

SCORE

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Dec. 16, 2011 - Jan. 12, 2012

atlanta

YEAR IN REVIEW

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LEAVE**

RIGHT SAVED

**FALCONS
SOAR**

HOOTERS

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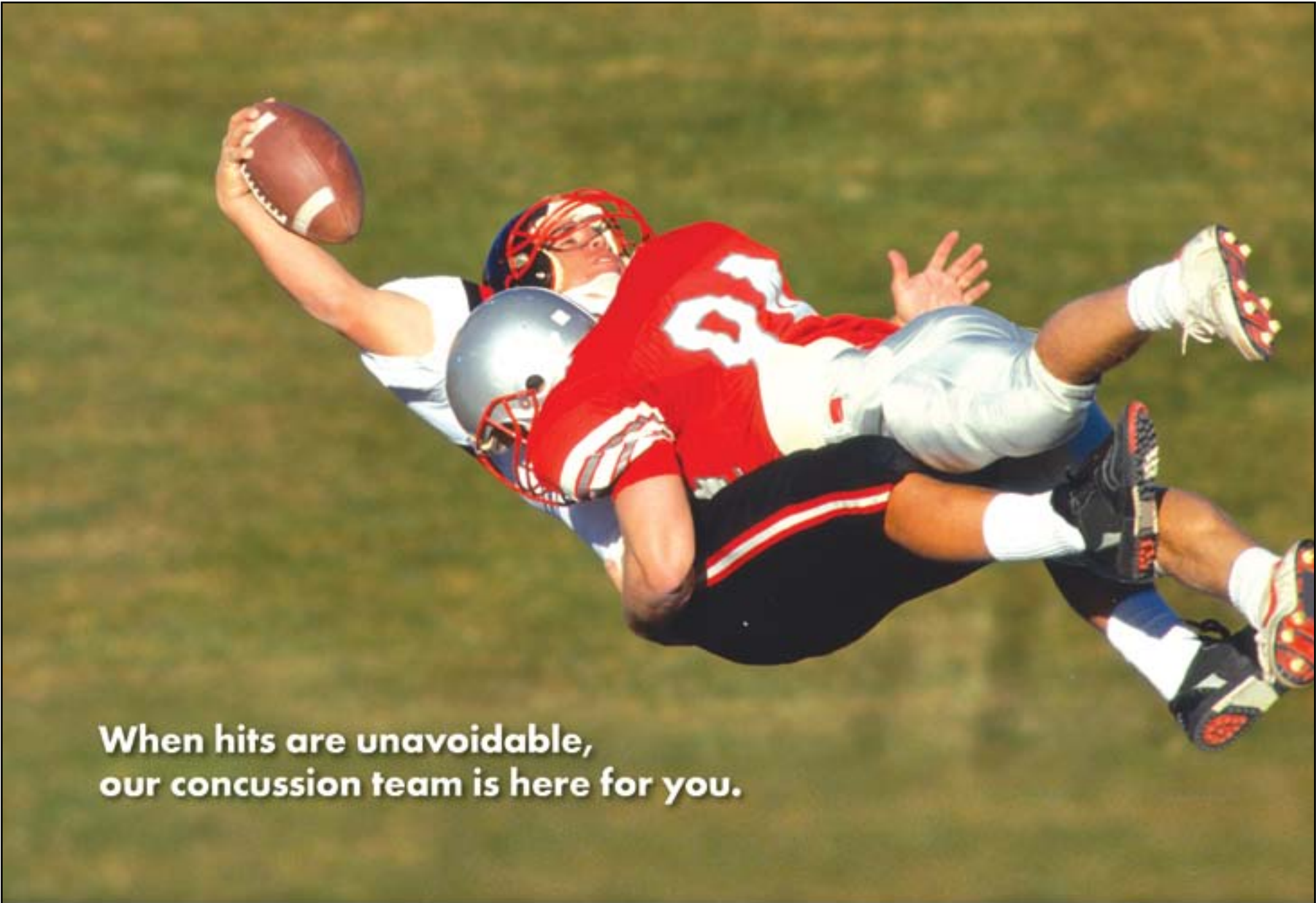
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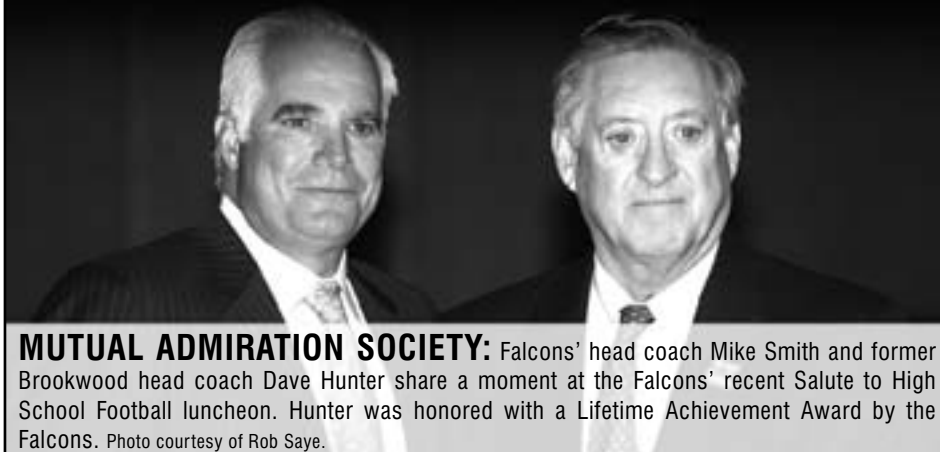
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CAN'T MISS THIS WEEK

- 4** The Fletch recognizes the GPB crew for its work during the GHSA football finals.
- 5** Joe Deighton reviews "the year that was" in metro Atlanta sports.
- 7** In our prep cover story, Fletcher Proctor covers the possible revolution among south Georgia Class A schools.
- 9** Check out our high school hoops and final football rankings!



SHOT OF THE WEEK...



MUTUAL ADMIRATION SOCIETY: Falcons' head coach Mike Smith and former Brookwood head coach Dave Hunter share a moment at the Falcons' recent Salute to High School Football luncheon. Hunter was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Falcons. Photo courtesy of Rob Saye.

TEAM SCOOP AND VOICES

*COVER DESIGN BY DJ GALBIATI
 COVER PHOTOS COURTESY OF DJ GALBIATI, ROB SAYE AND
 JIMMY CRIBB/ATLANTA FALCONS*

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INSIDE AT SCORE

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THE FLETCH



GPB covers football finals like dew

By Fletcher Proctor



The GHSA football playoffs wrapped up the 2011 season last week at the Georgia Dome and GPB was there like never before. Not only did the broadcast crews feature several new faces and voices, but the coverage was taken to an entirely new level with a live interactive video chat. Online viewers were treated to several GPB personalities taking you behind the scenes throughout the 18-plus hours of football over two days.

