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## COMMENTARY: Tigers remain in tangled web concerning scheduling

BY JOSH MOON • JULY 20, 2008

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I just don't get Auburn's complete incompetence when it comes to scheduling football games.



It's one of life's great mysteries -- how this university that's so PR savvy in every other area be so utterly hopeless in this one. It's as baffling as Stonehenge, Flavor Flav pulling in a paycheck and the Kardashians getting a TV show.

Pretty much every decision made at AU is weighed from a public relations standpoint. In most cases, university officials think through every little decision -- sometimes way too much. But they rarely make boneheaded PR blunders.

Think about it: The head football coach is media friendly. The sports information staff does an above average job of handling the media. There are few scandals or embarrassing situations that the school doesn't get out in front of.

It's like PR-U over there.

Until you get to football scheduling.

That's when you get things like this: Auburn vs. Furman in 2009.

Sweet mercy, is that ever terrible?

I jokingly said last week that AU officials hadn't finalized the '09 football schedule because they were waiting to see if a hole on The Citadel's schedule would open up. I had no idea I was so right.

None of this makes any sense.

Honestly, it's as if when football scheduling time rolls around an entirely new staff of people take over. And they do idiotic things, like schedule The Citadel, Furman and West Virginia.

That's right, I tossed in WVU. That was a stupid scheduling move, too. You don't schedule your one decent non-conference game against an opponent that has as much, if not more, talent than you yet still has more to gain than lose. It's just not smart.

There are 50 different teams around the country whose name on the schedule would have garnered just as much respect as West Virginia's. And against more than half of them, AU would have walked in as the favorite. In some cases, it would've been a big favorite.

But not against WVU. In all likelihood, the game will be a pick-em in the eyes of Vegas. But it certainly won't

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feel like one to the folks in Morgantown. After all, it will be the Big East against the big, bad SEC.

Why put your program in that sort of situation? It's no-win.

Why not play a has-been that still carries some name recognition, like Miami, Nebraska or UCLA? Or why not play a middle-of-the conference team, like Virginia, Colorado or Oregon State.

All of them mean as much on the schedule as West Virginia, and most of them won't be nearly as good.

When it comes time to play the pansies, think it through.

Why play Furman or The Citadel? If you're going to play a (formerly) I-AA opponent, why not go after an in-state opponent, like Alabama State, Alabama A&M or Jacksonville State? Do something good for the state. That would at least make the paying fans feel a little less robbed.

Of course, what would make them feel great about all of it is if AU wouldn't waste their time. That's what a game against Furman is -- a complete waste of time. It's also a waste of chalk and perfectly good sod.

Look, I understand that SEC teams play a brutal conference schedule. Even in 2004, when voters were discounting AU's case for a national championship because it played The Citadel, the Tigers still played more ranked opponents and had a stronger schedule than USC and Oklahoma.

But at the same time, Auburn learned a harsh lesson that year -- college football is all about perception and appearances.

Because you're not winning championships on the field. You're winning them in the minds of voters.

And in 2004, those voters were able to discredit the accomplishments of one of the best teams the SEC has ever seen based partly on the fact that a (formerly) I-AA opponent was on the schedule.

And yet, not four years later, here's Furman on the schedule.

There's a term for doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

Josh Moon, can be reached at [jmoon@gannett.com](mailto:jmoon@gannett.com). You can also hear him weekdays from noon to 2 p.m. as part of "The Roundtable on WMSP-AM 740.

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**fallfever1616** wrote:

Playing Furman is horrible, but to say that playing West Virginia means the same as if you would have played Virginia, Colorado, or Oregon State? It's comments like this that make me wonder why you aren't writing columns for the 'Weekly Reader' at our local elementary schools. I've seen this game listed by some as a Top 20 or Top 10 game of the year. You think AU and Colorado would have gotten that? Name the last regular season non-conference game that had any national relevance for Auburn???? That would be USC. (Please don't even think Wash State or Kan State) Beating a Miami or even a Nebraska would mean nothing. News flash, Auburn beat Nebraska in a bowl game and nobody cared. Granted, we lost to USC, but if you want to win National Championships you have to beat the best. I'd rather take on a Top 10 team in the regular season than play some middle of the road nobody cares game. That's what get's national recognition and that's why grabs voter's attention. Not Auburn vs. UCLA.

7/21/2008 9:49:51 AM

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**jmu1992** wrote:

You are a bit offbase here. The fact is that, since adding a 12th game to the schedule, scheduling a I-AA team is common practice. Some I-A schools even play two I-AA teams. This year there will be 73 of the 119 I-A programs playing I-AA programs. About 6-10 of them will lose. Auburn's mistake may be in playing Furman, who is one of the better I-AA prgrams in the country and could keep things intersting for a while.

7/20/2008 10:53:59 PM

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