Omaha! Jaguar! Hike!

by RG

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The official Saturday kick-off is in the record books. Multiple teams started their season on Saturday, September 4, 2021, and by all appearances it was a tremendous success. As Kirk Herbstreit said more than once during Saturday’s Game Day program and during the pre-game kickoff of the Georgia-Clemson game, after last year’s shut down of the fan base and their participation, “This is what college football is all about,” the excitement, screaming and shouting of everyone supporting their respective teams.

Every game from the Wisconsin-Penn State to Georgia Tech-Northern Illinois with many more in between was played and there was no lack of fan participation that I could see in any of the games while putting my remote control through its motions. Watching several games, you immediately saw the excitement of the fans, referees getting caught up in hits between players on the field, coaches blowing gaskets on the sidelines when a controversial ruling was made, and the disgust and heartbreak when the game was over by the losing team. The next best thing would to have been watching a game in person. However, all is not a bust for since today is Sunday of the long Labor Day weekend, there is a game this evening, Norte Dame and FSU and then tomorrow Ole Miss will play Louisville. All in all, it has been and will be a great weekend for watching college football to start the season.

The latest movement of Oklahoma and Texas leaving the Big 12 for the SEC has prompted a battle royale of sorts to commence with the ACC, Big Ten, and Pac-12 now coming out and saying they are joining forces to “work together on a variety of issues” as stated by Nicole Auerbach in her article on www.theathletic.com, posted August 24, 2021, titled “*ACC, Big Ten and Pac-12 are publicly committed to each other. So, what’s next for the alliance*.” The article mentions playoff expansion, NCAA governance, and a formation of a nonconference football scheduling alliance. All has the appearance to go up against the SEC becoming a powerhouse conference for as long as I can remember, there has always been a war of words of such between all the conferences by sports writers and commentors of which conference was the most powerful and predominant, Big 10, ACC, SEC, or the old Southwest Conference which now mainly consist of the teams of the Big 12.

Teams such as USC Trojans, Ohio State Buckeyes, Michigan, Norte Dame, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas A & M, Nebraska, Missouri, Penn State, Pitt, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Clemson, South Carolina, Miami, and FSU plus others, yes I know I am overlooking someone, are to name but a few that have always had reasons to boast and plead their case for being the greatest in front of the college football tribunal, the fans. Being from the south of course, my allegiances have always been towards the SEC. If one looks at the number of teams from the different conferences that attend a bowl game at the end of the season, it becomes quite apparent that the SEC has made a great presence in competing in bowls. Teams like Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, and yes Georgia, seem to always find a spot in one of the premier bowl games, whether it be the Sugar Bowl, Orange Bowl, Outback Bowl, Chick-fil-A Bowl (formerly known as the Peach Bowl), Gator Bowl, Citrus Bowl, or the Cotton Bowl. Over the years of course the names of the bowl games have changed because bowl committees have relinquished the old name to the corporate sponsors who are willing to pay top dollar (usually in multi-millions) in assuring their brand name has prominence.

The game though as much as it has remained the same has changed. “It’s tough out there. That’s why girls don’t play the game coach,” quoting a line from the 2000 movie “The Replacements.” Coaches like, Paul “Bear” Bryant, Vince Dooley, Barry Switzer, Frank Broyles, Bo Shembechler, Joe Paterno, Woody Hayes, Bobby Dodd, Pat Dye, Bobby Bowden, Eddie Robinson, Lou Holtz, Steve Spurrier, Phillip Fulmer and many countless others have all either retired and or have passed away leaving behind a legacy of coaching skills that those of today like Nick Saban, Dabo Swinney, Lane Kiffin, Steve Sarkisian, Kirby Smart, Jimbo Fisher, Chip Kelly, Jeremy Pruitt, Gus Malzahn, Tommy Tubberville, Ed Orgeron, Bobby Petrino, Mike Leach, and others have tried to emulate and bring their own nuisances to the arena of coaching. The goal of coaches has always been, “They’ve all played football somewhere. They all have something unique to bring to the game. We’re gonna take those people and try to put together a winning team.” Sadly, in some instances they, coaches, also have mimic some of the bad attributes that some of the old coaches exhibited and a select few have gone on to pursue other careers totally away from college football. Then there is another category of select coaches that have shown humbleness and respect while bringing out the best in the players they have coached and that would be coaches like Mark Richt.

Has the game changed, short answer, yes but so too has coaching. Coaches of today are no longer just the ‘War Lords’ of the sidelines as once seen. They are more the CEOs of the operation and organization that is college football. These men conduct, instruct, discipline, analyze, perform, and validate a player’s performance as well as the performance of the team. They are in a sense the drivers of the institution called college football which provides them great responsibility and notoriety. “Never was so much owed by so many to so few” as Winston Churchill said.

Setting aside all the distractions of the recent weeks, months, and year, we are witnessing a rebirth of sorts. With any birth comes the excitement of new life and the joy to see the baby grow into a valued adult. Change as it is said is usually a good thing. With the change coming to the SEC and now with the other conferences joining in unprecedented alliances, we are all in store for unique changes, some welcomed and others probably not so much, that will be over the horizon for college football. Still, unlike the fat man dance, if nothing else, it should be fun to watch to paraphrase a quote from “The Replacements.”