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CAN'T MISS THIS WEEK

- 4** Craig Sager II debuts his "Sager Says" column by discussing the prominence of quality football in the state of Georgia, at all levels.
- 5** In our cover story, Fletcher Proctor looks back at the Metro PCS Corky Kell Classic and breaks down our latest football poll.
- 7** Stephen Black discussed "The Battle of I-75" showdown with Lassiter coach Jep Irwin and McEachern's Kyle Hockman.
- 8-9** This week's prep coverage consists of Battle of I-75 pre-views as well as the latest news from cross country, softball and volleyball.

TEAM SCOOP AND VOICES

COVER DESIGN BY DJ GALBIATI
 COVER PHOTOS COURTESY OF SONNY KENNEDY
 AND JIMMY CRIBB/ATLANTA FALCONS

- 6** Score List - Numbers
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INSIDE AT SCORE

ON THE Score Atlanta is looking for new sales associates as well as writing and graphic design interns. For sales positions, e-mail IJ Rosenberg at ijrosenberg@scoreatl.com. For writing internships, e-mail Stephen Black at sblack@scoreatl.com. For graphic design internships, e-mail DJ Galbiati at djgalbiati@scoreatl.com. Feel free to call 404-256-1572 to speak with someone about any of these positions.

SHOT OF THE WEEK...



GRAYSON GREAT: Robert Nkem-diche barrels in from the one-yard line in the Rams' 31-12 win over McEachern at the Metro PCS Corky Kell Classic Saturday. Grayson is ranked No. 1 in the state and Nkemdiche is the top recruit in the nation. Photo courtesy of Sonny Kennedy.



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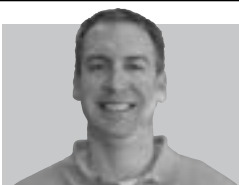
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STEVE BLACK ATTACK



Braves need to end Monday curse

By Stephen Black

After winning seemingly every game in July and August, the Nationals appear to be on a slide. That is terrific news for our Braves, who have been knocking on the door of the NL East lead for quite some time. The Nats boast a deep pitching staff and dynamic lineup, so odds are the slide won't continue long.

The Braves' biggest issue is themselves. After winning the final two games of a four-game set at San Francisco, our guys got shut out in San Diego in Game 1 of a series with the lowly Padres. Although the Braves won the following game, the series opener was the type of game the Braves need to start winning. And is it any surprise the shutout loss came on a Monday?

The sad part about all this is the Braves have been losing on Mondays regularly throughout the season, and at this point, it is a measure of annoyance and frustration, not just a fluke. Whatever you guys are doing Sunday night, please change the routine.

CORKY KELL CLASSIC ...

I hope many of you reading this column were at the Dome this past Saturday for the Metro PCS Corky Kell Classic. As always, it was a wonderful showcase for metro Atlanta high school football and this year, it also featured two teams from South Georgia. Some of the best players and teams in Georgia were at the event and more than 33,000 fans walked through the turnstiles during the day, which

began at 9 a.m. with Chattahoochee vs. Kell. The attendance mark is a record for the Corky Kell Classic.

I took away several things from this event, but the most memorable was Walton running back Tyren Jones tearing through the Brookwood defense all night for 302 yards and five touchdowns. Players put up big numbers all the time in high school football, but Jones did this against a proud program in the Broncos. While some of his runs were long sprints in which he pulled away from the Brookwood defense, some of his shorter runs may have been more impressive. What the 5-foot-8, 190-pounder did with no blocking on some runs was amazing.

The most exciting game of the day was definitely the North Gwinnett upset of Colquitt County. The Bulldogs lost somewhere around 10 assistant coaches depending on how you look at it, and were left for dead by many heading into this season. But Bob Sphire apparently did a wonderful job of hiring new assistants and keeping his players focused. The visiting Packers are one of the favorites to win the state title this year and were ranked No. 3 in the preseason polls.

Now, you have to look at the Bulldogs at a legitimate threat to win the state championship.

UNDER THE RADAR ...

While Rush Propst's Packers received some hype in the offseason, our Atlanta Falcons are mostly under the radar. If anyone has picked Mike Smith's bunch to win or even make the Super Bowl, please point me in the direction of that prediction.

Frankly, I can't understand why there has been so little love for our Birds. The Falcons return the core of their offense yet again, and Julio Jones should be an even bigger playmaker in his second year. And honestly, new coordinators Mike Nolan and Dirk Koetter can't help but be an improvement over last year's crew. While the defense lacks star power, it does have a lot of talent. The acquisition of Asante Samuel brings swagger and attitude to the unit and young players like Sean Weatherspoon and William Moore are nearing their peaks.

I like the Falcons to make the playoffs yet again, and this time, make a run in the playoffs. The division is down and the Falcons are the best team in it. The Saints are a mess with the suspensions and off-the-field drama and Carolina is Cam Newton versus the world. While I love Newton's game, he is not going to will Carolina to a division title.

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SAGER SAYS



Georgia football more than holds its own

By Craig Sager II

If any state in our football-infatuated country should have enthusiasm heading into the 2012 season, it should be us. This offseason suggests we could be witnesses to one of the biggest and most exciting years on the gridiron that Georgia has ever seen. It seems like everything is falling into alignment from the high school level to the professional ranks. The Falcons have been on the radar since Matt Ryan and Mike Smith debuted in 2008 season and appear to be on the threshold of a breakout season. They have been busy all offseason with new playbooks on both sides of the football.

CAMPUS CALAMITY ...

In the collegiate realm, we have UGA, Georgia Tech and Georgia State in our backyard. UGA is a preseason top 10 at No. 6 right

now, and after a few down seasons, it looks like coach Mark Richt will once again lead a dangerous band of Bulldogs. Georgia Tech should finally have an improved defense this season and could return to top form and jump back into contention for the ACC title.

Legendary football coach Bill Curry will coach in the final season of his storied football career with Georgia State. The Panthers travel to the University of Tennessee on Sept. 8 to take on the Volunteers.

The most notable entity of Georgia's football has already kicked off: high school teams. We need to understand the magnitude of our high school football.

The statewide wealth of Peach State football persuaded Rivals to nominate Georgia as the top high school football state for the first time in 2011. The rankings were based on

overall competitiveness throughout all classifications.

In this year's NFL draft, former Central Gwinnett Black Knight Jonathan Masquai was taken by the Falcons in the fifth round and was one of 14 former Georgia high school football players taken in the draft. The 14 Georgia players picked is right at the 13.7 average since it was first recorded in 1988. The 2011 draft had the most picks with 19, including No. 1 overall pick and former Westlake Lion Cam Newton.

The more statistics that have been collected to locate football talent, the more it pinpointed how superior certain hotspots were, and college football dove into a feeding frenzy to recruit them.

California, Texas, Florida and Georgia came out as the zenith of high school football, and this quartet has been battling it out since. When it comes to the overall production of football talent, though, Georgia should be the clear candidate. California has about four times the population of Georgia, Texas about two and a half times more and Florida is about double the size. The fact that Georgia matches up with a similar capacity of these states and can produce comparable draft picks and college talent is amazing.

PURE PERSPECTIVE ...

High School football is prominent throughout the state and has divided our landscape into

rivalled regions all claiming to have the best football. We saw North vs South in the Dome last weekend when North Gwinnett topped Colquitt County and then Camden County stomped Peachtree Ridge. Then we saw the county rivalries that are heating up each season with Cobb County's Walton beating Gwinnett County's Brookwood and then Gwinnett County's Grayson beating Cobb County's McEachern.

