

Gator Football

A Historical Review

Florida, one of only a few schools designated a major college football dynasty by the NCAA, a charter member of the prestigious Southeastern Conference, one of the participant schools in the first-ever SEC Football Championship Game in 1992 (a game that was also the first-ever championship playoff game for Div. I-A), and 1996 national champions, started football in 1906 against Rollins on a baseball field located immediately north of the current Florida Field. The Gators won, 6-0, and went on the following year to record a 4-0-1 mark behind the running of a halfback named Willie Shands, who eventually became an important senator for whom the Shands Hospital and Clinics at UF are named.

The finest of the early teams at Florida were under the tutelage of U.S. Army Major James A. Van Fleet, head coach and senior officer of the school's ROTC program. The Van Fleet teams in 1923-24 attracted national attention to the Gator football program for the first time.

In 1923 Florida tied Georgia Tech, the ruler of Southern football, 7-7, in Atlanta. The Jackets came from behind late in the game to earn the deadlock.

In the final game of that season Florida recorded one of the most shocking upsets of the year, beating Alabama and Wallace Wade in Birmingham, 16-6, as All-Southern back Edgar Jones scored every point for the Gators.

Florida was 6-1-2 that season and 6-2-2 in 1924, recording 7-7 ties against both Georgia Tech and Texas, two of the national football powers, and losing to Army, 14-7, at West Point.

Florida's 1928 team led the nation in scoring on the way to an 8-1 record,

losing its final game, 13-12, on a wet field in Knoxville, Tenn. to Tennessee.

The 1930's produced great individual talent at Florida. Walter (Tiger) Mayberry was an All-SEC halfback who was later to lose his life in World War II as an often-decorated Marine pilot. Tommy Harrison was a recordsetting passer in the late '30's and went on to become a president

Florida has appeared in 28 bowl games and seen 120 of its players earn All-America recognition, including 51 who have earned first-team All-America honors. Two players have received the Heisman Trophy and two players were honored as the "National Defensive Player of the Year." The Gators played in the first-ever SEC Championship Game, 33 of its players have been selected in the first round of the NFL Draft and UF captured the 1996 National Championship.

of Blair Radio and TV, a nationwide firm. His favorite target was end Forrest (Fergie) Ferguson, an all-star athlete who died years later as the result of wounds suffered in the invasion of Normandy during World War II.

Bob Woodruff brought the Gators to solid football status as the head coach of the 1950's. He produced the first bowl team in 1952, All-America linemen like Charlie LaPradd, John Barrow and Vel Heckman and a reputation for hard-nosed defense.

Ray Graves came out of the decade of the 1960's as the winningest Florida coach

of record. He was 70-31-4 with five bowl teams, four of which won. His only losing bowl team lost by two points to Missouri in the 1966 Sugar Bowl, 20-18.

That decade also produced Heisman Trophy winner Steve Spurrier, a record-setting passer, as was quarterback John Reaves in 1969, who smashed five national marks.

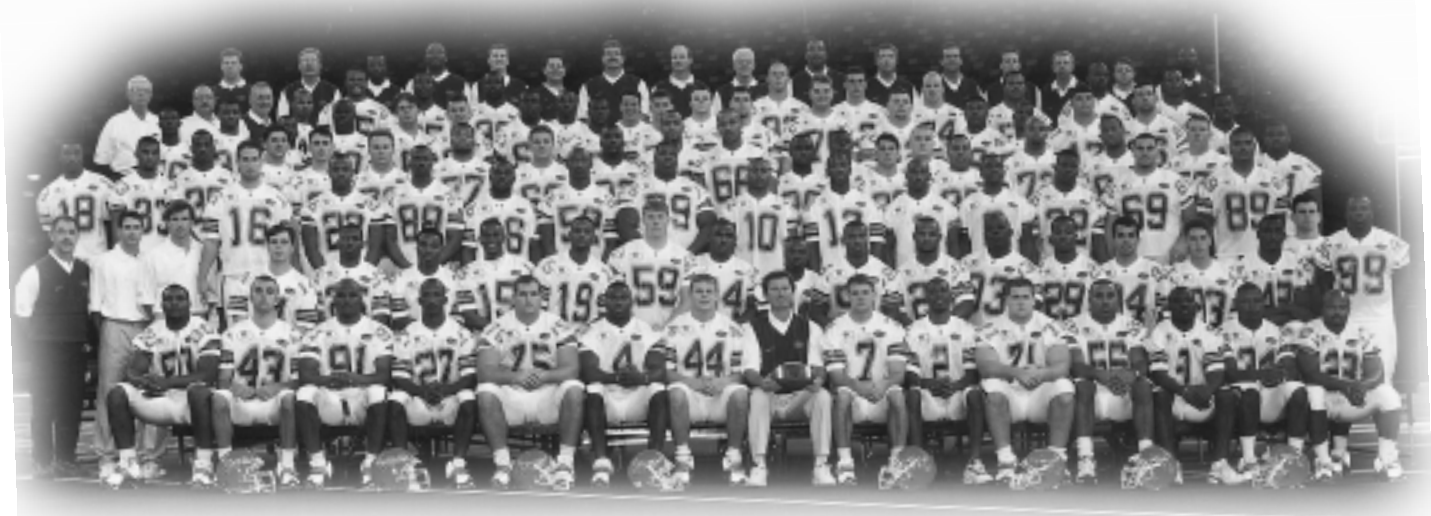
The teams of Doug Dickey from 1970-78 went to four bowls. His 1973 team was the second Gator edition ever to defeat Auburn at Auburn and went on that year to beat Georgia, FSU and Miami in the same month, a rare feat for Florida.

