

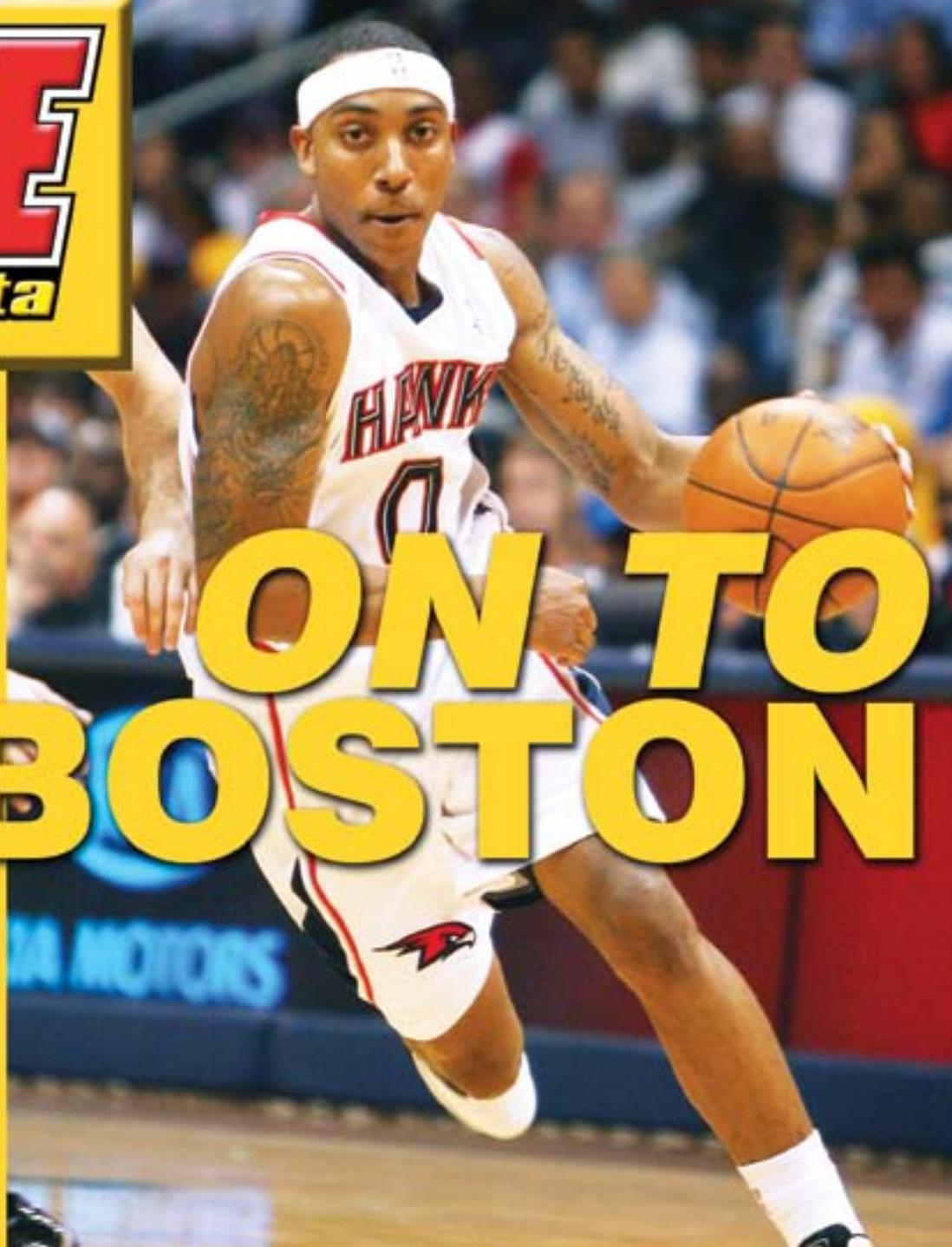
# SCORE

Vol. 8 | Iss. 9 | May 4-17, 2012

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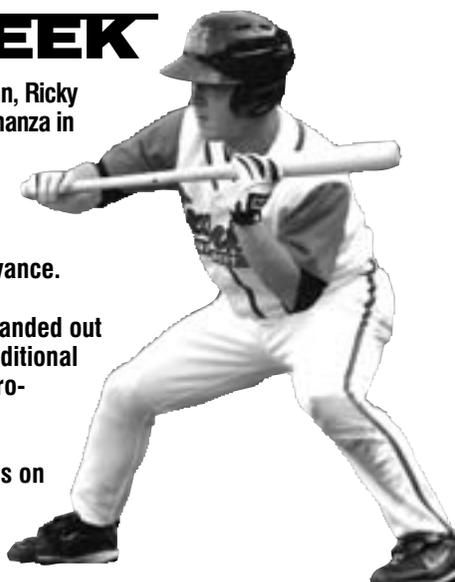
## CAN'T MISS THIS WEEK

**4** In another edition of his Dimon Club column, Ricky Dimon breaks down the Braves' hitting bonanza in 2012 and also discusses a negative trend.

**5** Reporter Robby Kalland digs deep into the Hawks-Celtics series and details what Larry Drew's club has to do to advance.

**7** There will be 49 state championships handed out this spring, but many will be won by traditional powers. Stephen Black looks at three programs trying to win their first titles.

**14** The countdown to the Dream's season is on and Joe Deighton brings you the latest news from Dreamland.



## TEAM SCOOP AND VOICES

COVER DESIGN BY DJ GALBIATI  
 COVER PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVID CASELLI  
 AND SONNY KENNEDY

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### INSIDE AT SCORE

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## SHOT OF THE WEEK...



**TITLE TOWN:** The Georgia men's tennis team celebrates its victory in the SEC tournament on April 22. Now in the midst of the NCAA tournament, the No. 2 overall seeded Bulldogs will attempt to add more hardware to their collection. In program history, Georgia has won 34 conference titles, eight SEC tournament titles and eight national titles (six outdoor, two indoor). Photo by UGA sports information.



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# THE FLETCH



## Another shuffle for 790 the Zone

By Fletcher Proctor

