

fcs week #3: curse of the socon

the samford bulldogs inherited a curse. last season, they stunned the socon world with a sweep of their regular season fcs opponents en route to a championship. had only they known that the last 3 teams to touch that trophy dropped off a proverbial cliff the following september.



things started well enough for the bulldogs, who went the length of the field on the opening drive. they must have felt a little ominous just a little over one quarter into their fcs opener, when western carolina defenders delivered a bone crushing hit to superstar qb michael hiers, jarring the ball loose. at that precise moment, lightning struck. literally. the stadium had to be evacuated. both the bulldogs and catamounts took shelter and waited... and waited... and waited. for nearly 6 hours, storm clouds rolled in and the sky over cullowhee, nc was an electric fireworks show. most suspected the game was cancelled, but just after 9 pm, a delay that took longer than the bus trip in from birmingham, the bulldogs and catamounts finally returned to a soaked field in an empty stadium. from there on out, it was all catamounts. hiers would have his usual 300 yards passing but also would be sacked 6 times. the dogs were shutout following the delay and never even made it back into scoring position.

coming full circle? to kickoff 2022, the bulldogs began their magnificent run by upsetting highly ranked kennesaw state in a game that was interrupted by a 3+ hour lightning related delay. maybe that portends a big season for western carolina, but if it does, catamount fans will have be left with something to worry about next september.

fcs game of week



last week: south dakota state jackrabbits (1 – 0, 50) edges montana state bobcats (1 – 1), 20 – 16

epic games are defined by epic plays, though this contest will likely be most remembered for one that did not even count. qb sean chambers threaded a perfect pass to the back of the end zone as time expired to cement the win as the bobcats stormed the field. unfortunately for them, one tediously long review later, the receiver's foot was determined to have come down out of bounds. worse yet, though they put a second back on the clock, the celebration penalty made a 2nd miracle all but impossible. instead, the winning score came a minute earlier when the jackrabbit wr screen broke through a seem in the defense for a big td play. and yes, that gamebreaker came only seconds after the bobcats had retaken the lead on a fg. prior to those offensive explosions, the two gladiators traded defensive gems. first, s cale reeder made a pick in the shadow of his own goal line to seemingly save some points, but 3 snaps later, a jailbreak led by db rylan ortt blocked and recovered the ball in the red zone to set up



the game tying fg. most of the offense came in the final quarter. prior to that, this was a slow game marked by the cats' methodical 2 rushing qb system. chambers, in particular, was effective racking up 90 yards on the ground himself and helping the cats to a 10 minute advantage in top. the jacks were even kept off the board the entire first half, something that has not happened in the last 8 seasons. that said, the jacks struck quickly on two long drives to open the 2nd half that set up this wild finish.



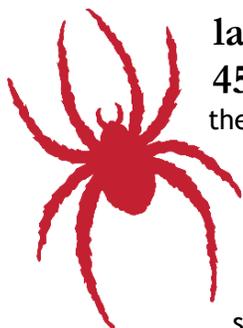
next week: holy cross crusaders (1 – 0) @ yale

bulldogs

the bulldogs are the defending ivy champ and are primed for a repeat given their deep pool of returning talent. of course, they are opening the season against the crusaders, who are coming off 4 consecutive patriot titles and a playoff seed. the crusaders will be particularly motivated to take down this ivy power and make an early case for that seed again, as their upcoming in-conference schedule is unlikely to boost any playoff stock. the battle within the battle likely revolves around whether the dog d-line can contain qb matthew sluka. the dynamic crusader qb makes magic happen when he is able to get loose. the bulldog d is no joke though, and de clay patterson is essentially a qb seeking missile, averaging just short of a sack per game over his career.



