

Part 3. "Freshman Class Reviews" ... Coach Bill Curry 1987 – 1989

Coach Bill Curry began his BAMA career in early January 1987. His selection as Head Coach surprised many BAMA faithful. The choice of a non-BAMA man as Head Coach was difficult for most to accept. His short three-year coaching era was filled with uneasiness and a constant battle to earn the respect of the BAMA family. IMO ... Coach Curry's decision to bring basically his entire staff from GA TECH is a key mistake he made. If he had selected a few assistants with a BAMA background, it would have helped with his acceptance. In 1989, with Offensive Coordinator / QB Coach Homer Smith running a very popular high octane offense, Defensive Coordinator Coach Don Lindsey's defense continued to struggle. IMO ... if Coach Curry had replaced Lindsey with a BAMA man and new defensive staff, he possibly could have survived. His zero life-time wins against Auburn was also a key negative. But the one item that even today is still debated is his recruiting ability and his results at BAMA. I'll try to provide facts that you'll find very interesting and deceiving.

One fact is Coach Ray Perkins left Curry a large number of super young players from the 1985 / 1986 recruiting classes. Coach Curry took full advantage of that talent in their junior and senior years in 1988 and 1989. But in his first year, he led a team coming off 9-2-1 and 10-3 seasons and loaded with young talent to a 7-5 season. This also got his BAMA era off to a negative start.

Coach Perkins departure was sudden so a strong effort had already been spent on securing prospects for what would have been Perkins third straight outstanding class. Many top prospects were committed to BAMA when Curry arrived. Curry accomplished little after his late arrival with that 1987 class. Coach Curry's recruiting era is filled with near misses on several big time signees. It seems Coach Curry led the nation in being the second choice of numerous big time prospects. The problem from this was when he lost out, he seemed to never have a solid backup to fall back on, so several "sleepers" were taken in the end.

The 1992 NC team had several starters from Curry's classes. Several were solid and consistent performers, but not spectacular. There is a much publicized statement used by many Curry supporters. It has been stated that Coach Stallings won the 1992 National Championship with Coach Curry's signees. A few facts that I gathered helped me form my opinion on this topic. One fact that supports this statement is that of the 22 players that started the 1992 National Championship game against Miami, 14 were Curry signees ... seven from the 1988 class and seven from the 1989 class. The deceiving fact about this scenario is Coach Stallings coaching philosophy caused much of this to be perceived this way. These 14 players were seniors and 5th year seniors on the 1992 team. Coach Stallings had a strong commitment to playing upperclassmen even if their talent level was less than a younger backup. The fact is the 1992 NC team had a tremendous blend of young and old. Several older players were not spectacular but consistent performers and great team leaders. Coach Stallings mixed in some outstanding athletes on defense and skill players on offense from his 1991 and 1992 classes. Many close games were won that magical year and the young Stallings signees produced many key plays in those victories.

I've always thought that statement is one of the most deceiving statements used by many BAMA faithful in defense of Coach Curry's recruiting efforts. So IMO ... it took both coaches signees to claim that long overdue National Championship. Again, that is just my personal opinion based on the facts I know about both coaches and the players on the 1992 team.

Ratings for 1987 -- 1989 Recruiting Classes

	<u>INCOMING</u>	<u>OUTGOING</u>
1987.....	3.8 *Average.....	2.8 *Poor
1988.....	3.4 *Average.....	2.9 *Average
1989.....	3.8 *Average.....	3.4 *Excellent

For the second time since I started my ratings a class achieved an excellent outgoing rating. The 1989 class had a 3.4 outgoing rating and was the upperclassmen on the 1992 SEC Championship team and 1992 National Champions. A trend is now visible. The 1986 class that achieved an excellent rating won the 1989 SEC Championship and made a run at a NC as upperclassmen. This 1989 class with an excellent outgoing rating, also won a SEC Championship and got their National Championship as upperclassmen in 1992. At this point, the doubt I had about the accuracy of my rating system really ended. Great classes have produced championships both times the excellent number was achieved.