All the big name recruits and the rivalries are easy to focus on, but that is not what makes our football great. We have some of the top recruits in the country now, but it is the other guys that matter. It is the high school football star that may not have the frame to play in college but does a darn good job on Friday nights. Any time you watch a high school or college game these days, the measurements of the athletes can overshadow what they are doing.

I remember watching a 5-foot-11 shooting guard put up 30 points last season and lead his team to an impressive upset. The reporter responded with, "Wow this kid is great, but he will never have the size to play at the next level."

Let that be a lesson. Recruiting has turned high school football into a bidding war, but we have to remember what makes it so great, because in the end, all that matters is what they do on Friday nights.

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BREAKNECK START



Several teams make early statements

By Fletcher Proctor



High school football kicked off with a bang last week as the Metro PCS Corky Kell Classic saw several prime contenders make their claim for the top spot in the Score Atlanta Class AAAAAA poll. Grayson, Camden County and Walton all looked impressive in their season-opening victories while North Gwinnett pulled off a stunner over Colquitt County, announcing that the Bulldogs would once again be players in the chase for a championship. Kell showed its grit with a dominating win over Chattahoochee in a game where the Longhorns were rarely challenged.

Grayson entered the Corky Kell Classic with a 15-game winning streak and promptly pulled away from McEachern after halftime. The Indians kept it close until intermission, but the enormous stable of running backs Rams coach Mickey Conn has at his disposal is something that Grayson's opponents will have a hard time containing all year. Wayne Gallman showed some serious quicks on Saturday and Robert Nkemdiriche proved once again that, when he holds onto the ball, he is unstoppable in short bursts. Grayson remained No. 1 in the Score Atlanta poll after

finishing off McEachern 31-12

Camden County may have had a right to be a little upset about remaining No. 2 after dismantling Peachtree Ridge 42-0. Brice Ramsey completed just 6-of-8 passing for 132 yards, but the future Georgia Bulldog did record three touchdowns as the Wildcats dominated the Lions. Camden County's Wing T offense is incredibly dangerous with the athletes Jeff Herron has in the backfield, including J.J. Green, but it is Ramsey that presents the biggest headaches for opposing coaches.

"Brice gives us an ability to take advantage of what people are doing (defensively)," said Herron. "When you're able to run the ball in the Wing-T, you have some opportunities in the passing game. We have some big play capabilities."

Tyren Jones turned in perhaps the most impressive performance of the day, carrying the ball 31 times for 302 yards and five scores as Walton waxed Brookwood 35-24. Jones was taken out early in the fourth quarter, otherwise he may have approached 350 yards.

"He is the total package," said Walton

coach Rocky Hidalgo about the future Alabama running back. "He's incredibly competitive and he wants to be the best. It really drives him."

UPSET CITY ...

The most shocking result of the Corky Kell was North Gwinnett springing the upset on previously ranked No. 3 Colquitt County. The Packers, coached by Rush Propst and led by Cole Segraves, entered the year with perhaps Propst's best team since he took over in Moultrie, but it was North Gwinnett's playmakers that willed the Bulldogs to victory. Donnie Miles will likely play a majority of his snaps this season on defense, but the future UNC Tar Heel took a handoff 77 yards to the end zone late in the third quarter to give the Bulldogs a lead.

Segraves answered with a huge pass to Bobby Hill, leading to a Deonte McCain score, and it appeared that Colquitt County had won the game when the Packers stopped North Gwinnett with only minutes to play in the fourth quarter. The Bulldogs' defense forced a three-and-out before Michael Hayes took over and connected on a pair of passes then a 20-yard running play, all with no timeouts. Michael D'Angola drilled a 33-yard field goal as time expired to give North Gwinnett a 16-14 win.

The fact that North Gwinnett won isn't shocking. The Bulldogs have posted at least 10 wins in each of the last six seasons and have not dropped a region game since 2008. Before the season, though, head coach Bob Sphire told Score that the program was in a "crisis situation," after losing part of the population to a new high school and losing 10 assistants to other jobs over the last 18 months. The Bulldogs appeared to have found playmakers on defense in Mills and Dante Sawyer, who was constantly in the Colquitt County backfield last Saturday. If those two keep leading the charge, look for the Bulldogs to keep winning and barely skip a beat in region play.

HOOK EM HORNS ...

One of the more impressive performances of the Corky Kell Classic came from the program named for the man that inspired the event. The Kell Longhorns barely let Chattahoochee breathe on offense as the Longhorns defensive secondary staked its claim as the best in the state. Quincy Mauger and Brendan Langley each have SEC scholarship offers but the juniors Julian Burris, Jay Moxey and Taylor Henkle are perhaps just as talented, and the entire team was on display against the Cougars. Henkle came up with a late interception to ice the game while Moxey recovered a fumble. The secondary did such a quality job taking away the receivers that

Michael Valero was able to get into the Chattahoochee backfield and hit the quarterback time and time again.

Langley's biggest contribution also came on offense as he scored a pair of touchdowns for Kell. Langley took a screen and juked his way into the end zone early on in the game. Later, Langley hauled in a 27-yard touchdown pass from Matthew McGuigan. Kell quickly put its name near the top of the list of Class AAAAA title contenders.

OTHER ACTION ...

The Georgia Dome wasn't the only site for high school football action on the 2012 season's opening weekend. Thomas County Central, behind a ferocious defense, destroyed Thomasville 41-7 in the Rose City rivalry. Thomas County Central now faces Colquitt County in a classic "irresistible force meets an immovable object" game. ECI also moved up in the latest Class A Score Atlanta rankings after demolishing Metter 42-7.

Two defending champions fell on the season's first Friday night when Thomson tamed Burke County 21-14 and Jenkins edged Savannah Christian 21-20. Burke County lost a lot of talent from last year as 23 seniors graduated from the 2011 Class AAA championship squad. Savannah Christian is also trying to replace a host of talent on the offensive and defensive side of the ball.

Photos courtesy of Sonny Kennedy. Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.



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WHO'S HOT

THUMBS UP TO ACE STARTERS



Kris Medlen

This guy needs a nickname! Medlen has been a beast since joining the rotation. He has not allowed more than three earned runs in a month since May. The Braves are undefeated in games he's started dating back to May 2010. Dude is setting himself up to be the team's ace in September.

Friday Night Lights

It's that time of year again. Crank up the concession stand popcorn machine, break out the band and get ready for some of the best high school football in the country. If you don't love the smell of cut grass and fresh chalk this time of year in Georgia, maybe you should ... just leave town.

Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game

The folks that invented the chicken sandwich have perfected their annual start to the college football season. Last year, Georgia faced Boise State. This year we get the Tennessee-NC State and Auburn-Clemson matchups. Next year, it'll be Alabama-VA Tech. Fans across the country are realizing that Atlanta is becoming college football's home field.

The All-Suspended team

Too many top college football stars will be missing from familiar sidelines this weekend. Some players have been dismissed from their programs and are trying out new destinations. Other bad boys face suspensions. Don't you wish you could see guys like Tyrann Mathieu, Michael Dyer, Isaiah Crowell, Sanders Commings and Da'Rick Rogers on the field?

Michael Carson

Carson is the suspended head coach of M. L. King's Class AAAAA No. 9 football team. Recently, police confirmed that he sent a text picture of himself au natural to a parent of one of his players. The successful coach needs to straighten up. We hope the talented team rallies around interim coach Robert Freeman.