In what is becoming a yearly tradition, 790 The Zone is reshuffling its lineup and adjusting its hours. After scaling back to just four hours after Tony Barnhart and Wes Durham came aboard from 10-11, Mayhem in the AM with Steak Shapiro, Chris Dimino and Nick Cellini will go back to five hours from 6 to 11 am.

For the drive home, Mike Bell and David Archer, aka Archer & Bell, will shift up one hour from 2 to 6 pm and John Michaels' Football Night In Atlanta will run for two hours, from 6 to 8 pm. A combination of the 2LiveStews and Barnhart and Durham will air between 11-2 with the new Red Zone show.

While I enjoy Barnhart & Durham, and miss when they aren't there talking college sports (please don't bring in Jamal Ander-

son again), I really want to speak on John Michaels. He is, without question, one of the hardest workers to get where he is with 790 The Zone.

He started in promotions and would appear on any and every show he could to expand his brand. He has done the Braves' postgame show Extra Innings, Zone Sports Sunday, Zone Sports Saturday, college football pregame, college football postgame, NFL pregame, NFL postgame, Georgia Force work, a wrestling show, updates, fill-in work for the 2 Live Stews, Barnhart & Durham, Pollack/Arch & Bell, Mayhem, and now he has Football Night in Atlanta as well as the Falcons' sidelines gig. Good for Michaels, who has proven that if you work

hard once you get the opportunity, good things can happen.

### ATLANTA'S SOCIAL MEDIA ...

At the recent Business of Sports Summit, I found Braves President John Schuerholz's response to an inquiry about social media interesting. In a moment of frankness, Schuerholz admitted that he wished it would vanish from Turner Field.