Bob Houghton, Rachel Daniels, Chrissy Warrilow, Jon Nelson, Gil Tyree and Fletcher Proctor all spent time on the video chat and were joined by guests such as Alan Smith of the GAOA, I.J. Rosenberg of Score Atlanta and Tommy Palmer of the Palmer Media Group. Daniels also gave great insight into the bands, while Warrilow spoke on a range of topics from the bands to cheerleaders to the weather. Houghton and Proctor, who called the Class A game along with Palmer, gave insight on the football broadcasts, called highlights from the various games and also engaged with Warrilow and Daniels on a variety of topics. The video chat was a success and could be seen again next year.

As for the announcers, the Class AA team of Nelson, Bob Rathbun and Tim McFarland was simply sensational for the excit-

ing finish. Rathbun gave an incredible call and McFarland's in depth knowledge of the game was a treat for the viewers. The Blessed Trinity coach won a state title with Roswell and had Blessed Trinity in the playoffs a few weeks ago, but if he wants, he certainly has a career behind the mic whenever he hangs up the whistle. McFarland did a nice job in the Class AAA game as well along with Nelson and WSB's Zach Klein.

If you missed the Class AAAAA championship game, you can still catch it tonight on GPB Knowledge at 8 p.m. GPB Knowledge has been airing the games all week. You can also watch them by heading to the "watch video" tab on www.scoreatl.com or by clicking on the game you want on www.gapnews.com.

NO BREAKS ...

The poor Falcons. It seems as though everyone is against them and I have no idea why. The morning after the Falcons score 24-straight points to beat Carolina 31-23, everyone seems to hate the team. Why? Do folks not realize that the Falcons WON THE GAME?! Callers to the two Atlanta radio stations were bemoaning the Falcons, saying that they can never win if they keep

playing this way.

You mean the way the team just played that earned a win? Was the first half a poorly played half? Yes. But how about the second half? The half where the defense shut the door on the likely rookie of the year. The half where the offense put up score after score, including a pair to Julio Jones. I can understand complaining after a loss, such as the loss to Houston, when the team went on the road against a squad that is playoff-bound and fell in a tight one.

But people are really going to call up and moan and complain after a victory? It doesn't help when Jeff Schultz of the AJC spurs on the effort by asking "Confused? You've got company." I will commend Schultz for stating what should be the obvious (though it doesn't seem to be so obvious around here) "The NFL is a league that doesn't care about the eye test - just wins and losses." Thank you. At the end of the day, the Falcons won and improved to 8-5. That puts them not only in the playoffs with three games to play, but in the No. 5 hole. Chillax folks, if the Falcons take care of business over the next few games, the playoffs should be sewn up entering the final weekend of the season and perhaps Matt Ryan can take a bit of a breather in the finale. A win is a win is a win. Accept the win and you'll feel a lot better.

And remember this, the Falcons, in order to improve upon last year's regular season would have had to go 14-2, which would have earned them likely ONLY a first-round bye as the Packers have started 13-0 this year. Unless the Falcons were undefeated, they weren't matching last season's homefield advantage through the NFC playoffs. Just remember that.

NO HOCKEY LOVE ...

Maybe I just "don't understand the game," but aren't hockey players supposed to be tough? I remember going to Thrashers games in the past, seeing players take a huge whack, flounder around then get up, skate off and return later in the game. The Face of the NHL Sidney Crosby of the Pittsburgh Penguins suffered a concussion 10 months ago, returned for eight games a few weeks back but then bumped into a teammate during practice, and the 24-year-old has been

out ever since.

I know with brain injuries you want to be careful, but seriously, isn't it time this tough hockey player puts the skates on and take the ice? According to several outlets there is no timetable for his return. What happened to the sport that SportsCenter anchors once said of "he would return, after all he is a hockey player?" One AP story said that the Penguins star passed an ImPACT test, which diagnoses concussions, but Crosby has not played since he developed a headache.

Before I take anyone else to the woodshed for a lack of coverage, I need to point the laserbeam at myself for a minute. Georgia Southern is in the FCS semifinals and we have not really covered the Eagles' playoff run as we did during the regular season. With that being said, how about a little more coverage of the Eagles' run in some other local outlets please. Don't fret, as you will be able to find some coverage on Georgia Southern on ScoreATL.com as long as the Eagles are still alive in the playoffs.

Photo courtesy of GPB. Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

CAN YOU BELIEVE... ...HE SAID THAT?

"For some reason UCLA has decided to make Jim Mora its football coach, and the reason might well be that he was the only one who'd take the job."

That was the AJC's Mark Bradley mocking the Bruins for selecting FOX commentator and former Falcons coach Jim Mora as its new head coach. Bradley has a tough time figuring out who he will root against when USC plays UCLA next year. At this point, I am not sure why Falcons fans should care about Mora, except that this means he won't be butchering any more of their games on FOX, which is a positive.



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YEAR IN REVIEW



Highs and lows mark 2011 sports year

By Joe Deighton



It has been a long and sometimes frustrating year in Atlanta sports. The Braves missed the playoffs following a historic September collapse and the NHL no longer calls Atlanta home after the Thrashers left for Winnipeg.

This year showed us why football is king around here. Georgia surprised everyone by winning 10 straight games and reaching the SEC Championship Game. The addition of Julio Jones has put the Falcons on track to make another run at the playoffs. It was a year to remember and a year to forget for Atlanta sports fans.

SILVER LINING ...

Fredi Gonzalez took the helm as manager with huge shoes to fill following the retirement of legendary skipper Bobby Cox. The emergence of rookie closer Craig Kimbrel made Gonzalez look like a genius through the month of August. The 23-year-old right-hander set a Major League rookie record with 46 saves and was named National League Rookie of the Year.

On Aug. 31, the Braves beat Washington 3-1 for their 80th win of the year. A wild card

berth was a virtual certainty at that point of the season. That's when the bottom fell out. The Braves stopped hitting and suddenly couldn't win. A 9-18 record in September caused the team to lose an 8.5-game lead on the eventual World Series champion St. Louis Cardinals. On the final night of the season, the Braves still had a chance to force a one-game playoff with the Cards, but the Phillies ousted Atlanta 4-3 in 13 innings.

However, solace can be found in the most disappointing end to a season in Atlanta Braves history in that the team is young and the future is bright. Outfielder Jason Heyward had a disappointing sophomore campaign, but the potential for stardom is still present. First baseman Freddie Freeman had a huge rookie season, hitting 22 home runs with 77 RBIs. The talent is there, and hopefully the experience of last year will be a teaching tool for Gonzalez to use in 2012.

RECURRING NIGHTMARE ...

Hockey in the South has always been an abnormality. The Flames left Atlanta for

Calgary after eight seasons in 1980. Nineteen years later, another franchise was awarded to the city. This time it was going to work. This time it would be different. The Thrashers played in a new state-of-the-art arena and made Atlanta a true professional sports city with four major franchises.

The Thrashers seemingly had everything - top young talent in Danny Heatley and Ilya Kovalchuk, a coach with experience in Bob Hartley and a shark for a general manager in Don Waddell. But they couldn't win. The team suffered financially and couldn't keep the young talent, which resulted in the loss of their coach, and four years after winning a division title, the franchise moved to Winnipeg.