Part 4. Coach Stallings Classes 1990 - 1994 - Will E-Mail Tuesday 12-7-99 (Maybe- G).
My E-Mail address: eddiesaint@aol.com

1987 Freshman Class

INCOMING ANALYSIS AND RATING -- 3.8 *Average

Coach Curry and staff began recruiting in early January 1987. No one on the staff had a reputation as an “ace” recruiter. They had come from GA TECH with Coach Curry and were now pursuing prospects for a prominent football and academic school. The tough academics standards for admission and status of GA TECH football had these assistants involved with an entirely different group of prospects than BAMA. Starting only weeks before signing day, they tried to pickup the relationships with kids BAMA was recruiting and secure what was to be Perkins 3rd consecutive great class. It turned out to be a difficult task. Due to a very young roster, less than 20 scholarships were available. Coach Perkins already had several key in-state commitments and thanks to that Coach Curry avoided a disastrous signing day. The key signees that Curry secured from his GA TECH background were C Jody Dowda from GA, OL Walt Underwood from Kentucky, and LB Tony Cox of GA. I must point out that Coach Jimmy Fuller, a holdover from the Perkins staff and a BAMA man, was instrumental in keeping the committed players in the fold during the transition

This class had an incoming rating of 3.8 *(Average). There were 18 signees in this class, but one promising LB from Birmingham had to give up football before reporting due to an injury. Terry Langston was a very promising prospect. I list him in this class, but do not include him in the ratings. Of the 17 signees, I gave 4 a “5” rating. Only 11 of 17 signees (58%) rated a “4” plus (80% a good rating). Also, 13 of 17 signees were LBS and linemen.

The most celebrated signee was PK Phillip Doyle from Birmingham. He was a Parade and USA Today high school All-American. The signee that really had everyone excited was LB Keith McCants from Mobile. This athletic prospect was in the mold of Cornelius Bennett. DE Steve Webb from Holt was a highly rated signee and with Doyle and McCants gave BAMA three of the top prospects in the state. Out of state signees I gave a “5” rating were OL Russ McCullough from Kansas and C Jody Dowda from GA.

OUTGOING ANALYSIS AND RATING -- 2.8 *Poor

This class had an outgoing rating of 2.8 *(Poor). It is another unique class. The class had only 8 of 17 signees (47%) contribute “3” plus careers (60% a good rating). The most significant negative factor for this class of 17 was the number of “1” rated players (never arrived, left, quit, ect.) When you include Terry Langston , 10 of 18 signing day players never completed their 4-5 year careers.

PK Phillip Doyle arrived a highly rated prospect and did not disappoint. He was a 2-time All-American and All-SEC selection. "THE KICK" is one of BAMA'S greatest moments as his clutch FG beat the UT VOLS in K-ville. LB Keith McCants was an All-American and All-SEC performer that left early for the NFL. I do not penalize a player's rating for leaving early for the NFL. You would hope to sign several players with that talent and ability. The only other All-SEC player from this class was DL George Thornton. Two players that contributed outstanding careers but did not reach all-star status were DE Steve Webb and FB Kevin Turner. Popular WR Craig Sanderson was outstanding when healthy, but two knee injuries hampered his career. All three key Curry signees, Dowda, Underwood, and Cox, never contributed at BAMA.

This class was a part of the 1989 SEC Championship team. In truth this class was killed by attrition as 9 of 17 players did not complete their careers. Then add the early NFL departure of McCants and the misfortunate Craig Sanderson with 2 knee injuries, you have 11 of 17 players that did not contribute full 4-5 year careers. This class does not have the lowest outgoing rating since 1980, but probably contributed less to the program than any class.