Braves' battered starting rotation

The Brave's starters just can't stay healthy. Consider this, Tim Hudson, Brandon Beachy, Jair Jurrjens, Tommy Hanson and Ben Sheets have all been tabbed for the disabled list this year, and zero Braves' starters are on pace to pitch more than 180 innings all season. That makes for a brutal September workload for the boys in the bullpen.



WHO'S NOT

THUMBS DOWN TO THE DL

SCORE LIST

BY BRIAN JONES

1 **CLASSIC SATURDAY:** Athens, the Classic City, will be on fire Saturday because it is the start of the 2012 football season. The Bulldogs will face Buffalo in what should be a nice tune-up game before they head to Missouri the following week. The one thing I will be watching is how offensive lineman John Theus does in his first start. And I also want to see how Malcolm Mitchell does in his first start at cornerback. It should be a very fun day for all Georgia fans.

2 **MONDAY MADNESS:** Georgia Tech will start its season on Labor Day facing the Virginia Tech Hokies. It will be a tough game to win because the Jackets are playing in Blacksburg. But if the Jackets can get a consistent passing game going and improve on special teams, there is no reason they cannot steal one from the Hokies on Labor Day. But do I think that's going to happen? We'll just have to wait and see.

3 **DOMESTIC KICKOFF:** The Georgia Dome will be swamped with college football fans on Friday and Saturday nights for the Chick-fil-A College Kickoff weekend. Tennessee and N.C. State will be squaring off on Friday and Auburn and Clemson will be featured in the Saturday contest. I think Tennessee and Auburn will be the winners, but both games should be very compelling. The Chick-fil-A College Kickoff has always been a great way to start the season and these two games will not disappoint.

4 **EAST VS. WEST:** McEachern will be the battleground for East Cobb and West Cobb on Friday night. In what's being called the "Battle of I-75," Hillgrove will face Lassiter at 7 p.m. and Walton will face off against the Indians about 30 minutes after the first game ends. In my opinion, Lassiter and Walton will be the victors and East Cobb will come away with the sweep. But Hillgrove and McEachern are very talented teams which will make both games exciting. Check out both games on GPB and GPB.org/sports.

5 **ONE MORE GAME:** But wait. While you're on GPB.org/sports watching two great games, there is also the first webcast game of the year as Northside-Warner Robins will travel to Flowery Branch to face the Falcons. These are two very proud programs and there is no other way to start the webcast season than watching these two teams go at it. Score's Fletcher Proctor and Bob Houghton have the call, which is another reason to tune in. Kickoff is set for 7:30 p.m.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

BY FLETCHER PROCTOR

17 Straight Kris Medlen starts won by the Braves, matching Chris Carpenter's 2005 streak

17 Straight innings Medlen has shut out the San Diego Padres over the past two weeks

16 Consecutive wins by Grayson, the longest current winning streak in GHSA football

37.5 The point spread for the upcoming UGA/Bufalo football game as of Wednesday

6 Completed passes by Brice Ramsey in eight attempts against Peachtree Ridge

3 Touchdowns Ramsey passed for against Peachtree Ridge in the Corky Kell Classic

31 Carries by Walton's Tyren Jones against Brookwood. He tallied 302 yards and five scores

2 Starts last season for new Falcons' backup QB Luke McCown. He went 1-1 with the Jaguars

10 Home runs in 45 games since the All-Star break by Jason Heyward

7 Hits by Reed Johnson in his last six games. Johnson has hit .319 since joining the Braves

TRIVIA QUESTION

What current Brave played college baseball for both Auburn and Florida?

Answer on Page 10

SANITY AT LAST

"I know this experience will help. We just competed with one of the nation's top teams and we hung with them for a while. We're a young team, we had mistakes, and they happen. I think we're going to come back better and more mature next week and we're going to get it done."

- McEachern offensive lineman Jajuan Dulaney after the Corky Kell Classic loss to Grayson.

COACH'S DIARY

New Centennial football coach Jeffrey Carlberg is quickly putting his fingerprints all over the Knights program, and he has invited Score along for the ride during his first year at the helm. Here are highlights from last week...

We traveled to Marist for our final scrimmage Friday before kicking off the 2012 season at Roswell this week. Our quarterback Chase Rosenberg ran for one score and connected with Christian Robinson for a pair of touchdowns as we continue to implement the spread offense. This was really the first time we've put the spread out against players that aren't familiar with our system, so the coaching staff was interested to see what happened.

We got off to a slow start because we weren't playing with much aggression early on.



We were passive and not crisp. That started to change during the second quarter, but I still addressed the team at halftime with a simple challenge: stop playing tentatively. Be the hammer, not the nail.

We responded with several scoring chances in the third quarter and capitalized on two of them.

The final score was 38-20, but there were plenty of bright spots on both sides of the ball and plenty of our players saw action. Our offense certainly had a lot to build on this week, and it was clear that the defense got a lot better as the night went on. I thought the defensive ends in particular played really well. Hopefully, we can carry that over into our opener against Roswell.



Friendly county rivalries turn hostile

By Stephen Black

There is no disputing the fact that Friday's Battle of I-75 is a chance for some of Cobb County's best programs to demonstrate the quality of high school football played here. And while the familiarity between Cobb teams certainly breeds contempt at times, the programs tend to enjoy mutual respect that does not exist in other parts of the state.

RESPECT AND SUPPORT ...

According to two coaches in Friday's event, the respect between programs and coaches is palpable despite the intense and competitive rivalries around the county.

"Cobb County coaches, since I've been here, have been really tight and supportive of each other," said McEachern head coach Kyle Hockman, who has coached the Indians since 2008. "In a playoff game for a Cobb County team, there's a bunch of other (Cobb) head coaches sitting there watching on the sideline and all pulling for each other. Maybe (Friday's event) will kickstart some good cross-county rivalries."

Lassiter coach Jep Irwin, in his third year at the east Cobb school, agrees with Hockman.

"What I like about Cobb County is that when coaches got eliminated in the playoffs, they were sending us text messages like 'Good luck!' and 'Go Cobb!' So it's really a friendly rivalry," said Irwin. "There's not as much hatred as a lot of people like to make it out to be. It's a good healthy, friendly rivalry, but the coaches in Cobb County want to promote Cobb football and I think this event is one way we can do that."

While the event is a big deal to football fans around the state, its origin was rather simple and easy.

"We kinda had the idea start to float around," said Hockman of an intra-county football event. "I was just real honored that the other guys jumped on it really fast. The other three (coaches) were like 'Hey, let's do this.' It was really just a matter of working out details. It's obviously something that all four of us are excited about."

While the coaches and programs as a whole are respectful of each other, the games are intense and highly competitive. Lassiter and Walton share a rivalry so important it has been named "The Super Bowl of East Cobb" and Hillgrove and McEachern enjoy their own neighborhood grudge match. However, the combatants in Friday's game do not really share anything but respect and support for their opponents.

McEachern and Walton have a relationship that stretches back to 1976. The two programs have played seven times, with the Raiders holding a 4-3 edge. The last game between the Raiders and Indians came in the 2003 Corky Kell Classic, a 21-7 Walton win.

Lassiter and Hillgrove, meanwhile, have never met. But the two programs have made the playoffs a combined seven times in four seasons and each program has made at least the quarter-finals of the playoffs in the past two years.

TOUGH OPENERS ...

