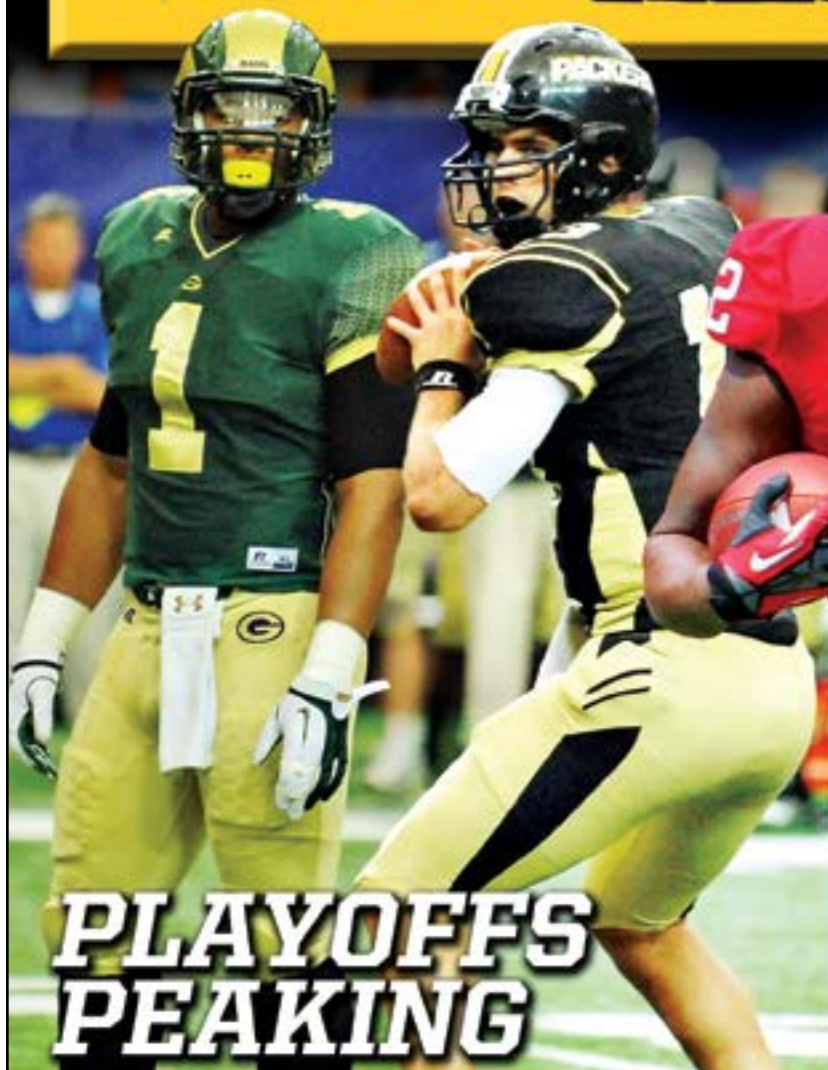


SCORE

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**CAN'T MISS
THIS WEEK**

- 4** In our columnists page, we give you this week's "The Fletch" and "The Dimon Club" for our opinions on the world of Atlanta sports.
- 5** Chris Lionetti looks into Georgia's sudden appearance in the thick of the national title discussion by breaking down how the Dawgs got into the mix and what they need to do to make it to Miami.
- 7** On our prep cover, Stephen Black brings you the latest news in high school swimming and wrestling.
- 8** Stephen and Fletcher preview the second round of the football playoffs.

**TEAM SCOOP
AND VOICES**

COVER DESIGN BY DJ GALBIATI BLALOCK
 COVER PHOTOS COURTESY OF SONNY KENNEDY AND ROB SAYE

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INSIDE AT SCORE

ON THE Score Atlanta is looking for writing and graphic design interns. 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 for more information.

**SHOT OF THE
WEEK...****MIRACULOUS TURNAROUND:**

Georgia Tech QB Vad Lee celebrates during the Jackets' 41-24 win over Duke Saturday. Tech has now won three straight games heading into the showdown with Georgia and, thanks to Miami's probation, now has a berth in the ACC Championship game. Photo courtesy of Jon Barash.

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THE FLETCH



More use of the “No Respect” card

By Fletcher Proctor

One might believe that Atlanta sports fans have listening to Rodney Dangerfield comedy albums non-stop this autumn after playing the “No Respect” card yet again this past Monday. After weeks of whining that the Atlanta Falcons aren’t getting the respect from national football writers, now online bloggers and talk radio callers are complaining that the University of Georgia is not getting any respect after last weekend’s series of upsets.

The Georgia Bulldogs, ranked No. 5 entering the weekend, dispatched Georgia Southern, then sat back and watched as No. 1 Kansas State and No. 2 Oregon lost. The Bulldogs were the new No. 3 team in the new BCS poll last Sunday night with just Notre Dame

and Alabama ahead of them. The Dawgs, in all likelihood, will face the Crimson Tide for the SEC title in the Georgia Dome, meaning that if the Dawgs win out, they will play for a national title. However, ESPN only called Alabama and Notre Dame the real “winners” of the shakedown last Saturday. This did not sit well with Bulldog Nation. The Dawg fans were rabid, calling in and wondering why Georgia wasn’t receiving the love.

Being a Georgia alumnus, I have to say that ANYONE calling up and complaining about Georgia not getting any love is making the rest of us look bad. Georgia controls its own destiny. Simply beat Georgia Tech and then Alabama and the numbers will put the Dawgs in the national title game, period. I

would prefer Georgia to fly under the radar ala 2005 when UGA stomped LSU for the SEC crown. As far as not having national respect, the loss to South Carolina earlier this year didn’t help us with our national perception, neither did the LSU or Boise State games last year. Georgia must earn the national accolades, and a win over Alabama would start to give the Bulldogs the benefit of the doubt.

MORE SCORE ...

This past Saturday on the brand-new FM 92.9 The Game, Score Atlanta debuted its second high school sports offering of the week. In addition to the Georgia High School Football Scoreboard with Score Atlanta on Friday nights from 10 p.m. until midnight, Score Atlanta now offers a complete look at all things high school sports Saturday mornings from 6-9 a.m. Last week, Kell head coach Derek Cook and McEachern head coach Kyle Hockman joined the Saturday show to talk about the first round of the playoffs. Lassiter head coach Jep Irwin called in Friday just moments after his team’s shocking loss to Brookwood.

Two weeks ago former M.L. King head coach Michael Carson came on the Friday night show to give his side of the story of how he and the Lions’ program parted ways. It was an honest interview and he held nothing back,

answering all questions. Expect plenty of high school football playoff talk over the next few weeks with incredible guests on Friday nights and Saturday mornings.

Speaking of The Game, everyone knows about The Game’s daytime programming, but if you haven’t tuned in to some of the after hours broadcasts, you are missing out. Jim Murray does a great job late at night and on the weekends, and Mac McDonald and Jason Goff, while certainly two different styles, have meshed well in the 6-10 p.m. slot. Give the late-night guys a listen because you will not be disappointed with their fresh angles on stories without the BS of leaning on just a name or reputation to carry them through.