"We'd like to have social media banned in the clubhouse, especially a few hours before the game," said Schuerholz. "We have young men and that's how they are communicating, but these are grown men too."

This was interesting as several Braves are very active on Twitter, including Kris Medlen (@KrisMedlen54) and Peter Moylan, who have countless followers and offer witty insight to the life of a Major League ball player. Medlen retweets photos and comments during his spare time to his 22,000 followers while answering questions from some of his near 40,000 followers.

Score's Hawks beat writer Robby Kalland investigated how the Hawks use Twitter and found that the organization doesn't regulate social media, nor does it have any guidelines for the players' use, outside of the league-wide regulations set by the NBA.

Coach Larry Drew said of social media, "I don't use it. I know guys that do it, my kids do it. I don't know much about it. We don't do anything to monitor guys, the league has rules, but, no we don't (do anything extra)."

Kalland found out that the general feeling in the locker room is, for the most part, the use of social media is positive. About half of the Hawks have either a Facebook account or a Twitter account, but usage varies. Jeff Teague and Al Horford use Twitter to communicate what they're doing or thoughts on the team with their fans, but others, like All-Star Joe Johnson, use social media sparingly.

"I've got both (Facebook and Twitter), but I barely use either one of them," said Johnson. "I don't think it's a bad thing, man. I think it's a way to communicate and socialize with your fans around the world."

None of Atlanta's main tweeters are as notorious as self-professed Twittaholic Miami Marlins outfielder Logan Morrison. @LoMoMarlins has been quite vocal on a number of topics throughout his time on Twitter, inspiring a Sports Illustrated piece on his behavior, and leading many to believe that last year's demotion to the minors was partly because of his Twitter habits.

*Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.*

# THE DIMON CLUB



## Falcons, Braves taking big swings

By Ricky Dimon

On the surface, the Falcons' three days at the NFL Draft were entirely uneventful. One of three teams without a first-round pick, Atlanta was on the sidelines until making the No. 55 overall selection. Thomas Dimitroff and company started with a center from Wisconsin, Peter Konz, who will likely serve in a backup role for at least one season. He is the only player picked by Atlanta whom even relatively hardcore fans have probably ever heard of. Lamar Holmes, an offensive tackle from Southern Miss, was taken in the third round despite being projected to last until round six or seven. The Falcons did not pick again until No. 157 overall in the fifth round.

The 2012 draft, however, should not be

overlooked nor forgotten by Atlanta fans. Julio Jones may have been selected in 2011, but the Falcons used this year's first-round pick to move up to No. 5 overall last season. They assumed—correctly—that this year's installment of the draft would feature a relatively weak player field and that a successful season in 2011 would result in a late first-round draft position. Atlanta would have been in slot No. 22, where the Browns snagged former Oklahoma State gunslinger Brandon Weeden to be their quarterback of the future (and present). In that place the Falcons could have had someone like offensive tackle Riley Reiff or pass-rushers such as Nick Perry or Whitney Mercilus. Good players? Yes. Julio Jones-

type players? Nope.

In the seventh round, this might as well have been the announcement: "With the 229th overall pick in the 2012 NFL Draft, the Atlanta Falcons select Asante Samuel, defensive back, Central Florida." Of course, in reality the Philadelphia Eagles sent Samuel to the Falcons in a pre-draft trade then used the 229th pick to get Kansas State running back Bryce Brown. No, Samuel is not a 22-year-old rookie getting paid seventh-round money. He's 31 and in line for several million dollars from the Falcons (\$2.875 million against the cap this season) over the next three years. Still, getting a proven Pro Bowl cornerback and making an NFC rival eat a large chunk of his upcoming salary? Now that's what I'm talking about for a seventh-round pick!