McEachern opened with last year's state champion, Grayson, last week and play the runner-up Friday in Walton. With such a tough opening schedule, Hockman and his program obviously have their sights on being more than

just a playoff team.

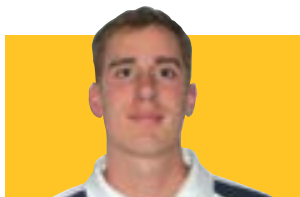
"It's gonna be a huge challenge," said Hockman of his team's first two games. "We've definitely got our work cut out for us in back-to-back weeks and, honestly, that's what we're trying to do. That's our goal as a program, where Grayson was (state champions), and we want to play those types of teams early when there's no playoff implications on the line and to see where we're at."

Preparing for these games is always tricky, as there is no hiding weakness against such quality competition. Lassiter, as the only program that hasn't played a game yet, is in a unique situation.

"You hope that you've done enough to get yourself ready to play up until game week," said Irwin. "We know what we're up against in terms of the good coaching and good players they have (at Hillgrove). They've had a very good program there the past couple years."

While the competition on the field Friday will be white hot with intensity, there is a deep respect between the competitors. After all, the four programs are united in search of one common goal: bringing a state championship back to Cobb.

Black can be reached at sblack@scoreatl.com.

SIMPLY
THE BEST

Is Jones the top back in America?

By Fletcher Proctor

Tyren Jones rushed for 2,375 yards and 38 touchdowns as a junior in his first season with Walton. After committing to Alabama and putting on nearly 20 pounds of muscle over the summer Jones is back, running hard toward another offensive player of the year recognition.

BRONCOS BLITZED ...

Last week at the Georgia Dome, Jones carried the ball 31 times for 302 yards while finding the end zone five times in a 35-24 Walton victory. As incredible as the numbers were, Walton head coach Rocky Hidalgo is used to seeing Jones turn in these types of games.

"He's had so many great games," said Hidalgo. "It is really hard to say which has been his best game, but he was really impressive Saturday night."

Despite last season's eye-popping numbers and the early success for 2012, Jones is still not considered ranked in the top 18 in two of four major recruiting services. Rivals.com has him listed as the third best back in Georgia, just No. 26 in the country. Scout.com has him as the second-best back and No. 19 overall. ESPN has him pegged below Norcross' Alvin Kamara in the state and No. 8 overall. The final service, 247sports, has him the

fifth-best back in the entire country.

"He's incredibly competitive," revealed Hidalgo. "He wants to be the best back and it drives him."

Who are these backs and how in the world can they be better than Jones, who carried Walton to the state finals one year ago before scoring nearly every point for Walton last week?

NUMBERS AND FIGURES ...

Recruiting is a numbers game before anything else. Measureables are the best way to differentiate running backs when they play similar positions against far different competition. Jones' size ranges from 5-foot-9, 197 pounds on Scout.com to 5-foot-8, 202 pounds according to 247sports to 5-foot-8, 185 pounds according to Rivals, with ESPN rounding out the field with 5-foot-8, 190 pounds. Jones is somewhere in there, but his measureables have earned him four stars across the board from all four services.

Conversely, Scout.com's top back Ty Isaac out of Illinois headed to USC is listed at 6-foot-2, 220 pounds. Stockton, California product Justin Davis, also headed to USC, checks in at 6-foot-1, 195 pounds. Each of these players has earned five stars based largely on their height.

Of the four other five-star prospects, only Keith Ford out of Cypress, Texas was under 6-foot-1.

The 40-yard time is also a measureable that could possibly have kept Jones from making it into the top 10 in all of the services. Jones posted a 4.57 time, behind players such as Ryan Green of St. Petersburg, Fla., (4.40), Kailo Moore of Rosedale, Miss., (4.44) and fellow Alabama Crimson Tide commit Altee Tenpenny out of North Little Rock, Ark., (4.42).

But numbers can be deceiving and sometimes it is the intangibles that make the difference. "He is a great kid with great character," said Hidalgo. "His talent is overshadowed by how hard he works. He is talented in a lot of ways and I think is the total package."

Nick Saban seems to agree and the Alabama head coach is no doubt glad to have Jones verbally committed to his program. For now, Jones and the Raiders will go back to work on trying to finish off what they started last season, which was winning their first 14 games before falling to Grayson in the state championship game. Jones posted more than 2,300 yards and could have padded the stats even more, according to Hidalgo, had the Walton coaches played him in the second half of blowouts.

This season, expect Jones to possibly eclipse the totals from one year ago, especially with fellow Alabama pledge Parker McLeod under center for Walton making defenses think twice about putting nine in the box.

Hidalgo said the team would be working to improve in several areas on offense, including making strides with the offensive line. If the line can improve its play and avoid costly penalties, expect Jones to surpass the 300-yard mark quite often in 2012 and pick up some more hardware before heading off to Alabama.

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

PREP
NOTEBOOK

Roswell girls edge defending champs

By Stephen Black

At the Peachtree Ridge/Walton stage races in Duluth, defending Class AAAAA cross country champion Walton was edged by Roswell in the girls meet. The Hornets won the meet with 19 points while the Raiders came in just behind with 21. Dunwoody had a respectable third-place showing with 22 points. The Wildcats' Alexandra Cameron won the overall race with a time of 11:33.46. In the boys meet, Mill Creek and St. Pius X tied with 10 points and were followed by Brookwood with 27 points. Austin Sprague of St. Pius X won the race with a time of 9:47.11 while Eric Westog of Mill Creek came in second with a time of 9:52.

In Fairburn, Norcross won the Mercy Invitational boys meet with 36 points while Marist came in second with 61. Marist won the girls meet with 50 points to defeat second-place Blessed Trinity (73) and the rest of the field. Senior Katherine Yost of Norcross won the girls race with a time of 18:31.53, well ahead of second-finisher Morgan Ilse of Marist, who finished in 19:20.56. The War Eagles finished with 10 runners in the top 23. The individual winner of the boys race was Michael Thurston of Marist, who clocked a time of 16:03.34, just ahead of Arman Rehmann of Norcross, who finished at 16:04.70.

McIntosh won the Bob Blastow Invitational

in Douglas County Saturday with 53 points, besting Milton's second-place total of 68 points. The Chiefs finished 1-2 in the individual standings as well, with seniors Brad Hort and Sidney Speir clocking times of 15:30.91 and 15:35.12. Milton's Nathan Riech broke through in third place with a time of 15:46. Milton won the girls meet with 64 points, easily ahead of second-place Landmark Christian, which totaled 103 points. The individual winner was also an Eagle, Annie Kelly, who finished with a time of 17:55.60. Landmark Christian's Kathryn Foreman came in second at 18:09.34.

DIAMOND NOTES ...

Class AAA No. 1 Buford (10-0) won its Region 7-opener against West Hall 12-0 in five innings. The Wolves scored 11 runs in the first three innings, including a homer run and three RBIs by Remington Hasty and three RBIs by Sydney Stavro. Pitcher Bria Bush (6-0) got the win after throwing two no-hit innings. Bush then yielded to freshman Peyton Wolfe, who tossed the last three innings in giving up just one hit. Saturday, at North Georgia College and State University, Buford beat North Forsyth of Class AAAAAA and Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe. In the North Forsyth win, Bush won her fifth game

of the season, allowing two runs in seven innings. Jazmin Hawkins was 2-for-3 with a triple and two runs while Stavro was 2-for-2 with a stolen base. Against Lakeview, Bekah Rude (3-0) earned the win with four innings of work. Alexis Baldy hit an inside-the-park homer and Hasty had a triple and two RBIs.

