

# College Gameday

By Eric Prisbell

## THE RUNDOWN

### NOON

**Noon:** North Carolina at No. 17 Virginia Tech, WDCB (Channel 20), WJZ (Channel 13)  
**Noon:** Akron at Connecticut, MASN  
**Noon:** Villanova at James Madison, Comcast SportsNet  
**Noon:** No. 2 Louisiana State at Tulane, ESPN2  
**Noon:** Notre Dame at Purdue, ESPN  
**12:30:** Baylor at Texas A&M, Versus  
**1:** Air Force at Navy, CSTV

If you are a fan of enjoying someone else's misery, the Notre Dame-Purdue game is drop-everything-and-watch television. The good news is Notre Dame scored its first two offensive touchdowns of the season last week. The bad news is that the Michigan State game offered the Fighting Irish its best chance for a victory during

this brutal opening eight-game stretch. Is Charlie Weis still denying this is a rebuilding year? Look at the statistics.

Notre Dame is ranked 100th or worse nationally in nine categories. The Fighting Irish are last in rushing offense, total offense and sacks allowed. Purdue quarterback Curtis Painter has played like the Big Ten's best quarterback, leading an offense that ranks seventh in scoring offense. Another Big Ten team on the rise, Illinois, is worth checking out as well (if you have a dish). Illinois won a conference opener last week for the first time since 1993. Rashard Mendenhall ran for a career-high 214 yards and scored two touchdowns in the victory over Indiana. Quarterback Juice Williams, who also is a capable runner, is another focal point for Penn State's defense. The Nittany Lions rank sixth nationally in rushing defense, but Michigan's Mike Hart ran for 153 yards last week.

### AFTERNOON

**3:30:** Maryland at No. 10 Rutgers, WJLA (Channel 7), WMAR (Channel 2)  
**3:30:** Michigan State at No. 9 Wisconsin, ESPN  
**3:30:** No. 3 Oklahoma at Colorado, Comcast SportsNet

The Pacific-10 is the only conference with three teams ranked among the top 11 of the Associated Press poll. Two, Oregon and California, will meet in a must-see matchup of two explosive offenses. The Golden Bears have scored at least 34 points in four victories. The Ducks scored the last 55 points in last week's victory against Stanford. Cal has its Heisman hopeful in wide receiver DeSean Jackson. Oregon has its own in quarterback Dennis Dixon, who threw for 367 yards and four touchdowns last week. Dixon has 11 touchdowns and no interceptions. Don't sleep through the Michigan State-Wisconsin game, which is an unlikely Big Ten feature matchup. The Spartans have won three of their last 16 Big Ten games, but under first-year coach Mark Dantonio, they are averaging 200 rushing yards per game and could pose a threat to a Wisconsin team that has struggled to win convincingly this season. The Badgers have lost only one of their past 22 home games — a 20-10 loss to Iowa in 2005 — so Wisconsin remains the clear favorite. Clemson is off to its best start in seven years, but recent Clemson-Georgia Tech matchups typically have been close.

### NIGHT

**5:** No. 22 Alabama at Florida State, WUSA (Channel 9), WJZ (Channel 13)  
**6:30:** UCLA at Oregon State, Comcast SportsNet  
**7:** Pittsburgh at Virginia, ESPN  
**8:** Auburn at No. 4 Florida, ESPN  
**8:** No. 8 Ohio State at Minnesota, ESPN2  
**8:** No. 1 Southern California at Washington, WJLA (Channel 7), WMAR (Channel 2)  
**10:** Cincinnati at San Diego State, Versus

Grab a bite to eat and then settle in to catch the end of Alabama-Florida State to see a rare matchup of two of the nation's storied programs. It also will be interesting to see if the Crimson Tide can play a third consecutive game down to the wire. Florida State has not been overly impressive thus far, but now is the time to gather momentum. After today, the Seminoles won't play another ranked opponent until Nov. 3, when they face Boston College. Washington seems to play a more formidable opponent each week. It does not get any more difficult than facing Southern California, which has the national spotlight for the second straight week. Perhaps the only question is whether this will be a heavy rushing or passing day for USC. Either way, look for the Trojans to roll. Florida should be on upset alert with the prime-time showdown at LSU looming next week. Auburn has struggled mightily this season, but with an experienced albeit embattled quarterback in Brandon Cox, the Tigers are capable of making tonight interesting.

