

## Gators, 'Noles May Move Up '97 Game

November 25, 1996 | By CHRIS HARRY Gainesville Bureau and Alan Schmadtke of the Tallahassee bureau contributed to this report.

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GAINESVILLE — The Florida-Florida State contract will expire with the conclusion of Saturday's [football game](#) at Tallahassee. What lies ahead for this state's premier rivalry? Well, the only agreement between the parties is that the game should not be played under current circumstances.

Here's why:

-- Florida wants an open date before the first Saturday in December in the event the Gators reach the Southeastern Conference championship [game](#), something they have done all five years the event has been staged.

- -- Florida State likes the distraction the SEC title game provides UF but hates the fact that Florida reworked its 1996 schedule to have an open date the week before facing the Seminoles. That's an extra seven days of rest and preparation for the Gators.

Florida Athletic Director Jeremy Foley and Florida State Athletic Director Dave Hart have been involved in contract negotiations since 1994.

"We said from Day 1 that each school has a wish list and that through the process of any negotiation there has to be some give and take on both sides," Foley said. "Dave Hart and I have a tremendous relationship, and I think we'll come out of this with a situation satisfactory to both schools."

A tentative four-year agreement to move the game to the Saturday before Thanksgiving, thus satisfying the top concerns of both schools, has been reached.

"We have to start printing tickets and schedule cards for 1997 in the next few weeks," Foley said. "We continue to talk, and we'll make any announcement at the appropriate time. It won't be game week, I can tell you that, because neither of us needs the distraction."

Whenever the announcement comes, it won't be what UF coach Steve Spurrier wants to hear. Spurrier has long been an advocate of playing the game early in the season, allowing the Gators to concentrate on, and emphasize, their Southeastern Conference opponents.

"The biggest game of our season is the SEC championship game, if we're fortunate enough to get in it," Spurrier said. "It'd be fairer to our players to play [FSU] earlier in the year."

A season-opening, Florida-FSU game would be a college [football](#) event, but too many principals, such

as school officials, boosters and fans from both sides, like the game at the end of the year in rivalry season.

So the next best thing for Spurrier and, consequently, Seminoles coach Bobby Bowden, is to play a week earlier.

For three years, Foley has lobbied FSU to move the game up a week. The Seminoles, citing UF's double-whammy disadvantage, said no.

So last fall, Foley took matters upon himself. He threw an extra \$100,000 at Southwestern Louisiana, originally scheduled to face the Gators on Saturday, in return for moving their non-conference date to an Aug. 31 season opener.

In reaction, FSU attempted to move its game against Maryland, but contract obligations with Raycom, which bought the game from Maryland and moved it to Miami, prevented any switch. That meant the Seminoles will finish the season playing six consecutive Saturdays.





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