Marietta is just 3-5 on the season, but is led by junior Taylor Hartenbach, who is hitting .391 with three triples and four RBIs. Hartenbach also leads the team in most pitching categories, with two wins, 48 strikeouts and a 3.67 ERA.

St. Pius has struggled to a 1-6 start to its season, but Natasha Sherrod has been scorching at the plate, hitting .533 with four extra-base hits. The Golden Lions will open Region 6-AAA play against McNair on Thursday.

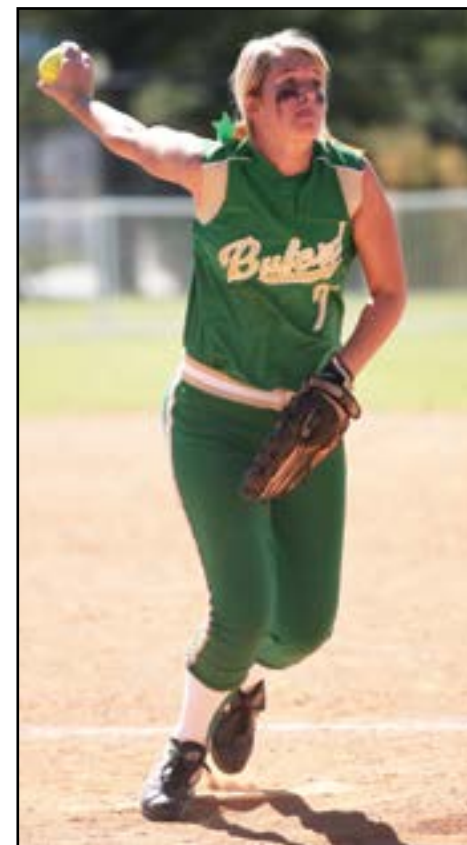
ON THE COURTS ...

No. 3 Mill Creek won the Brookwood Aloha Bash with a 4-0 record in the event. The Hawks defeated Brookwood (25-21, 25-15), Providence Christian (25-21, 25-13), Class A No. 1 George Walton Academy (25-22, 25-22) and Parkview (25-12, 25-15). Mill Creek's Emily Wylie had 25 kills and four blocks, while Cayla Graham had 18 kills, Brittany Moore had 35 digs and Kaitlyn Lattimer had 46 assists.

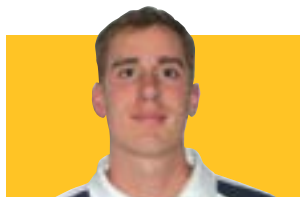
Class AAA No. 1 Woodward Academy won four games last week with victories over Chattahoochee (22-25, 25-22, 25-23), Sandy Creek (26-24, 25-23), Starr's Mill (25-15, 25-15) and Columbus (25-23, 25-16). Lexie Norfleet had 30 total kills in the four games, Sydney Morton had seven service aces and Elizabeth Muse had 20 digs.

Class AAAAAA North Cobb upended Class AAAAA Sequoyah 25-15, 25-17, 25-23 in a best-of-five match Tuesday in Kennesaw. The host Warriors (11-4) benefited from 11 kills by Savanna Gonzales and nine from Maddie Dukes. Taylor Parrish had 30 assists.

Photo courtesy of the GHSA. Black can be reached at sblack@scoreatl.com.



HILLGROVE VS. LASSITER



Plenty of options available for both offenses

By Fletcher Proctor & Stephen Black

The Lassiter Trojans will once again boast a high-flying offense that should barely skip a beat after the loss of star wideout Charlie Hegeudus to graduation. Jep Irwin's squad reached the Class AAAAA semifinals one season ago and looks to advance even further with Eddie Printz back under center. The future UCLA Bruin will once again have Juwan Dickey on the outside as well as Ryan Jenkins, who is headed to Clemson, and junior Quincy Perdue.

Printz has really taken on even more of a leadership role leading up to his senior season according to his coach.

"He is leading workouts and throwing to the younger guys," said Irwin earlier this summer.

Defensively, the Trojans return defensive back Robert Dowling and linebacker Josh Danforth along with Trenton Gantt up front on the defensive line. Irwin will be working in several newcomers on defense with Eric Perdue at safety, Hakim Carter at defensive back and Chris Murphy at cornerback.

Many figured the Hillgrove offense would take a step back after the departure of Kenyan Drake to Alabama, but Phil Ironside's Hawks looked dominating in a scrimmage a few weeks

ago, taking down Walton 21-16. Troy Thompson looks like he is more than capable under center and Richardre Bagley took a simple screen nearly 70 yards for a score. Look for Thompson to find Bagley and tight end Evan Ingram a lot this season. Ingram is 6-foot-3, 210 pounds and is headed to Ole Miss. Omar Black and Justin Denton will also be options on the outside for the Hawks.

Ironside said before the season that his offense would spread the ball around to take advantage of the talent on offense.

Defensively, Tolando Cleveland leads an experienced secondary.

"We have all of our secondary back and they all started as sophomores," said Ironside. "We'll get a good test early on. We've got a good regular season schedule and it is really important to get off to a good start to stay atop the region."

Expect plenty of points go up on the board as both of the offenses will throw the ball around the field, especially if the summer 7-on-7 camps were any indication. While many expected Lassiter to shine, Hillgrove played strong defense in addition to throwing the ball well, impressing many who witnessed the event.

Last week, Hillgrove defeated Westlake

31-15 in the season opener as Thompson threw for 281 yards and four touchdowns on 18-of-25 passing. Hillgrove started a tad slow, as Westlake grabbed an early 7-0 lead and held it through the half. But to start the second half, the Hawks scored on a 60-yard screen pass to Bagley. From there, Ironside's squad dominated in outscoring the host Lions 17-0 in the third period.

Meanwhile, Lassiter is the only team in tonight's event to have not yet played a game in 2012. Irwin prepared his team by focusing on its own issues throughout fall camp, but shifted the focus to the Hawks this week.

"You hope that you've done enough to get yourself ready to play up until game week," said Irwin. "But we already know what we're up against in terms of the good coaching and good players they have over there. They've had a very good program there the past couple years."

Irwin knows he won't have a difficult time getting his team motivated for tonight's game. While the other programs in the Battle of I-75 had openers last weekend, the Trojans had all offseason to think about this game.

"I think the entire offseason your players really have a big game to look forward to," said Irwin. "Playing Hillgrove in the Battle of I-75 for Cobb County football is really big. It's been good for us in the offseason."

Lassiter has been a veteran of big early-season showcases having participated in the Corky Kell Classic the past two seasons. With that in mind, how important is the season-opener, especially against such a respected opponent?

"I think it all depends on how you play in that first game," said Irwin. "I don't think it can define your season, but it sure doesn't hurt to get a win first."

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

sic. While the 31-12 defeat looks bad on paper, McEachern's players and coaches were encouraged by how they competed with what may be one of the best high school teams in the nation.

"I know this experience will help," said Indians offensive lineman Jajuan Dulaney after the Corky Kell Classic. "We just competed with one of the nation's top teams and we hung with them for a while. We're a young team, we had mistakes, and they happen. I think we're going to come back better and more mature next week and we're going to get it done."

Clemons scored twice against the fearsome Rams' defense and McEachern trailed just 14-12 entering the second half, but succumbed to Grayson's unmatched experience and talent. The Indians will see how much they've improved tonight.