richmond spiders (0 – 1)



last week: fall to michigan state spartans (fbs), 45 – 14

the spartans dominated as expected from fairly early on, recovering a muffed punt in the spider red zone late in the 1st quarter and scoring on the ensuing 6 drives. the spiders responded late with 2 tds, both generated by the defense, but the game was well out of hand by that point. qb noah kim was as effective as advertised picking the spider secondary apart for 3 tds and nearly 300 yards. rb nate carter caught fire in the 3rd quarter, when he scored 3 tds on the ground and amassed most of his 120 yards. defensively, the spartans were suffocating at the line, achieving 7 sacks and 13 tfl with de zion young being the most disruptive. for the spiders, lb tristan wheeler was once again seemingly in on every defensive play, but that would not be nearly enough to overcome the big gap between these programs. (fun fact: db aaron banks' 50 yard fumble return for td was the 4th forced turnover he has made in as many career games against fbs opponents.)



sideline: the press conference

though it had nothing to do with either the spiders or the fcs as a whole, it would be hard not to acknowledge what happened immediately after the game beginning with a pointed question during the post-game and ending with spartan coach mel tucker's indefinite suspension hours later. the controversy involves his relationship with brenda tracy, a survivor of sexual assault

herself who has since carved out a career advocating against sexual violence on campus. the two first formed a professional relationship then a personal one, both of which by mutual account came to an abrupt end last year when tucker masturbated on a call with tracy. the salacious details of that call, which became public after the game saturday night, have dominated the headlines, but not to be lost is tracy's allegation that tucker had threatened to retaliate professionally if she came forward. while tucker denies this, his claim took a bit of a hit when he did in fact cancel tracy's scheduled michigan state events and then told the school that he had inside knowledge of a bombshell espn report that was going to reveal tracy's decades old rape case to be a hoax, a rumor it appears he just made up. adding yet another layer to this sordid story is that tucker is still owed over \$70 million in guaranteed monies by michigan state, a sum he only forfeits if he is terminated for an ethical violation of exactly this sort.

next week: delaware state hornets



the hornets are another 2nd tier program from the less than stellar meac, the type of team the spiders routinely shelve in these early games. that did not happen 2 weeks ago in a very similar situation. the hornets present limited threat offensively. wheeler, banks, and the rest of the spider d should be smothering. the d-line behind marlem louis and aiden murray should be able to control scrimmage and bring consistent pressure. the offense and special teams will need to step up and avoid any more bad turnovers or misplays. the hornets do have a strong defense, and lb mario goings in particular is a pretty good run stuffer. nevertheless, if the spiders can establish any momentum on the offensive side of the ball, this game should break their way. the hornets already lost to a d2 program this season, so 2023 is not exactly feeling like the year they finally start winning.

northern arizona lumberjacks (0 – 1)



last week: north dakota fighting hawks (2 – 0), 37 – 22

the fighting hawks took over this game pretty early and kept the lumberjacks at a distance throughout. the hawk d, marked by an



outstanding performance from lb wyatt pedigo, was able to hold the l-jacks to a single fg in the first half, despite the team threatening on 3 of their 4 drives. in the 3rd quarter, qb tommy schuster took over with 3 long td drives that would put the game out of hand. top target wr bo belquist hauled in 8 receptions for 120 yards, and the hawk o would build up a huge advantage in top (35 min) to put the l-jacks on the ropes. on the bright side, qb kai millner had a strong game, particularly down the stretch when he was able to find wr coleman owen and isaiah eastman time and again for big gains. he also added 80 yards on the ground as the top lumberjack running threat. symbolically, though, millner's breakout was marked by the rare 2

point conversion that was picked off and run back the other way—a very arduous journey that still ended with points going the hawks' way. the lumberjacks also have a lot to tighten up, having been flagged for 11 penalties over the course of the game.

next week: vs utah tech trailblazers (0 – 2, -50)



the trailblazers are a 3rd year program that still has not found its footing on the fcs level but did show some signs of life late last season. so far this year, they have suffered through two blowouts, but those did come at the hands of powerhouses montana and montana state. de syrus webster gives them a quick outside rusher, which they will be hoping can neutralize the fleet of foot millner. the t-blazers are replacing a lot on offense, so it's not clear how much they can challenge in a shootout. given that the two programs had been trending in opposite directions, this should be an indicator of whether the lumberjacks have finally turned a corner.