THE NEW NO. 1 ...

Finally, it was a treat to listen to the FOX broadcast of the Falcons’ game last Sunday as the best color commentator on FOX Daryl “Moose” Johnston was on the call. Too many times the Falcons get stuck with a joke announcing squad, but Johnston in my opinion is the best on the network. Now if only they would permanently kill the mic of Tony Siragusa, who adds nothing to each broadcast, life would be good.

Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

DIMON CLUB



Falcons, Jackets using bizarre ways to win

By Ricky Dimon

How bad were the Falcons last Sunday in the Georgia Dome against the Arizona Cardinals? Historically bad, but in a good way, if that makes sense. Matt Ryan became the first quarterback since Bart Starr in 1967 throw five interceptions in one game and still come out on the winning end. Despite committing six turnovers in total, losing the giveaway-takeaway battle by five and rushing for an abysmal 58 yards, the Falcons found a way to prevail 23-19.

Belying its 9-1 record, Atlanta has by no means played its best football. The Falcons aren’t peaking right now and don’t appear to be anywhere close. But as recent postseasons have taught us, it’s all about getting hot at the right time. The Falcons may be able to do just that come January; and if they can do it with

home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs, even better.

“As a quarterback, you don’t ever want to have those kinds of games,” Ryan said in his postgame press conference following his disaster against the Cardinals. “But they happen. It’s just about how you respond to that and what you keep doing. I think it says a lot about our football team that I made a lot of mistakes, but I’m still surrounded by 52 guys on the active roster that show up and make plays. ... I’m just glad that we still won.”

A lot—both good and bad—can be said about these Atlanta Falcons. What has to be said, though, is that they simply, sometimes inexplicably, know how to win football games.

CHAMPIONSHIP-BOUND ...

It can be argued that not a single one of this state’s three major football teams (the Falcons, Georgia and Georgia Tech) is playing championship-caliber football. The Falcons lost to a 3-5 New Orleans team on Nov. 11 then did whatever it was they were doing against Arizona. Georgia Tech may be in the midst of a three-game winning streak, but it is still a disappointing 6-5 overall with losses to Middle Tennessee and BYU. Georgia has won five in a row to improve to 10-1, but it will never be able to erase a 35-7 humiliation at South Carolina from its resume.

For all their faults, however egregious they may be, all three teams are in contention for championships. While the Falcons are farther away from their destination due to number of games remaining, Georgia and Georgia Tech have already booked spots in their respective conference title games (although in the Jackets’ case it’s more like they backed into it via Miami’s bowl ban).

With the way the two SEC division champions are playing right now, perhaps Alabama should not have been the one rioting in the streets when losses by Kansas State and Oregon paved a direct path to the BCS National Championship. Since their loss to the Gamecocks, Georgia has a win over Florida and blowout victories against Ole Miss, Auburn

and Georgia Southern. In two of its last three outings, Alabama could have (should have?) lost to LSU and did lose to Texas A&M.

Tech’s resume is far worse than that of its in-state rival and its championship outlook isn’t quite as rosy, either. Still, the mere fact that a squad with five losses—including three in the conference and two in the division—is going to compete for the ACC title is an absolute miracle.

“Playing for an ACC championship was one of our goals when we began the season, so we are pleased that we will have that opportunity,” head coach Paul Johnson told ramblinwreck.com. “I’m proud of our players and coaches who, when things weren’t going too well early, remained focused and determined.”

There is, in fact, something to be said for that. The Jackets may have taken a roundabout way to reach this point, but they suddenly have two chances to post what can only be considered a successful season. Winning at Georgia or beating Florida State to take the ACC title and book a trip to the Orange Bowl would certainly do the trick. Just think of this possibility: a 7-6 team with 21-point home loss to Middle Tennessee playing in the Orange Bowl.

As they say in those ESPN commercials: “It’s not crazy. It’s sports.”

Dimon can be reached at rdimon@scoreatl.com.



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CHAMPIONSHIP QUEST



Dawgs within striking distance of title

By Chris Lionetti



What seemed lost the morning of Oct. 7 has now been regained for the Georgia Bulldogs. After a 35-7 loss to rival South Carolina, the team believed that its SEC and national title hopes were dashed, but a month later that is not the case.

Since losing to the Gamecocks, the Bulldogs are 5-0 and the powerhouse of the SEC East with wins against rivals Florida and Auburn. During that stretch, they are scoring an average of 33 points per game while holding opponents to an average of 11 points per contest.

The win against the Auburn Tigers gave Georgia the SEC Eastern Division title and clinched a spot in the conference's championship game. Georgia head coach Mark Richt has gone on record multiple times that his goal for the season was to win the division and get to championship game; after that, he believes everything will take care of itself.

However, this is a team that had national championship aspirations at the beginning of the season. Winning the conference championship would assure the Dawgs a spot in the Sugar Bowl but to get to the national championship, they needed to win all of their games or receive help.

By losing to conference rival South Car-

olina, Georgia took the route to the championship that required help and help they have received. The month of November has seen the nation's top three teams at one time, Alabama, Kansas State and Oregon all lose. The losses by these three teams have catapulted the Bulldogs to the third spot in all three polls, one spot away from a berth in the BCS National Championship game.

HISTORY REPEATING ...

As it currently stands, the Notre Dame Fighting Irish occupy the top spot in the polls followed by Alabama and Georgia. For Richt and company to make the title game, all they need to do is beat archrival Georgia Tech and then defeat the Crimson Tide in the Georgia Dome. This would set up a date in Miami with the Irish.

A matchup with Notre Dame is the most likely possibly, but another national championship game that may arise is a rematch with the Florida Gators. Florida is currently ranked right behind Georgia as the nation's No. 4 team, two slots away from a spot in the title game. If Notre Dame was to fall to the USC Trojans, the SEC's top three teams would slide up one spot in the poll. This

would set up a No. 1 vs. No. 2 matchup in the SEC Championship between Alabama and Georgia. If Georgia defeats the Tide, Georgia would sit atop the polls and the Gators would seemingly be right behind in the No. 2 spot.

While there are numerous scenarios that could occur due to the chaos that is college football, the point to be taken from this is that Georgia controls its own destiny and is two wins away from a national championship appearance. Nearly two months ago, some were calling for Richt's head and the nation believed that Georgia's shot at a national championship was gone. The stars have aligned for the Bulldogs since then, and it could not have happened at a better time for a team that is currently playing its best football.

TURNING POINT ...

Historically a team that has gotten stronger as the season progresses, the Bulldogs' play of late has been due to another factor as well. This factor was a prominent senior calling the team out and demanding better play from his teammates.

"We're playing too soft as a defense," said safety Shawn Williams the Monday before the Florida game. "That goes for the D-line, linebackers, corners, safeties, everybody. We're just not playing with the same attitude we were last year. I don't know what it is."

His comments charged up a defense that performed at a subpar level for the first half of the season and propelled it to the high level many expected of it. Since being called out by Williams, the team is allowing 120 rushing yards per game at a rate of 2.76 yards per carry. Before that, the defense was allowing 168 rushing yards per game at a rate of 4.05 yards per carry.