"That will be the key: whether we improve next week, and then whether we improve after the week after that," said Hockman after the Grayson game. "We'll know if we got better next week against a really good team in Walton. (Improvement) is what we're looking for and we'll know that on a weekly basis."

The No. 3 Raiders, meanwhile, ripped through a solid Brookwood team last week at the Corky Kell Classic to the tune of 302 rushing yards by Jones. The Alabama commitment hit paydirt five times during the game as Walton cruised to a 35-24 win that was not as close as the score may indicate.

Hidalgo is rightly proud of his stellar tailback. "He's a great kid with great character," said Hidalgo. "His talent is almost overshadowed with how hard he works."

With Walton coming off a big win against a respected foe and McEachern rebounding from a defeat by an elite program, it will be interesting to see how the two teams play in tonight's finale.

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

McEACHERN VS. WALTON



Young defenses to be seriously tested

By Fletcher Proctor & Stephen Black

The Walton Raiders have experienced quite the gauntlet dating back to last season. The Raiders last faced a team with a sub-.500 record on Nov. 11 in the first round of the playoffs in Milton. Since then, Tyren Jones, Parker McLeod and the rest of the Raiders have taken on South Cobb, Dacula, Lassiter, Grayson, Brookwood and now McEachern.

Jones and McLeod lead a stout offense that relies on the legs of Jones and the play-action of McLeod. The Alabama commits helped the team go 14-1 last season, but they will be looking for a third member on the outside to help take some attention away from Jones. D.J. Smith could be that outside threat as he will likely split time between defense and offense. Brandon Kublanow is a monster up front and can push a pile around from his spot on the offensive line. "The Finisher" busted out at last year's Corky Kell Classic and he was recently named to the AJC Super 11 as well as the Score 44 preseason list. He will be joined on the line by Jake Boyton.

McEachern must replace a host of play-makers on both sides of the ball. Quarterback Trent Thompson moved on to play college football as did wide receiver Amba Etta-Tawo and kicker Nicholas St. Germain. Tray Fletcher,

Kofi Amichia and Jaloni Wells are also gone from a very effective offense from last year's 10-2 season. Defensively, the Indians must replace Marsell James, Jed Nwankwoh and Darius English off the front four and Cameron Gamble out of the secondary.

Kyle Hockman has plenty of experience molding fresh talent and his skills will be put to the test early on. After opening with Grayson in the Corky Kell Classic, the Indians face another tall task in the Raiders.

"We're going to be extremely young," said Hockman. "The only experience coming back is four offensive linemen. We are going to rely on them early in the season for production and leadership."

The line is anchored by Jajuan Dulaney and Sherrod Pittman. Dulaney is headed to Maryland next year, but Pittman could be the more important of the two.

"(He) is a fireplug that we are relying on," said Hockman.

The task of replacing Thompson will fall to Ty Clemons, though Hockman admits that McEachern will use multiple quarterbacks in 2012.

Over the weekend, the Indians fell to No. 1 Grayson in the Metro PCS Corky Kell Clas-

WEEK 2 FOOTBALL RANKINGS

CLASS AAAAA

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

CLASS AAAAA

1.....	Tucker
2.....	Stephenson
3.....	Northside-WR
4.....	Kell
5.....	Gainesville
6.....	Warner Robins
7.....	East Paulding
8.....	Flowery Branch
9.....	ML King
10.....	Thomas County Central

CLASS AAAA

1.....	Sandy Creek
2.....	Cairo
3.....	Marist
4.....	Carrollton
5.....	Statesboro
6.....	Baldwin
7.....	Burke County
8.....	Grady
9.....	Stephens County
10.....	Griffin

CLASS AAA

1.....	Peach County
2.....	Buford
3.....	Carver-Columbus
4.....	Elbert County
5.....	St. Pius X
6.....	Washington County
7.....	Thomson
8.....	North Oconee
9.....	Blessed Trinity
10.....	Jefferson County

CLASS AA

1.....	Calhoun
2.....	Cook
3.....	Fitzgerald
4.....	Lovett
5.....	Dublin
6.....	GAC
7.....	Brooks County
8.....	Westminster
9.....	Vidalia
10.....	Wesleyan

CLASS A

1.....	Wilcox County
2.....	Lincoln County
3.....	ECI
4.....	Aquinas
5.....	Charlton County
6.....	Wilkinson County
7.....	Seminole County
8.....	Clinch County
9.....	Savannah Christian
10.....	ELCA

SPORTS AND CONCUSSIONS



Children's helps athletes safely return to play after a concussion

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta sees many children and teens each year who are suffering from concussions. With fall sports underway, Children's is prepared to see many more concussed athletes, ranging from football and soccer players to cheerleaders. The pediatric team of concussion specialists at Children's is trained to treat head injuries of all severities and tailor each patient's treatment plan to meet his/her specific needs.

Even if athletes use or wear equipment properly and follow the game rules, head injuries can happen. When they do, it's important that an athlete be held out of participating in sports and possibly school until he or she is evaluated and cleared by a medical

professional trained in the management of concussions. Athletes need to treat any head injury seriously. If a player sustains a second concussion before he/she has fully recovered from the first injury, there can be severe consequences such as brain damage or even death. It's very important that anyone who suffers a concussion take the time to recover.

There is no set time frame for when an athlete can return to play or school. No two brains are alike, so no two concussions are alike either. Athletes must be completely symptom-free at rest and during physical exertion before returning to sports or recreational activities. Neurocognitive tests may be used to measure aspects of an athlete's brain functioning—like short term and

long term memory, reaction time and problem solving—to help determine if the brain has recovered. Children's uses Immediate Postconcussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing (ImPACT™), a computer-based evaluation for sports concussions. If the ImPACT™ test is taken before the season starts to identify an athlete's baseline score, it can be compared to post-concussion testing if the athlete suffers a head injury later. ImPACT™ testing is recommended for athletes participating in sports like football, lacrosse, soccer, basketball, cheerleading and gymnastics.

Once an athlete is symptom-free, has gradually returned to school and activities, has normal cognitive test results and is cleared by a medical professional trained to manage concussions, he/she can return to sports.

Visit choa.org/concussion to learn more about Children's Concussion Program or call 404-785-1111 to speak with our concussion nurse coordinator.

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Braves catcher David Ross played college baseball at both Auburn and Florida.

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PANTHER PROWL



Panthers kick off Curry's final year

By Brian Jones

The college football season began on Thursday for the state of Georgia as the Panthers took on South Carolina State at the Georgia Dome. Results were not available at press time.

In order for the offense to succeed, it will need consistent quarterback play. Redshirt freshman Ben McLane is listed as the starter, as he won the job during spring practice beating out last year's Kelton Hill.

He will have a reliable running back behind him as Donald Russell returns for his senior season. He missed two games last year and racked up 665 yards on 128 carries.

McLane's go-to receiver will be Albert Wilson, who led the team in receiving last year. Wilson caught 37 passes for 772 yards and six touchdowns in nine games.

The offensive line features all juniors and will be anchored by Ulrick John and Grant King. Four starters from last year are gone, so for the Panthers to have any success on offense, the line has to gel in a hurry.

ON DEFENSE ...

Under new defensive coordinator Anthony Midget, the Panthers will run a 4-2-5 where only four starters return and there are only four seniors on the defensive side of the two-deep depth chart.

Curry is hoping defensive tackle Joe Lockley is able to adjust to the college game quickly and be a force in the new scheme. Lockley has looked sharp in the practices and scrimmages, but it's a different story once he faces teams like Tennessee and James Madison.

