Miami) and make good decisions (“pretty simple, huh?” he said) -- seems to be working.

He's calling audibles at the line. He’s actually using the play-action pass. His offense is more unpredictable. And he’s still got all the physical tools.

In fact, Spence said: “His physical is skills are outstanding. He’s very strong. Quick trigger. Excellent arm strength. Great velocity. Can be extremely accurate. Very, very intelligent. High football IQ. The stature through genetics. It’s all there.”

What Spence has helped Whitehurst do is restore confidence.

So here’s a Whitehurst take. Think … Don’t Be Cruel … Which some Clemson fans were to Whitehurst on campus last season, when he had twice as many interceptions as touchdowns after entering the season as a Heisman candidate.

Charlie Whitehurst -- in his own words:

“I’d say the lowest point of last season came after this game against Virginia. We lost something like 30-10 and the Sunday after the game, I’m thinking, ‘Well, I only threw one interception and we lost by 20. So it wasn’t as bad as last week.’

“And that was a scary moment. I’m thinking, ‘Losing has become a habit. Interceptions have become a habit. And they had.’ It was very scary.

“My Dad would do what he could. He'd just say, ‘It’s got to get better, son. It can’t get any worse.’ I felt fortunate I lived off campus. I mean, I was only on-campus an hour or two a day. It’s not like anybody was nasty. But I’m getting a few more pats on the back after wins so far this season.

“You want to know what Rob Spence is like? Candid. In everything he does. He’s different than anybody I’ve been around. In meetings. On the field.

“James Davis breaks this long run in the first game and he’s yelling, ‘That’s our stallion, baby! He’s a stallion! He’s a stallion!’ It was pretty funny.

“They call Coach Spence the ‘Mad Scientist’ for a reason. You see him and he’s in there just watching film. Never sleeping. That’s what it boils down to. He’s a bright guy.

“I remember on the Friday night before the first game I said, ‘You gonna get some sleep?’ He said, ‘No.’ Didn’t even smile. But that’s how these coaches are now. It’s crazy. He’s got us in there with him.

“He’s shown me cool stuff, too. I had a quick release before. But Coach Spence shows me these little things. He said, ‘You know, if you push the ball back a little further you’ll get an even quicker release.’ And it’s worked.

“I’ve been watching these tapes of Peyton Manning and Brett Favre. It’s funny. They’re not always fundamentally sound. But it seems to work for them.

“I think over the next few weeks, you may see us begin to open up our offense a little bit. Maybe take a few more riskier-type plays. But you know what? If my career has told me anything, it’s that efficiency is the name of the game. What you want is high percentages. Our goal is to be over 70 percent at the end of the
Weis, Ohio State and unlikely rivals

posted: Friday, September 9, 2005

Getting back in the swing and wondering:

• Is Charlie Weis that smart or is Pittsburgh’s defense that bad? I suppose we’ll find out on Saturday when ... oh, no, I guess we won’t find out when Notre Dame takes on Michigan’s defense.

• Would Tom Brady really sell out Weis and feed Michigan’s defensive coaches inside information on his offense? Nah. I don’t think so. I mean, who do you feel stronger about, your parent or your school?

• Look out Steve Spurrier. They may hurl some things your way between the hedges this week. South Carolina’s Spurrier -- does that read right? -- told me before the season that he knew some teams will be looking for payback opportunities. Dialing up a Florida touchdown pass at Georgia, already ahead 45-17, in 1995? Oooh, they do remember that, coach. Good thing you said being on the losing end of blowouts can sometimes be good for a team.

• Remember when I said, "Who would you rather be than LSU coach Les Miles?" (I mean, of course, other than GameDay’s Nick Lachey or USC’s Matt Leinart, two givens) ... Well, scratch that. Not that there aren’t much, much greater concerns in the Southeast right now, but the postponement of the season opener and a move of this game to Arizona State makes life much, much more difficult for Miles as he begins his first season. "I can’t be thinking about me right now with all that’s going on," Miles said.

• I spent three days with the Southern Miss football team this week in Memphis, where it is relocated. Can the Golden Eagles win at Alabama on Saturday night? I wish I could say yes, but it’s probably no. Alabama got off to a slow start in the season opener and should be sharp for this one. Speaking of Southern Miss, did you know it has had 11 consecutive winning seasons under Jeff Bower? Loyal to Hattiesburg, Bower has always graciously declined opportunities, including one I was told at Georgia a few years ago.