Though the difference in the numbers is staggering, perhaps the biggest change in Georgia's defense has been a consistent effort. Before Williams' rant, Georgia played sloppy first half football but would then get it together in the second half. That is no longer the case.

"I don't think it was saving the season," said Williams four weeks after ranting to reporters. "I just knew we could do it, so I just had to go out and do it."

While Williams may not think his comments saved his team's season, his coach recognized the effect William's comments had on the team on his radio show days before the Georgia Tech game.

"I think Shawn's comments certainly had a great effect on our football team," said Richt on Monday. "It jolted guys a little bit. It got some guys mad, it got some guys hurt. But I think everybody understood Shawn's

motivation, which was to play the way they were supposed to play."

All championship teams have a point where they believe they turned their season around and everything came together. For the Georgia Bulldogs, that point was just before the Florida game when one player voiced his displeasure. However, the team must recognize that there are a few more stops on its road to hoisting the Waterford crystal football. The Bulldogs need to sustain their high level of play for a bit longer.

Three teams sit ready to spoil the Bulldogs' hopes of a title: Georgia Tech, Alabama and Notre Dame. Most will look past the Jackets, but Paul Johnson's team features the nation's third-best rushing offense. Georgia just gave up 302 yards to a triple-option offense similar to that of Tech's last week and crazy things happen in rivalry games.

Alabama held the No. 1 spot in the polls for most of the season and pose perhaps a bigger threat than the Fighting Irish. Of course, Georgia will not look past the Crimson Tide. To defeat Nick Saban's team, Georgia will need to play the best it has all season on both sides of the ball. Aaron Murray will need to prove he can win the big game and Jarvis Jones will need to live in Alabama's backfield.

Georgia is two wins away from a national championship appearance and three wins away from their first title in 32 years. They still have improving to do, but for a team that seemed out of the title hunt, things couldn't be better.

Photos courtesy of Rob Saye. Lionetti can be reached at clionetti@scoreatl.com.



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WHO'S HOT

THUMBS UP TO DIVISION RIVALS



NFC South

As the 2012 NFL schedule hovers around two-thirds completion, the South has risen again. The Falcons have nine wins, Tampa Bay is a tiebreaker away from a playoff spot and the Saints sit at 5-5, having won three straight. Teams from the South will be headline makers all December long.

The SEC

After Alabama fell from the top of the BCS standings, some college football fans and observers saw a chink in the SEC's armor. Just a week later, the Crimson Tide, Georgia and Florida are in spots No. 2-4. A back-to-back all SEC BCS championship is unlikely ... but very conceivable.

Georgia Tech

The roller coasters at Six Flags have nothing on head coach Paul Johnson's 2012 team. The Yellow Jackets were headed off the rails in early October with a 2-4 record including an embarrassing home loss to Middle Tennessee. But now with four consecutive conference wins, they'll face FSU in the ACC championship game.

College Hoops in November

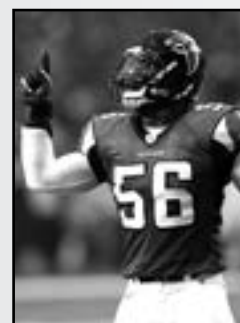
Tech and Georgia are in their respective conference championships. Georgia Southern is ranked sixth in the Sports Network FCS College Football Poll. Oh, and the Falcons have only one loss. We'll be watching a lot more carefully in a few weeks, but we've got football on the brain for now.

Lane Kiffin

Oh, where to start? Kiffin became Tennessee's head coach and named his son, Knox. He then left Knoxville in the middle of the night. The wreck he left at Rocky Top is the primary reason Derek Dooley could not succeed there. Now his USC team has gone from pre-season No. 1 to out of the top 25.

Wounded Birds

The NFL life is taking its toll on some of our hometown heroes. Brent Grimes has been down all year. Defensive leader Sean Weatherspoon has missed nearly a quarter of the season. Now, Julio Jones and Asante Samuel are hobbled and were limited against Arizona. Get well soon boys, we need ya!



WHO'S NOT

THUMBS DOWN TO INJURIES

SCORE LIST

BY BRIAN JONES

1 **RIVALS REVISITED:** The Falcons got a big win over Arizona last weekend and now have to face three consecutive NFC South opponents. Atlanta travels to Tampa Bay Sunday, then faces the Saints at the Georgia Dome the following Thursday and finishes with a trip to Carolina on Dec. 9. This will be a good test for the Falcons. Can they win all three and improve to 12-1?

2 **THE BIG GAME:** With this being Thanksgiving week, that can only mean Georgia and Georgia Tech are set to do battle on the gridiron. The Bulldogs are in position to possibly reach the national championship while the Jackets are in the ACC title game. If I had to predict a winner, I think the Bulldogs win 34-20, but Tech is playing well, so it should be a very entertaining game.

3 **NO NAME CHANGE:** Atlanta's professional soccer team will still be called the "Silverbacks" after the franchise had a contest in which fans could vote on the team's new name. "Silverbacks" prevailed over the "Chiefs" as well as "Atlanta FC." While the team name will remain the same, the logo may change as fans have a chance to vote on a new logo via Facebook.

4 **ANOTHER SELLOUT:** The Chick-fil-A Bowl will likely draw another sellout crowd as less than 1,000 tickets remain for sale. Early predictions have Clemson taking on Texas A&M, but the bowl committee won't know for sure until Dec. 1 when the ACC and the SEC have their conference championship games. If Clemson does face the Aggies, something tells me there will be a lot fireworks.

5 **THE SECOND ROUND:** After a very interesting first round which involved Walton and Lassiter going down, the second round of the high school playoffs kickoff this weekend with more compelling matchups. In 6A action, Grayson will face North Gwinnett while Northside-Warner Robins will take on Thomas County Central in a 5A battle. Check out scoreatl.com to get all the scores.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

BY RICKY DIMON

4 Falcons' magic number to clinch the NFC South; it will be cut in half if they beat Tampa Bay Sunday

5 Interceptions thrown by Matt Ryan vs. Arizona after throwing seven in his first nine games

1 Quarterbacks (Ryan) since Bart Starr in 1967 to throw five picks in a game and still win

2 Games in the last three in which Ryan hasn't thrown a TD. He had gone 22 straight with a TD

3 Atlanta's NFL ranking in passing yards through 10 games, compared to 28th in rushing

0 Times a team unranked in AP, BCS and Coaches Top 25 has reached the ACC title game

0 Times Georgia and Georgia Tech have played conference title games in same year

2-0 Georgia Tech's record against Florida State since 2003, having won in 2008 and 2009

2-2 Georgia's record in the SEC Championship game. The Dawgs last won the conference in 2005

10 Games out of the last 11 in the Georgia vs. Georgia Tech rivalry won by the Bulldogs

TRIVIA QUESTION

With Georgia's berth in its second SEC Championship game in a row, how many times have the Bulldogs played for the conference title since the split in 1992?

Answer on Page 14

SANITY AT LAST

"Guys will be fired up going into this game. This is on our goal board: Beat UGA. I think guys are licking their chops to get a chance to go to Athens next week and play."