The move of the Thrashers in 2011 was deeply hurtful to many people in the metro area, but the loss really didn't resonate with the majority. Hockey didn't work here in the 1970s and it didn't work here in the 2000s. It is sad to say, but the NHL will likely never return to Atlanta.

WHAT HOT SEAT? ...

Mark Richt's job status seemed to be the only thing that people could talk about after the Georgia Bulldogs lost their first two games to Boise State and South Carolina. It seemed inevitable that Richt would be fired at some point during the 2011 season if things didn't change quickly. The schedule was in UGA's favor, and the Dawgs took advantage by winning five straight games going into the Florida game.

The matchup with the Gators would make or break the season for Georgia. Richt proved that he deserves to be the head coach of the Bulldogs with two risky fourth-down calls that were both converted into touchdowns. Georgia beat Florida 24-20, Richt's job was safe and the SEC East was there for the taking.

Quarterback Aaron Murray was efficient through the first eight games, but over the final four games Murray was spectacular. The sophomore made a statement against Auburn,

throwing for 224 yards and four touchdowns in a 45-7 blowout win. Four more touchdown passes against Georgia Tech helped UGA to a 10th straight win and cemented Murray's place in Georgia football history.

When the Dawgs were 0-2, no one was thinking SEC East championship. Richt and Murray were criticized, but at the end of 2011, the Bulldogs established themselves as one of the best teams in the SEC.

FALCONS RISE UP ...

Winning teams start with great drafts. For the 2011 Atlanta Falcons, the NFL Draft was where the season started, as the team traded five picks for a superstar receiver out of Alabama named Julio Jones. The combination of Jones and Roddy White immediately made the Falcons a threat to make another playoff run.

The presence of quarterback Matt Ryan has made the Falcons a perennial winner since 2008. This year has been much of the same, but with the addition of Jones, Ryan has been able to stretch the field, which has in turn improved an already strong running game.

Michael Turner has been a workhorse in the backfield, carrying the load for over 1000 yards for a second straight year. Turner has benefited greatly from the passing threat that White and Jones present to defenses.

In the fifth round of this year's draft, the Falcons took a deceptively fast running back named Jacquizz Rodgers. Although the numbers aren't big for Rodgers, the impact has been. Needing just one first down to salt the clock away against Detroit earlier this season, the Falcons got a big run from Rodgers on third down, which ended up winning the game.

Atlanta is 8-5 and has a solid chance at making the playoffs this year. If the Falcons do make the postseason and make a run at the Super Bowl, they can point to where it all started in 2011 with a stellar draft.

Photo courtesy of the Atlanta Braves. Deighton can be reached at jdeighton@scoreatl.com.



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WHO'S HOT

THUMBS UP TO THE CHAMPIONS



State Champions

Congratulations to Grayson, Tucker, Burke County, Calhoun and Savannah Christian for winning state football championships at the Georgia Dome last weekend. All five teams have worked hard since the summer and their hard work paid off in the end. Now with the football season over, who's ready for the 2012 season?

Falcons Offense

Head coach Mike Smith said before the season that he wanted his team to have more explosive plays. So far, the Falcons have accomplished that with 46 pass plays of 20 yards or more in 13 games. That is a huge improvement from last year as they only had 32 pass plays of 20 yards or more.

Kell Classic

Well, it looks like the Dome is ready for the 2012 high school football season to begin because the games for the 2012 Kell Classic have been announced which will be played at the Dome on Aug. 25. There will be five games and the first will start at 9 a.m. between Kell and Chattahoochee. The final game will be played at 8 p.m. between 5A runner-up Walton and 2010 5A champion Brookwood.

Schools Leaving GHSA

There is a stir in the GHSA as 33 of the schools in the association don't like the direction it's headed and want to start their own association. The schools are located in south Georgia and currently play in Class A. They no longer want to compete with private schools because they feel they are at a disadvantage.

Health Issues

After the Falcons' win against Carolina, head coach Mike Smith was having chest pains and was sent to a hospital in Charlotte. Smith went through undisclosed test and he was able to return to Atlanta early Monday morning. Very scary to hear that, and we're glad Smitty is okay.

Kenny Anderson

The former Georgia Tech basketball star got into a little trouble with the law on Sunday. Anderson was arrested in Florida for leaving the scene of an accident. Anderson hit a curb and crashed his white Cadillac into two trees and walked away shortly after the accident. Anderson faces a misdemeanor offense.



WHO'S NOT

THUMBS DOWN TO LEAVING THE SCENE

SCORE LIST

BY RICKY DIMON

- 1** **NBA CHRISTMAS:** Christmas Day always means great NBA games, but this year it also means the first day of the season. The Hawks, though, begin two days later at New Jersey. Thus begins an opening stretch in which Atlanta plays nine games in 12 days, including three straight from January 5-7. It won't take long to figure out what the 2011-12 Hawks are all about.
- 2** **NOT SO EASY:** The Big Easy is usually just that for the Saints when they play at home, and not so much for visiting teams. Atlanta will pay a visit to NFC South-leading New Orleans on Monday night, December 26. The Saints will be favored, but the road team has actually won the last four meetings in this head-to-head series. Revenge for a Week 10 heartbreaker would go a long way in the Falcons' playoff push.
- 3** **DAWGS GO AFTER SPARTY:** For the second time in three years, Georgia and Michigan State will be squaring off in a New Year's Day bowl game (although this time it's technically Jan. 2 since Jan. 1 is a Sunday). The only other non-BCS bowl game to pit two 10-win teams from BCS conferences is the Cotton Bowl between Arkansas and Kansas State. Get your popcorn ready for what should be a great Outback Bowl.
- 4** **SUN MIXED WITH CLOUDS:** Georgia Tech is headed to the Sun Bowl, but the Jackets' forecast can only be described as hazy at best based on their recent bowl results. They have lost six consecutive bowl games, beginning with a 38-10 blowout at the hands of none other than Utah—also this year's opponent—in the 2005 Emerald Bowl. Will a month of prep be enough for Utah to stop the triple-option?
- 5** **FUTURE IS NOW?:** In 2009 the Braves let Jason Heyward take over in right, in 2010 they gave Freddie Freeman the 1B job, and now shortstop appears to be the position heading into the hands of a young prospect. Atlanta is reportedly content with Tyler Pastornicky, 22, as its starting shortstop after Alex Gonzalez signed with Milwaukee. Still, there's a long way to go in the offseason.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

BY RICKY DIMON

- | | |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 31 | Exact number of points the Falcons have scored in three straight games vs. Carolina |
| 56.9 | Cam Newton's quarterback rating in two games vs. the Falcons this season |
| 3 | Games in the last 6 (prior to Jax) in which Matt Ryan has had a QB rating of at least 120 |
| 11 | Differential in Falcons' red-zone TDs scored vs. red-zone TDs allowed, best in the NFL |
| 18.1 | Julio Jones' yards per catch, fifth most in the NFL among players w/ at least 30 catches |
| 1 | Number of times the Hawks face a Western Conference team during their first 12 games |
| 4 | Times in a five-game January stretch the Hawks will play Eastern finalists Miami and Chicago |
| 72 | Games played by Tracy McGrady last year (with Detroit), his most since 2004-05 |
| 33 | Average age of Hawks' newcomers McGrady, Jerry Stackhouse and Vladimir Radmanovic |
| 14.8 | Points per game by Jeff Teague in last year's Eastern Conference Semis vs. Chicago |

TRIVIA QUESTION

Roddy White is on pace to be the Falcons' leading receiver for the fifth straight season. Who was the last Atlanta wideout to lead the team in receiving five times?