• Did you know Iowa State has beaten Iowa in five of the last seven meetings? I didn’t know that, but thought you might be interested. With quarterback Bret Meyer and running back Stevie Hicks, Iowa State has a shot at home this weekend. Yes, even if Iowa appears to have rediscovered how to run between the tackles.

• Yes, Texas has the edge against Ohio State on both the offensive and defensive lines. Yes, Vince Young is explosive. But hey, Ohio State has never lost a home game at night (8-0), has an edge in confidence and mental mindset and will have the advantage of 100,000-plus fans on their side. Ohio State 24, Texas 21.

• No reason to care about Wake Forest at Nebraska, right? Well, I am interested to see how Cornhuskers quarterback Zac Taylor, who once played at Wake Forest, handles playing against his former teammates. The Deamon Deacons have a very good shot in this game.

• No reason to care about Tulsa at Oklahoma, right? Well, you should want to see how Oklahoma responds to losing at TCU. And you should want to see how Rhett Bomar, who many people think should have started the opener at quarterback, responds to being inserted into the lineup. Less than a week ago, Bomar was cited for possession of alcohol in Norman.

• No reason to care? Well, you get the idea. I think Michigan State at Hawaii and California at Washington will be fun to keep tabs on. Michigan State hates Hawaii. Huh, you say? Well, Spartans players told me in the offseason they have not been able to get over a loss at Hawaii last season in which they blew a 21-0 lead and felt they were robbed by bad, homer calls. Now Hawaii coach June Jones is upset because Michigan State won’t send its game films over to his staff.

• Oh, and Cal? Not only does Tyrone Willingham not want to fall to 0-2 -- he probably will -- but Cal fans want to know if Joseph (or Joe, which is it?) Ayoob is as horrible as he looked at times last weekend, or as good as he looked in junior college when he was compared to Marcus Vick.
Walking in Memphis

posted: Tuesday, September 6, 2005

I'd seen Chris Clark dancing with teammates. And singing. And smiling. Always smiling. I had no idea that he grew up on a street called Unity Drive. In New Orleans East. And that it is under water. Completely.

I'd spent three days with the Southern Miss football team. In Memphis. Displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Hearing stories here or there about water damage. Loss of electricity. And trees crashing through roofs.

Then I interviewed Clark, the Golden Eagles' giant left tackle. The house he grew up in? Under water. Completely. Friends he grew up with? Relatives say many of them are dead. Or so they assume.

And yet he smiled. His high school diploma. Trophies. The brand new bed with a king-sized mattress his mother just had delivered and placed in his childhood bedroom?

"Everything," Clark said. "It's all gone. Everything. I had no idea if my mother was dead or alive. I had no idea about anything."

Why then, was Clark smiling? Southern Miss' first game -- against Tulane of all teams -- had been postponed. Hattiesburg, Miss. -- his college town -- was battered and residents had no electricity, water or gasoline. In what then was Clark finding joy?

"God has a plan," said Clark, who has since spoken with all his family members. "He has a plan for all of us. New Orleans may be gone. But our lives go on."

The Southern Miss football team eats together. Prays together. Sings songs together. Performs these unintelligible chants together. And in general, perhaps more than any team I've ever observed, sticks together.

The one thing I'll most take away from this experience? Perspective.

There was Clark. But there was also George Batiste, the teams' clearly defined ringleader, who maintained his high motor mouth throughout the visit -- despite concerns about family in Avondale, La.

And Damion Carter, who managed flashy practice catches despite fears about his New Orleans home and relatives. And running back Conrad Chanove, a New Orleans native who happened to have a tree crash though his Hattiesburg bathroom as he occupied it during the storm.

"Can I say toilet on TV?" he asked.

Then Chanove turned serious for a moment, explaining the damage was far worse in the area where he grew up. His grandmother's house is gone.

Yet they maintained their focus on preparations for Alabama, a team they'll face 11 days after vacating home. They maintained their positive energy and spirit.

They never complained as they changed clothes in University of Memphis meeting rooms, wore the same gray THINK BIG T-shirts over and over before finally making that Wal-Mart run after a prayer service in the annex of a school cafeteria.

The image I'll remember most from this experience? Jacoby Housley, one day before his second birthday, having no idea what he was doing in Memphis, but enjoying the cheese and sauce of pizza spread across his face. He gave his Mom Danielle a sloppy kiss, before reaching out for his father Wesley, a Golden Eagles' offensive lineman.

