UF players hold the Coaches’ Trophy after the team won the BCS National Championship Game 24-14 in Dolphin Stadium in Miami Gardens Thursday night.

Gators once again boast top football program thanks to defense

By PHIL K Egler
Alligator Staff Writer
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MIAMI – Titletown is alive and well again. It just took a little longer to realize this time.

This one was a far cry from the blowout two years again in Glendale, but the fireworks and confetti were just as sweet for the Gators.

Brandon Spikes knows that Gainesville now contains the best football program in America.

"If ya'll want us," Spikes said, "You gotta come get us."

Oklahoma will be left wondering, yet again, about its struggles in BCS contests as it lost its fifth straight BCS game and third straight national championship game Thursday night in Dolphin Stadium.

At the same time, Urban Meyer became the first coach to win two BCS national championships.

"It feels great," Meyer said. "It is humbling when you consider all the great coaches and players who have an opportunity to do it. It only shows the professional way that our coaches and players prepare every week."

And a year after the Gators’ defense was embarrassed by Michigan in the Capital One Bowl, it had its sweet revenge in front of 78,468 fans, the largest crowd ever for a football game at Dolphin Stadium.

While the majority of the defense is made up of the same players from a year ago, linebacker Ryan Stamper said the unit has come miles from the young squad that gave up 41 points to Michigan in last year’s Capital One Bowl.

UF held Oklahoma to a season-low in points, and the Gators won 24-14, clinching their second national championship in three seasons.

This was a Sooners offense that had scored a NCAA-record 702 points this season and came into Thursday scoring 60 points in five straight games.

"In the offseason, we told our defense if they got stops this year, we would win a national championship," wide receiver Percy Harvin said. "We’re No. 1 now."

This was a game where UF quarterback Tim Tebow wasn’t at his best, at least early on. The Offensive MVP ended the game 18-of-30 passing for 231 yards, with two touchdowns and two interceptions. He added 109 yards on 22 carries on the ground. He told his teammates at halftime when the score was tied at 7 that they were going to pull it out, according to safety Major Wright.

"Tebow’s a man of his word," Wright said.

SEE BCS, PAGE 22
WHAT’S HAPPENING?
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For more information, visit our website at:
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or Clint McDaniel: cfmgator@ufl.edu
Luckily underwear, birthdays determine final score

By THOMAS STEWART and MORGAN COLLINS
Alligator Writers

The game was in Miami, but you wouldn’t know it from the noise at the Stephen C. O’Connell Center during the BCS National Championship Game Thursday night. 10,330 pairs of arms and legs chomped and stomped in the stands of the O’Dome as fans watched the Gators snag their second title in three years on four jumbo screens in the corners of the stadium.

Fans sprang from their seats in unison after the Gators drew first blood against the Oklahoma Sooners in the first quarter and stayed on their feet through much of the night.

After each touchdown, fans hollered, hopped around and high-fived. They wore orange and blue shirts, wigs, hats, jerseys, beads, scarves, plastic Hawaiian leis, and face paint while a small group of cheerleaders and pep band members tried to add to the energy of the already pumped-up crowd. There was a brief period of panic around 10:45 p.m. when the video feed cut out and a rotating Gator logo replaced the game. After what seemed like hours but was only a minute or two, a relieved crowd cheered when the image was restored.

Across campus in the Orange & Blue, the crowd held their collective breath and clapped their hands in prayer as the Sooners approached the Gator goal-line at the end of the first half. The intoxicated crowd screamed and pounded the tables after the Gators denied the Sooners end-zone entry. Amid the sea of orange and blue, a lonely Oklahoma fan shook his head. He declined to comment when asked for his reaction to the game.

Meanwhile, Shannon Corwin, a UF mathematics junior, said the Gators were going to win because it was her birthday. “They won last time on my birthday too,” she said.

I’m wearing my lucky underwear,” she said. The atmosphere off campus was equally spirited.

On the sidewalk outside of Tijuana Flats, a football fan in an alligator-skull-topped UF cap greeted passers-by, telling them how great it is to be a Florida Gator. Midtown bars and restaurants filled with fans but were noticeably equally spirited.

As soon as the clock ran out, fans poured out of the O’Dome and rushed University Avenue in Gator Championship tradition. Chants of “It’s great to be a Florida Gator” and “Orange” and “Blue” filled the night. Streams of toilet paper sailed over the crowd and people stood on top of crosswalk signals. Across the street, a shirtless fan did pull-ups from the top of a street pole.

“I’m having the best time of my life,” said Ely Mercil, a fan who climbed a greased light pole.

“We destroyed Oklahoma. We’re going to win because I’m good luck.”

RUSHING OFF CAMPUS

On the sidewalk outside of The Swamp, a bouncer at The Swamp, Shannon Corwin, a UF mathematics junior, said the Gators were going to win because it was her birthday. “They won last time on my birthday too,” she said.