### OTHER TOP 25

No. 6 California at No. 11 Oregon, 3:30  
 No. 7 Texas vs. Kansas State, 3:30  
 No. 12 Boston College vs. Massachusetts, 1  
 No. 13 Clemson at Georgia Tech, 3:30  
 No. 14 Kentucky vs. Florida Atlantic, 1  
 No. 15 Georgia vs. Mississippi, 1  
 No. 16 S. Carolina vs. Mississippi St., 12:30  
 No. 19 Hawaii at Idaho, 5  
 No. 21 Penn State at Illinois, noon  
 No. 23 Arizona State at Stanford, 10  
 No. 25 Nebraska vs. Iowa State, 2:05



# Criticism Often Is Difficult to Temper

**C**ongratulations, Mike Gundy, your face is now minted on the Mount Rushmore of Meltdowns, joining Hal McRae, Jim Mora and Bob Knight.

By now, most college football fanatics have seen the postgame rant by Gundy, the Oklahoma State coach who spent more than three minutes criticizing Oklahoman columnist Jeni Carlson's piece about Cowboys quarterback Bobby Reid.

Scraps between coaches and reporters are as old as the game itself, but they usually occur in private. In the past, rare public displays of anger never were captured on the Internet, where they now live forever.

Clips of Gundy's outburst on YouTube had more than 500,000 combined views by yes-

terday. Imitations exist that mock the tirade, and \$15 T-shirts are on sale that read "You Don't Have a Child."

Constant replays of the tantrum have fueled a debate on the proper way to cover college athletes.

Dennis Dodd of Sportsline.com criticized Gundy. Jason Whitlock of the Kansas City Star criticized the column.

Tom O'Brien, the North Carolina State coach, agreed with Gundy, saying: "It's one thing to criticize professional athletes that get paid, and it's their living. If you want to criticize somebody, criticize the coaches. Lay off the players."

Florida State Coach Bobby Bowden believes coverage of college athletes has grown

more cynical. Bowden recalled a local beat writer who used to openly defend his program years ago. Writers like that are now rare; criticism is more common.

"I'm 77 and can hardly handle" criticism, Bowden said. "That's one of the toughest things about being in sports. I know coaches that have gotten out of coaching because they couldn't handle the criticism."

Oklahoma Coach Bob Stoops said: "I find it odd that whenever we have an opinion on what you guys do it is unacceptable. We're entitled to our opinion as well."

Coaches, much like writers, come in all shapes and sizes. Few coaches would express displeasure with the same Gundy-like gusto.



### COMBUSTIBLE

**Mike Gundy, Oklahoma State:** After a critical victory against Texas Tech, Gundy spent his entire 3-minute 20-second news conference chastising a reporter. That qualifies Gundy as a tad bit flammable.

**Dan Hawkins, Colorado:** You'd be in a sour mood, too, if the team you left (Boise State) made a BCS game and your new team won two games during your first season.

**Mike Leach, Texas Tech:** Must be something in the water in the Big 12. The undercard to Gundy's outburst occurred in the opposing news conference, where Leach unloaded, adding an expletive for good measure.



### THE TIGHT-LIPPED

**Tyrone Willingham, Washington:** No, Willingham does not celebrate Notre Dame's demise. Trying to get a morsel of juice from a Willingham interview is a futile endeavor.

**Nick Saban, Alabama:** When Saban arrived for SEC media day, he reportedly was escorted by an entourage of state troopers. Tough to get close to a guy who builds walls around him.

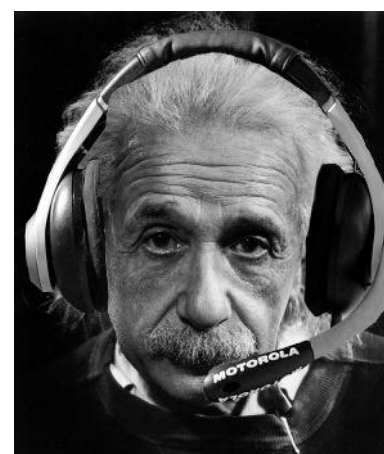
**Joe Paterno, Penn State:** Paterno is good for a quip or two, but media access tends to be super-restricted. When Paterno allowed freshmen to speak to reporters two years ago, jaws dropped.

### GENIUSES

**Charlie Weis, Notre Dame:** A recent blog headline: "Charlie Weis — Arrogant & Winless." If you don't believe Weis is an offensive genius, just ask him.

**Al Groh, Virginia:** Another branch from the Bill Parcells tree, Groh has a one-voice policy for his program. Unfortunately, that voice often gives terse explanations.

**Bob Stoops, Oklahoma:** "I'm not being cocky," Stoops told a Texas reporter in 2005, "but we've been pretty successful against everybody, right? So I don't know" if going 0-5 against the Sooners would be a knock on Texas Tech.



### FUN BUNCH

**Pete Carroll, Southern California:** Carroll opens practices to reporters, lets celebrities roam sidelines and stages mock suicides to lighten the mood around his top-ranked team.

