

Gator Football

A Historical Review

by Norm Carlson

In 99 years of competition since college football started at the University of Florida in Gainesville, the program has come a long way.

Florida football teams have appeared in 33 bowl games, won six Southeastern Conference championships, the 1996 National Championship, played in the first-ever SEC Championship game (1992), produced 135 All-American players, 35 NFL first-round draft choices, two Heisman Trophy winners, two "National Defensive Player of the Year" winners and nine who were named "SEC Player of the Year."

Football officially became a sport at Florida in 1906 when a team, later to be known as the Gators, defeated Rollins 6-0 on a field immediately north of the current Ben Hill Griffin Stadium. That field, which was also the practice site for football, track and baseball, is still called Fleming Field. It is now used as a parking lot on game days.

Stars of that era included Willie Shands and W.W. Gibbs on the 1908 team. Gibbs was the team's captain, and he was killed in action while serving as an Army soldier in World War I. Shands went on to become a powerful state senator for whom the Shands Hospital and Clinics at UF are named.

Gator football earned national recognition and respect in the 1920s, beginning in 1923 under new head coach Major James A. Van Fleet, who was also senior officer in charge of the school's ROTC program. Van Fleet's team tied Georgia Tech, the ruler of Southern football, 7-7, in Atlanta, and later that season they pulled off one of the biggest upsets in college football by beating Alabama and coach Wallace Wade in Birmingham, 16-6. All-Southern half-back Edgar Jones scored all 16 points for Florida.

Florida finished 6-1-2 that year, and 6-2 in 1924, recording 7-7 ties against both Georgia Tech and Texas, two of the nation's top teams, and losing to national kingpin Army at West Point, 14-7. Coach Charles Bachman's 1928 team led the nation in scoring on the way to

Fergie
Ferguson



an 8-1 record, losing its final game 13-12 to Tennessee in Knoxville. End Dale Van Sickel was Florida's first All-American in 1928.

Florida's record of 64-25-8 in the decade of the 1920s was the best by any Gator team until Coach Ray Graves led the 1960-69 teams to a 70-31-4 mark.

The 1930s were not kind to Florida football, although in 1937 tailback Walter (Tiger) Mayberry became the school's first All-SEC player since UF joined the Southeastern Conference as a charter member in 1933. Mayberry, who still ranks among the leaders on offense and in pass interceptions at Florida, lost his life in World War II as an often-decorated Marine Corps fighter pilot.

Tommy (Red) Harrison was a record-setting passer in the late 1930s and went on to become president of Blair Radio and TV, a nationwide firm. His favorite target was end Forrest (Fergie) Ferguson, who was first-team All-America in 1941. Ferguson was a hero in the Normandy Invasion in World War II, and died of his war wounds in 1954.

The modern era of Florida football began with the arrival of Bob Woodruff as head coach and Director of Athletics in 1950. The stadium was expanded from its original 22,000 capacity in 1929 to over 40,000 and the Gator team became a solid contender, earning its first bowl bid in 1952, and finishing 53-42-6 from 1950-59. The Gators had a reputation for hard-nosed defense during that era and produced All-America linemen in Charlie LaPradd, John Barrow and Vel Heckman. Woodruff's teams had a 6-4 record against archrival Georgia in the 1950s.

Ray Graves took the head coaching reins in 1960, promising wide open, exciting football, and he and his teams delivered. In 1960, Coach Graves went for a two-point conversion with seconds remaining and his Gators beat third-ranked Georgia Tech, 18-17, setting the tone for his era. That decade produced Heisman Trophy winner Steve Spurrier in 1966, national passing champion John Reaves and All-America receiver Carlos Alvarez in



1969, and 12 All-Americans from 1964-69.

Graves put the Gators in five bowl games, winning four of them, including the 1967 Orange Bowl, Florida's first major bowl game. Like Woodruff, he had a winning record against Georgia, 6-3-1, the last time a Gator coach would accomplish that feat until the era of Steve Spurrier, his protégé, began in 1990.