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Couldn’t come Sooner

ABOVE: Sid Carlo, of Brooksville, Fla., holds up a sign while hunting for tickets for himself and his 15-year-old son before the BCS National Championship Game at Dolphin Stadium in Miami Gardens Thursday morning.

LEFT: A man cheers for the Gators’ win over the University of Oklahoma in the BCS National Championship Game while others celebrate on University Avenue on Thursday night.

People walk towards West University Avenue to join others after the Gators’ 24-14 win against the University of Oklahoma in the BCS National Championship Game on Thursday night.
Editorial

It's that time of year again. Quickly becoming as commonplace as Homecoming and spring break in Cancun, it's the unofficial kickoff to the spring semester—UF finding itself in the BCS National Championship Game.

With this seemingly annual celebration of UF's football awesomeness comes trips to locales such as Phoenix and Miami, an extended drop/add period, and no class the day after the big game.

Oh wait—well, let's move on to the BCS—we-know-you-missed-it-oh-so-much edition of this semester's...

Darts & Laurels

What should have been a week full of smiles and schoolgirl giggling over the possibility of a second football championship in three years sadly found itself upended by the unscrupulous actions of our "beloved" president.

With his first DART of the new semester (insert shock here), President Bernie Machen is on a record-setting pace to reach epic levels of infamy on the pages of the Alligator in 2009. Early Vegas-line figures show Machen as an odds-on favorite to take home the crown as the most heavily darted individual of the new year.

Refusing to accommodate UF students while our football team battles for gridiron glory really strikes a chord with the Editorial Board. Homecoming gets a three-day weekend just so Fatty McFrat and Suzie Sorority can chug oversized quantities of jungle juice to the point of inebriation? Come on, Bernie, you have to admit you really stuck it to us on the fourth day of school.

Hmm, wonder where the UF higher-ups will be at 8:30 on Friday morning? Fat chance we find them wide-eyed and cheery at another one of those, yawn, symposiums they just love to attend.

On a much brighter note, the Editorial Board would like to give the entire UF football team a goddamn-you-guys-are-good LAUREL for their accomplishments this season. Urban Meyer's tenure in Gainesville has seen unparalleled success for the program—giving us even more to brag about to our lowly friends from high school who have the unfortunate lack of attending Florida State.

Win or lose, we will not soon forget a highlight-reel season, from Superman, err, Tim Tebow's heartfelt press conference to a gutsy fourth-quarter comeback against then top-ranked Alabama — sans superstar wide receiver/everything-imaginable Percy Harvin.

Back to the harsh realities that not everything can be as great as UF football, the Editorial Board turns to anyone who exploits the not-so-deep pockets of the Gator Nation, especially given the current economic climate.

We're looking at you, West University Avenue bars — guilty for jacking up the price of booze knowing damn well that hordes of UF students far more concerned about academics than football would be staying in town to catch the game. Here's a come-on-friday-night-special DART for taking our business 364 other days of the year for granted and making a night out in Gainesville really feel like Miami for us — minus that whole charm and ambiance thing.

Handy a shock if you've been keeping score at home — but the Editorial Board would like to present this week's final award to a former dart gone good. For his attempts to show Congress that bleeds blue and orange trumps all political obligations, we award Rep. Cliff Stearns a well-deserved LAUREL as a consolation prize for being stuck watching the game amid the undereducated wannabe sports fans who roam the streets of D.C.

That's all for this week. Win or lose — have a safe weekend.

Opinions

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Column

Partial coverage breeds U.S. apathy

As the battle between Israeli and Hamas fighters in Gaza stretches into its second week, not enough Americans are speaking up against the outrageous destruction of innocent lives.

Wars are covered in terms of numbers: casualties, rockets fired, troops sent in. Now that the death toll in Gaza has topped 700 people — at least 40 percent of whom are women and children — what does that mean to the American people?

The answer is not enough.

What we don't see paints a horrific image of people suffering with no place to go. Children are arriving at hospitals in Gaza where doctors do not have the resources required to give them the treatment they need, and hospital morgues are filled.

To Americans, this war simply isn't terrible enough for us to care. Yes, it is sad. And yes, it is a shame. But these partial stories have been killed in an instant.

Average Americans are protected from the gruesome images of foreign wars with light, fluffy "news." On the lies beyond these scenes that might be too graphic for our taste.

Should the news outlets, driven by advertising revenue, be blamed for simply pandering to their audiences? In a word, yes.

Supposedly, there was a time when journalists had a duty to inform people even if what they were telling them was not what people wanted to see. Somewhere down the road, however, things changed, and they stopped showing us scenes that might be too graphic for our taste.

Is it because the country has been involved in some form of war since 2001 that the concept of war has lost its importance? Wars are driven by greed, sold by the wanton killing of civilians currently taking place. Children are arriving at hospitals in Gaza where doctors do not have the resources required to give them the treatment they need, and hospital morgues are filled.

