

Headline: Voices of the SEC: Alabama could be tested while the SEC East could get answers

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Background: I updated the strategy, wrote, edited, and curated this newsletter, which was designed for a niche audience. It had a 35% open rate and 5.8% clickthrough rate over a six-month period.

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Every solid college football season includes a few quirky off-field storylines and surprising dramas. This week featured two of them.

Let's start with the quirky. LSU fans are showing their appreciation for kicker Cole Tracy by donating to Assumption College in Massachusetts. Tracy graduated from Assumption in the spring and has hit field goals of 54 and 42 yards this season for LSU.

And now for the drama. Notre Dame coach Brian Kelly called out Vanderbilt for "bad football" earlier this week, and Vanderbilt coach Derek Mason was pretty blunt in his response during the SEC teleconference Wednesday.

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So, yeah, it was a fairly exciting week in the SEC, if you like passionate college football fans and coach drama. If you like actual football, we've got that too! Let's take a look at what's going to happen on the field this weekend:

Alabama faces a test

...Maybe? The top-ranked Crimson Tide host No. 22 Texas A&M Saturday in their first game of the year against a ranked opponent. Jimbo Fisher and the Aggies couldn't manage to upset Clemson in Week 2, but they came dangerously close. Could this be the week A&M pulls it off?

The game pits two of the five ranked SEC West teams against each other. The best of the rest includes No. 14 Mississippi State at Kentucky. The Bulldogs will have to avoid a slow start and contain Benny Snell Jr., while Kentucky's defense will have the chance to show just how good it is.

SEC East mysteries

After a few weeks of football, we know that Georgia is very good and everyone else is still kind of a mystery. We might be closer to answers about the state of the division after this week.

Vanderbilt nearly upset Notre Dame in South Bend last week, which leaves us wondering how good the Commodores might actually be. But you can't earn a moral victory without taking an L, and it's time now for Vandy to actually put big victories on the board. They can do that by snapping a nine-game losing streak to South Carolina Saturday.

Derek Mason: Vanderbilt-South Carolina will be a 'street fight'

Vandy-USC: Gamecocks see Vandy defense as 'always chippy'

Then there's Florida and Tennessee. Both teams have new head coaches and both teams will need better play from their quarterbacks to pull off a victory. But which team is actually further along in the rebuild process? Saturday should help us figure it out.

SEC on tape

Coaches aren't the only ones who take a deep dive into game film during the week. Reporters from across the USA Today Network are also breaking down tape. Here's what they noticed this week:

Auburn's penalty woes: The Tigers have been flagged 25 through three games and are among the most-penalized teams in the country

Vanderbilt's use of Jared Pinkney: Pinkney leads all FBS tight ends in the receiving yards.

Tennessee and play-action: Vols quarterback Jarrett Guarantano has completed three passes for more than 50 yards this season and all three have come from the shotgun.

Schedule (All times CT)

No. 3 Georgia at Missouri, 11 a.m., ESPN

Kent State at Ole Miss, 11 a.m., SEC Network

No. 22 Texas A&M at No. 1 Alabama, 2:30 p.m., CBS South Carolina at Vanderbilt, 3 p.m., SEC Network Florida at Tennessee, 6 p.m., ESPN

No. 14 Mississippi State at Kentucky, 6 p.m., ESPN2 Louisiana Tech at No. 6 LSU, 6 p.m., ESPNU Arkansas at No. 11 Auburn, 6:30 p.m., SEC Network

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