

From 2005-'08 I published an article titled Coaching Changes in my College Football Preview magazine. Each year I try to make the magazine a little bit bigger and a little bit better but we're capped out at 328 pages so Coaching Changes does not appear in my 2010 magazine. We have had a lot of requests for this article and since the website has an unlimited amount of room, PhilSteele.com is a great vehicle to continue publishing this article and I will do so each year.

There is something to be said for coaching stability as it usually takes a couple of years for a new head coach to get a program going. They usually have their best success when they have a team full of their own recruits and their offensive and defensive systems have been in place for a couple of years. The first few years can be rough on a new head coach as they inherit players who now have to learn new schemes on both offense and defense and he has to learn the players strengths and weaknesses. Pete Carroll won two straight National Titles but in his first year the Trojans opened up at 2-5 and finished at just 6-6 after the bowl. Tommy Tuberville's first team at Auburn was just 5-6 but in his 6th season they were a perfect 13-0. Nick Saban's first LSU team started off 3-3 and finished 8-4 but in his 4th year they won a share of the National Title. In Bob Stoops' first year at Oklahoma, the Sooners were just 7-5, including a bowl loss to Mississippi. Since then, they have won a National Title and played in six Big 12 Championship games. Les Miles went 4-7 in his first year at Oklahoma St followed by 3 winning years. Jim Tressel was just 7-5 his first year but won a National Title in his second. Kirk Ferentz was a combined 4-19 his first two seasons but the Hawkeyes have now been to six Jan bowls. Pat Hill's first two Fresno St teams went a combined 11-12 but since then have had 10 winning years. Finally Woody Hayes won just 4 games in his first season at Ohio St.

The reason I bring up these examples is twofold: first it shows that Athletic Directors should have a little more patience before firing a head coach for a losing season.

Secondly, I wanted to point out that there are individual unit rankings in the lower right hand corner on each of the conference pages. You will notice that I have FIRST year coaching staffs graded lower than you would normally expect. What sparked this article a few years back was Ole Miss' dumping of David Cutcliffe just one year after the Rebels shared the SEC West Title with LSU. They were the only team that had been bowl eligible 7 straight years prior to that rare losing season. Then after the firing, from 2005-2007, the Rebels went just 3-21 in SEC play.

SLOW STARTERS

Let me go over some programs that stuck with coaches for much longer than expected, through many losing seasons but have ultimately been rewarded. The best example is Virginia Tech. Frank Beamer had successive years of 2-9, 3-8, 6-4-1, 6-5, 6-5, 5-6 and 2-8-1 to start his tenure. Amazingly, Virginia Tech stuck with him. Can you imagine another program that would stick with a head coach through a streak like that? Beamer has done an amazing job building his program including having one of the best strength training programs in the country. They are now a National Title contender on a yearly basis and simply won the ACC Title in their inaugural year in the conference despite being picked 7th in the preseason ACC poll. Joe Novak started out 1-10, 0-11, 2-9 and 5-6 his first 4 years at Northern Illinois and once again, they opted to stick with him and were rewarded with 7 consecutive winning seasons from 2000-'06. Darrell Dickey was DONE at North Texas. His first 3 teams went 3-8, 2-9 and 3-8 and in 2001 they opened the season 0-5. Their AD was under HEAVY pressure to get rid of Dickey not just at the end of the season but RIGHT THEN so they could have some hope. They rebounded to win an amazing 26 consecutive SBC games (including the final 5 in 2001)! They went to four bowls with 4 league titles. Will NT stick with 4th year HC Dodge (5-31 in '07-'09) if he starts out like Dickey? Navy's Paul Johnson went 2-10 in his first year but the Mids went to five straight bowls winning 8, 10, 8, 9 and 8 games in those seasons. Rocky Long inherited a New Mexico team that went 9-4 in Dennis Franchione's last season and his first squad went just 3-9. Two more losing seasons followed but they stuck with him and the team had 7 consecutive years of bowl eligibility. When Barry Alvarez took over at Wisconsin, he went 1-10 in his first year and followed that up with two more losing seasons. The Badgers simply went to 11 bowl games in his tenure and he retired with an amazing three Rose Bowl wins under his belt. Dan McCarney of Iowa St had his team go 3-8, 2-9, 1-10, 3-8 and 4-7 his first FIVE years. Can you imagine an AD in today's climate sticking with this guy? The Cyclones