### BASHING BRAVES ...

The Braves are no strangers to leading the major leagues in fewest runs allowed, but leading the league in most runs scored? That's about as rare as the Atlanta Thrashers making the Stanley Cup playoffs. The 2012 Braves were once again expected to rely on pitching, but they were No. 1 in the bigs in runs until April 21 and No. 1 the National League until April 28. The Braves are still sixth in the ma-

jors and second in the NL behind St. Louis. Freddie Freeman and Brian McCann both have four homers while Michael Bourn and Jason Heyward are creating scoring opportunities with a combined 15 stolen bases. When the pitching gets going, watch out.

The bad news, though, is that Atlanta is a dismal 2-5 against the NL East as of Wednesday. A division that is expected to remain tight is currently separated by 2.5 games from the leader to the fourth-place team. In that kind of race, a 2-5 record against key rivals is not going to get it done.

It's getting ugly in the NBA, where players are dropping by the wayside due to suspension (Metta World Peace, Rajon Rondo), injury (Derek Rose and Iman Shumpert worst of all) and stupidity (Amare Stoudemire). The Hawks have certainly not been immune to the injury bug in this crowded, lockout-shortened season. Already without Al Horford and Zaza Pachulia, they lost Josh Smith to a sprained knee in Game 2. Atlanta was looking good after a convincing Game 1 win and a Rondo suspension, but 48 hours later everything had changed with the series heading back to Boston.

*Dimon can be reached at rdimon@scoreatl.com.*



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# NBA PLAYOFFS



## Hawks head to Boston with series tied

By Robby Kalland



After two games in Atlanta, the first-round series is tied at one game apiece.

The Hawks dominated early in Game 1, but had to fight off a number of Celtics runs in the third and fourth quarter to pull out a 83-74 victory. Game 2 saw much of the same as the Hawks pulled ahead multiple times, including a game-high 11-point lead late in the third quarter. However, the Hawks were unable to hold onto the lead in the fourth quarter, allowing the Celtics to outscore them 26-14 in the final period on their way to an 87-80 road win.

The main area of concern for the Hawks and head coach Larry Drew has been execution in the fourth quarter.

"We have to be better just in executing," said Drew. "We've been too slow getting into our sets, didn't do things with pace. [Tuesday night] we played too slow and too methodi-

cally. Boston's a good halfcourt team, particularly in the fourth quarter and we fed right into their defense."

### FADING LATE ...

Fourth quarter struggles have plagued the Hawks in all five meetings this season with the Celtics, including their two victories. In the first two games of the series, Atlanta has scored 32 points combined in the fourth quarter while the Celtics have scored 47 points. The Hawks know they have to improve in the fourth quarter, and for Marvin Williams it needs to start on the defensive end.

"Defensively we had a lot of breakdowns in transition [in Game 2]," said Williams. "They had a few fast-break points and it's normally not like us to give up that many fast-break points, so defensively is where we have to step up."

The fourth-quarter lapses have been frustrating because the Hawks have shown the ability on a few occasions in this series, most notably the first quarter of Game 1, to play at a fast pace and really force the Celtics back on their heels. In that first quarter the Hawks jumped out to a 31-18 lead, aided by seven fast-break points. The Hawks controlled the glass with 13 boards, and moved the ball extremely well at the offensive end with seven assists in the quarter.

Though Williams placed an emphasis on the defensive struggles for the Hawks, the offensive performance in the final period has also been dismal. Unlike in that Game 1 first quarter, the Hawks' offense has not been moving the ball well, and has reverted back to old habits with a lot of isolation plays for Johnson and others. The lack of ball movement is exemplified by the fact that the Hawks only have one assist in each fourth quarter. They also are yet to get a fast-break point in the fourth quarter, which shows the lack of pace that Drew spoke on.

### ROAD RAGE ...

For the Hawks to go on the road and reclaim home-court advantage, they will have to find a way to get some easy transition baskets and move the ball in the fourth quarter. The key player that can be the catalyst for the Hawks' offense and can help them pick up the pace is Jeff Teague.