Answer on Page 14

SANITY AT LAST

"It's just the way the business works. Obviously it's sad to hear because I love Atlanta, love the organization and everybody in the clubhouse. I guess we'll look around and see what we can do, what we can find."

- Former Braves utility man Brooks Conrad, who was recently non-tendered by the organization.

MY TWO CENTS

Happy Holidays, folks! It's that time of year again, and as we look forward to 2012, we also are reflecting on the year past.

As Joe Deighton mentions in our cover story on page 5, it was an up-and-down year for sports in Georgia. We lost another NHL team, but considering the ownership, we're kind of glad they're gone. At least our fans can't be toyed with and lied to any longer.

The Braves also tore our hearts out with their late-season collapse. But hey, it could be worse. We could be the Indians or the Cubs. And the Braves will return even stronger this season with their perennially solid pitching staff.

On the college front, Tech seems to be in

good shape with new hoops coach Brian Gregory. The Jackets finally got over the hump and beat Georgia in Athens. What's next, winning in Durham or Chapel Hill?

The Bulldogs, on the other hand, inspired their fan base by winning 10 straight games and the SEC Eastern Division. Next year could be even more special for Georgia, as another manageable SEC schedule awaits them as well as several key returning starters.

Finally, those of us at Score would like to wish all of you a happy holiday season, and we will be back on Jan. 13 with another issue of Score Atlanta.

Black can be reached at sblack@scoreatl.com.





Class A-AA schools plot secession

By Fletcher Proctor

G HSA reclassification has long been a controversial issue, and the new six-class format that has been agreed upon for the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years has driven some schools to the brink. Earlier this week more than 80 representatives gathered in Rochelle to discuss options for some of the smaller Class A public schools from south Georgia who feel they are being ignored by the GHSA and its reclassification committee.

ROCHELLE TEA PARTY ...

A total of 33 schools were represented and many of those, plus others that were not present, have let it be known that they are considering pulling out of the GHSA to perhaps join the Georgia Independent School Association (GISA) or create a third athletics association in Georgia. As many as 45 schools could defect from the GHSA to form this new association.

GISA representatives were on hand at

Tuesday's impromptu meeting, including executive director Jeff Jackson and assistant director Tommy Whittle. Should the public schools join the 134-member GISA, they would be placed in a "public school" division and separated into a different playoff bracket for the postseason. If the collection of public schools does not want to join GISA, some talk has floated around that the new association would use the GISA in an advisory role or perhaps even in a managing role.

Wilcox County head football coach Mark Ledford, whose team won a recent state title but lost to metro-Atlanta private school Wesleyan in another final, led the discussion according to the Macon Telegraph. In a story on the paper's website, Ledford said, "I think the turnout showed that it was more than just a few south Georgia schools upset about the classification issues." Several Lincoln County representatives noted that most of the 33

schools were south Georgia Class A schools, but a few surprises were also at the meeting. Representatives from Tift County were also present and appeared ready to join the defections. Other schools according to various media outlets included Atkinson County, Baconton Charter, Calhoun County, Central-Talbotton, Charlton County, Chattahoochee County, Claxton, 2010 Class A football champion Clinch County, Dooly County, Echols, Glascock County, Gordon Lee, Hancock Central, Irwin County, Jenkins County, Johnson County, Lanier County, Miller County, Montgomery County, Randolph-Clay, Schley County, Seminole County, Social Circle, Stewart County, Taylor County, Terrell County, Twiggs County, Warren County, Washington-Wilkes, Wheeler County, Wilcox County and Wilkinson County.

ROCKING THE BOAT ...

The GHSA's reclassified Class A still has 35 private schools competing with public schools, and the issue came to a head just a few weeks ago when four private schools reached the Class A semifinals in football. Many of the Class A public schools had been petitioning the

GHSA to allow a split in postseason play, but the GHSA chose not to adopt such a scenario during its reclassification sessions.

Wilcox County Director of Athletics Donnie Clack told the Valdosta Daily Times that "We have been in eight to 10 meetings and (the GHSA) still hasn't done anything about (a postseason split). The only option is to pull out of the GHSA."

The next steps to the potential defection plan will be hatched over the next few weeks. An eight-member advisory committee was formed at last Tuesday's meeting, and it is this group that will lead the effort. The committee plans to meet in Macon on Wednesday, according to S. Thomas Coleman of the AJC. At this meeting the committee members will draft by-laws and develop processes and procedures for a new association. All interested parties will be invited to meet Jan. 4, 2012 to review the plans.

The GHSA will ratify the new classifications and regions on Jan. 10, 2012 after schools are permitted a chance to petition for a lateral region change.

Photos courtesy of Clinch Co. HS and Rob Saye. Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

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FINAL FOOTBALL RANKINGS

CLASS AAAAA

1. Grayson
2. Walton
3. Colquitt County
4. Camden County
5. Lassiter
6. ML King
7. North Gwinnett
8. Stephenson
9. McEachern
10. Hillgrove

CLASS AAAA

1. Tucker
2. Lovejoy
3. Northside-WR
4. Flowery Branch
5. Warner Robins
6. East Paulding
7. Chattahoochee
8. Ware County
9. Tri-Cities
10. Kell

CLASS AAA

1. Burke County
2. Peach County
3. Gainesville
4. Sandy Creek
5. Cairo
6. Allatoona
7. Carrollton
8. St. Pius X
9. Stephens County
10. Mary Persons

CLASS AA

1. Calhoun
2. Buford
3. Carver-Columbus
4. Appling County
5. Fitzgerald
6. Lamar County
7. Dublin
8. Elbert County
9. Brooks County
10. North Oconee

CLASS A

1. Savannah Christian
2. Landmark Christian
3. ELCA
4. Prince Ave. Christian
5. Lincoln County
6. Aquinas
7. Seminole County
8. Bremen
9. Wilcox County
10. Wilkinson County



HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL RANKINGS

BOYS

CLASS AAAAA

- 1 Milton
- 2 Wheeler
- 3 Shiloh
- 4 Harrison
- 5 Tift Co.
- 6 Berkmar
- 7 Mill Creek
- 8 S. Gwinnett
- 9 Westlake
- 10 Norcross

CLASS AAAA

- 1 Miller Grove
- 2 SW DeKalb
- 3 Lovejoy
- 4 Chattahoochee
- 5 Fayette Co.
- 6 Jonesboro
- 7 North Clayton
- 8 Osborne
- 9 Bainbridge
- 10 Rockdale Co.