then went to 5 bowl games in McCarney's last 7 years from 2000-'06. Then the new AD let McCarney go and they have went just 12-25 since! Bill Snyder went 1-10 at Kansas St in his first year and had 3 losing seasons his first 4 years but they stuck with him and he rewarded them with 11 straight bowl appearances, making them a National Title contender. Kentucky fans weren't too thrilled when Rich Brooks was hired in 2003 and he inherited a team that had just 68 scholarship players. The Brooks era began with 3 losing seasons (9-25) but he rebounded to lead Kentucky to four straight bowl berths in the tough SEC. As you can see, sometimes patience is a virtue.

BAYLORED

OK let's take a look at the Baylor situation. Constant head coaching changes are a bad thing. The coach inherits another coach's recruits and many times they not only don't fit his system but they signed with the school because of the other coaching staff. Many times personality or disciplinary conflicts arise and many players leave a program after the coaching change, leaving a team short on scholarships. I call this section "Baylored" because that school provides the most prominent example of how constant head coaching changes can hurt a program. Let's go back to 1996. Baylor had 5 out of 6 winning years despite facing their tough SWC foes on a weekly basis. They were 7-5 in 1994 and 7-4 in 1995 and the amazing part was that HC Chuck Reedy was bringing in recruiting classes on par with teams like Texas and Texas A&M, even finishing ahead of the big boys some years! In this day and age a winning record for a Big 12 team would make them a perennial bowl team. In 1996 they had a nightmare season as the team was besieged by injuries and also dropped some close games like a 28-24 loss to Oklahoma, a 28-23 loss to Texas and a triple OT loss 49-42 to Missouri (those type of losses would look pretty good currently). They still finished 4-7 and clearly, if not for the injuries, could have had a winning season. Amazingly Baylor FIRED Coach Reedy! They have played THIRTEEN years of football since and have topped three wins in a season just 4 TIMES in that span (5 in '05, 4 in '06 and 4 the last two seasons)! First they brought in Dave Roberts in 1997 then after two losing seasons fired him! They brought in Kevin Steele and gave him 4 years before the axe fell. As mentioned with constant coaching changes, keeping the full complement of scholarship players has been a problem. Baylor has a record of 14-98 in the Big 12 and some years have been outgained by an avg of over 200 ypg in league play. Guy Morriss is the latest firing at Baylor as he had a 5-6 season in '05 (4-1 start) and was given 5 years but continues the "Baylored" tradition.

FLIGHT DELAY

They do not run the option in the NFL so this category strictly applies to the college game. I have said many times over the last few years that it takes 3-4 years for an option team to successfully move to a pass offense. Why does such a switch take so long? A college team is basically built from 5 different recruiting classes with the classes from 3, 4 and 5 years ago being the most important. A college coach who runs an option offense can be very successful in the college game. To be a success he must be able to bring in big, powerful run blocking offensive linemen who are known more for power than pass blocking. His choice of WR's is generally not made on the guy that will make the most catches but the one who may be the best downfield blocker. The QB's in an option offense are valued more for their mobility than for their passing accuracy. When a coach comes in and tries to move to a pro style passing offense or a pure passing offense, he finds himself ill-equipped to do so. He needs fleet pass catching WR's, QB's who are known for their accurate passing and a solid pass blocking line. By the time a coach recruits those types of players and the starters spots are taken by those type of recruits, it is usually at least two years down the road and possibly 3 or 4. Two big name schools recently went through the switch and their struggles bear out what a difficult transition it can be.