The answer is not enough.

Regardless of why it is occurring, we cannot accept these partial stories and allow this to carry on, for as long as we do, we are doing a huge disservice to the people of Gaza.

Both Hamas and Israel need to stop hitting civilians immediately, but they are not the only ones to blame for these merciless killings. Each moment we let pass without speaking up and demanding that the leaders of the world work together to stop the violence, we are silently allowing these acts to continue.

It is time for Americans to stop hiding behind the shield of the news outlets and see for themselves what lies beyond their television sets. The people caught in the crossfire don't have time for us to ignore the big picture anymore.

Naudia Jawad is a journalism graduate student.

The views expressed here are not necessarily those of the Alligator.
Letter to the Editor

Defense no excuse for attacks

Apparently, Spenser Solis doesn’t value every human life with his attempt to justify the collective, disproportional punishment of Gaza as part of Israel’s defense when Israel, along with the United States, is one of the few countries to still maintain with a straight face that blatantly offensive attacks are indeed defensive.

While I would prefer Hamas not to be in power in Gaza, the fact remains that Israel and the United States, who weren’t too keen on the ruling Fatah party at the time, practically forced elections on the Palestinians, didn’t like the results and then collectively punished them through starvation.

Now, after it provoked them, it’s quite obvious that the government of Israel was only looking for an excuse to go back in and show the Palestinians who’s boss—turning to tactics the likes of which organizations such as the Red Cross and Amnesty International have openly condemned.

Jonathan Bull
Vice President of External Relations, Islam on Campus
Middle schoolers arrested for assaulting classmate

By KATIE EMMETS
Alligator Writer
Kemmets@alligator.org

Three middle school students were arrested this week in connection with the sexual battery of one of their classmates.

On Dec. 15 at Kanapaha Middle School, two 14-year-old males were accused of restraining and sexually assaulting a 13-year-old female when the teacher stepped out of the classroom. A 13-year-old male was also arrested for threatening to harm students who cooperated with the Alachua County Sheriff’s Office investigation, said Steve Maynard, ASO spokesman.

The four students are mentally disabled.

According to the ASO arrest report, one of the male students rubbed the girl’s legs and the other put his hand under her skirt. The two male students then pushed her on the couch and held her down while one sexually assaulted her, according to the report.

The school reported the incident to ASO the following day.

“The ASO Special Victims Unit has undergone special training to be able to speak with children,” Maynard said.

After the ASO Special Victims Unit spoke to the girl who was reportedly assaulted and students who were in the room, officials decided they had probable cause to arrest the two students, Maynard said.

One 14-year-old male student was arrested Monday and charged with sexual battery and false imprisonment, and another 14-year-old male student was arrested Tuesday and charged with false imprisonment.

The school board is investigating the portion of the crime that deals with the teacher leaving the classroom unattended, Maynard said.

Because all involved students are mentally disabled, he said it is up to the court to decide if the students knew they were committing a crime.

Jews and Palestinians unite to protest conflict in Gaza

- KATIE EMMETS

Jews and Palestinians came together Thursday afternoon to protest the conflict in the Gaza Strip.

Led by Scott Camil, coordinator for the Gainesville chapter of Veterans for Peace, protesters stood at the corner of University Avenue and 13th Street holding signs protesting the violence in the Middle East.

“I am a Jewish person,” Camil said. “It’s really important for Jews and Palestinians to work together and do what we can to raise awareness and set an example.”

Violence is not an acceptable means of conflict resolution, he said.

Camil said that because $3.5 billion in U.S. tax money goes to Israel each year in the form of weapons, it makes the conflict American citizens’ business.

“I have been to the Gaza Strip, and the living conditions there are unacceptable,” Camil said. “[Conditions] are not good enough for my family, and if they are not good enough for my family, they are not good enough for any family.”

The protesters will meet again Friday afternoon.

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Cheering the Champs
People walk toward West University Avenue to join other fans celebrating the Gators’ 24-14 win against the University of Oklahoma in the BCS National Championship Game on Thursday night.

The Florida education system tied with Vermont for 10th place in overall education quality, according to Education Week’s Quality Counts 2009 report.

Florida’s overall grade for 2009 was a 79.6, or a C-plus, which is an improvement over its score in 2008. Since 2007, the state jumped in ranking from No. 31 to No. 10.

The overall grade was derived from individual grades each state received in six separate fields. These fields included chance-for-success, K-12 achievement, finance, standards, transition and alignment and the teaching profession.

In each of these categories, the state earned a C-minus or better.

The state earned a 90.8 (A) in the standards, assessment and accountability category. The one sore spot is the 51.7 (F) Florida earned in spending, a sub-category of school finance.

The high marks were a welcomed opportunity for Tallahassee to lead the efficacy of its education system.