- Georgia Tech QB Tevin Washington on facing No. 3 Georgia in Athens.

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:

After starting the 2012 season 0-5, I was truly proud of how our team stuck with the plan and battled back to come within a victory in the final week of the regular season of making the playoffs. Our seniors in particular stayed the course and led by example to help us reel off three straight wins and be in a position to win our final game.

Despite missing out on the playoffs,

our season has to be considered a success for the way our team never gave up. By the end of the season, we were playing with the type of attitude necessary to win big in Class AAAAAA.

We will wrap up the year and recognize our players at the Centennial Knights Annual Season End Celebration awards banquet on Monday, Dec. 10. I am looking forward to being together with this special group of players, cheerleaders, trainers coaches and community one more time. This special night should also help us as we prepare to begin writing the story of the 2013 season.



SCORE

PREP



MAKING A SPLASH!

Raiders, Longhorns take early meets

By Stephen Black

It's early in the season in both wrestling and swimming and diving, but big news is already flowing. Individual athletes have made their college choices and some crucial meets have taken place just weeks into the 2012-2013 season.

SWIMMING SWEEPS ...

Walton won the Cobb County Time Trials and Relays as both the Raiders' boys and girls squads won their meets. The Raiders totaled 616 points as the boys had 314 and the girls put up 302. Kennesaw Mountain came in second in both races.

Lambert swept the Cherokee/Forsyth Relay Meet Saturday as the girls team scored 442 points and the boys totaled 450 in a meet that featured 10 squads from both counties. The Longhorns boys easily outdistanced Woodstock, which had 294 points, while the girls beat out Etowah, which had 380. Lambert won seven total relays, including four by the girls team.

In a private-public clash, host Wesleyan defeated Dunwoody in a dual meet Friday. The No.

2 boys team beat the Wildcats 178 to 136 while the No. 8 girls won 180 to 133. The Wolves won all six relays. However, Tanner Elliot and Ryan Gaines of Dunwoody finished first and second, respectively, in the boys diving competition while Wesleyan's Leah Davis and Maggie Dryden finished 1-2 in the girls diving event. Wesleyan senior Jake Cusick won the 50-yard freestyle and the 100-yard freestyle races. Fellow Wolves senior Drew Middleton won two races as well, taking home the 100-yard fly and the 200-yard freestyle races. For the Wesleyan girls, Rachel Koch won the 200-yard IM and the 100-yard fly.

At the McCallie Invitational Friday and Saturday in Chattanooga, the top-ranked Class A-AAAA Westminister girls won their meet while the No. 3 boys came in second behind the hosts. The Wildcats won the overall meet with 587.5 combined points, as the girls led the charge with 331.5. Northview came in second overall with 423 points, while finishing fourth in the girls meet and third in the boys race. Lakeside-DeKalb

took fourth overall while Milton came in sixth. Harrison and Centennial finished ninth and 10th overall. Westminister senior Nicole Stafford won the 200-yard freestyle and 100-yard freestyle races. Westminister won the boys 200 medley, boys 400 freestyle and girls 400 freestyle relays.

Meanwhile, at Marist, 72 divers from around the state competed in the Early Bird Diving Invitational Nov. 10. Marist senior diver Andrea Demick, a Georgia Tech commitment, won the overall girls competition and set a pool record in the 11-dive with a score of 534.80.

In the boys meet, Centennial's James Herch took the top prize in the 6-dive while teammate Chase Barron came in second in the 11-dive. Brendan Eckert of Duluth won the boys 11-dive with a score of 330.75, ahead of Barron's 310.85. Riverwood's Walker Wheeler won the Class A-AAAAA 11-dive event with a posted score of 466.75. Jonny Colley of Upson Lee came in second with a 405.65.

ON THE MATS ...

Class AA No. 1 Jefferson won the Spartan Slam at West Hall. Flowery Branch came in second and Dawson County took third Saturday.

Class AAAAAA No. 1 Collins Hill edged host Class AAAA No. 1 Alexander 37-35 in the Alexander Duals Saturday. Class AAAAAA No. 9

Parkview took third with a 50-15 win over Southeast Whitfield while Class AAAAA No. 6 Ola came in fifth after a 34-24 win over Carrollton. Lee County came in seventh by beating Douglas County 45-33.

For Parkview, Ben Boatright, Edwin Lindsey, Alex Pham, Harry Schmid and Kamaal Shakur each went undefeated at the meet. Alexander's Cody Dickerson, Spencer Gray, Morgan Holloman and Chad Starnes each were undefeated during the meet. Class AAAAA No. 2

Gilmer beat host Woodward Academy, Eagle's Landing, Heritage-Conyers and Locust Grove at the Early Bird Duals Monday.

COLLEGE BOUND ...

Senior, 165/174-pounder Tyler Askey of Northgate signed with the University of Virginia and traveled to Charlottesville over the weekend to watch his future teammates compete. ... Milton senior 125-pounder Phillip Anderson signed with Gardner-Webb on Oct. 29. ... Lassiter swimmer Jimmy Yoder, considered to be the top swimmer in Georgia's class of 2013, committed to Stanford and will swim for the Cardinal next year. Yoder specializes in freestyle and butterfly.

Photos courtesy of Dawna Black and Brian L. Morgan. Black can be reached at sblack@scoreatl.com.

CLASS 4A-6A PREVIEW



Intensity ratchets up in Round 2

By Stephen Black

Things always start to get interesting in the second round of the state football playoffs. The matchups get better, the intensity rises and upsets seem to be the norm. And this year seems to be no different from years past.

GWINNETT-HEAVY ...

One of the more highly anticipated second-round games comes in Gwinnett County between two of the state's best programs. Defending Class AAAAAA champ Grayson will host North Gwinnett in a juicy matchup that will have eyes on it from high school gridiron fans all over the nation. Bigtime senior prospects like Robert Nkemdiche and DeVondre Seymour will pique the interest of recruiting gurus.

Surprisingly, the two Gwinnett power programs have only met once on the gridiron, a 23-19 Grayson win in 2010 that paved the way to the Rams advancing to the semifinals. Mickey Conn's program has won 10 games or more each year since 2007 while North Gwinnett has won 10 or more each year since 2006.

There are two other all-Gwinnett duels Friday night as Norcross hosts surprising South Gwinnett while Mill Creek hosts No. 4 seed Brookwood. West Forsyth, which has been building under coach Frank Hepler since its inception as a program in 2007, faces Parkview in Round 2. The Wolverines made the quarterfinals last season and would not be satisfied with any-

thing less this year.

DEKALB DYNAMOS ...

The Class AAAAAA slate features a bevy of metro Atlanta matchups Friday night. Allatoona travels to Hallford Stadium to face DeKalb go-liath M.L. King, which has not missed a step despite seeing former coach Mike Carson resign just before the season started.

Fellow DeKalb power Stephenson will face west metro juggernaut East Paulding, which is 11-0 in coach Chuck Goddard's first season. The Raiders have won double-digit games in five of the last seven years, each of them under former coach John Reid until this season.