Dickey's top players included All-Americans Jack Youngblood, defensive end; Wes Chandler, wide receiver; Sammy Green and Ralph Ortega, line backers, and SEC rushing king Jimmy DuBose.

Charley Pell's rebuilding job began in 1979 and his last four Florida teams went to bowls, averaging eight wins a season against one of the nation's most demanding schedules. Pell's 1983 team secured the school's then highest final ranking ever with a No. 6 finish. Wilber Marshall, a linebacker, was named "National Defensive Player of the Year."

The top players of the Pell era (1979-84) were WR Cris Collinsworth, LB David Little, DT David Galloway, LB Wilber Marshall, and OT Lomas Brown. All were first-team All-American selections.

Galen Hall was named interim coach after the first three games of the 1984 season. He proceeded to win the next eight games. When the squad defeated Kentucky, 25-17, to clinch the school's first-ever first place finish in the SEC standing, he was named the new head coach in the lockerroom after the game in Lexington. The squad closed the



The 1996 Gator squad captured the consensus national title with a 52-20 win over Florida State in the national championship game at the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans. The squad posted an overall 12-1 record and ranked among the most dominant contingents in SEC history as it posted a perfect 9-0 mark in league play and defeated its conference foes by an average of 31 points per game.

banner year with a 27-17 win at Florida State to cap a 9-1-1 season. In the final regular season wire rankings, Florida was ranked third in the nation, the best regular season ranking in school history. The '84 squad was named the national champion by the *N.Y. Times* and *The Sporting News*.

Hall led Florida to another banner season in 1985. The Gators opened the season with an eight game unbeaten streak to stretch UF's two season unbeaten mark-to 18 consecutive games. When

Florida is one of only three schools in major college history to win at least 10 games for six consecutive years (1993-98) and one of only six major college schools to win 100 games during a decade (102-22-1 in the 1990's). Its 73 SEC wins in the 1990's was the most league wins during a decade in the long and storied history of the conference.

Florida defeated Auburn, 14-10, in the eighth week of the season, UF was ranked first in the weekly Associated Press rankings, the first time in school history that the Gators held that lofty status. Florida finished with a second straight 9-1-1 season. The Gators were ranked 5th in the final AP ranking.

The period of 1983-85 ranked then as the most successful in school history. During that time frame, Florida was the only school in the nation to finish in the top six in the final AP ranking in each of those respective seasons. Florida's 27-4-3 record during that time frame represented the second best winning percentage (83.8%) in the nation.

The decade of the 1980's ended with three successive bowl appearances (1987 Aloha, 1988 All-American, 1989 Freedom). Overall, UF went to seven bowl games in the 1980's making it the then most successful in that regard in school history. In addition, the Gators posted 76 wins during the 1980's, the most successful decade in school history.

Gary Darnell replaced Hall as interim head coach six games into





the 1989 season. Hall completed his career (1984-89) with a 40-18-1 record. The top players of his reign were first-team All-America selections OLB Alonzo Johnson, OG Jeff Zimmerman, OLB Clifford Charlton, DB Louis Oliver, DB Jarvis Williams, DT Trace Armstrong, and RB Emmitt Smith. In addition, QB Kerwin Bell, FB John L. Williams, and RB Neal Anderson ranked among UF's all-time greats.

On the eve of the new decade of the 1990's (Dec. 31, 1989), Steve Spurrier, a man who had provided the University of Florida with so many fond memories as a player, was hired as the school's head coach.

Spurrier wasted little time in making a dramatic impact on the Gator program. His 1990 team started the year with a 9-1 record, the best start for a UF team in school history. The squad finished with a 9-2 record and in the process established 14 new school records. Its 6-1 conference record was the best in the SEC. Included in the nine wins were 41 and 31-point victories over Auburn and Georgia respectively, then the largest vs. those two long-time rivals in school history.

