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Open date gives Clemson Tigers deserved mental health days

Manie Robinson 10/11/2018



© BART BOATWRIGHT/Staff Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney after the Tigers 63-3 win over Wake Forest at BB&T Field in Winston Salem, N.C. Saturday, October 6, 2018.

Open dates have been relished for the opportunity they grant teams to heal. Practices can be lightened.

Rest can be ordered. Injuries can be nursed.

In recent years, research and simple earnest observation have revealed that treating athletes' mental health is equally important to physical therapy.

Toward that end, the open date could not have fallen at a better time for Clemson. The Tigers endured two challenging ordeals through the previous two weeks. The unexpected departure of senior quarterback Kelly Bryant preceded the unexpected death of former running back C.J. Fuller.



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Bryant elected to transfer after freshman Trevor Lawrence was promoted to starter. Clemson was forced to reconfigure its quarterback depth chart. Chase Brice was elevated to backup. Star receiver Hunter Renfrow, a dazzling triple-option quarterback in high school, split time between the wideout and quarterback rooms.

Lawrence suffered a neck injury in the first half of Clemson's next game and did not return. Brice was thrust into the lineup. He

navigated the nerve-racking scenario, orchestrated a desperate comeback and salvaged Clemson's College Football Playoff hopes.



© BART BOATWRIGHT/Staff, Clemson quarterback Chase Brice (7) plays against Georgia Southern during the 4th quarter Saturday, September 15, 2018, at Clemson's Memorial Stadium.

The following Wednesday, Fuller passed away, less than a year after his final carry at Clemson. The tragic news rocked his former coaches and teammates. It affected none more than the running backs unit, including senior Adam Choice, who arrived at Clemson with Fuller.

The running backs channeled their sorrow into 462 rushing yards and six touchdowns during Clemson's 63-3 rout of Wake Forest. Choice notched a career-high 128 yards. He had never rushed for more than 100 yards in a game. The Tigers savored that victory with heavy hearts and celebrated Fuller's life the following day at a memorial service.

More: Clemson should run first, ask questions later

The young body is resilient. Combined with the advancements in treatment and technology, young players can recover rapidly from physical injuries. The mind is also resilient, but it needs ample time to recover.

The Tigers can utilize this week simply to decompress. They can visit their homes for a respite, embrace their loved ones and recharge their spirits.

They can reset their minds, hearts and bodies in preparation for the arduous journey ahead.

Clemson's path to the Playoff cleared some last week. The group of undefeated contenders withered as Oklahoma and Louisiana State suffered their first losses. Texas A&M, which Clemson defeated in Week 2, edged Kentucky and cracked the Top 25 of the Amway *USA TODAY Sports* coaches poll.

© BART BOATWRIGHT/Staff Clemson linebacker Tre Lamar (57) and defensive lineman Xavier Thomas (3) bring down Wake Forest running back Matt Colburn II (22) during the 1st quarter at BB&T Field in Winston Salem, N.C. Saturday, October 6, 2018.

Clemson, which remained No. 4, also benefits from North Carolina State's victory against Boston College. >
The Wolfpack remained undefeated and climbed from No. 25 to No. 19.

N.C. State also enjoys an open date this week. Thus, Clemson is guaranteed to host a ranked team when the Wolfpack visit next week.

Clemson still cannot recover from a loss, but it received the assistance it needed at the top of the standings. If Clemson sweeps through the remainder of its schedule, it will remain in the Top 4 with Alabama or Georgia, Ohio State and Notre Dame.

The only remaining threat to that neat quorum is undefeated No. 5 West Virginia, which would be rewarded heavily for defeating the overrated Big 12 teams, No. 14 Texas and No. 11 Oklahoma.

The Big 12 reveals the fallacy of the polls. Oklahoma nearly lost to Army and stacked its other wins against Florida Atlantic, UCLA, Iowa State and Baylor. Yet, the Sooners are still ranked ahead of the 5-1 team that defeated them Saturday.

Skewed perception fuels college football, but Clemson can capitalize on it. A perfect record will give Clemson two wins against the vaunted SEC and three wins against ranked foes (Texas A&M, N.C. State and presumably Miami). That should be enough to merit a Playoff spot, period.

Perfection will require clear minds and full focus. It will not be an easy run, but the Tigers can approach the

remainder of the schedule with confidence, presuming the second half of the semester will not be nearly as taxing as the midterm.



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Full screen

Wake Forest head coach Dave Clawson at BB&T Field in Winston Salem, N.C. Saturday, October 6, 2018.

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