

thoughts on SEC CoY

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Who is the SEC's Coach of the Year?

It would be easy to say it's Vanderbilt's James Franklin. But nothing is easy in the SEC. Ask any football coach about that.

Franklin has some stiff competition for the honor.

You can make a solid case for Franklin and three other coaches, and none of them have their teams playing in the SEC Championship Game.

Franklin is gaining national attention for the transformation occurring in Vanderbilt's football program.

Vanderbilt is 8-4 in Franklin's second season. The Commodores are bowl-bound for the second straight year, a first in school history. They overcame a 1-3 start, losing four of their first six games. The schedule became easier and Vanderbilt ran off six straight wins to end the season.

Of Vandy's eight wins, not one team finished the season with a winning record. Only 6-6 Ole Miss is going to a bowl. The eight teams Vanderbilt defeated had a combined record of 29-66.

But the job Franklin did was much more than wins and losses. He infused a winning attitude in a program that had been a SEC whipping post for years.

Franklin inherited a shrinking, aging fan base. He gave them hope and the results they longed for. Vandy Nation is now a proud and growing fan base. He got the administration off its haunches, providing funding for a number of long overdue facility additions and improvements.

Teams searching for coaching replacements have Franklin on their wish list. He says he is going to finish what he started, and that is to make Vanderbilt a special place to play football.

We would be remiss to ignore the job Kevin Sumlin did in his first year at Texas A&M. You talk about transition. Sumlin not only took a new job, it was one that required him to make his maiden voyage in the SEC, home of the last six national champions.

The Aggies were 10-2, losing only to SEC heavyweights Florida by three and LSU by five. They upset defending national champion and undefeated No. 1 Alabama, 29-24 in the Tide's backyard.

Unlike Franklin, Sumlin had a previous track record as a head coach. His Houston team won a school record 12 games in 2011. At Houston, Sumlin was 35-17 and took his team to three bowl games.

Sumlin earned his spurs five years under Oklahoma's Bob Stoops. Before that he worked two years for R.C. Slocum at Texas A&M as assistant head coach and offensive coordinator. The 48-year-old Indianapolis native walked on at Purdue and led the team in tackles as a senior.

In my mind it's a two-way beauty contest between Franklin and Sumlin. There are others in the discussion.

We are not discounting the job Hugh Freeze did at Ole Miss, which has been a coaching carousel. The team was 7-18 the two years before Freeze was hired.

You could also make a case for the Head Ball Coach, Steve Spurrier. OK, so we were high

school buddies and remain friends.

Now 67 years old, HBC won 10 games for the second year in a row. Never before done at South Carolina. He won 10 despite losing star running back Marcus Lattimore for much of the season and starting quarterback, Connor Shaw, part of the year.

I give an ever-slight edge to Sumlin, with Franklin first runner-up. How about you?

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