Notre Dame was a run based attack under Lou Holtz with option style QB's and continued in the same vein after his departure. When Ty Willingham took over he inherited a team that avg'd 102 ypg passing the previous year hitting 50% with a 4-11 ratio. The top 2 QB's combined to throw for just 1,071 yards but had 893 gross yards rushing. While ND did win their first 8 games under Willingham, it was hardly due to offensive prowess. They had just 11 FD's and 203 TOTAL yards on offense in a win over Purdue. Later they had 10 FD's and 185 TOTAL yards on offense in a win vs Pitt. That offense averaged just 313 ypg with the QB's hitting 50.4%. The next season they brought in a pure passing QB, Brady Quinn. Quinn however was a freshman and the offense was just in its second year so he was not yet surrounded by the O-line and receivers which you need in a West Coast offense. He threw for 1,831 yards but only completed 47.3% with a 9-15 ratio. The third year of the offense showed solid improvement as you would expect. Quinn upped the totals to 2,586 yards passing, improved to 54.1% completions and had a 17-10 ratio. In 2005, with all 11 offensive starters back and in the 4th year of the switch, Charlie Weis stepped into a great situation and Quinn exploded with 3,919 yards passing (64.9%) with a 32-7 ratio. There were no Jeff Samardzija-types on the roster in Willingham's first year but thanks to his recruiting, the team was much better equipped to run the pro offense under Weis. In 2006 with 3 solid receiving options, Quinn had 3,426 yards passing (61.9%) with a 37-7 ratio.

When Nebraska hired Bill Callahan he stunned the Husker faithful by announcing that he was ditching the option offense and converting to a pro style pass attack. Some said it was about time and thought he would have immediate success. The 2003 NU team was a solid 10-3. I did not make a lot of friends

in Lincoln when the next year in my magazine I picked Iowa St, who had finished 2-10 the previous year to finish AHEAD of Nebraska in the Big 12 North! Joe Dailey threw for 2,025 yards which was the most at that school since Dave Humm way back in 1972. Unfortunately, he completed just 49.4% of his passes with a 17-19 ratio and the Huskers had their first losing season since 1961! Now, let's not pin the whole thing on Dailey. He was recruited as an option QB and had OL's in front of him that were recruited for run blocking who were just learning the pass blocking schemes. He also did not have a fleet of pass catching WR's like most passing schools have. Callahan looked to speed up the system so he went the JUCO route (something ND did not do). He brought in PS#18JC QB Zac Taylor (no freshman QB growing pains), JC WR's and OL's. Despite bringing in JUCO's, the offense did not take off right away. In the first two games vs IA foes in the 2nd year of the offense, they avg'd 104 ypg passing with just 45% completions. The unit got better as the season went on and Taylor threw for 392 yards generating 30 points vs Colorado in the season finale. For the season NU still completed just 53.8% and only increased their passing yards by 37 ypg. In 2006 they improved to 244 ypg passing and 59.4% completions and topped that in 2007 with 324 ypg pass (61.5%).

SOME TOUGH SHOES TO FILL

Following a legend is never easy. Vince Lombardi had an incredible run with the Green Bay Packers but after 4 straight NFL titles, stepped down. Phil Bengtson was the unlucky guy who took over a team where anything less than an NFL title would be considered a weak season. Unfortunately he not only failed to bring home a championship but suffered 2 losing seasons in 3 years before being fired after going 6-8 in 1970. Ron Zook had the misfortune of being the guy who took over for Steve Spurrier at Florida. A few days after taking the job www.fireronzook.com got started and anything less than an undefeated season and National Title was construed as a failure. Here are a few other coaches that stepped into tough spots. Dennis Franchione left TCU after a great 10-2 season to take the job at Alabama. Gary Patterson unfortunately went 6-6 his first year but did flirt with an unbeaten season in 2003. At Ohio Jim Grobe had one of the best seasons at the school in recent memory in 2000 going 7-4 and contending for the MAC Title. He left for the ACC and Brian Knorr inherited raised expectations and was let go after 4 losing seasons. Tommy Bowden led Tulane to a 12-0 season in 1998 with 16 returning starters. He left for Clemson and Chris Scelfo inherited a rebuilding squad and had nowhere to go but down in his first year. They went just 3-8 but he did guide them to two winning seasons.

Some coaches have stepped into this type of tough situation and thrived. Urban Meyer led Utah to a super 12-0 season and left for Florida. His assistant Kyle Whittingham has guided the Utes to 5 winning seasons including a 13-0 #2 finish in 2008. Mike Price led Wash St to their first ever back-to-back 10-win seasons in the school's history before bolting for Alabama. Longtime assistant Bill Doba took over and led them to ANOTHER 10-win season and a Holiday Bowl win over #5 Texas. Dirk Koetter left Boise St after a 10-2 season, their best ever, and while Dan Hawkins' first squad "only" went 8-4, he did a remarkable job there going 45-7 in the next 4 years before moving on to Colorado. In 2006 Chris Petersen, who had been the longtime OC at Boise St, stepped in and as I forecasted in my 2006 magazine, took the team to a BCS bowl berth and an undefeated season after their win vs Oklahoma in the Fiesta Bowl.

