

June 12, 2003

TO: Fans, Friends, and Supporters of LSU Athletics

FROM: Dan Radakovich, LSU Senior Associate Athletics Director

This is the sixth in a series of letters intended to keep LSU fans up to date on their athletics program and to give you a “behind the scenes” look at how and why things take place in college sports. Skip Bertman is attending the College World Series this week, so he asked me to write about one of my areas of responsibility, football scheduling.

I’ve just completed my second year at LSU as senior associate athletics director. During my time here, I’ve developed a deep appreciation for the fans and traditions of LSU and feel honored to work for Tiger Athletics. It’s the people that make this University unique, and I am grateful to play a role in the operation of your athletics program.

A lot of you have responded to Skip’s Cyber-side Chats by asking about football scheduling. Let me start by giving you two basic facts:

No. 1, the schedule consists of 11 games. In those years when the calendar has 14 Saturdays during the traditional football season, a school can play 12 games: 2002, 2003, 2008, 2013, 2014 and 2019.

No. 2, LSU must annually play four home SEC games and four road SEC games. That leaves three non-conference games in most years (four non-conference games in those years when we can play 12 games).

It is virtually a must to have seven home games for one very simple reason: those seven Saturday nights financially drive the entire LSU athletics program. One sold out home football game is worth over \$2 million to Tiger Athletics in ticket sales alone. So it’s easy to see that, when we have only 11 games, the three non-SEC games must be played at home.

Most top name opponents, generally called BCS schools because they play in leagues affiliated with the Bowl Championship Series, want to play a home and home series. In other words, to get a BCS team to play in Tiger Stadium, we would have to play one game in their stadium, too.

Now that we have a few 12-game seasons to work with, that is possible. We played at Virginia Tech in 2002 because Virginia Tech will come to Tiger Stadium in 2004. We will play at Arizona this year because Arizona will come to Tiger Stadium in 2006.

So you can see that our opportunity to schedule BCS schools is very limited by the fact that we can only occasionally play a non-conference game away from Tiger Stadium. Most of our future non-conference scheduling involves schools from the Mid-American Conference and Conference USA.

Here's a quick rundown on HOME non-conference opponents around the SEC in 2003:

Alabama: South Florida, Oklahoma, Northern Illinois, Southern Miss
Arkansas: Tulsa, North Texas, New Mexico State
Auburn: Southern Cal, Western Kentucky, ULM
Florida: San Jose State, FAMU, Florida State
Georgia: Middle Tennessee State, UAB
Kentucky: Louisville, Murray State, Ohio
Ole Miss: ULM, Texas Tech, Arkansas State
Miss. State: Oregon, Memphis
South Carolina: ULL, Virginia, UAB, Clemson
Tennessee: Fresno State, Marshall, Duke
Vanderbilt: UT-Chattanooga, Georgia Tech, Navy

The games you see above involving some top BCS schools, like Oklahoma, Southern Cal and Oregon, are the reciprocal games in return for SEC schools going to those team's stadiums in other seasons.

Some SEC schools are able to play only six home games because of the annual influx of revenue from their fund-raising groups. Florida for instance will generate this year over \$40 million in six home games through ticket sales and donations associated with football ticketing, while LSU will generate slightly less than \$28 million with seven home games.

This year's non-conference schedule was muddied by a late cancellation by Marshall in January. We tried very hard to schedule a Division I-A game, but there was no other opponent available on the date we had open. Bigger cancellation penalties are going to be written into future contracts to help prevent these situations from arising again.

The 2004 non-conference home schedule featuring Virginia Tech, Houston and Troy State is hopefully more reflective of future scheduling in Tiger Stadium.

In the end, it's important to remember that LSU plays in the best football conference in America. Year in and year out we'll see the likes of Alabama, Auburn, Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Florida and Arkansas, and occasionally Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Kentucky and Vanderbilt under the lights of Death Valley.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you this week. We encourage you to send your feedback to LSUvision@etigers.net. Please know that all e-mails will be read. Thank you for your continued support of Tiger Athletics.