

Everything Begins (and Ends) the Same

The State of Football at USM

by Duane Cobb

In an astute comment, [USAToday](#) summarized the state of football at USM.

In a matchup of monumental ineptitude, 0-4 Southern Mississippi hosts 0-4 Florida International on Saturday. Technically somebody has to win, but considering these two teams, we wouldn't be surprised if they found a way to circumvent that rule.

Actually, USM found a way to lose to FIU, which was, until two weeks ago, arguably the worst football team in the country. Of course, [FIU played](#) its first football game on 29 August 2002 and moved to Division I-A in 2005. USM [first fielded](#) a football team in 1912 – more than a hundred years ago.

On the hundredth anniversary of USM football, Ellis Johnson became Southern Miss' head football coach. Let's think back to how Johnson's [tenure began](#). Former president Martha Saunders proudly made the announcement that Johnson emerged as the absolute best candidate from a pool of talented individuals. Saunders also told the crowd that Johnson knew plenty about winning, something he demonstrated in 2010 when South Carolina administered a 41-13 “whipping” of USM in Columbia.



We all know how Saunders' cheerful optimism ended. Barely four months after announcing Johnson, Saunders had been [“separated”](#) from her role as President of USM. At the end of a disastrous 0-12 first season, Johnson was fired with an embarrassingly generous [golden parachute](#).

Now, [Todd Monken](#) has replaced Ellis Johnson. One thing that did not change was the overblown rhetoric flowing out of the University. According to a [USM](#) presser

announcing Monken's hire, "We said going into this search that we wanted to find a dynamic leader with the character to lead our program back to prominence, so," said Hammond. "I believe today, with the hiring of Todd Monken, we have accomplished that. With his extensive background at some of the premier programs in college football and in the NFL, we believe he is perfectly positioned to return the Golden Eagles to competing both in Conference USA and in the national spotlight."

Less than a year later, Monken has yet to win a game – even against FIU. Expectations are not high. According to President [Rodney Bennett](#) "But, as Coach Monken says, we are going to win. It is only a matter of time."

Right now, Bennett seems more optimistic than Monken. Earlier today, Coach Monken told [The Hattiesburg American](#): "There wasn't much resolve today," he said. "There were a bunch of nice kids out there today, but not much resolve. You get a couple days off, it's hard to tell if guys take care of themselves. Didn't feel like it today."

Next week the Eagles travel to Greenville to play East Carolina. If, as expected, they lose that game, they will be 0-6 with the 2013 season at its halfway point. Should this occur, USM will not be able to lose a single time over its final 6 games of the season and still go to a bowl game during the holidays. Sources tell usmnews.net that it will be next to impossible for USM to finish 6-1 from here on and qualify for a bowl. Not getting to a bowl could be a disaster for the already-cash-strapped athletics department.