The success of that period resulted in stadium expansion in 1965. Construction on the east side of Florida Field brought 10,000 additional permanent seats to raise capacity to 56,164. Temporary bleachers moved from the east side to the south end zone resulted in total capacity to 62,800 by the 1966 season.

In the 1970s, under the direction of Coach Doug Dickey (a former Gator quarterback in the 1950s), Florida went to four bowl games and had a succession of near misses in the quest for a SEC championship.

His 1973 team became the first to defeat Auburn at Jordan-Hare Stadium and then finished the month of November by beating Georgia, Kentucky and Miami in a row, then

FSU on Dec. 1. That resulted in a bid to the Tangerine Bowl. The 1974 team, lead by linebackers Glenn Cameron and Ralph Ortega and guard Burton Lawless—a trio of All-America players—won eight games and played Nebraska in the Sugar Bowl.

Heartbreaking losses to Georgia in 1975 and 1976 cost Florida at least a share of the SEC football championships in those seasons. Coach Dickey's nine seasons resulted in an overall record of 58-43-2.

Some of the finest linebackers in UF history played in the 1970s: Glenn Cameron and Ralph Ortega (1972-74) Sammy Green (1973-75), Scot Brantley (1976-79) and David Little (1977-80). Also, two of Florida's all-time great wide receivers — Wes Chandler and Cris Collinsworth — played on Gator teams of that period. Some other top players of that period were future NFL Hall of Famer, 1970 All-America end Jack Youngblood, and SEC rushing leader Jimmy DuBose in 1974.

Collinsworth, who started his Florida career as a quarterback in 1977 and threw an NCAA record-tying touchdown pass of 99 yards to

Derrick Gaffney against Rice, finished his Gator days as an All-American wide receiver under head coach Charley Pell in 1980. He was MVP in the 1980 Tangerine Bowl.

Pell's rebuilding job started in 1979 and his last four Florida teams went to bowls, averaging eight wins a season against one of the nation's most difficult schedules. Pell's 1983 team secured the school's then highest final national ranking ever with a No. 6 finish with a 9-2-1 record and a 14-6 win over Iowa in the Gator Bowl. Linebacker Wilber Marshall was named "National Defensive Player of the Year."

In addition to Collinsworth and Marshall, other All-Americans of the Pell era (1979-84) include LB David Little, DT David Galloway, and OT Lomas Brown, who is still regarded as the finest offensive lineman in school history. Brown played 18 years as an offensive lineman in the NFL.

Pell also coached James Jones (1979-82) Lorenzo Hampton (1981-84), Neal Anderson (1982-85) and John L. Williams (1982-85). These four running backs were all first-round draft choices in the NFL.

FLORIDA'S BOWL RECORD (15-18)

GATOR BOWL (Jacksonville, Florida)

1953 – Florida	14
Tulsa	13
1958 – Florida	3
Mississippi	7
1960 – Florida	13
Baylor	12
1962 – Florida	17
Penn State	7
1969 – Florida	14
Tennessee	13
1975 – Florida	0
Maryland	13
1983 – Florida	14
Iowa	6
1992 – Florida	27
North Carolina State	10

TANGERINE BOWL (Gainesville, Florida)

1973 – Florida	7
Miami (Ohio)	16

TANGERINE BOWL (Orlando, Florida)

1980 – Florida	35
Maryland	20

OUTBACK BOWL (Tampa, Florida)

2003 – Florida	30
Michigan	38
2004 – Florida	17
Iowa	37
2006 – Florida	31
Iowa	24

FLORIDA CITRUS BOWL (Orlando, Florida)

1998 – Florida	21
Penn State	6
2000 – Michigan State	37
Florida	34

ORANGE BOWL (Miami, Florida)

1967 – Florida	27
Georgia Tech	12
1999 – Florida	31
Syracuse	10
2002 – Florida	56
Maryland	23

FIESTA BOWL (Tempe, Arizona)

1996 – Florida	24
Nebraska	62

SUGAR BOWL (New Orleans, Louisiana)

