



El Niño This: Winter's Looking Nippy

In an interview Last Week (*Nat Gas Desk*, 10/27), **Andy Weissman made a passing reference to Weather Insight meteorologist Dave Melita as the guy he trusts most on the whole weather thing.** No small claim for Weissman, who puts a lot of emphasis on weather fundamentals for his various economic and commodity price forecasts. You might say that weather inputs put the real doom in Dr. Doom's forecasts.

That said, we thought we'd ping Melita about this El Niño mystery everybody is up in arms about, and his take on the Winter heating season.

"Many of the past El Niños you might have heard about were not El Niños at all," Melita says. "There are different ways to define these events. The so-called big event in '82-83 is actually believed by some scientists to not have been an El Niño at all."

Call us crazy, but we thought these events followed some sort of rigid definition and that only the effects were up for interpretation. According to Melita, everything is up for some measure of interpretation, whether it's an El Niño, or La Niña. La what? For all you science Luddites out there, a La Niña is characterized by unusually cold ocean temperatures in the Eastern equatorial Pacific, as compared to El Niño, which is characterized by unusually warm ocean temperatures in the equatorial Pacific. La Niña tends to bring nearly opposite effects of El Niño to the United States — wetter than normal conditions across the Pacific Northwest and dryer and warmer than normal conditions across much of the southern tier. The impacts of El Niño and La Niña at these latitudes are most clearly seen in the winter. In the continental US, during El Niño years, temperatures in the winter are warmer than normal in the north central states, and cooler than normal in the Southeast and the Southwest. During a La Niña year, winter temperatures are warmer than normal in the Southeast and cooler than normal in the Northwest.

Melita says the current ocean warming situation began last fall, after the last ocean cooling (La Niña) situation. Melita did such a great job calling last winter's weather (unlike the

rest of us) because he interpreted the 2005 La Niña situation as the real deal. The government did not. “We didn’t know it would be the warmest winter on record, but we knew it was going to be quite a bit above average,” he says.

Back in March, his Summer forecast actually nailed almost to the day the blistering hot weather patterns we experienced across the Plains and Midwest. Something to do with a strong monsoon someplace. “All of these events often have strong implications for something else, so they have to be monitored carefully. As for the current, so-called El Niño, I don’t see all the necessary elements in play here. Bottom line is that we don’t see any reason for the trade winds to effectively shut down – for any length of time – that would allow temperatures to get beyond slightly above average. And this is necessary for an El Niño. Trade winds have to cease for a moderate-to-strong El Niño to develop.”

So, no El Niño?

“That’s correct. Besides, we think that even if this is actually a really weak El Niño, there are a lot of other processes out there that are more dominant during the cold Winter months that will overwhelm any signal that might be generated by a weak El Niño.”

So we should all be long gas this winter?

“It’s going to be a cold winter this year. I’m very bullish on a 2002-2003 response for this year...and I’m the last meteorologist you’ll meet who uses analogs as a basis for my analysis or forecasts, simply because I feel the atmosphere will never repeat itself. But the comparisons are really striking between 2002 and what we’re seeing here. We had a transition to a very cold October in 2002. And right now we are coming off the coldest October on record. In 2002, a cold October was followed by moderation in November, just as we’re expecting now. Only this year I think it may be a little less warm in November, but a lot wetter. The cold air amassing in Canada will make the last 10 days of this month look like October. My November map says very cold in early November, moderate temps in the middle two weeks, and cold in the last week leading into early December. Bottom line: I’m very bullish a cold Winter. I hate to sound so extreme, but there it is,” Melita says.

Melita can be reached at dave.melita@weatherinsight.com. As we mentioned in the EIA auction column this week, we suggest you check out Melita’s Eagle Eye forecast newsletter at www.weatherinsight.com.