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

There are just some coaching openings that have early success written all over them. In 2004 for example I pointed out many times in the magazine that UTEP's Mike Price was stepping into a great spot. Gary Nord took over at UTEP and guided the team to an 8-4 record and a rare bowl in his first year. He opted to build the program the right way by getting away from bringing in JUCO's and he not only signed almost all freshmen but redshirted most of them, building the team's depth. He suffered through 3 losing seasons but had put all of his eggs in the basket of the 2004 season, as he knew he would have success with a deep and veteran squad. Unfortunately they fired him so Mike Price took over a team that was -15 in turnovers the previous year and was just 2-11. When a new head coach comes into some early season success it gives a losing team new found confidence. They then buy into the new coach's program more quickly. UTEP went on to their 1st back-to-back winning seasons since '87-'88 and benefited thanks to Nord biting the bullet and taking those redshirts. Keith Burns was doing the same thing at Tulsa and also did not catch many breaks his last few years as his team was hit hard by injuries. His final team had just 9 seniors and naturally new head coach Steve Kragthorpe inherited a team with the most returning starters in the WAC (17). Some early season success had them more confident and the team rewarded the new guy going from 1-11 to 8-4 and a bowl berth. Urban Meyer took over a Utah team that was one of the most snakebitten teams in the NCAA in 2002. Between 2000-2002, Utah was among the MWC leaders in ypg vs conference foes and in 2000 and 2002 finished with losing seasons overall despite outgaining and outsourcing their opponents on the year. In 2002 they had FIVE losses by 8 pts or less! The talent was there and when Meyer achieved some early season success, the team started gaining confidence and won those close games that had escaped his predecessor Ron McBride. Just two years later they were undefeated. There were 12 new coaches in 2005 and few success stories besides the heavily publicized hires of Charlie Weis, Florida's Urban Meyer

and LSU's Les Miles. Bronco Mendenhall took over a snakebitten BYU team that had 3 close losses and outgained league foes by 54.6 ypg, 2nd best in the MWC in '04, taking them to a bowl in '05. Meanwhile, Bill Cubit of W Michigan, took a 1-10 team to a 7-4 record becoming bowl eligible.

TYPICAL 1ST YEAR HEAD COACH

When looking over the list of new coaches this year, I decided to add a new category to my repertoire titled "Typical 1st-Year Head Coach". Typically when a HC takes over, there is a learning curve in the 1st year. The HC has to learn the player's strengths and weaknesses and the players must learn new schemes on both sides of the ball. Generally with these circumstances, the team is not as experienced as they seem to be as many of the returning starters could lose their jobs under the new regime. These coaches in the near future will be achieving some success but the outlook in the first year is not as good.

Now let's take a look at some of this year's head coaching changes and I will put them into some of the categories listed above. Keep in mind many of this year's new guys will go through the typical 1st years that I described previously.

2010 NEW COACHES

RIGHT PLACE RIGHT TIME:

The last 5 years I have had 34 coaches mentioned in this section. 27 of the 34 (79.4%) have improved their teams records (2 had same record). In 2006, Chris Petersen of Boise St took over a 9-4 team and guided them to a perfect 13-0 and a BCS bowl win. In 2007 Dennis Erickson took a 7-6 ASU squad to an 8-0 start and #6 in the country. In 2008, Houston Nutt took a 3-8 Ole Miss squad to a Cotton Bowl victory. Bo Pelini of Nebraska took over a 5-7 Husker squad and guided them to a tie for the Big 12 North Title. Coach Jerry Kill of Northern Illinois inherited a 2-10 squad and guided them to a bowl. Last year, I went a perfect 9 for 9 as every coach I listed guided their team to a better record. Gene Chizik took over a 5-7 Auburn team and led the Tigers to a 8-5 record including a New Year's Day bowl win. Lane Kiffin also took over a 5-7 team and led the Volunteers to a 7-win regular season before departing for USC. Dabo Swinney inherited a 7-6 Clemson team and guided them to 9 wins and a division title as the Tigers made their first appearance in the ACC Title game. Steve Sarkisian did a great job at Washington in his first year as he took over a team that was just 0-12 in '08 and led them to 5 wins. Also Bill Snyder in his second stint at Kansas St nearly led the Wildcats to a division title last year. JIMBO FISHER, FLORIDA ST