“We’ve been improving in all areas,” said Tom Butler, press secretary for the Florida Department of Education. “Florida is making improvements and building a foundation from the earliest grades on up, and I think we are seeing the fruits of that process.”

Local parents agreed with the study’s ratings, and some even believed that their children’s education was superior to the study’s findings.

“My child, personally, I think is getting a better education [than the study indicates],” said Holly Nelson, whose daughter attends Fort Clarke Middle School. “I think that [the school] is doing a great job.”

Some local school administrators criticized the lack of state funds and agreed that Florida deserves an F in spending. The grade is only slightly lower than the national average of 67.

Florida also earned an F in spending in last year’s study, and local school administrators are concerned that a proposed 2 percent across-the-board cut on education spending will exacerbate the situation. The Florida House of Representatives is considering the proposal.

“The state of Florida is trying to run social services and education off a 6 percent sales tax. It’s absurd,” said Don Lewis, principal of Abraham Lincoln Middle School. “Florida’s rating would be higher if the appropriate funding would come in like it should.”

Florida’s teachers and administrators have been forced to pick up the slack, Lewis said.

He credited Florida’s high grade to the quality and resilience of Florida teachers and administrators.

“Considering the lack of funding, it’s remarkable to me that you have educators who continue to do and serve so well,” Lewis said. “[Our teachers] are so well prepared... I don’t know how we retain them.”

Overall: C+ (79.6)
- Chance for Success: C+ (77.3)
- K-12 Achievement: C (71.2)
- School Finance: C (71.2)
- Standards, Assessment & Accountability: A (90.8)
- Transitions & Alignment: C+ (78.6)
- The Teaching Profession: B (84.2)

Florida earns 10th in education quality
Members of the UF football team celebrate as they view the announcement that they will play in the BCS National Championship Game in Miami on Jan. 8 against Oklahoma.

They got the news during a dinner in the Gator Room in the Newnar Football Complex at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium on Sunday night.

Gators earn spot in BCS Championship Game against Oklahoma

By EVAN DREXLER

After UF defeated Alabama on Saturday evening, the excitement of the national championship game was in the air.

For the second time in three years, the Gators will be playing in the BCS National Championship Game.

No. 1 in the BCS rankings, UF will meet No. 2 Oklahoma in the title game, which will be played in Miami on Jan. 8.

The game was a long time coming. After winning the Southeastern Conference championship against Alabama on Nov. 24, the Gators were rewarded with a spot in the national championship game.

The game will be the first time Florida and Oklahoma have met in a national championship game.

The Gators, who finished the season with a 12-1 record, are ranked No. 1 in the BCS rankings.

Oklahoma, which finished the season with a 12-1 record, is ranked No. 2.

The game will be a battle of two of the nation's most storied programs.

Florida, which has won six national championships, will face Oklahoma, which has won five national championships.

The Gators will be looking to add to their collection of national championships.

Gators coach Urban Meyer said he was proud of his team for making the championship game.

"We've been working hard for this," Meyer said. "We've been preparing for this for a long time."

The Gators will face Oklahoma in a game that will be watched by millions of fans around the world.

The game will be played at 8 p.m. ET on Jan. 8.

For more information on the BCS championship game, visit www.bcs.org.
Cuba exhibit debuts

By TATIANA GONZALEZ
Alligator Contributing Writer

The items that sit inside glass cases tell Cuba’s story – a map of the island nation from 1606, a book of poetry from a slave who would become a famous intellectual, and even photos of a future UF professor who joined Fidel Castro’s revolution.

These and other rare items can be seen today until Jan. 23 in the CUBA: Past, Present and Future Exhibit of Rarities display at the Smathers Library.

“These materials have never been exhibited before,” said Richard Phillips, head of the Latin American Collection at UF. “We’re very excited.”

The exhibit, open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday, consists of rare books, maps, photographs and other items spanning more than 200 years of Cuban history and culture.

A signed book of poetry by Cuban national hero Jose Marti sits in one case, while another display contains insurance policies expressing the dehumanization of slaves in the early colonial days of the Caribbean islands.

On Campus

The athletic department donated a trophy from a 1926 track meet between UF and a university in Havana. Another UF library donated a 1929 letter from the President of Cuba to UF President John Tigert expressing the desire for closer relations and exchanges with the university.

Phillips said UF has one of the top collections pertaining to the post-1950s Caribbean and Latin America.

The exhibit debuts today on the second floor of Smathers Library.

On Sunday, there will be an opening reception at the exhibit from 4 to 7 p.m. to mark the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution and Castro’s rule.

Ptn to I as nr m n r"
Patients use painting for therapy

By CHELSEA KEENAN
Alligator Contributing Writer

Doris saw the picture of the palm tree and knew: She liked the mixture of greens, yellows and oranges.

But her pre-painting warm-up was different than most.

Rather than mixing colors on a palette or envisioning her artwork on a blank canvas, she sang “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.”