1966 – Florida	18
Missouri	20
1974 – Florida	10
Nebraska	13
1992 – Florida	28
Notre Dame	39
1994 – Florida	41
West Virginia	7
1995 – Florida	17
Florida State	23
1997 – Florida	52
Florida State	20
2001 – Florida	20
Miami	37

SUN BOWL (El Paso, Texas)

1977 – Florida	14
Texas A&M	37

PEACH BOWL (Atlanta, Georgia)

1981 – Florida	6
West Virginia	26
2004 – Florida	10
Miami	27

BLUEBONNET BOWL (Houston, Texas)

1982 – Florida	24
Arkansas	28

ALOHA BOWL (Honolulu, Hawaii)

1987 – Florida	16
UCLA	20

ALL-AMERICAN BOWL (Birmingham, AL)

1988 – Florida	14
Illinois	10

FREEDOM BOWL (Anaheim, California)

1989 – Florida	7
Washington	34

Coach Galen Hall coached Hampton, Anderson and Williams in 1984-85 after being named interim coach after the first three games of the 1984 season.

Hall's 1984 year proceeded to win eight straight games and won the school's initial first-place finish in the SEC. He was named the permanent head coach following a 25-17 victory over Kentucky clinched the title. Florida was 9-1-1 that year and ranked third in the nation. The New York Times named that squad the national champion.

Hall led the Gators to another exceptional season in 1985, stretching a two-season unbeaten streak to 18 consecutive games. When Florida beat Auburn on the road, 14-10, in the eighth week of the season, the Gators jumped to their first national number one ranking in the AP poll. Florida finished the season at 9-1-1 and ranked fifth in the final AP poll.

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 rankings each season, and their 27-4-3 record 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, the Gators went to seven bowl games in the 1980's, then the most successful decade in school history. In addition, UF posted 76 wins in the 1980's, another school record.

Hall, who was replaced by Gary Darnell as interim coach six games into the 1989 season, finished with a career mark of 40-18-1. The top players of his reign were All-America selections, OLB Alonzo Johnson, OG Jeff Zimmerman, OLB Clifford Charlton, DBs Louis Oliver and Jarvis Williams, DT Trace Armstrong, and the man generally regarded as the greatest running back in school history, Emmitt Smith. In addition, QB Kerwin Bell, WR Ricky Nattiel, FB John L. Williams and RB Neal Anderson rank among UF's all-time greats.

Steve Spurrier took over as head football coach in 1990 and produced the finest dozen seasons in Gator history (1990-2001)



1996 – A NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP AND A HEISMAN



Florida became one of just three teams in NCAA history to be named the national champions in the same season in which it faced a schedule that the NCAA deemed the nation's toughest. Penn State (1984 champion), Colorado (1990 co-champion) and Florida (1996 champion) were the only teams in NCAA history to accomplish that feat.

Behind record-setting quarterback Danny Wuerffel, who joined Steve Spurrier as a UF Heisman Trophy recipient, the Gator offense averaged 46.6 points per game, a mark that ranked as the best in SEC history and led the nation. Florida, posting a 9-0 mark in SEC play, outscored its conference foes by an average of 46.8-15.8 (a 31 point average victory margin in SEC games). Its 76 touchdowns were the most in SEC history and in addition to leading the nation in scoring (46.6 points per game), it also led the country in average yards per play (7.1) and TD passes (42).

