

## OPINION: Florida's Football Team is a Title Contender

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I know, I know. Eye roll. *Yeah, right. A team that went 4-7 last season a title contender?* But really, they are.

It's out with the old and in with the new.

Out with the coach that would rather eat a bag of Lays on his couch than coach his football team. Out with the coach who lied on national television about getting death threats, because he just knew his team was just that bad.

In with the coach who was the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach when Florida won two national titles and Tim Tebow won the Heisman trophy. In with the coach who was the national college football coach of the year in 2014, the same year he won honors as the SEC coach of the year. Mullen is the game changer for the Gators.

Mullen is no newbie to developing quarterbacks, and he will have four potential options at Florida. He coached Alex Smith at Utah, who was the number one overall NFL draft pick. Not to mention Dak Prescott, who Mullen turned from a three-star prospect into a dual threat NFL quarterback. He also coached Josh Harris, Omar Jacobs, and Nick Fitzgerald- who was only a two star prospect- into success. Did I mention he tutored Tim Tebow? Go ahead and add Felipe Franks or Emory Jones to that future list. Jones is a true freshman dual-threat quarterback- just the type Mullen coaches well. Just like Dak Prescott. A Florida team with a Mullen-mentored quarterback? Unstoppable.

Mullen had a 67-44 overall record at Mississippi State- the highest win percentage of any coach for the Bulldogs in 65 years. No one thought Mississippi State would ever be that good of a program- just like many believe Florida won't be now. He also led them to their first bowl game since 2007, and led them to eight bowl games in a row, setting a school record. The Bulldogs were ranked No.1 during the regular season for the first time in history under Mullen-only six teams have been ranked No.1 since 2014. Mullen turns programs around.

Mullen's last three classes have ranked 28<sup>th</sup> nationally at worst, so recruiting won't be an issue. 22 players have been chosen for the NFL draft under Mullen in the last eight years. MSU had seven first or second round picks in the last seven NFL drafts. In the eight drafts before Mullen? Zero. Again, the difference is Dan.

He's a coach that has been extremely successful at Florida in the past- and can easily bring back the *déjà vu*. In the 2006 National Championship game, Mullen's offense scored 41 points against an Ohio State team that had held opponents to less than 11 points a game during the season. In 2007 under Mullen, the Gators were the only ones in the country to rush and pass for a touchdown in *every* game of the season, not to mention scoring on over half their drives. In 2008, his offense was ranked third nationally in scoring, the same season they rushed for a school record 41 touchdowns.

The team itself will certainly be better. With Doug Nussmeier gone, the offense finally has hope, especially with a coach who is an expert in offense. All five offensive line starters are returning. An

improved offense will mean the defense won't be about to pass out after the first quarter of every game, so they can actually do their job. The gators will have new additions David Reese, a four star linebacker, and safety Amari Burney.

They will also utilize running back Lamical Perine, who finished with 562 yards and 8 touchdowns last season. Fresh faces include Dameon Pierce and Iverson Clement who joined Florida in December, and can show their talent on the field in August.

Mullen brings a culture with him too- a culture of winning and excitement. He wants players to give relentless effort on the field and in the classroom. He's determined to get everyone excited and involved. He has spoken to fraternities and sororities, ran with the ROTC, and spoken in multiple classes. When players missed classes, he made them run sprints- and Mullen ran with them. These are things Jim McElwain never cared to do.

The culture that surrounds Florida football is a national championship culture. They had over 53 thousand fans at their spring game after such a horrific season. Other teams in the south didn't even have a spring game. There is no feeling like being in the swamp: the sea of blue and orange, chomping your hands together as loud as you can, being surrounded by ecstatic fans. It's even better when the head coach embodies the excitement. Mullen's optimism and skill translates on the field, and there is no doubt the team will feel it this season.

It's time to bring back the glory days.