It may be wrong. But I'll begin to analyze Ohio State-Texas when I get home.
Recovering from Katrina

posted: Saturday, September 3, 2005

I pulled onto the McNair Farm in Collins, Miss., on Air McNair Drive, off of unmarked Windmill Road and a few other winding, back-country trails spotted with downed trees, to find at least 12 members of the McNair family working outside on Friday afternoon.

Using tractors and drenched in dirt and sweat, they pulled together to clear debris. Mind you, this was days after Hurricane Katrina slammed the South. And mind you, the McNair home is a safe distance from the worst of the destruction. Or so Lucille McNair, mother of former Alcorn State quarterback Steve, thought.

The beautiful home her son had built survived but was not unblemished.

"No, I'd never move to Jackson or Birmingham or Atlanta or Ft. Lauderdale," Lucille said. "Florida? Never. Now you should know I don't feel safe near the water."

She shook her head, realizing what she had said. She'd been able to watch some of the destruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast on a small television in her kitchen, one connected to a generator Steve had sent. That truck, arranged by Steve and friend Brett Favre, the former Southern Miss standout, arrived around 5 a.m. Thursday morning.

The McNair family is without electricity, sans the generators, which go in and out. There's no hot water. There's water damage upstairs. Some family members have been sleeping in a camper outside the home.

Lucille recalled her fear during the worst of the storm, as she gazed out onto the farm in which she once picked cotton and saw hundreds of shingles flying off of her house. She saw horses and cows huddled in one corner, near a fence.

She saw the chandelier in the living room sway. She heard the howl of Katrina stirring inside her chimney. She heard the crash of ceiling fan blades breaking off and smashing -- one by one -- on the balcony outside her window.

"I was scared," she said. "It was the most scared I've been in my life."

And yet she realized it could have been worse. So too, did Fred, Steve's brother, another former Alcorn State standout.

"You know, Alcorn was going to have a ceremony for me and my brother on Saturday," Fred said. "But that's not important right now. What's important is helping those people that aren't getting enough help."

After the Packers-Titans game in Nashville on Thursday night, I asked Steve why he was going to charter a plane to Jackson and drive to Collins to see his family. Preparations for the NFL's regular season begin on Monday.

"I just need to see them," said Steve, who hadn't seen his mother since training camp began. "I need to see with my own eyes that they're all right."

That was also the case for Deuce McAllister, the former Ole Miss standout, who plays for the Saints. Little did I expect to see Deuce sitting on a chair at the Jackson, Miss., airport on Friday. But there he was, trying to reach family on a cell phone he'd just purchased at a West Coast airport.

"It's got a California phone number," Deuce said. "My New Orleans number is useless. Like everyone else I just keep getting, "Due to the hurricane..."

Deuce had played the night before in Oakland. "We got beat," he said. "Hard to think about football right now, you know?"

He said he planned to take a car from one of his area dealerships and -- with teammate and former Mississippi native Fred McAfee (also a Saints running back) -- drive around the state searching for family and friends.

"I have cousins I have not spoken to," Deuce said. "I have my friend, the Gulfport basketball coach, who's missing. If I have to go to New Orleans, I'm not concerned about my safety. I'm concerned about finding these people. I'm concerned about figuring out a way to get clothes to these people in Mississippi and Louisiana who need our help."

McAfee said he wanted someone to help rescue his niece, trapped in her home in New Orleans. "I share a place with my brother in New Orleans," McAfee said. "But I'm sure everything we own is gone."

Before I took off on a drive from Jackson to Collins, in a rental with a quarter tank
of gas (the National Guard protected gas lines that stretched for hours in the state of Mississippi), McAllister turned and had one final message.

"When you see Mac," McAllister said of McNair, "tell him I hope his family and everyone he knows is all right."

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**Marcedes Lewis: Unplugged**

posted: Tuesday, August 30, 2005

There are a few things you should know about Marcedes Lewis. He's big. As in, "I'm 6-foot-6 and if you don't mind, I'll just jump over you now big." He's good. Best tight end in college football, in fact. And he's honest. And oh, how we love our candid athletes.

No tight end in UCLA history has more touchdowns than Lewis' 11, which includes seven last season. He's returning for a senior season. And, oh yeah, he isn't named after a car. So please, please, don't call him Mercedes.