The Panthers will also rely on linebacker Mark Hogan and safety Demazio Skelton to make more plays in the new scheme. Hogan had 56 tackles and one interception last year while Skelton notched 61 tackles and two picks.

REGROUP AND RECOVER ...

While the football team kicks off its season, the men's soccer team is trying to pick up the pieces after suffering three different tragedies in three months.

Back in June, Tim Nixon died in a car accident. Nearly a week later, Jordan Wise fell down a flight of stairs and suffered brain swelling. And last week, Ayokunle Lumpkin was shot in a confrontation in downtown Atlanta. He died later that night at Grady Memorial Hospital.

Before every home game, there will be a moment of silence for Nixon and Lumpkin. Each player will wear patches on their jerseys with Lumpkin's No. 22 and Nixon's No. 25.

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OWL OUTLOOK



Soccer, volleyball pick up wins

By Brian Jones

Kennesaw Stadium is seeing a lot of action as of late. The soccer team kicked off its season nearly two weeks ago and the fans have come at a record-setting pace.

After losing a tough game to Alabama and then blowing past Alabama A&M, the Owls took on Georgia State last Friday. The Owl Nation knew that this was a big game, and a record crowd of 2,683 was in attendance to see the rivals go at it. The Owls could not come up with the victory as they fell to the Panthers 2-1.

The difference was when State's Whitney Raven scored the game-winning goal with less than 40 seconds left in the contest. The Panthers got their first score of the game four minutes into the first half when Jewel Evans scored.

The Owls tied the game with seven minutes left in the contest when Danielle Gray scored via corner kick.

"It was a good game," Owls head coach Rob King told ksuowls.com. "It is going to be a good rivalry in there. We look forward to playing them. The fans were fantastic tonight. We heard them cheering all game long. The result didn't go the way we wanted it to, but it was a very exciting game. We still have plenty to do."

The Owls will be back at Kennesaw Stadium Friday when they face Tennessee at 7 p.m.

FAST START ...

The volleyball team has gotten its season off on the right foot as the Owls went 3-0 in the Maroon Classic last weekend. The Owls defeated Louisiana-Monroe 3-1 last Friday and took down Jackson State (3-1) and Mississippi State (3-2) the next day.

Sara Metroka was named the tournament MVP after a combined 137 assists and 14 kills. Camille Pedraza was named to the All-Tournament team after racking up 78 digs, including 31 in the Mississippi State series.

"It was such a great way to start the season," head coach Karen Weatherington told ksuowls.com. "Even the kids we didn't have in the game were great. I couldn't ask for more."

The tournament win was the first outright win in Owls history. They will be back in action this weekend taking part in the Savannah State tournament.

BLACK AND GOLD ...

College Colors Day is today and KSU will be on top of it like no other. KSU President Dan Papp along with AD Vaughn Williams met with Kennesaw Mayor Mark Matthews and Acworth Mayor Tommy Algeood on Wednesday to proclaim Friday College Colors Day for the two cities.

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BULLDOG BEAT



Dawgs ready to run with the Bulls

By Chris Lionetti

After months of practicing and scrimmaging against each other, Mark Richt and the sixth-ranked Georgia Bulldogs are ready for the season to start.

"We've been waiting a long time and we're getting tired, quite frankly, of running into each other," said Richt at his first game week presser. "I'm sure every coach in America is saying this, but it's true. We want to play."

PECKING ORDER ...

The Bulldogs' head coach went over a plethora of subjects with members of the media Tuesday, but what garnered the attention of the group was the release of the team's depth chart.

On offense, there were few surprises on the team's first depth chart of the 2012 season. As expected, Ken Malcome is listed as the starter at tailback after enjoying a great fall camp and is followed by Todd Gurley, Keith Marshall and Richard Samuel. Gurley, a less-hyped prospect than Marshall, ran for more yards than any other back in the team's three scrimmages. Former walk-on Merritt Hall is the starter at fullback and is backed up by Samuel. Freshman John Theus will start

at right tackle after showing great athleticism at the position. The starters at wide receiver are the same as last year, Tavarres King and Marlon Brown, but the surprise is Malcolm Mitchell being listed third behind Brown.

Defensively, the Bulldogs look very similar to last year but have made some changes. Cornelius Washington is now a starter at defensive end opposite Abry Jones. Sophomore linebacker Ramik Wilson will start at Washington's old position. Malcolm Mitchell is listed as the starter at cornerback opposite Branden Smith and Damian Swann is the team's nickel corner.

SUSPENSIONS? ...

Though the depth chart turned out as expected, what is interesting is that linebacker Alec Ogletree and safety Baccari Rambo are listed as starters. The duo is facing suspensions after failing drug tests but the school has been tight-lipped about how long they will miss, if they will miss time at all.

"I don't know if there is anything etched in stone, but we are handling it a little bit different this year," added Richt.

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TECH BUZZ



Jackets prepare for Labor Day opener

By Ryan Caiafa

The Yellow Jackets will be in the spotlight on Labor Day as they will be taking on the No. 16 Virginia Tech Hokies in the final Week 1 matchup of the 2012 campaign. Questions about the Jackets' depth chart continue to linger in the final days of preparation for the new season.

GLORY "DAYS" ...

While it seems as if Tevin Washington has been penciled in as the starter at quarterback for the season opener, many still feel that at the first sign of trouble, backup Synjyn Days should be given an opportunity to shine at the position. With Stephen Hill now playing in the NFL, the wide receiver position seemingly will be occupied by Jeff Greene and Jeremy Moore. Since implementing coach Paul Johnson's triple-option offense, the Jackets have had great success at developing their receivers into deep-ball threats, with Hill and current Peyton Manning-target Demaryius Thomas being taken high in the NFL Draft. Johnson and the rest of the staff seem to be highest on Moore, who is expected to take over the top receiver spot and display the talent that he was expected to prior to injuries hindering his progress.

IN THE TRENCHES ...

The offensive line could be the Jackets' strong point this season, as it's filled with juniors and seniors looking to build on a solid, yet inconsistent 2011 season. The line will need to be solid for the team if Washington is to thrive in guiding the offense in his senior season. Senior guard Omoregie Uzzi and junior tackle Ray Beno return to help anchor an O-line that propelled an offense to an average of 34.3 points per game last season. The high-powered offense will meet a tough Virginia Tech defense that surrendered just 17.6 points per game in 2011, which was good enough for seventh-best in the nation.

The X-factor in this matchup may be whether or not the Jackets defense can come up with critical stops against a Hokies offense that looked stagnant at times in 2011. Even without senior linebacker Julian Burnett, who suffered a severe neck injury in the Sun Bowl, the Jackets still bring back enough depth from last season and should be much improved from 2011, when Al Groh's unit allowed 26.1 points per game.

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HAWKS HAVEN



Sund stays; preseason slate released

By Robby Kalland

The Atlanta Hawks continue to reshape their organization this offseason, most recently making some additions to the front office and coaching staff. Former GM Rick Sund has been brought back as the Senior Advisor of Basketball Operations. Sund, who served as GM for the past four years, was replaced by Danny Ferry earlier in the summer. Kenny Atkinson and Bob Weiss have been added as assistant coaches on Larry Drew's staff. Atkinson's most recent coaching stop was as an assistant for the Knicks over the past four seasons while Weiss, who was head coach of the Hawks from 1990-93, most recently coached in the Chinese Basketball Association.

SCRIMMAGE SLATE ...