1987 Class – Bill Curry						
Name	Pos.	St.	Incoming Rating	Outgoing Rating	Honors	NFL
Sam Atkins	OL	AL	3	1		
Scott Bolt	OL	AL	4	1		
Tony Cox	LB	GA	3	1		
Jody Dowda	OL	GA	5	1		
Phillip Doyle	K	AL	5	6	A-A (2), SEC (2)	
Stacy Harrison	DB	GA	3	4		
Ben Holt	OL	AL	2	1		
Tim Matheny	OL	AL	2	1		
Keith McCants	LB	AL	5	6	A-A, SEC	*
Russ McCullough	DE	KS	4	1		
Steve Ramer	LB	AL	4	1		
Craig Sanderson	WR	AL	4	4		
Byron Sneed	DE	VA	4	3		
George Thornton	DT	AL	4	5	SEC	
Kevin Turner	FB	AL	3	5		*
Walter Underwood	OL	KS	4	1		
Steve Webb	OL	AL	5	5		
Terry Langston	LB	AL			Injury before reporting	
Overall			3.8	2.8	A-A (2), SEC (3)	2

1988 Freshman Class

INCOMING ANALYSIS AND RATING -- 3.4 * Poor

Coach Curry went into his second recruiting year with some valuable experience from the 1987 signing period. One thing he learned was the media and fans take recruiting very serious at BAMA. The 1987 class was small and several signees had already left or never showed up. Well, his second recruiting campaign was going to be difficult also. At BAMA, you get many in-state signees because of state allegiance and family backgrounds. Well, this particular year there was a very poor in-state group of prospects. Curry needed a strong and deep class and had to pursue prospects across the nation to meet those needs. On signing day, 15 of 28 signees were from outside the state. Coach Curry and staff were in the running for several top rated national prospects, but in the end, BAMA came in second place. But, the key is Curry showed the ability to get involved with these national prospects and be a finalist for their signature. The majority of these big time prospects didn't make their decision until very late in the recruiting period. This led to a negative situation for Coach Curry. The players we had to fall back on (the B list) were primarily "3" and "2" rated prospects. So this class is heavy with "sleeper" type players.

This class had an incoming rating of 3.4 * (Poor). Of the 28 signees, 15 are rated "4" plus (54%) ... (80% a good rating). I gave only 3 of 28 signees a "5" rating. As you can see very few highly rated prospects were signed. Also, due to a need for early contributors, we signed two JC players.

Of the three "5" rated players signed, only one was from in-state. Big OL Charles Dare from Enterprise was considered the #2 rated prospect in the state behind #1 prospect and Auburn signee OL Ed King. The other two "5" rated signees were the only out of state blue chips we secured from the group of approximately 10 that we were in their final two choices. DB Charles Gardner from CA surprised many by signing with the TIDE. The other signee was RB Derrick Owens from NY, the player of the year in NY. Later in his career he added Lassic to his name. The remainder of the class was rated very average overall. One player I rated a "4" that several insiders were excited about was a big pure athlete. OLB Eric Curry from GA had a combination of great size (6-6, 210) with outstanding speed (4.75 / 40).

OUTGOING ANALYSIS AND RATING -- 2.9 *(Average)

There is some very interesting facts to mention about this class. The outgoing rating for this class was 2.9 *(Average). Of 28 signees, 14 (50%) contributed “4” plus careers. The ratings for this class are insignificant because of some very unique and memorable accomplishments.

The only player in this class to make All-American was DE Eric Curry. He also was a 2-time All-SEC selection. He came in at BAMA an OLB with great speed. His growth, along with work in the weight room, pushed him to the DE position. While he got bigger and stronger, he never lost his 4.75 speed. As a senior he teamed with fellow All-American DE John Copeland as the corner stones of one of the all-time great defenses at BAMA and in the nation. That defense led BAMA to the 1992 National Championship.

RB Derrick Owens-Lassic was an All-SEC selection and the starting TB on the 1992 NC team. He turned in a spectacular performance in that game and did the best impression of Fred Sanford’s “Elizabeth, I’m having the big one” after a key TD run. That little act and his penalty for spinning the ball after a first half run, will be a couple items for the archives. The key thing I’ll remember about Lassic. He ran HARD that NC game night and put it all on the line for a CHAMPIONSHIP!