Doris participated in a program called Art Without Boundaries, which uses a combination of singing, painting and movement as a form of therapy.

This therapy, called MmeTherapy — whole brain therapy — helps people with Alzheimer’s disease, autism and learning disabilities.

“The art shows the triumph of the human spirit, and we’re here to support that triumph,” said artist and founder of Art Without Boundaries Noell Hammer.

More than 20 clients from Alzheimers’s Place, a local center for Alzheimer’s patients, will have one-on-one 30-minute sessions with Hammer on Thursday and Friday to create their own works of art.

During the sessions, clients choose a piece of artwork Hammer has painted and recreate it.

“I’m amazed by some of their work.”

Elise Cichoracki
resident nurse

Executive director of ElderCare of Alachua County Anthony Clarizio said artwork the clients produce will be sold at a silent auction on Jan. 31.

The money raised at the auction will serve as a fundraiser for the clients of Alzheimers’s Place.

“This is not kindergarten art,” Hammer said. “These are actually things you’d put on a wall and enjoy.”

Hammer started Art Without Boundaries nine years ago in South Florida, but now the program and therapy are used in 21 states.

“This is a disease that is all about, ‘I can’t,’” she said. “But we say you can.”

Hammer said that although the program has physical benefits for patients, its main purpose is to take away the fear that so many Alzheimer’s patients live in.

The artwork is also beneficial to people other than the clients, like their families, Hammer said.

“It says to their family members that this person can still do things,” Hammer said. “They can still produce beauty.”

Staffers can see the results, too.

“They all come out looking so proud of their work,” said resident nurse Elise Cichoracki. “I’m amazed by some of their work.”

Once the palm tree painting was complete, both Hammer and Doris admired their hard work.


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2009 recruiting class lays foundation for future titles

By TYLER JETT
Alligator Writer

While the Gators’ tickets to the BCS National Championship Game were punched Dec. 6 with a win against Alabama, the journey began much earlier.

Not in August, but in February 2006, when many of the current UF players committed to take snaps in Gainesville.

National Signing Day this year is Feb. 4, and until then, coaches will call, host, visit and send letters to high school seniors in hopes of swaying them to their schools.

The work done over the next few weeks will lay the groundwork for the next few years.

Last weekend, the Gators got a boost to their class at the U.S. Army and Under Armour All-American games when they received oral commitments from linebacker Jon Bostic, offensive tackle Xavier Nixon and wide receiver Andre Debose.

The Gators already have 16 commitments — 14 oral — for next season and have put a priority on two things: swiftness and bulk. Speed has been a UF trademark for years, so it’s no surprise the team has targeted quick skill players. But the number of linemen bound for Gainesville (already 10 combined defensive and offensive) is surprising.

Debose, of Sanford Seminole High, is considered one of the most explosive players in the class. Recruiting Web sites and forums have been making Debose-Percy Harvin comparisons for months, despite what Debose thinks.

“I don’t compare myself to nobody,” Debose said.

He is not as technically sound as other top receivers, but he impressed scouts at the Under Armour Game, and Mike Bakas of Scout.com said Debose has emerged as a potential game-breaker.

“I don’t compare myself to nobody.”

André Debose
Wide receiver

“There were probably 10 or 11 receivers (at the Under Armour Game) — all four-five-star guys — and Debose was the most explosive kid among them,” Bakas said.

Nixon is the No. 1 offensive tackle on Scout.com and is very athletic, considering his 6-foot-6, 285-pound frame. The Fayetteville, N.C., Jack Britt High star plays basketball for his high school team, which could help him dominate in pass protection, where footwork is key.

While much of the class is set, UF is still pursuing a few recruits who could push this year’s class from the top 20 to the top five.

The Gators have found themselves in some head-to-head recruiting battles over players like Maryland-based linebacker Jelani Jenkins (Penn State), Georgia native linebacker Jarvis Jones (Georgia) and Sweet Armwood High defensive end Ryne Giddins (South Florida).

Then there’s comeback Greg Reid. Reid orally committed to Florida last February but has recently de-committed and will visit Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi State — now home to UF offensive coordinator Dan Mullen — later this month.

Oral commitments are non-binding until a national letter-of-intent is signed on National Signing Day on Feb. 4.

2009 GATORS APPROACH SIGNING DAY WITH SPEED AND SIZE IN MIND.

By EUGENIO TORRENS
Alligator Writer

It’s not déjà vu. Relax, you’re not seeing double.

For the second night in a row, a Gators-Sooners matchup is in the works. The UF gymnastics team will open its season against Oklahoma at 7 p.m., one night after the two schools clashed for the national championship in football.

“It’s a crazy coincidence,” sophomore Alicia Goodwin said.

One school is feeling great about Thursday’s outcome, while the other is not.

“We definitely want to start our season with a really strong win,” Goodwin said. “It’s against Oklahoma, so if we (and the football team) win, that’ll be great.”