Tucker and North Paulding, which each defeated higher-seeded foes last week, will meet to decide who gets the winner of Thomas County Central and Northside-Warner Robins in the quarterfinals. Meanwhile, a contrast in styles will take place in Cobb when Gainesville's high-powered offense hits the road to take on a tough Kell defense.

In Class AAAAA. Grady, Marist and Sandy Creek are the only metro Atlanta teams remaining. Marist's clash with Carrollton looms large on the Friday night landscape as the winner will become one of the favorites to make the Georgia Dome.

Black can be reached at sblack@scoreatl.com.

SCORE FOOTBALL atlanta RANKINGS ENTERING POSTSEASON

Class AAAAAA

1. Camden County
2. Lassiter
3. Grayson
4. Norcross
5. Lovejoy
6. North Gwinnett
7. Lowndes
8. McEachern
9. West Forsyth
10. Langston Hughes

Class AAAAA

1. Sandy Creek
2. Marist
3. Burke County
4. Griffin
5. Jonesboro
6. Cairo
7. Ridgeland
8. Monroe Area
9. Stockbridge
10. Westside-Macon

Class AA

1. Calhoun
2. Brooks County
3. Vidalia
4. Lamar County
5. Jefferson
6. Heard County
7. Fitzgerald
8. Screven County
9. Washington-Wilkes
10. Cook

Class AAAAA

1. Northside-WR
2. East Paulding
3. ML King
4. Kell
5. Whitewater
6. Flowery Branch
7. Ware County
8. Thomas Co. Central
9. Tucker
10. Allatoona

Class AAA

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

Class A

1. ELCA
2. Lincoln County
3. ECI
4. Athens Academy
5. Calvary Day
6. Wilcox County
7. Walker
8. Prince Ave. Christian
9. Savannah Christian
10. Seminole County

CLASS 1A-3A PREVIEW



Peach, Buford looking to be road warriors

By Fletcher Proctor

St. Pius X will host Hart County after rushing for 525 yards against Dawson County in a 72-28 Golden Lions' victory. Ryan Braswell led the charge with 127 yards and four touchdowns. Look for Braswell, Jack Spear and Brandon Mitchell to once again try to get the offense cranked up with a shot at the quarterfinals on the line.

Peach County began the year as the Class AAA favorite and could potentially go all the way to the finals without hosting a playoff game after Round 1. Peach County, the No. 2 seed out of Region 2-AAA, will face Pierce County then could travel to North Hall before heading out for a semifinal game, perhaps against St. Pius X.

Buford has gone 25-1 in the postseason since 2006 with four straight titles from 2007-10. The Wolves bumped off Cedar Grove last week but now must travel to North Oconee. The Wolves are used to hosting playoff games; however, following two forfeit losses, the Wolves are a two-seed that could, like Peach County, make the semifinals having hosted just one game.

STEPPING UP ...

Westminster saved its biggest defensive performance for the playoffs, posting the team's first shutout of the season with a win over Pep-

perell in Round 1. The Wildcats will need to conjure up another huge effort with a trip to Region 8-AA champion Jefferson looming.

Meanwhile, Greater Atlanta Christian has its hands full with a team that no one seems to be talking about despite an unblemished record. Heard County averages 45 points per game and GAC will need a focused effort from Rafe Chapple with star tailback Kyle Scales recovering from a lower leg injury. Scales rested last week as the Spartans knocked off Model behind Micah Abernathy's 129-yard evening.

GROUND ATTACK ...

Seminole County will look to do damage on the ground when the Indians host Commerce. The rushing attack, led by Jakhari Martin, has posted nearly 2,800 yards entering the Class A playoffs. Meanwhile, Wilcox County looks ready to make a serious run behind quarterback Mikail Grace. Lastly, Eagle's Landing Christian Academy is finally healthy after Keyante Green and Isaac Rochell each missed time this year with various ailments. The two stars should help Jonathan Gess' squad add on to a nine-game winning streak that began back in August.

Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

SWIMMING RANKINGS

BOYS

Class AAAAAA

1. Parkview
2. Lassiter
3. Brookwood
4. Alpharetta
5. Milton
6. North Gwinnett
7. Collins Hill
8. Chattahoochee
9. Mill Creek
10. Johns Creek

Class A-AAAAA

1. Marist
2. Wesleyan
3. Westminster
4. Dalton
5. Sequoyah
6. St. Pius X
7. Woodward Academy
8. Oconee County
9. Pope
10. North Hall

GIRLS

Class AAAAAA

1. Brookwood
2. Parkview
3. Kennesaw Mountain
4. Walton
5. Etowah
6. Lassiter
7. Peachtree Ridge
8. Mill Creek
9. North Gwinnett
10. Archer

Class A-AAAAA

1. Westminster
2. Marist
3. Woodward Academy
4. St. Pius X
5. North Paulding
6. Calvary Day
7. Pope
8. Wesleyan
9. Greenbrier
10. Oconee County



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BASKETBALL RANKINGS

BOYS

GIRLS

Class AAAAAA

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Norcross | 6. Milton |
| 2. Tift County | 7. Shiloh |
| 3. Wheeler | 8. Peachtree Ridge |
| 4. Westlake | 9. Alpharetta |
| 5. North Cobb | 10. Berkmar |

Class AAAAA

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Miller Grove | 6. Cedar Shoals |
| 2. Southwest DeKalb | 7. Jones County |
| 3. Stephenson | 8. Northside-WR |
| 4. Tucker | 9. Gainesville |
| 5. Drew | 10. Hardaway |

Class AAAA

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Eagle's Landing | 6. Fayette County |
| 2. Monroe | 7. Marist |
| 3. Jonesboro | 8. Carrollton |
| 4. Columbia | 9. Dalton |
| 5. North Clayton | 10. Ridgeland |

Class AAA

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Johnson-Savannah | 6. Central-Carroll |
| 2. Savannah | 7. North Hall |
| 3. Morgan County | 8. North Murray |
| 4. Buford | 9. Dodge County |
| 5. East Hall | 10. Central-Macon |

Class AA

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Laney | 6. Jordan |
| 2. Manchester | 7. Bleckley County |
| 3. GAC | 8. Brooks County |
| 4. Vidalia | 9. Screven County |
| 5. Early County | 10. Coosa |

Class A - Public

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| 1. Mitchell County | 6. Lanier County |
| 2. Wilcox County | 7. Hawkinsville |
| 3. Wilkinson County | 8. Portal |
| 4. Gordon Lee | 9. Claxton |
| 5. Turner County | 10. Commerce |

Class A - Private

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. North Cobb Chr. | 6. Lakeview Acad. |
| 2. Athens Christian | 7. Aquinas |
| 3. Whitfield Acad. | 8. St. Francis |
| 4. Landmark Chr. | 9. Hebron Christian |
| 5. Greenforest | 10. Mt. Pisgah |

Class AAAAAA

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| 1. McEachern | 6. Alpharetta |
| 2. Norcross | 7. Parkview |
| 3. North Cobb | 8. Alcovy |
| 4. North Gwinnett | 9. Woodstock |
| 5. Mill Creek | 10. Hillgrove |