The 1991 team was even better as it posted an overall 10-2 record, including a perfect 7-0 mark in SEC play to clinch Florida's first ever outright league title. The '91 team was the first in school history to win ten games in a season and closed the banner year with an appearance in the Sugar Bowl vs. Notre Dame. The squad won its last eight straight regular season games and completed the year ranked as the nation's seventh best squad.

The 1992 team started the season at 1-2 but bounced back to win seven straight games and claim a spot in the first-ever SEC Championship Game as the Eastern Division representative where it lost a heartbreaking 28-21 decision to unbeaten and eventual national champion Alabama. The Gators closed out the '92 campaign with a 27-10 win over North Carolina State in the Gator Bowl giving it a 9-4 record and final AP national ranking of 10th. It marked just the second time in school history that the Gators had won nine or more games in three consecutive seasons.

The 1993 unit won the SEC title, won more total games (11) and more SEC games (8) than any team in Gator history, and won the school's first ever Sugar Bowl championship. The '93 Gators posted a final

Steve Spurrier, the 1966 Heisman Trophy recipient at UF, has led the Gators to their greatest team achievements since taking over the coaching reins in 1990. In the last 10 years Florida has captured six outright SEC titles and the 1996 national championship. Spurrier is one of 120 Gator players who have earned All-America recognition on the football field, including 51 players who have earned first-team All-America distinction.

The 1990's was the most successful decade in Florida history, so successful in fact, that the NCAA classified this period of Gator achievement a "major college dynasty," a designation that has been given to a school on rare occasions only after demonstrating consistent excellence over a significant period of time. During the 1990's UF won the 1996 national title, played in two national championship games (1995, '96), won five SEC titles and won nine or more games each year of the decade. Florida won 10-plus games for six straight seasons (1993-98), an achievement unmatched in SEC history and a streak that ranks among the three longest in that category in major college history. The Gators finished in the top 12 of the polls for 10 straight seasons (1990-99), one of only two schools who could claim that distinction.

11-2 record and ended the year ranked 5th in the final AP Poll and 4th in the USA Today/CNN Coaches Poll, just the third time in school history that a UF team finished the year ranked among the nation's five best.

The 1994 unit posted a 10-2-1 record and finished the year ranked 7th in the final polls, a fourth straight year in the top ten. The Gators once again won the SEC title, their third in four years.

The 1995 Gator season was the greatest in school history, as the squad posted a perfect 12-0 regular season mark and advanced to the National Championship Game in the Fiesta Bowl versus Nebraska. Florida won its third straight outright SEC title, something accomplished by only one other school in league history (Alabama), as well as finishing the year ranked second in the final AP Poll, its highest finish ever. The 12 wins was the most in school history.

The 1996 team took things to an even higher level as it garnered the school's first national title after posting a 52-20 win over state rival Florida State in the national championship game at the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans. The squad posted a 12-1 record and won a fourth straight SEC title, something accomplished only one other time in SEC

history (Alabama 1971-75). It ranked among the most dominant teams in SEC history as it posted a perfect 9-0 mark vs. league teams and won its SEC games by an average margin of 31.0 points. QB Danny Wuerffel joined Steve Spurrier as a UF Heisman Trophy recipient.

The 1997 team posted a 10-2 record and finished the year ranked fourth, the seventh straight season a Gator team finished the year ranked in the top 10. The squad, which failed to win the SEC title for the first time since 1992, completed the year with a 32-29 upset of top-ranked Florida State and a 21-6 win over Joe Paterno and the

Florida's 102 total victories in the 1990's was the second most during a decade in SEC history and its 73 league wins from 1990-99 ranked as the top total during a decade in conference history.

Penn State Nittany Lions at the Florida Citrus Bowl. The 1998 team also posted a 10-2 record and in the process Florida became the first school in SEC history to win at least 10 games in a season for six straight years.

The 1999 team advanced to the SEC Championship game for a sixth time in eight years and posted a 9-4 record, its 10 straight season of nine or more wins.

The Gators began the new century in fine fashion as they captured the 2000 conference crown, their sixth SEC title in the last 10 years. They joined Alabama as the only schools in SEC history to win at least nine games for 11 straight seasons and UF became the first school in SEC history to appear in a January bowl for the eighth consecutive season.

Since it began playing football in 1906, the Gators have had 51 first team All-Americans, two Heisman Trophy winners in Steve Spurrier and Danny Wuerffel, played in 28 bowl games, and captured the 1996 National Championship. All told, 120 different players have earned All-America honors. Thirty-three (33) Gator players have been selected in the first round of the NFL Draft. Its list of sparkling achievements have earned a "major college dynasty" classification by the NCAA.