Florida St has underachieved the last several years and unlike most new head coaches Fisher does not have to learn the players' strengths and weaknesses as he has been the OC at FSU the past three seasons. I also feel that Fisher has taken away some of the game-day duties from coach Bowden the past couple of years and steps into a great situation as the team has not had double digit wins since '03. The Seminoles are loaded on offense and get most of their toughest ACC foes at home as 7 of my 9 sets of power ratings call for a double digit win season! BRIAN KELLY, NOTRE DAME

Kelly inherits a Notre Dame program that has vastly underachieved recently and even has a losing record the past 3 years. This year he inherits plenty of talent and Kelly always gets the most out of his players. While the defense gave up a school-record 398 ypg last year, 9 starters return and Kelly's defense at Cincinnati performed admirably last year with just one returning starter. Kelly is the only coach in the history of the magazine to beat me six straight years and while he inherits an inexperienced QB, I would not worry too much as he led Cincinnati to a Big East title in '08 with FIVE different QBs!

SKIP HOLTZ, USF

There seems to be a recurring theme here as we are seeing coaches who get the most out of their talent inheriting underachieving programs. USF despite climbing into the AP Top 10 in two of the past three seasons tallied off late in the season and failed to finish in the Top 25. The Bulls were probably the most "athletically" talented team in the Big East the last three years while Holtz only had the 3rd or 4th most talented teams in CUSA the last couple of years but has two CUSA title rings on his fingers. TURNER GILL, KANSAS

Personally I feel that last year's team led by QB Todd Reesing and WRs Kerry Meier and Dezmon Briscoe is stronger than this year's Kansas team. However, the Jayhawks caught Oklahoma, Texas and Texas Tech out of Big 12 South last year. This year they play none of those teams and have a much better schedule this year. Turner Gill did a great job at Buffalo and despite personnel wise being a little weaker this year, I think they have a great shot at bowl eligibility. SONNY DYKES, LOUISIANA TECH

Derek Dooley did not leave the cupboard bare as he did a good job of recruiting and a good portion of the freshman were red shirted last year. The Bulldogs only lose 12 letterman from a 4-8 team that did not catch a lot of breaks last year with 3 net close losses. Despite their 3-5 record in conference play the Bulldogs were +27.9 ypg (4th best in WAC). All 9 of my sets call for bowl eligibility this year and an 8 or 9 win season is possible. MIKE LONDON, VIRGINIA

Virginia did not catch a lot of breaks the last two years going just 8-16. Prior to '08 the Cavaliers had been to 5 bowls in the previous 6 years, London steps into a good situation with the program having a newfound enthusiasm and will be favored in at least 3 games this year. While it will be tough playing in the brutal Coastal division with

Miami, Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech and North Carolina plus drawing Florida St and Boston College from the Atlantic, Virginia has a solid shot at improving upon last year's record.

WILLIE TAGGART, WKU

I like the job former HC David Elson did moving WKU from I-AA up to the FBS. The team really played its heart out for him last year but they suffered 3, 6 and 4-point losses blowing late leads in the last 3 games. This year Taggart inherits a team that returns 18 starters and while there won't be a lot of wins on their platter this year, it only takes one to improve.

TYPICAL 1ST-YEAR HEAD COACH

CHARLIE STRONG, LOUISVILLE

I am very bullish on Charlie Strong at Louisville and I think it is a strong hire. Strong will bring lots of energy to a program that was 12-1 in '06 but went just 15-21 under former HC Kragthorpe including just 5-16 in Big East play. This year the Cardinals have a tough schedule and return only 4 starters on defense. While I expect them to be more competitive on the field this year, they were -104 ypg in Big East play last year and return just 39% of their tackles (5th fewest in the NCAA). Strong will have them competing for a bowl game next year as they will be going up in the Big East standings, but this year they will have a tough time improving on last year's 4-win total. MIKE MACINTYRE, SAN JOSE ST