Class AAAAA

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Miller Grove | 6. Cedar Shoals |
| 2. Stephenson | 7. Creekview |
| 3. Forest Park | 8. Kell |
| 4. Allatoona | 9. Salem |
| 5. Southwest DeKalb | 10. Rome |

Class AAAA

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Columbia | 6. Fayette County |
| 2. Jonesboro | 7. Statesboro |
| 3. Cross Creek | 8. Troup |
| 4. Chamblee | 9. Westover |
| 5. Carrollton | 10. Dalton |

Class AAA

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Washington Co. | 6. North Hall |
| 2. Buford | 7. Beach |
| 3. East Hall | 8. St. Pius X |
| 4. Oconee County | 9. North Oconee |
| 5. Cartersville | 10. Woodward Acad. |

Class AA

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Wesleyan | 6. Westside-Augusta |
| 2. Lovett | 7. Heard County |
| 3. GAC | 8. Model |
| 4. Laney | 9. Putnam County |
| 5. Brooks County | 10. Taylor County |

Class A - Public

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Towns County | 6. Turner County |
| 2. Gordon Lee | 7. Greenville |
| 3. Dooly County | 8. Warren County |
| 4. Mitchell County | 9. Charlton County |
| 5. Claxton | 10. Wilcox County |

Class A - Private

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. SW Atlanta Chr. | 6. Holy Innocents' |
| 2. Darlington | 7. Paideia |
| 3. St. Francis | 8. Strong Rock Chr. |
| 4. George Walton Acad. | 9. Pace Academy |
| 5. First Presbyterian | 10. Calvary Day |

A black and white photograph of an Atlanta Falcons player in his uniform, wearing a helmet and jersey with the number 56. The player is looking upwards with a determined expression. The background is dark and textured, with a bright light source behind the player, creating a silhouette effect and highlighting the edges of his uniform and helmet. The word "FALCONS" is visible on the jersey.

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BULLDOG BEAT



Bulldogs focused on archrival Jackets

By Chris Lionetti

A week after defeating Georgia Southern 45-14, the third-ranked Georgia Bulldogs will play host to the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets this weekend, in a game that will kickoff at 12 p.m. on ESPN.

The Bulldogs moved up two spots in the BCS rankings over the weekend to the No. 3 spot due to losses by No. 1 Kansas State and No. 2 Oregon. These events have Georgia two wins away from a BCS National Championship appearance. However, Mark Richt and the team remain focused on this week's opponent.

"I'm thinking that we need to have a great week of preparation for Georgia Tech," said Richt while deflecting BCS-related questions during his Sunday teleconference. "Right this minute, all I can think about is Georgia Tech. The only thing I'm concerned about is playing Georgia Tech and trying to have a good game plan throughout the week so we can try to figure out a way to slow down that offense and get some points on the board."

The biggest worry on the mind of Richt is defending Georgia Tech's triple-option offense. Tech has scored 143 points in its past three games, which is all the proof the Bulldogs need to see that this is not a team that should be taken lightly. The Yellow Jackets

currently own the nation's third best rushing attack, currently averaging 325 yards a game.

Luckily for the Bulldogs, this week will be the second in a row facing an option offense. The added experience against the option attack should help the Dawgs better defend Georgia Tech's offense.

Also aiding the Bulldogs is the fact their defense has come alive since being called out by senior teammate Shawn Williams for its "soft" play. Since that night, Georgia has allowed 2.76 yards per carry through four games. They allowed 302 to Georgia Southern last week, 100 yards short of their season average of 401 yards per game.

SENIOR NIGHT ...

Saturday's game will also be senior night for Georgia and the last time prominent players such as Shawn Williams and Bacarri Rambo will play between the hedges. Saturday may also be the last game in Sanford Stadium for superstars Aaron Murray and Jarvis Jones. Both still have a year of eligibility remaining, but have had stellar years that may push them to the NFL.

Lionetti can be reached at clionetti@scoreatl.com.

TECH BUZZ



Jackets will play FSU for ACC title

By Ryan Caiafa

This time last month, any notion that the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets would find themselves with not only a spot in the ACC championship game, but also a shot at a BCS bowl would have dismissed immediately. After a shocking turn of events and Miami self-imposing a postseason ban for the second straight season, this Jackets team, with a record of 6-5, will be taking on the Florida State Seminoles for the conference championship and the right to represent the ACC in the Orange Bowl.

With three straight victories over Maryland, North Carolina and Duke, the team finished conference play with a 5-3 record. The Jackets' 42-24 win over the Blue Devils was highlighted by three touchdown passes by Tevin Washington, a rarity by Georgia Tech standards, to go along with a rushing score, his 18th of the season and now the ACC record for rushing touchdowns by a quarterback.

The Dec. 1 matchup against the Seminoles will feature the Jackets' high-powered option offense, which has averaged just over 47 points per game in the team's three-game winning streak, against a Florida State defense

that has surrendered just 13.1 points per game, good enough for fifth in the nation. While Tech's defense has left much to be desired this season, they will certainly have their hands full against a Seminoles offense that has actually outdone the Jackets, with a 42.9 points per game average, led by quarterback E.J. Manual, who has passed for 2785 yards and 21 touchdowns, both career highs.

CLEAN, OLD-FASHIONED ...

Not to be overlooked, and certainly not this year, is the 2012 edition of the Tech-Georgia rivalry game. With both teams playing in their conference championship games in the same year for the first time, and with Georgia potentially playing for a national championship game berth, the game has taken on added meaning. The Jackets will be looking to play spoiler to their in-state rival's aspirations, while the Bulldogs will be looking to continue their dominance over Tech. Georgia has won 10 of the last 11 matchups between the two teams. The Jackets' last win over Georgia came in 2008, a 45-42 victory in Athens.

Caiafa can be reached at rcaiafa@scoreatl.com.

PANTHER PROWL



Football program reflects on Curry

By Brian Jones

The football season has come to an end for the Panthers, but they still got together one last time this past Thursday for the team's annual awards banquet.

Donald Russell, Albert Wilson and Terrence Woodard got the big awards as they were named team MVPs. Russell rushed for 747 yards before suffering a knee injury which sidelined him late in the year. Wilson led the team with 947 receiving yards, 94 punt return yards and 751 kick return yards. Woodard had 59 tackles despite playing with an injured ankle the entire year.

Other notable winners were Kail Singleton and Scott McQueen, who were named permanent team captains while Akeem Felder and Mark Hogan were honored as the team's scholar athletes awards. Felder was also honored with the Iron Man Award for his work in the weight room.

LOOKING BACK ...

With Bill Curry no longer the head coach and the team heading into a new conference, the Panthers will embark upon a new era. The new head coach will have an advantage coming out the gate as the team loses just 12 players to graduation.

The team will need to find some consistency at the quarterback position if the Pan-

thers want to make some noise in the Sun Belt Conference. Ben McLane and Ronnie Bell did not have great seasons, so it will be interesting to see what system the new head coach brings in and if either quarterback will be able to fit it moving forward.

But Curry believes this team can turn things around because they work hard and they want to be a better team.