Lewis proved to be all these things on a recent visit in Los Angeles. In a subsequent phone interview, Lewis opened up about demanding the ball, which Olson boy is a "beast," annoying USC, heroic Oprah Winfrey, the NFL, cliché-ridden Steve Lavin and reformed Karl Dorrell.

Here is Marcedes Lewis ... unplugged.

**How many touchdowns can you score this season?**

I caught seven last season with only 32 passes, so I think I can double the number this year. At least 14.

**What's been said to lead you to believe the ball is yours?**

I've been in the offense for three years now. I have a grasp and that's enabled me to move around and get the ball more and play different positions. My offensive coordinator, Tom Cable, looked me in the eye and said, "We're on the same page this year. And man-to-man, we're going to get you 50 balls this year."

**You've watched film?**

My position coach made a cut up of six tight ends, including Tony Gonzalez, Jeremy Shockey, Randy McMichael and Antonio Gates. I watch that tape every other week. I learn different techniques on what to do in motion and how to get open in zones.

**What NFL tight end do you like to compare yourself to?**

This one play, Tony Gonzalez ran a wheel route and caught it over two people, made a move on one and ran two over and got in the end zone. And he was lined up in the slot. It was kind of like the outside receiver ran a post route. He caught it down the sideline. I think I can make that kind of play. I know I can.

**What was your reaction when you heard Drew Olson was starting the opener?**

Honestly, Drew has stepped it up in the spring. When he got hurt, he had the chance to look at different things and really understand the whole offense. He had a different attitude and different approach. I'm not worried about Drew at all. His patience in the pocket has improved. He goes through his progressions.

**What are Ben Olson's greatest strengths?**

He is just an athlete. He is a beast. He's 6-foot-5 and 235. He has a gun for an arm. He's smart. He's catching onto the offense. You forget he hasn't played since 2002, but he's learning still. Once he gets in the game, look out.

**What have you been doing?**

Watching a Denzel Washington movie. Any movie with Denzel is all right with me. You know, I played against his son in Pop Warner. He played running back then. We all asked him, "Is Denzel really your dad?"

**What about USC are you tired of hearing about?**

[Laughs] To be honest with you, it is what it is. It's a great program over there. I don't know. I mean, I see them on TV all the time. And I turn the channel.

**Do you meet a lot of famous people?**

I met Oprah Winfrey at the ESPY's. I told her, "You're a black icon. You are the icon for African-American people." She asked me, "You in the pros?" I said, "No. I play for UCLA."
But didn't you almost go pro?
I was 60-40. It was 60 percent I was going pro. After talking to my parents, I said, "Why not stay another year? I'm not in academic trouble. I'm not financially in a hole." The NFL will be there waiting.

Have you ever seen mattreggiety.com?
Are you serious? They have a Web site? No. Get out of here. No, I'm not going to that Web site. I mean, Matt and Reggie. No. That's crazy. Seriously?

Yeah. And All Access is $9.95 a month.
Oh my God. No. I'm going to have to call Reggie tomorrow and ask him about that. Reggie is my friend. We don't talk football. I mean, we know our situations and leave it be. You know, Reggie Bush is more quiet and conservative than people realize. And he's picky with his food. Really picky.

What was it like to play seven games for Steve Lavin in 2002?
I mean, Coach Lavin was a people person. I loved him. He always had all the clichés. He'd say, "Go to the rack hard. Go through his snot box. Take it to the snot box. And finish strong." We used to always laugh at him.

How has Karl Dorrell gotten more involved with the players over the past year?
We did a couple of things in the summer that involved our coaches and players. We went to go play video games. We went and shot pool with the team. We got a chance to go see the coach. We had meetings with the coaches. And that really turned him around. Yeah, it was different. Coming from the NFL, he didn't have to talk to the players like that. It was a transition realizing we're young men. Some of the players are not from California and they needed that figure to talk to. He's doing a good job of being there for us. You would never know about this change unless you were with us.

Does it hurt when people say he's on the hot seat?
Yeah, it does. I do feel bad. I think most of the older guys do, too. As long as he's on the hot seat, we're on the hot seat, too. This year we'll be winning though. And then they will say, "He turned the program around." He's really working with us and trying to be more a part of our lives. We know what he expects.

Would you ever take ballroom dancing?
Sure. I know what you're getting at. Man, if I was done with everything else and taking that was all I needed to be eligible? I mean, one class is fine. Three? Heck no. Not if you're already finished. Maybe two. I don't know about three.