I got to speak to Coach MacIntyre this past off-season and came away very impressed. He has a plan to create his defense in the image of TCU but unfortunately has a depth-shy team and a lot of players will be playing different positions. The schedule is also brutal with Alabama, Wisconsin and Utah all coming on the road in the first four games. I think Dick Tomey did a great job leading San Jose St to 2 non-losing seasons in the last 4 years including a 9-4 finish in '06 and I expect Coach MacIntyre to have the Spartan program on the upswing in the coming years after suffering a typical 1st-year HC season. BOBBY HAUCK, UNLV

Hauck steps into a solid situation as UNLV could have been bowl-bound the last two years as they suffered some tough losses. Hauck had a solid record at Montana and inherits 15 returning starters this year but unfortunately the Rebels face a tough schedule (#25) and they will only be favored in a hand full of games. While the situation and head coach is solid, the Rebels could suffer a decrease in wins typical of a first-year head coach. ROB IANELLO, AKRON

Former head coach JD Brookhart had two winning seasons his first two years before suffering four straight losing seasons and this year Ianello inherits only 13 returning starters. While Akron will have better fortune in TO's and injuries this year, they must learn entirely new schemes and may not top last year's win total. LARRY PORTER, MEMPHIS

I got to speak to Coach Porter at the CUSA media days and came away very impressed, as he is a solid recruiter. He inherits a Memphis team that went just 2-10 last year after going to bowl games in five of the six previous years. While I think he will have the Tigers playing with a new enthusiasm this year, they do lose 25 letterman and face a brutal schedule, which has them facing the top four CUSA teams at home. There is a possibility that they could be an underdog in all 12 games this year. That does not mean they will lose all 12 but topping last year's 2-win total will be tough. DOC HOLLIDAY, MARSHALL

It's about dang time Doc Holliday landed a head coaching job as it was talked about every off-season for several years and I think he will do a fine job at Marshall. However the Thundering Herd did win 7 games last year achieving their first winning season since 2003. They might find a difficult time topping that this year as Holliday has lost three of my projected starters so far this summer and may go thru the typical 1st-year struggles.

TOUGH SHOES TO FILL

The last 5 years I have had 17 coaches listed in this category. Three coaches in 2005 had their teams go from a combined 25-11 (69%) in 2004 to 15-19 (44%) in 2005. In 2007 four coaches were in the box and 3 had weaker records including Tim Brewster at Minnesota who took over a bowl squad and went 1-11. The one coach that improved his team's record went from 10-3 to 11-3. In '08 I had 4 coaches listed in the box and of the 4 coaches, only one (Steve Fairchild, Colorado St) managed to improve his team's record but keep in mind the Rams were coming off a 3-9 season. BUTCH JONES, CINCINNATI

I'm a big fan of Butch Jones and I even mentioned him as being great possible hire for Cincinnati in my December 13 Blog before he was announced as head coach. But how do you top 12-0? How do you top back-to-back Big East titles and back-to-back BCS bowl games? There is no question he has some big shoes to fill but he has done it before at Central Michigan. RUFFIN MCNEILL, EAST CAROLINA

I met Coach McNeill at the CUSA media days and was very impressed. I think he will stay at East Carolina for a long time and have good success. Unfortunately he takes over a team that was only the 3rd or 4th most talented in the conference but won a pair of CUSA titles the last two seasons. They will struggle to match that success this year as he inherits a team that returns just 8 starters and loses 30 letterman. East Carolina also returns just 38% of their tackles which is 2nd fewest in the country and were +11 in TO's last year. While McNeill will have the Pirates in the near future atop the CUSA standings, they could go from back-to-back titles to a losing season this year. JOKER PHILLIPS, KENTUCKY

Naturally the SEC is a super competitive conference and when

former HC Rich Brooks was hired not a lot of fans were happy (see slow starters). After 3 losing seasons, Brooks rewarded their faith with spades as he led them to four straight bowls and an overall 30-22 record as the Wildcats have had 10 upsets in the last four years! This was quite an accomplishment at a school predominately known as a basketball power. While Phillips steps into a good situation, as he has been the coach-in-waiting and knows the current players, it will be tough to duplicate four straight bowls in the rugged SEC.

DAN ENOS, CENTRAL MICHIGAN

Enos inherits a program that has won 3 of the last 4 MAC Titles but this year the Chippewas lose record-setting QB LeFevour as well as WRs Brown and Anderson. Central is changing schemes on both sides of the ball and has only five home games this year. After all the success of the past four years, there is really only one way to go.