CLASS AAA

- 1 Columbia
- 2 Woodward Acad.
- 3 Thomson
- 4 Butler
- 5 Carrollton
- 6 Eagles Landing
- 7 Franklin Co.
- 8 Washington Co.
- 9 Gainesville
- 10 Shaw

CLASS AA

- 1 Buford
- 2 Thomasville
- 3 South Atlanta
- 4 GAC
- 5 East Hall
- 6 Rabun Co.
- 7 Dublin
- 8 Vidalia
- 9 Morgan Co.
- 10 Jordan

CLASS A

- 1 Wilkinson Co.
- 2 Terrell Co.
- 3 Whitefield Acad.
- 4 Wilcox Co.
- 5 Athens Christian
- 6 Hancock Central
- 7 Lanier Co.
- 8 Wesleyan
- 9 N. Cobb Christian
- 10 Mt. Paran Christian

CLASS AAAAA

- 1 McEachern
- 2 Norcross
- 3 N. Gwinnett
- 4 North Cobb
- 5 Hillgrove
- 6 Parkview
- 7 Marietta
- 8 Alpharetta
- 9 Lowndes
- 10 Mill Creek

CLASS AAAA

- 1 Fayette Co.
- 2 Forest Park
- 3 Chamblee
- 4 Statesboro
- 5 Alcovy
- 6 Douglas Co.
- 7 Miller Grove
- 8 Hardaway
- 9 Redan
- 10 Creekview

GIRLS

CLASS AAA

- 1 Washington Co.
- 2 Columbia
- 3 Carrollton
- 4 St. Pius X
- 5 Dalton
- 6 Allatoona
- 7 Americus-Sumter
- 8 North Hall
- 9 Westover
- 10 Sandy Creek

CLASS AA

- 1 Buford
- 2 GAC
- 3 East Hall
- 4 Morgan Co.
- 5 Rabun Co.
- 6 Lovett
- 7 Decatur
- 8 NE-Macon
- 9 Dade Co.
- 10 Laney

CLASS A

- 1 Wesleyan
- 2 Pace Academy
- 3 SW Atl. Christian
- 4 Calvary Day
- 5 Darlington
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BASKETBALL NEWS



Wheeler gets early edge over rivals

By Brian Jones

Now that football season has officially come to an end (except for all-star games that will be played over the weekend), it's time for basketball to take center stage. One of the marquee matchups that took place last Friday was the East Cobb showdown between Walton and Wheeler.

It was a game that went back and forth, but the Wildcats came away with a 72-71 win. Raiders guard Rico Overall led all scorers with 28 points, while Sean Morgan added 11 points and 12 rebounds. For the Wildcats, Charles Mitchell scored 16 points and Justin Seymour added 14.

On Saturday, the Wildcats will travel to Fayetteville, N.C. to face some of the nation's best basketball teams. Some of the teams that are scheduled to be there are Simeon (Ill.), Whitney Young (Ill.) and No. 3 Shiloh.

CLIPPED EAGLES ...

The Milton boys have a record of 4-4. Hard to believe isn't it? It's not because they have struggled to find any chemistry or just lacking in talent. The reason the Eagles have a .500 record is they had to forfeit three games due to having guard Charles Mann on the

court before he was ruled eligible.

Mann, who has signed with Georgia, played in the Eagles' victories against Buford on Nov. 29 and against two schools from North Carolina before that. Mann sat out the last five games including a loss to Tift County last week. Had they not been forced to forfeit any games, the Eagles would be 7-1 before they face Alpharetta on Friday.

PERFECT INDIANS ...

In girls action, McEachern is on a roll with an 8-0 record. Last Friday, the Lady Indians faced North Cobb and won 50-41. Pachiyanna Roberts scored 17 points and added 12 rebounds and three assists in the win. Dominique Wilson added 14 points while Destine Gibbs scored 12.

On Tuesday, the Lady Indians took care of Campbell 82-27. They went on a 28-0 run and never looked back. Wilson led McEachern with 19 points while Roberts added 15. Up next, the Lady Indians will face No. 7 Marietta on Saturday night. And like the Lady Indians, the Lady Blue Devils will go into the game undefeated.

Jones can be reached at bjones@scoreatl.com.



FOOTBALL NEWS



Champions crowned at Georgia Dome

By Fletcher Proctor

History was made at the Georgia Dome as several schools claimed their first GHSA titles while one school just missed out on taking over sole possession of an incredible streak. Grayson earned its first GHSA title by waxing Walton 24-0 to win the Class AAAAA title. Nick Schuessler passed for a pair of touchdowns and Robert Nkemdiche ran for a score in the victory. The win gave Rams head coach Mickey Conn his 100th career victory.

Burke County won its first title in school history after rallying to knock off Peach County, while Class A champion Savannah Christian won its eighth state title in school history, but first as a GHSA member.

STREAK BUSTED ...

The Buford Wolves' bid for a fifth straight state title ended in an overtime loss to Calhoun. Buford was trying to move past West Rome (1982-85). The loss snapped Buford's 27-game winning streak. The longest current streak in GHSA is shared by Tucker, Savannah Christian and Grayson, who all went 15-0 in 2011.

BEST EVER ...

Tucker head coach Franklin Stephens said several days before the Tigers' game against Lovejoy that should the Tigers win, this 2011 edition would be the best Tucker

squad ever. The Tigers won a title in 2008, but the 2011 Tucker team was a perfect 15-0 after a victory over the Lovejoy Wildcats.

LOOKING AHEAD ...

The field for the 2012 Corky Kell Classic was announced during halftime of the AAAAA game and the matchups should be intense. Kell and Chattahoochee will open at the Georgia Dome on August 25, with Grayson facing McEachern as the second game. Later in the day North Gwinnett faces Colquitt County, Peachtree Ridge squares off against Camden County and Brookwood wraps up the night against Walton.

DEFLECTIONS POSSIBLE ...

Earlier this week, representatives from 33 schools met in Rochelle to discuss possibly pulling out of the GHSA to form the state's third athletics association. The group was made up mostly of Class A public schools from the southern part of Georgia that were frustrated with the recent reclassification. The group has consulted with GISA for advice and could use the GHSA in a managing role for the new association. The group will meet again over the next few weeks.

Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

SWIMMING NEWS



Host Wolves win their own meet

By Stephen Black & Ricky Dimon

Wesleyan won the Wesleyan Invitational this weekend over Lambert, Johns Creek and Alpharetta. The Wolves won the meet with 528 points to Lambert's 518, Johns Creek's 435 and Alpharetta's 415. Wesleyan won the boys meet with 297 points, better than second-place Alpharetta's 236. Meanwhile, the Lambert girls won their meet with 309 points to runner-up Wesleyan's 231. Wesleyan's Nick Salyers broke the school record in the 200 individual medley with a time of 1:56.26, then won the 100 backstroke with a time of 52.74. Timothy Marsh (100 free and 200 free), Anthony McMurry (50 free), Taylor Panther (diving, 186.30) and Carrie Ciccotello (100 back) each won their races for the Wolves.

HOOKING HORNS...

