

## From Cowbells to Dave Ramsey . . . and Back

*How Mark Keenum's Program of Giving Back is Generating a Large Return*

The recent USMNEWS.net [story](#), "From Cowbells to 'Lymanese'," described how Mississippi State University president Mark Keenum developed a program wherein the MSU athletics department added \$0.75 million of its revenues to a private fund containing \$1.25 million in order to provide \$2 million in faculty bonuses and student scholarships. In the plan, 406 MSU professors each received a bonus of \$2,500, leaving roughly half of the \$2 million pot for student scholarships. Keenum told reporters at the time the program's details were made public that he "dreamed up" the plan last year (2009-10), his first as MSU president. At that time he felt that the university's football-related television revenue should "come back and support [the MSU] campus." As expected, Keenum's efforts have been lauded far and wide as an example of the kind of visionary thinking that is going to be necessary for major public institutions, such as MSU, to survive in the current economic climate.



Keenum



Saunders

The ". . . Cowbells to 'Lymanese'" report referred to above also stated that USM president Martha Saunders was, at the Oct-2010 USM faculty senate meeting, pressed by a USM faculty/faculty senator to divulge if she knew whether or not the USM athletics department was giving any consideration to a similar program for USM faculty and students. There, after receiving the question, Saunders uttered the vacuous "No" that sources say many around the USM family have discussed, at one time or another, since. Saunders' answer puts her "worlds apart" from MSU's Keenum when it comes to out-of-the-box *leadership*, at least according to sources. Still, the IHL has seen fit to reward Saunders with a four-year [contract extension](#), securing her position at USM for the foreseeable future.

Many Mississippians, from Hattiesburg to Starkville and beyond, follow the financial advice of the well-known [financial advisor](#), Dave Ramsey. A big part of Ramsey's program is "giving back" – to churches, charities, etc. – even when one is burdened by financial problems of one sort or another. In Ramsey's program, good things tend to happen for people who give to others. One has to wonder, then, what has become of

MSU's athletics department since Keenum's "giving back" program for it was envisioned?



**Ramsey**

A recent check of the Bowl Championship Standings (BCS) indicates that the Mississippi State Bulldogs rank 20<sup>th</sup> in the nation, just one spot behind South Carolina, which knocked off then-#1 Alabama earlier in the year.<sup>1</sup> The Bulldogs are currently 7-2 overall on the season, and 3-2 in the Southeastern Conference (SEC). To date, MSU has defeated Georgia (24-12), Houston (47-24), and Florida (10-7). Of the two losses, one was a 14-17 slugfest against now-#2 Auburn. A recent espn.com projection has the Bulldogs competing against Florida State in the relatively lucrative Chick-fil-A Bowl in Atlanta.



**Mullen**

MSU football is coached by a [rising star](#), Dan Mullen, who came to Starkville from Florida, where he was offensive coordinator for head coach Urban Meyer, and mentor to Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow. While at Florida from 2005-08, Mullen and the Gators won two national championships – 2006 and 2008. In each of the championship seasons, UF was 13-1, while the Gators were 44-9 overall while Mullen was in Gainesville. Prior to coming to UF in 2005, Mullen spent two seasons (2003-04) with

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<sup>1</sup> BCS ranking referred to here is dated 31-Oct-2010.

Meyer at Utah, where he served as quarterbacks coach. During Mullen's two seasons in Salt Lake City, the Utes were 22-2 overall, including a 12-0 season in 2004 wherein the school won the Fiesta Bowl, a game in which Mullen served as offensive coordinator. The 10-2 season at Utah included a shutout victory against Jeff Bower's USM squad in the Liberty Bowl. Before Utah, Mullen served as Meyer's assistant at Bowling Green State, where the two led BGS to an impressive 17-6 record overall (2001-02).



Mullen with Tebow



Mentor (Meyer) at end of 2010 home loss to protégé (Mullen)

Since Mullen departed Gainesville for Starkville, Florida's offensive punch has steadily weakened, a trend not lost on most UF fans. Some would say that the arrival of Mullen, and the thrilling ride that the MSU athletics department is enjoying from his presence, is simply part of the *return* to the *giving* that Keenum's program represents. Some in the MSU family might also say that Keenum's *presence*, not just his *program*, is just as rewarding.