But this meet would be important regardless of the Gators’ opponent.

“It’s important for everyone, seniors versus freshmen, to start off 1-0,” junior Maranda Smith said. “Even for those of us, like myself, that have competed before, it always feels good to start the season with a win, so it goes hand in hand.”

Junior Melanie Sinclair said even a BCS national championship wouldn’t equal her hopes of beating Oklahoma.

“Who wants to lose? I love winning,” Sinclair said. “I know I want to beat them, just as bad, or more.”

The football team may have had to wait for good. For the second night in a row, a Gators-Sooners matchup is in the works.

“The start of the season is going to help us, in the future, build up the confidence and know that we can go in there and do it,” Sinclair said.

UF opens with OU

By BOBBY CALLIO
Alligator Writer

For nearly two hours, UF made the third-largest crowd in women’s basketball history forget they had come to view the BCS National Championship game in this Oklahoma Center featuring the basketball game.

The 6,500 Gators fans cheered on the women to an 80-66 victory in their Southeastern Conference opener against Mississippi State, extending their school-record winning streak to 15 games.

The first 37 minutes saw seven lead changes, as neither team could pull away from the other.

With just under three minutes left, the No. 18 Gators finally claimed the game’s first double-digit lead and put the Bulldogs down for good.

It was only right for senior guard Sha Brooks to hit the layup that finished off Mississippi State.

Brooks ended the night 12 of 21 for a career-high 31 points — she is the first to score 30 points for UF since Bernice Mosby dropped 31 on Dec. 22, 2003.

The start of SEC play forced Brooks to elevate her play.

“You got to step it up,” Brooks said. “(SEC play) is a whole nother level, you just have to bring your ‘A’ game every night, and that’s what I did.”

Although the game stayed close throughout, the Gators controlled the pace for most of the second half.

They made a deliberate effort to take care of the ball to reduce the number of turnovers and, consequently, Mississippi State’s chances off them. The Gators allowed just 2 points off eight turnovers in the second half compared to 19 points off 12 before the break.

Another halftime adjustment that led to their second-half success was the switch to more zone defense, after the Bulldogs had success against the Gators’ man-to-man defense.

“We played a lot more zone in the second half than we did in the first half, and that got them off-balance a little,” UF coach Amanda Butler said. “They are such a great attacking team, and (the zone) took some of their weapons away.”

The game went well as Butler could have hoped, except for an injury to guard Jennifer Mossor, who left the game with 12 minutes remaining after a right knee injury and did not return to the game. Butler was unsure how serious the injury is.

“Starting out with a win is going to help us, in the future, really well, it just flew more unbearable.”

Men’s Basketball

Sinclair

Women’s Basketball

Amanda Butler
Alligator Writer

The football team may have had to wait for good. For the second night in a row, a Gators-Sooners matchup is in the works.

“The start of the season is going to help us, in the future, build up the confidence and know that we can go in there and do it,” Sinclair said.

UF guard Sha Brooks is jostled by an Alabama player during the Gators’ 80-65 victory over the Crimson Tide on Jan. 13, 2008.
By MIKE DIFERDINANDO
Alligator Staff Writer
mdiferdinando@alligator.org

It doesn’t take much for old friends to become familiar foes.

When UF (13-2) takes the court against Mississippi (9-5) on Saturday, the Gators will try to avoid being haunted by a ghost of the past.

Rebels guard David Huertas, a UF transfer, was a member of the 2006 national championship team.

Huertas, who leads Mississippi in scoring with 20 points per game this season, said farewell to Gainesville after his freshman year.

Now, UF coach Billy Donovan hopes he won’t be stung because of concerns over playing UF.

Huertas played with UF as a freshman at UF, goes back quite a ways with the Rebels’ sharpshooter.

Like Hodge, Huertas is a native of Puerto Rico, and the two have fond memories of playing with and against each other as children.

“I will be just like back home,” Hodge said.

Hodge said he regularly talks to his old teammate, and they are both looking forward to Huertas’ homecoming.

“I spoke to him two weeks ago. Just to see how he’s doing and wished him good luck,” Hodge said.

The two guards came off the bench for UF during the Gators’ 2006 national title run.

Huertas, a junior, has been forced to shoulder the load for Mississippi this season after injuries to three of the Rebels’ top four scorers.

Donovan, who played with Huertas as a freshman at UF, goes back quite a ways with the Rebels’ sharpshooter.

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Rebels guard David Huertas, a UF transfer, was a member of the 2006 national championship team.

Huertas, who leads Mississippi in scoring with 20 points per game this season, said farewell to Gainesville after his freshman year.

Now, UF coach Billy Donovan hopes he won’t be stung because of concerns over playing UF.

Huertas played with UF as a freshman at UF, goes back quite a ways with the Rebels’ sharpshooter.