In the Wesleyan Invitational, Lambert's girls were led by wins in the 50-yard freestyle (Megan Bestor), 100-yard freestyle (Megan Bestor), 100-yard butterfly (Ellie Sillis), 200-yard IM (Ellen Johnson), 500-yard freestyle (Ellen Johnson, 5:13.73), 200-yard freestyle

relay and the 400-yard freestyle relay.

In diving, Wesleyan's sister duo of Taylor and Lindsay Panther finished 1-2 in the girls event with scores of 186.30 and 178.62. In boys diving, Alpharetta pair Jack Nyquist and Crawford Berry formed the top two with scores of 319.80 and 251.00.

LIONS ROAR ...

At the Clody Memorial Invitational, Peachtree Ridge's Drew Wescoat won the 50-yard freestyle in 22.93 seconds while Julia Jacobi won the girls 50 free at 25.77.

The St. Pius X Golden Lions defeated Lakeside-DeKalb 193-177 on Dec. 6 and Greater Atlanta Christian 343-246 on Friday. The Lions will host Lovett and Whitefield Academy in a duel meet Saturday at 9 a.m.

Cross Keys swimmer Laura Ramirez was named the 2011-2012 Youth of the Year by the Boys and Girls clubs of Atlanta. Ramirez will attend Emory University next year.

Black and Dimon can be reached at 404-256-1572.

WRESTLING NEWS



Archer wins its own tournament

By Robby Kalland

Collins Hill traveled to Ohio for the Ironman Invitational and finished 10th with 77 points. Andrew Krawulski finished fifth in the 182-pound class, the best finish for the Eagles. Sophomore phenoms Ryan Millhof and Sean Russell had rare struggles going 3-2 and 2-2, respectively, without placing after both won their weight classes two weeks ago at the Cougar Invationals in FL.

NEW KIDS ...

Archer won its own tournament this past weekend, defeating formerly undefeated Bradley Central in the finals 42-26. The Tigers have emerged as a top team in the state after claiming the Southern Slam title last week in South Carolina and following last weekend's victory. Bradley Central defeated Peachtree Ridge in the semifinals 47-27, while Archer was able to get past Roswell.

Meadowcreek won its first duals tournament crown in more than a decade last weekend when the Mustangs went 4-0, defeating Central Gwinnett, Lanier, Clarkston and Duluth. The Mustangs had seven undefeated wrestlers in 106-pound DeWayne Harris, 120-pound Dante Bennett, 126-pound Rene Deluna, 160-pound Alex Steele, 170-pound Ogunlana Harden, 182-pound Ryan Moore and 195-pound Victor Truong.

IN THE BANKS ...

Banks County scored 238 points to win the Madison County Christmas Duals over second-place Morgan County (223.5 points) and third-place Oconee County (220 points). Mason Patton (120 pounds) and Francisco Hurtado (126 pounds) were both victorious in their weight classes, and 106-pound Taylor Wood, 160-pound Hayden Dilbeck and 170-pound Eli Smallwood placed second.

Rockdale County won the South Metro Duals over second-place Locust Grove and third-place Ola. Alonzo Allen, 106 pounds, and 132-pound Ulises Ponce each placed first in their respective weight classes.

ON THE DOCKET ...

Collins Hill once again will be out of state, this time going to Missouri for the Midwest Wrestling Classic.

Archer will look to continue its run of great wrestling at the Gwinnett County Tournament this weekend hosted by Shiloh. Collins Hill will not send its full varsity squad because the first team will be in Missouri, which will open the door for Archer and others to take the title that the Eagles have owned in recent years.

Kalland can be reached at 404-256-1572.

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PANTHER PROWL



Men's hoops wins seventh straight

By Dave Cohen

With four players in double figures, led by Devonta White's 20 points and Brandon McGee's 18 points, the Georgia State basketball team handled Rhode Island last Saturday 96-64 to win its seventh straight game and improve to 7-3 on the season.

"Defense has really been our staple this year, but today was the first time that offensively we played the way I want us to,"

said head coach Ron Hunter. "Our team is building a lot of confidence right now, and as things continue to come together, I think we can be a very good team."

Trailing 11-7 early in the first half, the Panthers went on a 20-4 run to take a 27-15 lead that they would never relinquish. The Panthers continue to get strong play from Eric Buckner, who finished with 15 points

and nine rebounds. James Fields finished with 15 points and nine assists. Georgia State is back on the road Friday at Utah Valley State before returning home to face rival Georgia Southern at the GSU Sports Arena Thursday. (WRAS-FM 88.5)

Women's basketball (2-4) hosts Kenesaw State and Georgia Tech before heading to the Bahamas to play in the Sunsplash Shootout where the Lady Panthers will play High Point and SIU-Edwardsville.

BANQUET SEASON ...

Georgia State football held its annual awards banquet last week at the Westin Peachtree Plaza, where outside linebacker Jake Muasau, running back Donald Russell and wide receiver return specialist Albert Wilson were named the Most Valuable Players.

Muasau was the third-leading tackler with 65 and had two interceptions. Russell ran for 665 yards on 128 carries and nine touchdowns while Wilson led GSU with 1,210 all-purpose yards, an average of 134.4 yards per game, and scored six touchdowns.

Senior nose guard Kalan Jenkins, an exercise science major with a 3.94 grade-point average, was named Scholar-Athlete of the Year. Junior running back Malcolm Smith received the Courage Award, recognizing his dedication and perseverance through injuries and adversity. Georgia State finished the season at 3-8. The Panthers begin playing a conference schedule in the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA) in 2012.

Dave Cohen is in his 28th season as the "Voice of Georgia State Athletics" on WRAS-FM (88.5) and WCFO-AM, Newstalk 1160.



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BULLDOG BEAT



Men's team loses at home to Tech

By Stephen Black

Georgia's men's hoops team fell to in-state rival Georgia Tech on Dec. 7, 68-56. It was the first time since 1976—a stretch of 13 games—that Tech had last won in Athens.

"That was a very disappointing loss. We're not a very good basketball team right now, and that's my responsibility," said head coach Mark Fox. "Our defense collapsed on us in the second half, but you have to give Georgia Tech credit. Their defense in the second half was better than our offense."

In the second stanza, Tech outscored Georgia 43-27 after trailing 29-25 at the half. A 12-0 run to start the second half gave the Jackets a lead they would not relinquish. Georgia shot just 30 percent in the second half while Tech hit 65 percent of its field goal attempts. In the paint for the game, Tech outscored the Bulldogs 34-14.

Point guard Gerald Robinson led the Dawgs with 20 points while Kentavious Caldwell-Pope had 10 points and led the team with five boards.

It was Fox's first loss in three games against the Yellow Jackets. The Bulldogs (4-5), now out of final exams, will play at Southern California Saturday before hosting Mercer Wednesday.

ALL-AMERICAN JONES ...

Despite taking a circuitous route to get to Athens, linebacker Jarvis Jones is making the most of his college football career. The blue-chip recruit from Columbus chose Southern California over the Dawgs after a standout career at Carver High School. But a neck injury sidelined Jones for half of his freshman season and the Trojans advised Jones to quit the game due to the injury. He would not, and transferred to UGA.