**Steve Spurrier, South Carolina:** With no shortage of ego, Spurrier can pester the opposition like no one else. Who else would say a fire at Auburn's football dorm destroyed 20 books?

**Mack Brown, Texas:** Brown, who can make small talk with every reporter in the room before news conferences, has earned his reputation as one of the most media-friendly coaches around.



### Rarefied (Hot) Air

*With emotional tirades, these college football coaches are in a league of their own.*

Name, School	Memorable Scene	Translation
Mike Gundy, Oklahoma State	"I'm a man! I'm 40!"	Criticize me, not my players
Dan Hawkins, Colorado	"Go play intramurals, brother!"	Players should not complain about summer conditioning
John L. Smith, Michigan State	Slapped himself in the face	A self-imposed punishment for his team's woes

## THE PLAYBOOK

### FIRST DOWN

#### Tide Turns

It didn't take long, did it? The Web site FireCoachNickSaban.com already is up and running following Alabama's 26-23 overtime loss to Georgia on Saturday. One loss to the Bulldogs is enough to make some Alabama followers feel the hype surrounding Tuscaloosa's \$4 million man is unwarranted. The bottom of the Web site says Saban's middle initial is L, which stands for "lil overrated." One of the posted comments, however, adds some much-needed perspective: "This is the poorest attempt I have ever seen to sabotage Alabama. What a sad little Web site."



### SECOND DOWN

#### Another Leave

The saga of Texas Christian standout defensive end Tommy Blake took another turn this week, when Coach Gary Patterson announced that the NFL prospect will take a leave of absence for the second time this season. Blake will miss at least the next two weeks, including today's game against Colorado State, on medical leave. Blake went home in mid-August for personal reasons and missed five practices and a scrimmage. He did not play in TCU's season-opening victory over Baylor, but started against Texas and Air Force and came off the bench Saturday against Southern Methodist.



### THIRD DOWN

#### Lack of Support

Nebraska's defense is struggling and players are frustrated that fans are beginning to jump off the Huskers bandwagon. Three days after Nebraska survived a 41-40 scare at home against Ball State, linebacker Corey McKeon said: "This is the first time in my career that we have not had the support. It's hard enough to win ballgames in today's college football." Regarding Nebraska fans who boo the defense, linebacker Steve Octavien said, "If they don't like it, they don't have to come and watch." He since has apologized to the fans for the remarks. No one, however, has apologized to the fans for the play of the defense.



### FOURTH DOWN

#### Resignation

Less than a day after Texas Tech lost 49-45 to Oklahoma State, defensive coordinator Lyle Setencich resigned. Stepping in on an interim basis is Ruffin McNeill, who was working with special teams. Setencich also had been dealing with family issues before resigning, a move that reportedly was initiated by Coach Mike Leach. Texas Tech allowed Oklahoma State to amass 610 yards. Speaking in general about the team's problems, Leach said: "Anybody who is not on board, you get rid of them. It doesn't matter if it's a player or a coach or somebody in the background or some support staff. If they are not on board, you get rid of them."



## IF I WERE IN CHARGE . . .



*Schools would have to play at least one nonconference road game.*

### THE PROBLEM

It is difficult to legislate scheduling in sports, but is it too much to ask to require teams to play a road game during the season's first month? Auburn and Michigan played their first four games at home and will play their first road matchup today. Vanderbilt, Kansas, Tulane and Stanford won't play road games until Oct. 6. Topping everyone is Rutgers, which plays its first five games in Piscataway, N.J., and won't play a road game until Oct. 13. Conversely, Duke plays four of its first five on the road, and San Jose State plays its first home game today after starting the season with four road games.

### MY SOLUTION

Require teams to play at least one road game during September. In basketball, teams are rewarded in the Ratings Percentage Index for playing road games. In football, though, the polls play a large role in determining who plays for the national title. Teams that don't start out high in the polls have a difficult time jumping other teams regardless of how convincingly they win. Teams that continue to win, regardless of where games are played, tend to hover at their initial ranking or slowly rise. Consider Rutgers, which started at 16th in the Associated Press poll. Despite playing all home games against inferior opponents, the Scarlet Knights have crept up to 10th this week because other teams — Penn State and Louisville among them — were knocked off.

### WHY IT WILL WORK

The power teams already have significant advantages; they don't need any more. Requiring teams to play at least one September road game levels the playing field ever so slightly. Auburn and Michigan had significant scheduling advantages in September; ironically, neither took advantage. But Rutgers (3-0) and Kansas (4-0) did. Both are slowly picking up more votes even though they have not shown anything this season other than that they can steamroll inferior competition in the friendly confines of their own stadiums.