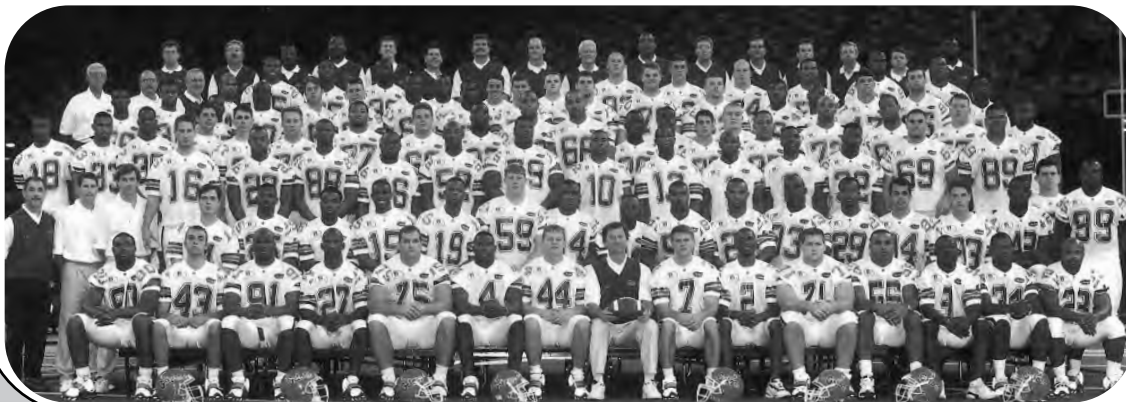
After posting a 12-1 record in 1995, with the one setback coming in the 1995 national title game against Nebraska, the Gators opened the new season with high

expectations once again. After posting a 35-29 win (in which UF jumped to a 35-0 lead in the first 20 minutes) at Tennessee in the third week of the season, in a much-hyped contest between Wuerffel and UT's Peyton Manning, the Gators moved into the number one spot in the polls. They held that spot until the last regular season game of the year when they suffered a 24-21 setback to number-two ranked Florida State in Tallahassee and fell to a fourth-place ranking in the national polls. Fate, however, would bring these two state rivals back together six weeks later in New Orleans.

A week after the loss to FSU, Texas upset number three ranked Nebraska in the Big XII Championship Game. That night the Gators defeated Alabama, 45-30, in Atlanta in the SEC Championship Game behind a six-touchdown performance by Wuerffel, which clinched the Heisman Trophy that he received the following week in New York. Entering the bowl season ranked number three, the Gators then saw Ohio State knock off second ranked Arizona State at the Rose Bowl in a dramatic last-second victory on New Year's Day.

That result now meant that the Jan. 2nd battle in New Orleans with top-ranked FSU was for the 1996 national championship.

The Gators put together a tremendous all-around performance in posting the 52-20 victory over the Seminoles, which led to a consensus national championship. The 32-point margin of victory over FSU was the largest versus a number one ranked team in bowl history.



Behind arguably the finest offensive unit in SEC history, a solid defense that registered a school record six touchdowns, and some good fortune late in the year, the Florida Gators capped off the greatest season in school history with a rousing 52-20 victory over number one ranked Florida State in the Nokia Sugar Bowl in New Orleans on January 2, 1997 to claim the consensus 1996 national championship.

with six SEC championships, a national championship, nine or more wins each year and a SEC-record of 10-plus wins for six straight seasons (1993-98). His 12-year coaching mark at Florida was 122-27-1, a winning percentage of .817, ranked among the top three in conference history.

Spurrier's teams won the SEC championship four consecutive years (1993-94-95-96), also capturing the league crown in 1991 and 2000. His initial Gator team in 1990 finished first in the SEC.

In Spurrier's last season as the Gator head coach in 2001, Florida posted a 10-2 record and finished the year with a 56-23 win over Maryland in the Orange Bowl and a number three spot in the final national polls, setting a SEC record for most consecutive (12) seasons ranked in the Top 15 of final polls, most consecutive-nine win seasons and most consecutive (9) January bowl games. Prior to his arrival in 1990, Florida had never won more than nine games in a season. In 12 seasons at the helm, he led the Gators to nine seasons of 10 or more wins.

Ron Zook became the 20th head coach in Florida football history in January of 2002, leading the Gators to 8-5 records and a pair of Outback Bowl appearances in his first two seasons. In doing so, Coach Zook became only the third coach in SEC history to lead his team to consecutive January bowl appearances in his first two seasons. His overall coaching record in three seasons at Florida was 23-14. His record against Georgia was 2-1, and in 2004 he led the Gators to their first win over FSU in Tallahassee since 1986.