After one season in Athens, Jones has been named an All-American by the FWAA. Jones had 69 tackles, which led the team, and had 19.5 tackles for loss and 13.5 sacks, which led the SEC. UGA's latest All-American is now second in school history with 13.5 sacks.

LADY DOGS ...

The No. 13 Georgia women's basketball team improved to 8-1 last week with a win over Mercer. The Lady Dogs will now play in the Las Vegas Hoops Classic on Monday. Other teams in the event include Gonzaga and Montana State.

Black can be reached at sblack@scoreatl.com.

TECH TALK



Yellow Jackets prep for Utah in Sun Bowl

By Ricky Dimon & Thomas Watson

Georgia Tech accepted a bid to play in the Hyundai Sun Bowl on Dec. 31 at 2 p.m. against the Utah Utes in El Paso, TX. This will be the Yellow Jackets 15th consecutive bowl game, and while Tech has the ninth-highest bowl winning percentage with a record of 22-17, the Jackets have lost their past six bowl games. They will try to get off the schneid against a Utah team that they are playing for the second time in school history. Utah beat Tech 38-10 in the 2005 Emerald Bowl. The Jackets are playing in the Sun Bowl for the second time in school history, having last appeared in 1970.

Utah is no pushover. The Utes are 12-4 in bowl games, and 6-1 under current coach Kyle Wittingham, with the one loss coming last year to Boise State in the Las Vegas Bowl. In its first season in the Pac-12 Utah was in contention to win the South Division, but a stumble against Colorado on Nov. 25 ended its hopes.

RARE WIN IN ATHENS ...

The Georgia Tech men's basketball team is not exactly off to a flying start under new

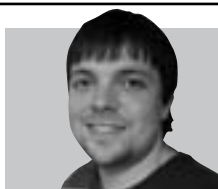
head coach Brian Gregory, but Gregory has already done something that eluded Paul Hewitt throughout the former coach's entire tenure. On Dec. 7, the Yellow Jackets beat Georgia in Athens for the first time since 1976. Jason Morris came off the bench to score a team-high 15 points, leading Tech to a 68-56 victory. Brandon Reed, Kammeon Holsey and Glen Rice added 12 points apiece for the Jackets.

Georgia Tech has now won two in a row since a disappointing two-game losing streak that featured a blowout loss to Northwestern and a setback at Tulane. The Jackets followed up the victory over Georgia by taking care of Savannah State 65-45 last Saturday. Reed scored 16 points and Daniel Miller added 12 for the victorious visitors.

Tech has three more non-conference contests before the new year, and it has a total of four games prior to the beginning of ACC play. The conference opener is set for Jan. 7 against Duke in Philips Arena.

Dimon and Watson can be reached at 404-256-1572.

HAWKS HAVEN



Hawks prepare for season opener

By Josh Bagriansky

After months of anticipation, it's finally time for the Atlanta Hawks to hit the court. Preseason camp opened up on Dec. 9 and fans will have two chances to see the Hawks in action before the regular season starts in just under two weeks.

First, the Hawks will host an intra-squad scrimmage at Philips Arena tonight. The Hawks will run through their regular practice routine before scrimmaging. Admission is free and the event begins at 7 p.m. Players and coaches are also expected to be available for autographs.

Then, the Hawks play two preseason games against divisional foe Charlotte next week. Atlanta hits the road on Tuesday to face Charlotte at Time Warner Cable Arena. The Bobcats visit the Highlight Factory on Thursday for a 7:30 p.m. tip.

NEW AND IMPROVED ...

Perhaps the biggest story of training camp has been the new look of forward Josh Smith, who lost 30 pounds over the offseason to try and become leaner and more explosive on the floor.

"He's getting off his feet a lot quicker, getting to the rim and exploding, even more than he has in the past," Head Coach Larry Drew told the AJC. "I'm seeing and hearing a

passion I haven't seen before."

Whether the enigmatic Smith's new off-season diet and workout regimen pays dividends remains to be seen. But it's a good sign for a team needing to get the most out of him in order to accomplish their goals.

"I've been in this league a while now," the Atlanta native said. "My main concern now is winning. I want to win, no matter what the cost is. I want to be one of the elite teams in this league. My window isn't closing, but it's slowly going down. Before I get out of here, I want to accomplish some things."

NEW FACES ...

The Hawks made two signings to improve depth before camp, acquiring veteran Tracy McGrady and sharpshooting big man Vladimir Radmanovic. Head Coach Larry Drew said the team needed a knock-down three-point shooter after last season, and "Vlad Rad" has the credentials to step into that role. The Serbian shot 40.5% from downtown last year and is a 38% career shooter from outside the arc. Meanwhile, McGrady is clearly not the player he once was. He averaged close to eight points per contest coming off the bench last season for Detroit.

Bagriansky can be reached at jbagriansky@scoreatl.com.

FALCONS FLIGHT



Playoffs on the line down the stretch

By Brian Jones

It's now crunch time for the Falcons. They have two regular season games left and need to finish strong to secure a playoff spot. Last Sunday when the Falcons faced the Carolina Panthers, the Falcons looked like a playoff team, at least in the second half.

With the Falcons down 23-7 at the half, they scored 24 unanswered points to win 31-23. Matt Ryan threw for 320 yards and four touchdowns while Julio Jones caught three passes for 104 yards and scored twice. After the game, players were happy to get the win but couldn't explain how or why they played so bad in the first half.

"It's a win," Todd McClure said to reporters after the game. "I don't know what else to say."

HEALTH SCARE ...

On the way back from Charlotte, head coach Mike Smith was feeling chest pains and the Falcons medical staff sent him to a nearby hospital. The hospital staff ran tests on Smith, which came back negative. Smith came back to Atlanta early Monday morning and talked about his status after a team walkthrough.

"I feel a whole lot better today than I did yesterday," Smith said. "I can assure you that."

RIVALRY WEEK ...

The Falcons took on the Jacksonville Jaguars on Thursday, so results were not available before press time. Regardless of the outcome, they have a huge game on Dec. 26 when they face the New Orleans Saints in the final Monday night game of the year.

The Saints (10-3) are the NFC South leaders and have won their last seven games. They play at Minnesota on Sunday, and if the Saints win, they will clinch a playoff spot and will be one game away from clinching the NFC South.

The last time the Falcons played the Saints was Nov. 13, when the Birds lost 26-23 in overtime. The play of the game was when the Falcons went for it on fourth-and-short deep in their own territory and failed to convert. Saints kicker John Kasay subsequently kicked the game-winning 26-yard field goal to polish off the Falcons.

Jones can be reached at bjones@scoreatl.com.

CHOP SHOP



Braves make move at Winter Meetings

By Fletcher Proctor

The Atlanta Braves left the winter meetings without the addition of a big bat and with the starting rotation still together. Rumors circulated the team was looking for a big bat in a corner outfield spot or perhaps a platoon-mate for Martin Prado, should he still be with the team on Opening Day.

ON THE MOUND ...

Jair Jurrjens was also not moved by Braves GM Frank Wren, despite the upcoming raise due from arbitration for the All-Star pitcher. Jurrjens may still be moved by spring training, though many pundits putting together the starting rotation are neglecting to include a key member from two years ago.