"They don't practice like a losing team," he told the AJC. "They will come out and work hard, continue to build on that and continue to emphasize that the next step for this program is to take the practice performance into games."

WELCOME BACK ...

Manny Atkins was a standout basketball player at Tucker before taking his talents to Virginia Tech. He transferred to the Panthers program last season but had to sit out due to NCAA transfer regulations.

On Monday, Atkins played in his first home game as a Panther and could not have been more excited.

"Yes, I am definitely excited to finally get to play at home in front of all my family and friends," Atkins said before the game. "It should be fun and I want to get a win."

Jones can be reached at bjones@scoreatl.com.

OWL OUTLOOK



Hoops teams open up with losses

By Brian Jones

The men's basketball team was in eastern Kentucky this past weekend to take part in the Eastern Kentucky Tournament, but they could not produce a desired outcome.

On Friday, the Owls took on the host team and fell 85-71. Markeith Cummings did have 22 points while Myles Hamilton added 14, but four players from Eastern Kentucky scored double-digit points including Glenn Cooley, who had 21. The Colonels out-rebounded the Owls in the second half while outscoring the Owls 49-38.

The Owls looked to bounce back on Saturday against Radford, but came away with a 67-58 loss. Cummings had another big game, leading all scorers with 31 points. However, he did not get any other help from his teammates as just one other player scored in double digits.

The Owls concluded their road trip with a 69-63 loss to Towson. Cummings scored 13 points in the loss, but individually it was a win for him as he became KSU's all-time leading scorer. He eclipsed Herman Smith's mark of 1,683 from 1986-90.

The Owls played Georgia Southern on Wednesday, but results were not available at press time. They will face Chattanooga on Saturday at the Convocation Center.

NIT BLUES ...

The women's basketball team took part in the preseason WNIT this past weekend, and like the men, the Lady Owls would like to have a do-over. They fell to Morehead State 50-49 on Friday and lost to Davidson College 63-54 on Sunday.

In the game against Davidson, the Lady Owls scored a team-record 12 three-pointers but had trouble countering Davidson's zone defense.

"We weren't expecting to see the zone from Davidson," Kennesaw State head coach Nitra Perry told ksuowls.com "I have faith in our kids to knock down those threes when we get those open looks."

The Lady Owls will look to rebound on Saturday when they face Wofford College.

FOOTBALL UPDATE ...

Officials are still hoping to field a football team by 2014, but the State Board of Regents has to approve a business plan, which won't meet until January. So the football team could start playing in 2015 which would give the program more time to hire a coach, put together a recruiting class and expand KSU Stadium.

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HAWKS HAVEN



Hawks stay strong for .500 start

By Ricky Dimon

The start of Atlanta's 2012-13 campaign could easily have been a disaster. With new personnel, a different style of play and a rough early schedule, the Hawks faced numerous challenges throughout the first two weeks of the season. As if all of those factors did not make for enough on Atlanta's pre-Thanksgiving plate, half the team got sick during a recent four-game road trip.

The Hawks headed out west on Nov. 11 having compiled a 2-2 record, with stellar victories over 2012 playoff teams Indiana and Oklahoma City (the latter on the road) and a pair of no-shame losses to Houston and Miami. An ominous opening to the trek saw Larry Drew's squad fall to the Clippers. Atlanta alternated losses and wins the whole way, bouncing back at Portland one day later before succumbing to Golden State last Wednesday.

In danger of dropping to 1-3 on the trip and 3-5 overall, the Hawks stepped up in a major way last Friday at Sacramento. Kyle Korver drained all five of his three-point attempts to lead the team with 22 points, Lou Williams added 21 and Al Horford recorded a double-double with 20 points and 10 boards as Atlanta cruised to a 112-96 win. Jeff Teague and Josh Smith performed well in both victories. Teague went for 13 points and eight assists against the Trail

Blazers before scoring 15 against Sacramento, while Smith added 19 points in both contests to go along with a combined 19 rebounds.

"This was a strange trip with everyone getting sick," Williams told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "We had guys not playing, guys playing sick, but we persevered and got through it. We wanted to break even on this trip before we headed back to Atlanta to get prepared for our homestand."

INSTANT IMPACT ...

Heading into the current stretch in which the Hawks are playing six of seven games at home, they have been getting significant contributions from their newcomers. Williams is thriving in pressurized, late-game moments while averaging 14.1 points; both Korver and DeShawn Stevenson are shooting at least 40 percent from long range; and Anthony Morrow is draining 57 percent of his shots—a remarkable rate especially for a shooting guard who rarely ventures inside the paint.

It must also be noted that Hawks veterans Horford and Smith are leading the way. Both players are putting up 15.6 points and more than eight rebounds per contest.

Dimon can be reached at rdimon@scoreatl.com.

FALCONS BEAT



Abraham still producing sack magic

By Craig Sager II

The Falcons' 23-19 win over Arizona moved Matt Ryan's career home record to 31-4, the best home record to start a career in the Super Bowl era. Atlanta's home winning streak grew to nine games and remains a perfect 5-0 this season. This prominent home record can explain how five Ryan interceptions, six total turnovers and recurring miscues could barely phase the 9-1 Falcons en route to last Sunday's victory.

Injuries were the question mark going into the contest and remained a factor as the game unfolded. Sean Weatherspoon did not dress for a third straight week and a limited Julio Jones dressed but was a non-factor after aggravating his injured ankle early. Asante Samuel missed most of the game with an injury to his right shoulder. Robert McClain came in for Samuel and proved valuable enough to patch up the secondary. McClain was one of the many unsung heroes, and his airtight pass coverage and physical tackling helped rally the defense.

John Abraham made several big plays Sunday, forcing a fumble and directing teammate Jonathan Babineaux to pick it up and score. Abraham added two sacks to his career total (121), becoming only the 15th player to post 120 career sacks.

THIRD-DOWN MONSTERS ...

"The third-down defense today was outstanding," said coach Mike Smith. "I really liked how our defense played today and helped carry the team when we needed them to."

The unit was unyielding in its third-down defense, which proved to be enough to offset the offense's six giveaways. Arizona was just 2-for-16 on third downs.

BUCS CALLING ...

Atlanta's next test is a division clash with Tampa Bay. After a poor 1-4 start, the Bucs have won five of their last six games, and rookie running back Doug Martin has already reached 1,000 yards on the season. Mike Nolan's defense will likely have Weatherspoon back in the line up, but it is clear the firepower of this division rival will outweigh that of Arizona and some previous challengers.

Tampa has been competitive every week and all four losses were within a touchdown. The Bucs boast the top-ranked run defense in the league, but are statistically the league's worst pass defense.

Sager can be reached at csager@scoreatl.com.

CHOP SHOP

PRESENTED BY



New look for Braves behind home

By Fletcher Proctor

The Atlanta Braves lost free agent catcher David Ross to the Boston Red Sox when the backup signed a two-year/\$6.2 million deal last week. The 35-year-old Bainbridge native appeared in 62 games last year for Atlanta, hitting .256 with nine home runs and 23 RBIs. Ross left the Braves after four seasons to head to the American League for just the second time this season in his career. He spent part of 2008 with Boston.