The Hawks will open their preseason schedule at home on Oct. 7 against the defending champs, the Miami Heat. They play three road preseason games against San Antonio (Oct. 10), Memphis (Oct. 14) and Indiana (Oct. 16) before returning to Philips Arena to face the Hornets (Oct. 18) and the Mavericks (Oct. 20). Their final preseason game will be at Detroit (Oct. 26) before they open their regular season at home on Nov. 2 against the Rockets. The Hawks have a difficult schedule for the

preseason, facing the last two NBA champions in the Heat and the Mavericks, along with three other playoff teams from last season.

These tune-ups, combined with training camp, will be vital for the new-look Hawks to build chemistry and confidence heading into the regular season. With so many new faces playing major roles for this team, most notably Devin Harris, Lou Williams and John Jenkins, the Hawks will be one of the teams most anxious to get their players out on the court against NBA competition in order to get comfortable with one another on the floor. This year's squad will be predicated on ball movement and making timely passes moreso than in any year during the Joe Johnson era, so familiarity and team chemistry will be extremely important for the Hawks.

While most around the Hawks are excited to see Iso-Joe no longer an option, it will mean some growing pains as this team transitions into a more conventional pick-and-roll offense. The preseason will be the first opportunity to see which combinations work best on the floor together, and who will be the primary options without Johnson.

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FALCONS BEAT



Falcons shuffle backup quarterbacks

By Craig Sager II

The Falcons' eventful offseason continued this week when big roster news came out of Flowery Branch. The preseason is ending and a finalized roster must get down to 53 men by this weekend. All of the position battles that amplified this offseason were given one final look at Thursday's fourth and final preseason game. The coaching staff must make final cuts as the team is now focusing on getting ready for a trip to Arrowhead Stadium.

One of the most protected positions heading into the 2012 season was quarterback. Matt Ryan is the franchise player, so it is understood why the bulk of attention had been directed towards linebacker, the offensive line and other roles. The preseason always gives the backup quarterbacks valuable game experience, and the Falcons' backup rotation was altered by rookie free agent Dominique Davis, who outperformed his reserve counterparts this preseason and asserted himself as a reliable backup.

Big changes in the quarterback rotation came on Tuesday when the Falcons waived Chris Redman, who had been with the team since 2007. Redman was waived just two days after No. 3 quarterback John Parker Wilson was trimmed during the cutdown to 75 players.

CASE FOR DAVIS ...

Davis remained on the team in part be-

cause of a great preseason, but also because Redman did not look ready to fill in should the Falcons need him this season. Davis has reiterated to the media that he has been successful so far because he is treating every rep as a competition, and he challenges himself to get better on every play. This attitude impressed his teammates, who have rallied around him this preseason and contributed to him beating out Redman and Wilson.

While some may be surprised with Davis' success, Ryan is not. Ryan had seen what type of player and teammate Davis was when the two were at Boston College. Davis was just a red-shirt freshman at during Ryan's senior season. Being a student of Ryan is something Davis is comfortable with and he has embraced that role all offseason.

"I have listened to every word Ryan has told me," Davis told the media this week.

OTHER OPTIONS ...

Luke McCown was brought in for Redman and is younger and more familiar with new offensive coordinator Dirk Koetter's playbook. McCown spent four seasons with Koetter in Jacksonville, so, despite being a late acquisition, he could immediately move into the No. 2 spot.

Sager II can be reached at 404-256-1572.

CHOP SHOP

PRESENTED BY



Medlen's pitching keeps Braves afloat

By Fletcher Proctor

The Atlanta Braves were just 3-7 in their last 10 games entering Tuesday's game in San Diego, and the team turned to makeshift ace Kris Medlen. The Braves reliever-turned-starter-turned-reliever-turned-starter-again took to the Petco Park bump with the Braves having recorded a victory in each of Medlen's last 16 starts dating back to May 2010. Medlen would extend that run to 17 straight as he held the Padres scoreless for eight innings in a 2-0 Braves' win. His shutout streak against the Padres stretched to 17 innings after he tossed his first career shutout against the Padres back on Aug. 16, and his personal scoreless streak was extended to 28.1 after Tuesday's victory. The scoreless streak is the longest since 2000 when Greg Maddux went 39.1 straight scoreless frames.

Medlen also managed to pick off two Padres baserunners in the game.

"I don't think I've seen two pickoffs from a right-handed pitcher in a long time," said Braves manager Fredi Gonzalez to atlanta-braves.com. "He does a lot of good stuff."

Craig Kimbrel struck out three batters in the ninth inning to record save No. 32, but his first since Aug. 3. Dan Uggla walloped a home run to help Atlanta earn the victory. The home

run for Uggla was his first since Aug. 15, and it was hit No. 1000 for his career.

HOT HEYWARD ...

Jason Heyward has been on fire over the last 30 days. Heyward has posted a .307 average in 29 games over the last 30 days, notching 35 hits and 23 runs with 16 extra-base hits. He has slugged nine home runs while driving in 20 runs. Over just the past week, Heyward has 10 hits and five RBIs in seven games. He has batted .292 since the all-star break and has raised his season average to .279. He has hit 24 home runs and 19 stolen bases as he is angling to become Atlanta's 20/20 player since Andruw Jones.

OPTIONS AT SECOND ...

Since being acquired last month, Reed Johnson has been invaluable to the Braves as a spot starter in the outfield and off the bench. In 18 games with Atlanta, Johnson has 15 hits in 47 at-bats. One thing to keep an eye on should Uggla continue to struggle, Gonzalez may move Martin Prado to second base, where he was named an All-Star in 2010, and start Johnson in left field.

Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

DREAM BEAT



Dream fire coach, suspend star

By Joe Deighton

Suspending players is a common occurrence in the NBA, NFL and MLB, but in the WNBA, it is almost unheard of because rarely do the players warrant suspensions based on their attitudes. Tuesday, the Atlanta Dream suspended their top scoring forward and best player Angel McCoughtry for violating team rules. This came after the firing of head coach Marynell Meadors on Monday. McCoughtry criticized Meadors after a loss to Minnesota, which turned out to be Meadors' final game as Atlanta head coach.

The relationship between Meadors and McCoughtry had been volatile at times, despite a successful two-year run which resulted in two straight WNBA Finals appearances and an Olympic gold medal.

This season has been a disappointing one, with the Dream struggling to stay at .500. McCoughtry leads the team and the league in scoring with 22.2 ppg. At times, though, she has refused to come out of games, and she could be seen sulking and complaining on the bench when she did come out of games. This attitude is something that new coach and general manager Fred Williams apparently

will not tolerate as he suspended McCoughtry indefinitely on Tuesday.

NEW BLOOD ...

Owners Mary Brock and Kelly Loeffler made the decision to part ways with Meadors and promoted Williams from his role as assistant coach, one he had served for the past four seasons.

"As a team, we are unified in our drive to build on what we have achieved in our first five years," Williams told the team's website. "We want to acknowledge the strong contribution that Marynell Meadors made to this organization. Our franchise will continue to build on the tradition of speed, scoring and tough defense that has resulted in back-to-back Eastern Conference championships."

PLAYOFF POTENTIAL ...

Atlanta's record is 12-13 and the Dream sit in third place in the Eastern Conference. If the season ended today, that position would be good enough to earn a playoff spot, but with a sizable portion of the schedule remaining, the fate of the playoffs seems to rest in McCoughtry's hands.

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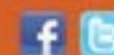
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