Like Hodge, Huertas is a native of Puerto Rico, and the two have fond memories of playing with and against each other as children.

“I will be just like back home,” Hodge said.

Hodge said he regularly talks to his old teammate, and they are both looking forward to Huertas’ homecoming.

“I spoke to him two weeks ago. Just to see how he’s doing and wished him good luck,” Hodge said.

The two guards came off the bench for UF during the Gators’ 2006 national title run.

Huertas, a junior, has been forced to shoulder the load for Mississippi this season after injuries to three of the Rebels’ top four scorers.

Donovan, who played with Huertas as a freshman at UF, goes back quite a ways with the Rebels’ sharpshooter.

Former Gator Huertas leads Rebels into Gainesville

Mississippi guard David Huertas tries to shoot over defenders during Mississippi’s 88-68 loss to Mississippi State in Starkville, Miss.

AP Photo

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It’s not too late for college.
QB’s fortitude more important than stats

By BRIAN STEELE
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MIAMI — It’s funny to think that a player who committed two turnovers served as a stabilizing influence on the winning team.

Sam Bradford had the better statistics at the end of the game with 256 passing yards and two touchdowns, but it was Tebow who got to hold the coaches’ trophy in the Gators 24-14 win against the Sooners.

After doing something he had never done in the first half — throwing two interceptions in one game. Tebow transformed to 2007 Heisman-winning form by running line backers over and stampeding into the history once again. Tebow finished with 251 yards through the air and two touchdowns.

"I struggled in the first half," Tebow said. "I just tried to get the ball out quick, and they did a good job of getting to me early on. We had to make some adjustments."

Tebow finished with 109 yards on the ground, and most of them came in the second half.

"I was coming out here trying to play with everything I had," Tebow said.

So it would make sense that he went into halftime and told his team he wouldn’t let them down.

"The guy was furious," junior receiver David Nelson said of Tebow.

After hearing Oklahoma cornerback Dominique Franks trash talk earlier in the week about how Tebow would be the fourth-best quarterback in the Big 12, Nelson said they should send some chocolates and flowers to Franks for motivating Tebow even more.

"Tebow was just being Tebow," said junior receiver Percy Harvin, who stole much of the offensive spotlight with 171 total offensive yards. "He's been the man all year. He's our great inspirational leader. When he comes into the game, he lifts everybody up." | UF quarterback Tim Tebow rushes for a gain during the second half of the Gators' 24-14 national championship win against Oklahoma in Dolphin Stadium in Miami Gardens Thursday night.

Meyer becomes first coach to win two BCS national championships

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The rest of the country can vouch for that.

After UF’s only loss of the season to Mississippi, countless clips of Tebow promising to outwork every other play in America were replayed on ESPN. Now, it would be tough for anyone to argue Tebow isn’t a man of his word.

He had an uncharacteristic first half, throwing two interceptions, matching his entire season total to that point.

On UF’s second drive of the second half, the 2007 Heisman Trophy winner took over. He led the Gators 75 yards on 13 plays and did most of the heavy lifting himself. He ran six times for 48 yards and completed one pass for 11 yards.

"He’s just one of those guys," Oklahoma defensive back Nic Harris said. "You give him your best shot, he’s going to get back up."

Then the defense once again added a stop of its own. The Sooners moved their way down the field, but Stamper stopped Oklahoma running back Chris Brown on 3rd-and-1 and forced Oklahoma to attempt a 49-yard field goal.

UF defensive end Carlos Dunlap showed his massive wingspan and blocked the kick, tying a school record for blocked kicks in a single season (9).

The offensive spark came from Harvin, who said after the game he felt about 90 percent.

The junior playmaker finished with five catches for 49 yards and 122 yards rushing on 9 carries along with one touchdown.

"There’s no better feeling. Nobody gave us a chance to win the game," Harvin said. "They said we weren’t tough enough."

The Gators defense did allow Brown to gain 110 rushing yards on 22 carries, but they had big stops against the junior running back.

The Sooners seemed to be poised to score after taking over at the Gators’ 26-yard line in the second quarter after a Tebow interception. Brown ran three straight times to take the ball to the UF 1-yard line. But the junior was stuffed twice straight times for no gain by UF defensive linemen Jeremy Cunningham and Torrey Davis.

Both teams entered Thursday night’s game averaging more than 45 points, but it was the defenses who left their mark early leading to a scoreless opening 15 minutes. Oklahoma was held scoreless in a quarter for only the sixth time this season and the first in the opening quarter of play.

UF free safety Major Wright upped the intensity when he ran across the field to break up a pass intended for an open Manuel Johnson.

The Oklahoma wide receiver had beaten cornerback Joe Haden down the left sideline after a pump fake by Sam Bradford. Wright did his best Reggie Nelson impression, laying Johnson out and leaving him dazed on the ground.

