

RECLAIM THE SUBSTANCE TRASH

Two weeks ago I was in a big box store, watching an old guy in an MSU cap buy the same computer as a younger guy in a Michigan cap. The old Spartans fan sincerely offered his opinion, as if he couldn't stand the sight of the Wolverines playing so pathetically. We don't need another Michigan man, they agreed, we need someone to restore the integrity of the program. I think even the most ardent traditionalists have come around to that (especially with Jim Harbaugh looking like a more likely candidate to coach the Raiders than than Wolverines after he gets fired in a few weeks). Though I think Michigan is still too committed to the failed leadership of business types who'd rather sell some more luxury boxes than fix the underlying product, from football to academics. I worry we're going to have one more failed coach before we'll find the man who'll return the team to glory.

Against that background, there's as much drama surrounding whether the Wolverines or the Gators can spoil the Bowl series hopes of their rivals. Michigan has the easier job here, which is good given that they're a far weaker team, they just need to prevent OSU from having a huge win in case something opens up ahead of the OSU. I think the Gators might surprise against the perfect FSU, which has been less than convincing. Plus, it'd be a victory Jim White might finally enjoy, being assured of Musgravekrat's departure. Meanwhile, I expect Alabama to roll through Auburn; I'm less sure about the Georgia rivalry.

Which brings us to the matchup of the week, and possibly the season: Pats – Packers at Lambeau Lawn (it's forecast to be freezing, but nothing really Tundra-worthy). In spite of all the hype over Numbers 12 facing off for the first time, this game will be decided on D. Will the refs let Brandon Browner manhandle Jordy Nelson? Will Jamie Collins, who adds necessary mobility to

the Linebacker corps, play as poorly as he did against the Lions? Will the repurposing of Julius Peppers prove to make the difference? If so, will it be by landing Brady on his ass or by blanketing Gronk? While it might be easy to predict a Packers win just on home field, I think this will come down to a Brady turnover (but of course, I hope I'm wrong).

Meanwhile, don't sleep on KC against Peyton at Arrowhead. The Broncos have been beatable of late, and KC played close in Denver.

I suspect the surprise game of Sunday will be Bills-Brownies. Both are just outside of contention (if you can call anyone in the AFC North out of anything). The Bills are fresh off a victorious trip to their home-away-from-home Detroit and a shellacking of the Jets. They have an impossible schedule from here on out, so will almost certainly play nothing but spoilers. The Brownies, however, could surge into something. And they just got Josh Gordon back. But I think this game will prove the wisdom of Bills' grabbing Sammy Watkins away from the Browns.