Another All-SEC selection was LB Derrick Oden. Many people have stated that he was so significant to the success of the 1992 defense as it’s leader and motivator. Also, making All-SEC was OL George Wilson. His unique story is special. He was the son of former TIDE player Butch Wilson. Early in his career, he accidentally shot himself in the foot. He crawled a long distance to get help and probably saved his life. Part of the foot was missing. He worked his way back with the help of a special shoe. He started on the OL on the 1992 NC team. He was a solid performer and inspiration to many over coming the severe injury to start on that NC team. LB John Sullins was a 2-time All-SEC selection and 4 year contributor. Two key performers on the 1992 NC team made tremendous contributions to that championship with their blocking. FB Martin Houston led the way for RB Derrick Lassic. TE Steve Buskey also provided outstanding blocking for BAMA’s physical running attack. Highly rated OL Charles Dare never developed and contributed very little at BAMA.

This class had seven players start in the 1992 NC game. Eric Curry, Martin Houston, Derrick Oden, Derrick Owens-Lassic, Steve Buskey, George Wilson and Prince Wimbley. They were all 5th year seniors. As I mentioned earlier, Coach Stallings passion and desire to start veteran players over younger backups even if they have less talent, was very prevalent on the 1992 NC team. These 5-year seniors were great team leaders and had a desire and passion to win. Great team chemistry and leadership was a major factor in winning that National Championship. I have a special rating for this class These 5th year seniors get a “10” for the intangibles they contributed to that 1992 SEC and National Championship team!

1988 Class – Bill Curry						
Name	Pos.	St.	Incoming Rating	Outgoing Rating	Honors	NFL
William Amelong (JC)	LB	CA	4	3		
Steve Busky	TE	MD	3	4		
Mike Campbell	DB	AL	3	2		
Chip Chester	P	FL	4	1		
Chris Cochran	LB	TN	3	2		
Eric Curry	DE	GA	4	6	A-A, SEC (2)	*
Charlie Dare	OL	AL	5	2		
Donnie Finkley	WR	AL	2	3		
Charles Gardner	SS	CA	5	4		
Darren Greenwood	DB	AL	4	1		
Craig Harris	RB	FL	3	2		
Rodney Helton	LB	TN	3	1		
Martin Houston	FB	AL	3	5		
Johnny Howard	OL	AL	4	2		
Robert Jones	RB	AL	3	1		
Keith Neighbors	LB	AL	2	2		
Derrick Oden	LB	AL	4	5	SEC	*
Derrick Owens-Lassic	RB	NY	5	5	SEC	*
Mike Ramil (JC)	DE	CA	4	3		
Bragg Rockwell	LB	AL	3	2		
John Sullins	LB	MS	3	6	SEC (2)	
Derrick Warren	TE	FL	3	3		
Eric Washington	DB	FL	2	1		
Brett Welborn	OL	AL	4	1		
Billy Whitehill	DT	TX	3	1		
George Wilson	OL	AL	4	5	SEC	
Prince Wimbley	WR	FL	2	4		
Danny Woodson	QB	AL	3	4		
Overall			3.4	2.9	A-A (1), SEC (5)	3

1989 Freshman Class

INCOMING ANALYSIS AND RATING -- 3.8 * Average

Coach Curry's third and last class at BAMA was just like the 1988 class. His staff was once again in on 10-12 of the top players in America. The top player in America RB Terry Kirby from VA, DE Alonzo Spellman of OH, QB Kenny Felder from FL, and several others teased BAMA but signed elsewhere. Also, the players Curry dropped back to were again not highly rated. He did sign a couple of big time prospects again in this class. So, after 3 years, Curry was not very successful at signing the top prospects he and his staff pursued. What Curry did sign in this class and the 1988 class were numerous kids with character and desire to excel in life and football. The amazing fact is, this is exactly the type player Curry was and he probably was comfortable with these kids and could see his characteristics in them. But, the numbers show, year end and year out the perennial football powers sign large numbers of big time prospects each year. I will provide some numbers in part 5 to support that.