BAYLORED

In 2005 the whole reason for me to write this article was the ridiculous firing of coach Cutcliffe at Mississippi where he had done a GREAT job. I think it may be decades before you see Ole Miss bowl eligible for 5 straight years and go to 5 bowls in a 6-year stretch like they did under Cutcliffe. In 2007, I had Rice and Idaho listed here due to constant coaching changes. Idaho went from 4-8 to 1-11 and Rice went from a bowl game to 3-9. In '08 I put Southern Miss here as Larry Fedora had one of 5 teams in the NCAA that had 14 straight winning years. The Golden Eagles opened 2-6 and it appeared that a losing season was a given but rebounded to win their final 5 games of the year and match their 2007 record of 7-6. Last year I had Frank Spaziani here as the Eagles went from 11 wins in '07 to 9 wins in '08 and followed that up with 8 wins last year. DEREK DOOLEY, TENNESSEE

Anytime a school has three head coaches in three years you are going to see a lot of attrition. At Tennessee, there have been 3 drastically different head coaches as several Fulmer recruited players left last year when Kiffin took over and this year several Kiffin recruited players have departed. The Volunteers could be under 70 scholarships this season and face a brutal schedule in which they will be a heavy underdog in six games. Tennessee will probably have to sweep November just to get to a bowl game and it will take a few years to reclaim their spot atop the SEC. While I think Dooley is a very good hire as he did a decent job at Louisiana Tech, topping last year's 7 win total will probably not happen.

NO DESIGNATION

In 2007 I created this category. Some new coaches have conflicting things working for them and it is tough to toss them into any one category above. Of the six I tossed in this category in '08, three had miserable seasons for their schools (Texas A&M, UCLA, Washington St) and W Virginia was disappointing. Baylor and Georgia Tech, however, had more success than most thought they would. Last year I had 7 coaches here and like '08, they had mixed results. Eastern Michigan, and Miami, Oh had miserable seasons while Iowa St and Wyoming had better seasons than expected. JEFF QUINN, BUFFALO

Buffalo won the MAC title in '08 and last year went 5-7. This year they return 14 returning starters and have a good shot at bowl eligibility. However, they lose a solid coach in Turner Gill and it will be interesting to see if Quinn can get Buffalo back to a MAC title game in the near future. TODD BERRY, ULM

While Charlie Weatherbie did not lead ULM to a single bowl game in his 7 years, I thought he did a solid job last year improving the defense as they allowed 3.3 ypc (5.7 in '08). Unfortunately they finished just 6-6 losing their final two games. I was not impressed with what Todd Berry did at Army and I think ULM will drop off of their 6-win total from last year. ROBBIE CALDWELL, VANDERBILT

I think this is one of the toughest coaching jobs in the country and personally it is one job I would not take as you have an academic school trying to compete in the toughest football conference. If Caldwell took over last year, I would have placed this in the Tough Shoes to Fill category as Bobby Johnson did a great job guiding Vandy to a 7-6 season in '08. However, this year Vandy is coming off just a two-win season. Caldwell was a breath of fresh air at the SEC media days and this year will be entertaining to say the least but the wins will be few once again. LANE KIFFIN, USC

You might be thinking that it is a no-brainer to put Kiffin in the tough shoes to fill category as he is saddled with sanctions, suspensions and transfers. With the Trojans on probation they could be in a similar situation to what Alabama and Miami, Fl faced when they were on probation. However, the reason I put Kiffin here is that USC was only 9-4 last year and I think they will take on an "us vs. them" mentality. I still have USC projected to win the Pac-10 title and if they catch all the right breaks and stay injury free, they do have an outside shot at a 13-0 season. If Kiffin does stay eight years at USC, he will come nowhere near Pete Carroll's 101-13 record that he achieved in his last 8 years. TOMMY TUBERVILLE, TEXAS TECH

I think Tuberville is a solid hire and after going thru the schedule I think Tech could have an 8, 9 or 10 win season possibly. Unfortunately he is taking over for the unique Mike Leach who recruited differently, went for it on 4th down a lot and never met a pass he didn't like. With Tuberville focusing on the run more this year, it is such a big break that I wonder if they will be as successful this season.