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**“Beef Production Strategies” article**

## **Preparing for Fall Calves and Football**

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August in a college town is always one of the most unique times of the year. Freshmen have begun their college careers and the seasoned upperclassmen are reuniting with old friends and making memories. The streets will become busier and most of us will plan to leave for work earlier than usual this month, because – let’s face it – freshmen cannot drive. Across campus momentum is building for football season to begin. Personally, I am trying to learn the coaches and playmakers and converting from Malzahn and Muschamp to Mullen and Prescott. Just like the Bulldogs will have a busy August practicing for football season, Mississippi farmers who fall calve should make necessary changes to prepare for calving season.

Colin Powell once said, “There are no secrets to success – it is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure. For Coach Mullen, preparation for football season has been occurring since last season ended. Just like he selected his key returning players and recruited new ones, you should have already determined which of your cows survived culling and which heifers were “recruited” to the cow herd. Players who don’t perform often times just take up space on the bench. Likewise those open or poor producing cows consume valuable resources. If you expect to play NCAA football after your first season, you had better give it 100% and not cause problems. Those players who are lazy *and* troublemakers get a ticket home. Selection of your dams for this year’s calf crop most likely began last calving season. Did you remember to cull that cow that had a bad quarter or the one that chased you under the truck?

Having the proper tools to win on the field or in the pasture is pertinent to any coach or cattle producer. Proper conditioning is crucial for both athletes and cows. Nutritional requirements increase about 10 to 15 percent in the last 30 to 45 days before calving. Maintain a good nutritional program targeting a body condition score of 5 (moderate condition) at calving for cows and 6 (high moderate condition) at calving for heifers. Do not underfeed females in an attempt to reduce calf birth weight. Would a good coach let his players be deprived of food before the most important game of the year?

One of the most important aspects of football or calving season is record keeping. To begin with any sort of record a roster must be formed. Could you imagine watching a football game if the players didn’t have numbers and names on their jerseys? It would be a nightmare for any coach, fan, or official. It would be impossible to know who performing and who is not. The same holds true for identifying calves. I like to know which calf belongs to which cow and will tag at birth. I realize there is always going to be that calf that takes off running like Ashton Shumpert and is a force to reckon with, but when you get it caught you will know it. Tagging your calves will make record keeping easier and will allow you to know which cows are working the hardest.

As calving season approaches, remember- you are the coach. Your competition is yourself and your goal is to be better than last year. Save one more calf, increase weaning weights, tighten calving season – be better. Yes, there is always going to be the time we have to punt in the red zone, but the drive that got us there will always get us back. Profitability starts here and winning is everything. Good luck this calving season and may you always be on the winning team!

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For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service.