This class had an incoming rating of 3.8 *(Average). Of the 22 signees, 14 are rated "4" plus (64%). (A good rating is 80% of class). I gave only three signees a "5" rating. That means in Curry's 3-year era, I gave only 10 signees a "5" rating. There were two big losses in this class. DL John Copeland did not have the academics to get in school and headed to JC. A really sad tragedy was LB Deon McLeod's death. Compared to Cornelius Bennett in size and speed, he dominated the AL / MS all-star game and was thought to be a star of the future. Shortly before fall practice he was killed in an automobile accident. These two players would have added a lot to this class. Also, two excellent JC players were signed for immediate help.

A Parade All-American LB from TN headed this class. Antonio London arrived highly rated and compared to Derrick Thomas. JC All-American RB Siran Stacy was signed for immediate help at the RB position. The other "5" rated prospect was C Chip Garner from GA. The top rated center in the South. The other JC signee, DB Efrum Thomas from CA was highly thought of by the coaches. Other notable signees were OL William Barger, LB Lemanski Hall, and DB George Teague from in-state. Key out of state signees were RB Irving Spikes from MS and DL Todd Chandler from FL.

OUTGOING ANALYSIS AND RATING -- 3.4 * Excellent

For the second time since 1980, an “excellent” outgoing rating was achieved. This 1989 class had several players improve substantially from signing day to their senior year. Two of the three “5” signees fulfilled their incoming expectations. Four “4” rated signees finished with “6” rated careers. That many 4’s to 6’s had not happened since I started in 1980. The outgoing rating for this class was 3.4 * (Excellent). Of 22 signees, 13 (59%) rated a “4” plus career. (80% a good rating). The class produced two All-Americans and along with five others a total of 7 All-SEC selections.

RB Siran Stacy provided the immediate impact you hope JC players can produce. He was an All-American and 2-time All-SEC selection. After a great season in 1989, he injured a knee 1990 and was lost for the entire year. He came back in 1991 with another outstanding year. The other All-American was DB George Teague. He also was a 2-time All-SEC selection and starter on the 1992 NC team. The play he made in the NC game running down Lamar Thomas and taking the ball away is one of BAMA’s all-time greatest plays and film clips. He’s so fast that it looks like fast forward is on. By the way, it’s the most famous play that did not count, there was a penalty. The other JC signee contributed the impact BAMA needed. DB Efrum Thomas was a 2-time All-SEC selection.

Other “6” rated all-star performers were LB Lemanski Hall and C Tobie Shields, both 2-time All-SEC and starters on the NC team. LB Antonio London and DL Jeremy Nunley were All-SEC selections and part of the great defensive squad in 1992. Another notable career was contributed by OL Matt Hammond. He was a 4-year starter at tackle. Every year he was to lose his starting job, but every year he held on to it. OL William Barger contributed early in his career. WR Kevin Lee and OL Roosevelt Patterson were starters on the 1992 NC team. BAMA coaches had found weakness in the heralded Miami defense. BAMA ran the trap play on the left side behind Patterson all night. It was never contained as Patterson played the game of his life.

Like the 1988 class, seven starters on the 1992 NC team were from this class. Lemanski Hall, Matt Hammond, Kevin Lee, Antonio London, Roosevelt Patterson, Tobie Shiels, and George Teague. This 1989 class and the 1988 class together produced three All-Americans. Those three plus 9 more players gave the combined classes 12 All-SEC players. Like the 1988 class, several of these players may not have been the most talented, but were the type performers Coach Stallings wanted on the field and they produced a SEC and National Championship.

In closing, Coach Bill Curry’s recruiting era was filled with near misses on some of the top prospects in America. The perennial powers get those type players every year. In the long run, his continual misfortune with these prospects would have hurt us, but staying only three years didn’t hurt us especially following Coach Perkins two great classes in 1985 and 1986. To his credit, he did sign numerous players with great character and a desire to win. “The Bear” called these type players “WINNERS”!!!