In the end, Tebow came through. In the fourth quarter, after a key Ahmad Black interception, the junior quarterback led his team on a 11-play, 76-yard drive that ate up 6:52 of clock time and essentially sealed the victory.

It was an old standby that would clinch the victory for UF. Tebow ran to his left, jumped and hit a cutting David Nelson.

"I promised the guys that I would go out and play with all my heart," Tebow said. "I was so motivated tonight. Oklahoma’s a great team and they came out and played hard. I’m so proud of my teammates right now. I can’t put into words — it was just an incredible night."
Harris fails to slow speedster

HARVIN
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on his leg, causing Harvin’s body to jolt, and it left the receiver on the ground for several minutes. “He tried to slow me down, and it didn’t work,” Harvin said. “I expected that because everyone knew about my injury, but I was able to push through it and didn’t let it stop me.”

That was the second scare for Gators’ fans with Harvin, who was rumored to have tweaked his ankle again in practice this week. Those suspicions were backed up on UF’s first play, when Harvin remained on the sideline, but any questions about his health were answered two plays later, when he caught a 3rd-and-8 slant from quarterback Tim Tebow, worked his way to the right sideline and outran a few defenders for a gain of 19 yards.

Harvin’s trouble decelerating was clear after the play. He had to jog another 25 yards before turning back to the huddle, but the run brought renewed confidence. “That was the first time I planted while running that fast, so when I did that play, I knew I was going to be okay,” Harvin said.

While he knew Harvin wouldn’t be completely healthy, UF coach Urban Meyer said, “The one thing about him is, the brighter the lights, the better he plays,” Meyer said. “He’s a bigtime performer, a little like (Tebow).

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from bad refereeing to bad sportsmanship, bad fan etiquette and even a mistimed jet flyover during the third line of the national anthem. Oklahoma fans booed while Murphy was cramping on the ground in the third quarter. UF fans booed during Oklahoma’s fight song after Sooners fans remained quiet during the Gators’.

Both sets of fans booed after referees couldn’t figure out how to get the clock to read the correct time, and the lethargic tempo of the game got to the players. “The slow pace of the first half, that really wore down on the defense,” defensive end and the game’s Defensive MVP Carlos Dunlap said. “It got us to the point where you want to think about pointing fingers.”

But in the end, the ugly deceleration turned into a graceful swan for UF. The Gators cemented their legacy as the best team in the country. Years from now we’ll be wondering how in God’s name Mississippi came into The Swamp and upset the national champions.

The only ones who still think this game was hideous, a disaster, a game that will be forgotten in 15 years? That would be the Oklahoma Sooners.

For UF, though, the end result is all that matters. They leave South Florida as national champions for the second time in three years. Now that’s beautiful.
Harvin returns from injury to lead Gators to victory

By MIKE McCALL
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MIAMI – Earlier this week, UF receiver Percy Harvin said the only lingering effect from his sprained ankle was that it made it hard to slow down.

Luckily for Harvin, most of his work in the No. 1 Gators’ 24-14 win against No. 2 Oklahoma in the BCS Championship Game involved speeding up.

The junior led UF in rushing with 122 yards and a touchdown on just nine carries, and he added another 49 yards on five catches, a productive night from a player whose health was in question right up until kickoff.

UF receivers coach Billy Gonzales said Harvin only took about nine snaps in each practice this week. He followed that up with a 12-yard run.

“I thought he做得 pretty well,” Gonzales said. “He’s a spark plug for us and we needed him tonight.”

In that time, the game that you wished would hurry up and end suddenly became a jewel worthy of a crystal trophy.

It’s all about defense and we pride ourselves on playing great defense,” linebacker Brandon Hicks said. “And we came out and played well.

Secondary steps up in win

By KARL HYPPOLITE
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MIAMI – The prevailing sentiment entering the BCS National Championship Game was that whichever team played defense would win the game.

What everyone failed to consider was the possibility that both defenses would show up and play well.

After weeks of hearing about the possibility that both teams could combine for 100 points, neither team scored a single point in the first quarter.

“There was a plethora of dubious firsts for Oklahoma this season. UF’s defense held Oklahoma to just seven points — the fewest allowed by the Sooners all season.”

The game you wished would hurry up and end suddenly became a jewel worthy of a crystal trophy.

No play provided proof of this as much as Ahmad Black’s fourth quarter interception with ten minutes remaining in the game. With the Gators attempting to take the lead after a Brandon Spikes sack of Oklahoma quarterback Sam Bradford, Black intercepted a pass that could have given the Sooners the momentum to win.

There was a plethora of dubious firsts for Oklahoma this season.

That’s just part of my game,” Black said. “And it’s just reading the quarterback and he brought me right to the ball.”

There was a plethora of dubious firsts for Oklahoma this season. UF’s defense held Oklahoma to just seven points — the fewest allowed by the Sooners all season.

Four plays later, Heisman Trophy winner Sam Bradford was sacked by linebacker Brandon Hicks.

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