Urban Meyer, the National Coach of the Year in 2004 after guiding Utah to an unbeaten season (13-0) and a Fiesta Bowl championship, became Florida's 21st head football coach in December of 2004.

In his first season at the helm of the Gator program, Meyer became just the third head coach in UF history to reach nine victories in his initial campaign. The Gators won back-to-back games to close out the season for the first time since 2001. Florida never trailed Tennessee, Georgia or Florida State, a feat never before accomplished at UF. It marked just the fourth time in school history that a Gator team has won all three rivalry games in the regular season in addition to winning its bowl game.

In an effort to regain home field advantage, Florida went undefeated in the Sunshine State, posting an 8-0 mark including contests in Gainesville, Jacksonville against Georgia and the Outback Bowl win over Iowa, held on Jan. 2 in Tampa's Raymond James Stadium.

Steve Spurrier

Tremendous Achievement

▣ Compiled a 122-27-1 record at Florida from 1990-2001, the most wins for a Gator coach in school history and a win percentage (.817) that ranked among the top three in SEC history.

▣ His 122 victories at Florida from 1990-2001 ranked as the best win total for a coach in his first 12 years at a school in major college history.

▣ The only coach in SEC history, and one of only two coaches in major college history, to lead a squad to six straight seasons of 10 or more wins (1993-1998).

▣ The only coach in SEC history, and one of only three coaches in major college history, to lead a school to 12 consecutive seasons (1990-2001) of nine or more wins.

▣ He achieved 100 career victories at Florida in a faster time period (10th season, eighth game) than any major college coach at a school in the 20th century.

▣ One of only five major college coaches in history and only the second in SEC history, to lead a school to 100 wins during a decade (102-22-1 at UF from 1990-99).

▣ One of only three coaches in major college history, and the only one in SEC history, to lead a school to an appearance in the weekly polls for a period of 200 consecutive weeks.

▣ The only coach in the nation to lead his team to at least nine wins in each of his 12 years (1990-2001) at the helm.

▣ One of only five coaches in major college history to have his team ranked in the final Top 15 Poll in each of 12 consecutive seasons (1990-2001).

▣ Coached UF to two National Championship Game appearances (1995 and 1996) and claimed the 1996 national title.

▣ His UF squads finished in the Top 10 of the polls nine times and six times in the final top five, totals that both ranked second best in the nation over his 12

seasons (1990-2001). UF's average poll ranking of 6.5 in the decade of the 1990's was second best in the nation.

▣ He and the legendary Paul "Bear" Bryant are the only coaches in SEC history to win as many as four consecutive league championships. (1993-96).

▣ His 87-14 record in SEC play ranked as the best winning percentage in conference history (.861) and his 73 league wins in the 1990's represents the most SEC wins during a decade in conference history.

▣ The only coach in SEC history to win eight conference games in a season four straight years (1993-96).

▣ The only coach in SEC history to lead a school to nine consecutive January bowl game appearances.

▣ His six outright SEC titles ('91, '93, '94, '95, '96, 2000) ranked as the second-best total in SEC history, trailing only "Bear" Bryant's 11.

▣ His Gator teams appeared in the weekly polls 202 of a possible 203 weeks, including each of his last 202 consecutive weeks. From 1990-2001, the Gators were ranked number one in the polls 29 times, appeared in the top five for 117 weeks and among the nation's top 10 for 179 weeks.

▣ Led Florida to seven appearances in the SEC Championship Game (1992-96, '99-2000), with five victories (1993-1996, 2000).

▣ Under his leadership, the Gator offense became the only unit in modern collegiate history (since the NCAA started keeping stats in 1937) to score at least 500 points (including bowl games) for four straight years (1993-96). Yale also achieved that distinction from 1886-89 and Michigan from 1901-04.

▣ Prior to his arrival in 1990, Florida had never won more than nine games in a season. In 12 seasons at the helm he led the Gators to nine seasons of 10 or more wins.

▣ Recipient of the 1966 Heisman Trophy.