1989 Class – Bill Curry						
Name	Pos.	St.	Incoming Rating	Outgoing Rating	Honors	NFL
William Barger	OL	AL	4	4		
Roderick Bradford	LB	AL	4	1		
Todd Chandler	DT	FL	4	1		
John Clay	LB	TN	4	4		
Lorenzo Cole	WR	AL	3	2		
Ervin Collier	DT	FL	4	1		
Chip Garner	OL	GA	5	1		
Lemanski Hall	LB	AL	4	6	SEC (2)	
Matt Hammond	OL	AL	3	5		
Kevin Lee	WR	AL	3	4		*
Victor Lockett	LB	AL	3	3		
Antonio London	LB	TN	5	5	SEC	*
Jeremy Nunley	DT	TN	3	5	SEC	*
Roosevelt Patterson	OL	AL	4	4		
Junior Sewell	RB	AL	3	1		
Toby Shields	OL	AL	4	6	SEC (2)	
Irving Spikes	RB	MS	4	1		*
Siran Stacy (JC)	RB	KS	5	6	A-A, SEC (2)	*
Ray Stanton	QB	NY	4	1		
George Teague	DB	AL	4	6	A-A, SEC (2)	*
Efrum Thomas (JC)	DB	CA	4	6	SEC (2)	
Shon Thomas	WR	AL	2	1		
Deon McLeod	DE	AL			Died	
Overall			3.8	3.4	A-A (2), SEC (7)	6

RATING FACTORS

INCOMING RATING

In the early 80's, there were very few recruiting publications available. I ordered Joe Terranova in 1980 because he was generally regarded as the National expert. Blue Chips out of California was also a National publication I ordered. I used newspapers like the Atlanta J-C and B'Ham P-H for the Southeastern list and ratings. In the following years, I subscribed to Max Enfinger for a National list. In the South, Forrest Davis came on the scene and finally in the late 80's numerous publications became available. The best of which IMO was and still is Pigskin Preps. Barry Holland and I are from North Alabama and learned of each other's interest in recruiting. We shared information and many phone calls for years. Then Barry and Freddie Kirby started Pigskin Preps, a very accurate recruiting publication was created. Freddie is a "walking computer" full of recruiting information. Many of you know him and will agree. These guys got me started going to T-Town to observe prospects on their official visits and it remains an annual ritual.

My incoming ratings are based on a 1 to 5 scale with a "5" rating the highest. A "5" rated player is basically a top 75 prospect in the Southeast or a top 200 player in the nation. Each year I get several different lists of ratings for high school prospects, then give each signee an incoming rating based on those sources. I then take those individual ratings and average them for a "class incoming rating". I consider a class incoming rating of 4.0 to 4.1 as good. It requires 80% of the total class to be rated a "4" or above to achieve that number.

CLASS RATING SCALE

3.6 – less Poor
3.7 – 3.9 Average
4.0 – 4.1 Good
4.2 – above ... Excellent

OUTGOING RATING

I created my own rating system based on factors I personally believe distinguish a career. Positive factors would be fulfilling 4-5 year commitment, contributing with significant playing time for multiple years, starter multiple years, and of course achieving all-star status. Negative factors would be not staying with the program for a full 4-5 years and no significant playing time during entire career.

My outgoing ratings are based on a 1 to 6 scale with a "6" rating the highest. A "6" rated player is your All-American or multiple All-SEC selections. After giving each original class member an outgoing career rating, I average the individual ratings for a "class outgoing rating". I consider a 3.2 to 3.3 to be a good class rating. It requires approximately 60% of the entire class to contribute a "3" rated career or above. Even today, most coaches consider that to be good overall contribution from a recruiting class.

RATING SCALE – PLAYER

"1" Never reported, quit, didn't complete full 4-5 year commitment
"2" On squad, limited playing contribution
"3" Part-time starter, backup on 2-deep depth chart
"4" Starter multiple years, significant contribution
"5" All-SEC one year, Impact player
"6" All-American or multiple All-SEC selection

CLASS RATING SCALE

2.8 – less Poor
2.9 – 3.1 Average
3.2 – 3.3 Good
3.4 - above .. Excellent