Kris Medlen will likely be battling for a spot in the starting rotation and, based on his numbers from two years ago, manager Fredi Gonzalez should give him a hard look after Tim Hudson and Tommy Hanson in the rotation, assuming Jurrjens is moved. Medlen was 5-0 as a starter and the team was 13-1 in games that he started.

Mike Minor, Brandon Beachy, Randall Del-

gado and Julio Teheran will likely battle for the final two rotation spots with the two that don't win out heading down to Class AAA Gwinnett or the bullpen. Arodys Vizcaino is a strong candidate to serve Atlanta in the bullpen in 2012.

FISH POACHING ...

The Braves did make one move during the Winter Meetings, selecting Robert Fish from the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim in the Rule 5 draft. Fish, a 23-year-old lefthander, was claimed for \$50,000 by Atlanta from the Angels Triple-A roster and must stay on the Braves 25-man roster all season. If he is not present on the roster for all of the 2012 season, the Braves must offer him back to the Angels for \$25,000. Last season he pitched mostly in Class AA, racking up 44 strikeouts to just 18 walks with a 2.97 ERA. Atlanta now boasts Eric O'Flaherty, Jonny Venters and Fish, all lefties out of the bullpen. George Sherrill, another left-handed reliever, will likely not be re-signed.

Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

GWINNETT GLADIATORS



Rough stretch drops Glads in standings

By Joe Deighton

The Gwinnett Gladiators are slipping down the standings of the ECHL's South Division. After an 0-2-0-1 mark in the last three games, the Glads are in second place. Gwinnett was in good position to overtake South Carolina, but the team dropped two key games to the Stingrays that could have been won.

STUNG BY S.C. ...

The Glads returned home after a five-game road trip that resulted in just one win. Gwinnett Arena did not provide the home team with much luck, either. South Carolina took four points by beating Gwinnett 3-1 on Saturday and 3-2 in a shootout on Sunday. The largest crowd of the season (9,059) came out to Gwinnett and saw the Gladiators take a 1-0 lead after forward Chris Clarkson deflected a shot off of the stick of Nikita Kashirsky. After that, it was all South Carolina; the Stingrays stunned Gwinnett with three straight goals in the first period. It would stay that way for the remainder of the contest.

On Sunday, Gwinnett put up a better fight by gaining a point but still lost. Forward Joey Haddad returned from a four-game sus-

pension in a big way, scoring just 17 seconds into the game. The Stingrays scored the next two goals, but the Glads tied things up with a goal from Colin Vock with just over three minutes left. Goalie Jeff Jakatis could not stop South Carolina forward Zach Tarkir in the sixth round of the shootout, and the Glads lost their fifth straight game.

WHAT LIES AHEAD ...

Gwinnett is fortunate to be in the position that it is in. A five-game losing streak can sometimes put a team in the cellar of the division. The Gladiators are still in a good spot with 28 points. South Carolina holds just a one-point lead in the South. The team has two more games with South Carolina this week, as well as one with Florida. Taking back the division lead will probably depend on the play of Haddad. He leads the team with 20 points (10 G, 10 A). Gwinnett lost every game during his suspension, so keeping the 23-year-old on the ice is essential. If the Glads are going anywhere, Haddad is going to take them there.

Deighton can be reached at jdeighton@scoreatl.com.

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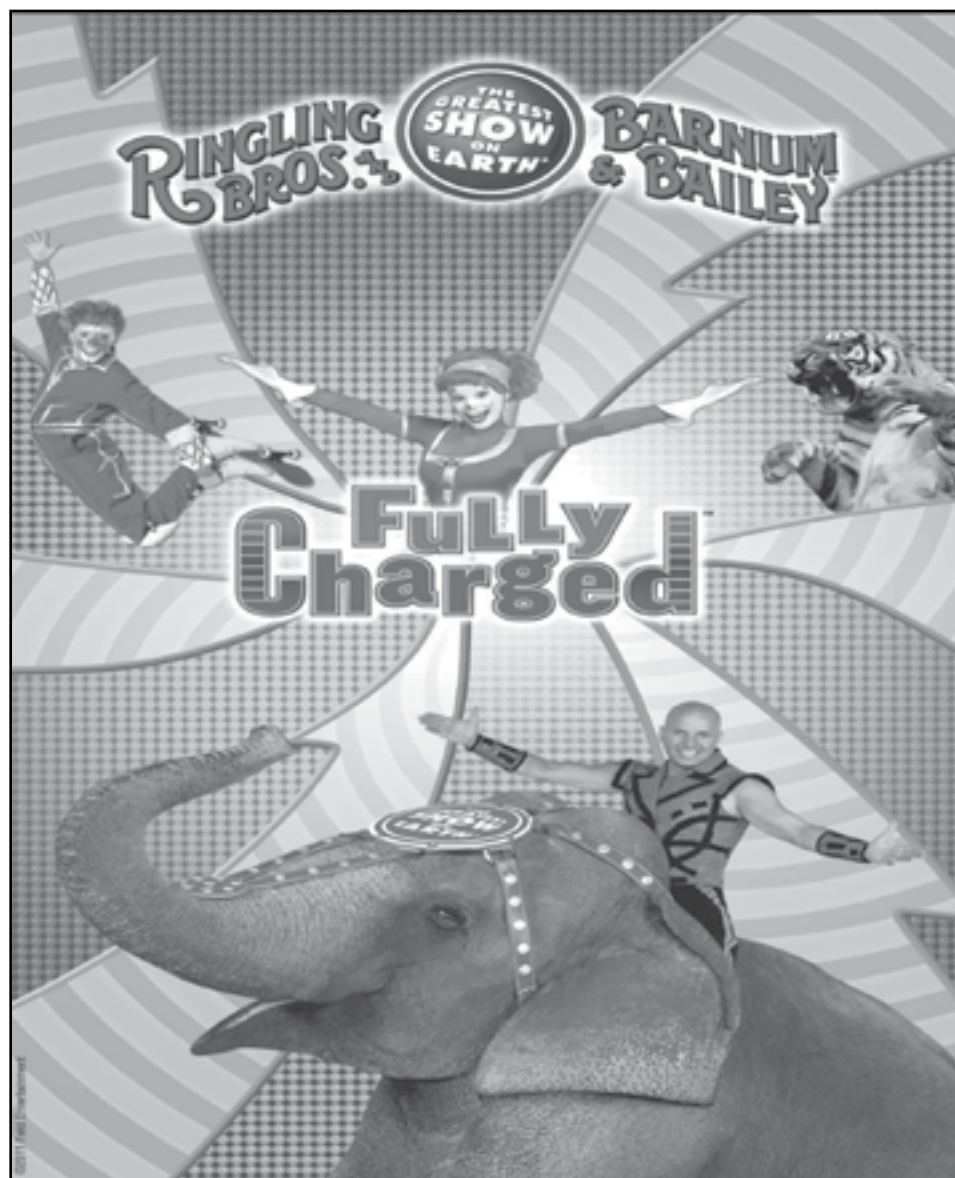
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