The team came to an agreement last Thursday with free agent Gerald Laird, who spent last season with Detroit. Laird hit .282 in just 191 plate appearances. He is a lifetime .244 hitter over 10 seasons. He started his career with Texas before spending time in Detroit and St. Louis, where he helped win a World Series title in 2011. The Braves will count on Laird to play early in 2013 as former All-Star catcher Brian McCann recovers from offseason surgery.

He could potentially serve as a mentor/backstop to Christian Bethancourt in 2014 should the Braves turn to the budding star when McCann's contract expires after the upcoming year. The team elected to bring back McCann by picking up his \$12 million option. He managed just 487 plate appearances in 2012 and failed to make the All-Star game

for the first time since 2005, when he appeared in just 59 games as a rookie.

STILL SHOPPING ...

The Braves' qualifying offer of one-year/\$13.3 million to free agent outfielder Michael Bourn was turned down recently as Bourn is reportedly seeking a multi-year deal. Various insiders have Philadelphia and Washington leading the charge for Bourn, who is represented by Scott Boras. Atlanta has been rumored to be in the market for Cody Ross, who spent 2012 with Boston. The team also reportedly brought Tampa Bay free agent outfielder B.J. Upton in for an interview. Last season, Upton hit .246 for Tampa with 28 home runs and 78 RBI while making \$7 million. He could replace Bourn in center field.

DEEP CY ...

Braves closer Craig Kimbrel finished fifth in the NL Cy Young voting, receiving one first-place vote and 41 points. Mets knuckleballer R.A. Dickey won the award after receiving 209 points. Kimbrel finished with 42 saves and 116 strikeouts in 62.2 innings of work.

Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

GWINNETT GLADIATORS



Glads own best record in league

By Joe Deighton

There are many things to be thankful for in Gwinnett and one of them is that, through 17 games, the Gladiators have the best record in the ECHL. The Glads lead the Eastern Conference with 25 points and are playing the best hockey of any team in the ECHL to this point. Gwinnett leads the South Division by two points over Greenville.

Gwinnett picked up another two points on the road by defeating the South Carolina Stingrays in Charleston 2-1. Backup goalie Louis Dominguez got a rare start and made 22 saves. It was just the third game Dominguez has played in this season and he picked up his second win. Chris Clackson scored his sixth goal of the year to put the Glads up 2-0 late in the second period. Gwinnett dominated the third period, as the Glads put together 11 straight shots at the net and tilted the ice in their favor. It was the 12th win in the past 14 games for the Gladiators, who lead the ECHL in wins and points.

LEAGUE LEADERS ...

The Gladiators are the top team in the ECHL and with that they have some of the top scorers in the league, as well as one of

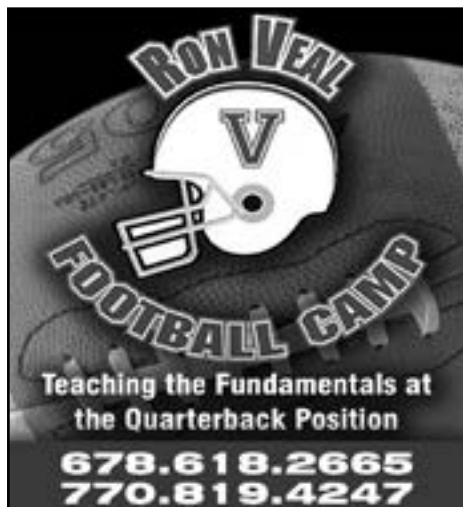
the best goaltenders in rookie Mike Lee. Lee ranks second in the league with 301 saves, second in goals-against average (1.83), second in wins (8) and second in save percentage (.932). He is well on his way to earning what was previously known as the John A. Daley Memorial Trophy for rookie of the year.

Forward Casey Pierro-Zabotel has been, without question, the best player for the Gladiators all year. He leads the team in points and ranks third in the ECHL with 24. Pierro-Zabotel has scored six goals to go along with 18 assists this season through 17 games.

UP NEXT ...

The Gladiators will host Orlando for two games this week at the Arena at Gwinnett Center. Much of the success that has Gwinnett in first place has come against the first-year SolarBears. The Glads have won all four meetings so far against the ECHL's newest franchise this season. Two more wins against Orlando will stretch the Gladiators' lead over the division foe to 10 points.

Deighton can be reached at jdeighton@scoreatl.com.



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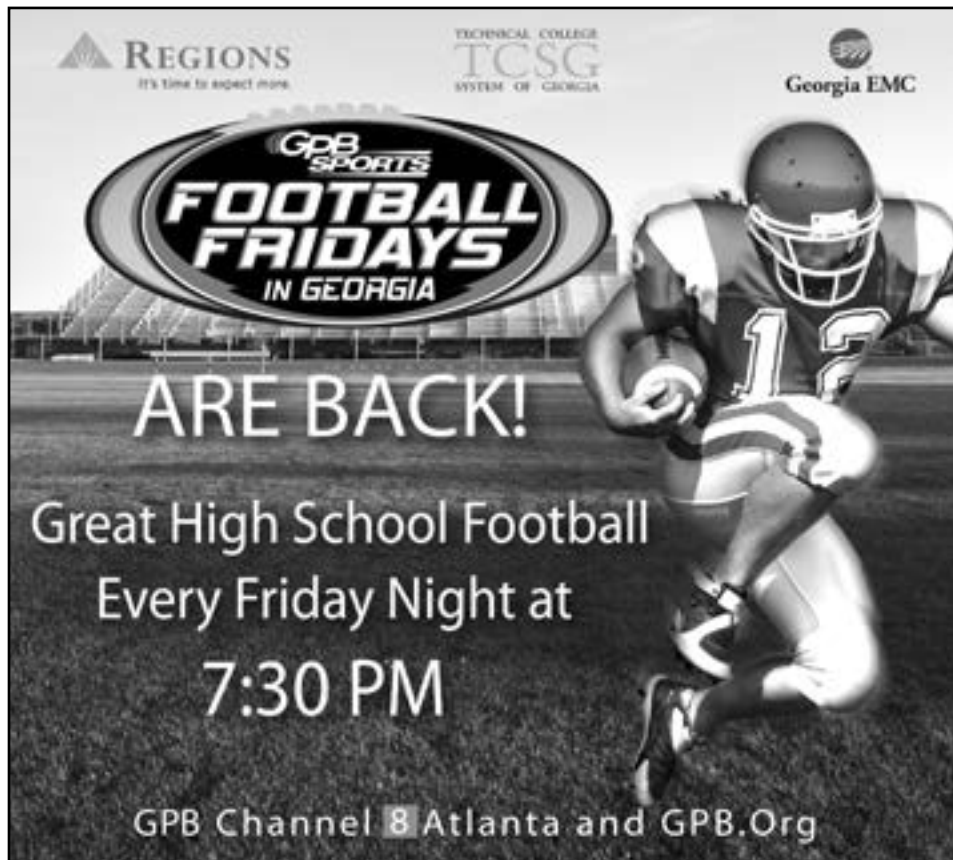
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