Teague has played extremely well in both games, but has not been as explosive in the fourth quarter. Part of this has been because the Hawks have run a lot of isolation plays for Johnson and Josh Smith. However, with questions about Smith's availability due to a sprained left knee, Teague will need to take on a bigger role in the offense.

Teague's quickness and ability to penetrate the Celtics' defense has been on display in the first two games. He is tied with Johnson for second on the team in scoring, with 33 points in the first two games, only behind Smith's 38. The good play by Teague has gotten the notice of Celtics coach Doc Rivers, who is searching for answers to combat the quick Atlanta point guard.

"He's quick as lightning, we're trying to use our point guard to do so many things defensively, they have to guard him and get into help positions," Rivers said. "And with

Teague when you get off of him and try to recover and he's attacking you with his speed, he's really hurting us. We have to go back to the film, because we haven't figured out how to stop him."

Teague's presence could be a factor if the Celtics have to stay at home on him and not double off on Atlanta's scorers, and if they do continue to use their point guards to help on defense, Teague will need to take advantage by knocking down open jumpers and using his quickness to penetrate into the lane. He will be the "X-Factor" that could allow the Hawks to steal a road win in Boston, but the task will only get more difficult as Rondo will be back after four days of rest due to his one-game suspension.

Not only can Teague be a major factor in the half-court sets, but he is crucial for Atlanta to get out in transition. The Hawks feed off Teague's energy and his knack for jumping passing lanes and pushing the ball on the fast-break. He was one of the league leaders this year in steals, averaging 1.61 steals per game, and many of those steals lead to fast-break opportunities.

With Josh Smith potentially being out for Game 3 with his knee injury, the Hawks will need guys like Teague to step into a more integral role in their offense. Smith's play has been great all year and that carried over into the first two games of the playoffs, but Drew maintains the confidence in his team to get the job done no matter the injury situation.

"Can we win the series? I think we can. I still think we have guys that are capable," Drew said, "Certainly we'll have to get big games from certain guys, but I have all the confidence in the world that if those guys [Al, Zaza and Josh] aren't there then we can still win."

For the Hawks to win this series they will need to win a game in Boston, a rarity in Hawks' playoff history. However, this team has fought through injuries all year and has had different guys step up into big roles at both ends of the floor. To get the job done in Boston they will look to their superstar, Joe Johnson, to step up his offensive game, but the key will be getting energy at both ends of the floor from Teague, the floor general.

*Photo of courtesy of Jon Barash. Kalland can be reached at rkalland@scoreatl.com.*

# WHOS HOT

THUMBS UP TO RIVALRIES



## Hawks vs. Celtics

In the late 80's, Dominique Wilkins and Larry Bird had some epic playoff matchups. While the current Hawks and Celtics aren't necessarily among the NBA's elite, the story lines are there. Boston coach Doc Rivers played in Atlanta with Dominique. In 2008, these perennial playoff teams fought for seven games. Enjoy.

## Field Day, circa the 70's and 80's

Think back. Field Day was the greatest day in the history of the school year for a little kid. Wheelbarrow races. The softball throw. The 100 (or so) yard dash behind the school or in the parking lot. The first sunburn of the summer. Yes, those Field Days were A-W-E-S-O-M-E.

## Derek Lowe

Yes, thumbs up to ... Derek Lowe. The Braves are paying \$10 million of this guy's \$15 million salary this season, and he's been lights out for the Cleveland Indians so far in 2012. If you watched him in a Braves' uniform, it's hard to believe he's already won four games. That said, well played Derek.

## Caleb King

The kid (young man) just doesn't get it. The former star running back left Parkview for greener turf at Greater Atlanta Christian and ended up with a broken leg and some controversy. Then, at Georgia, his career never blossomed. Now, he's been released by the Minnesota Vikings after a late night altercation. It's time to "man-up," Caleb.

## Field Day, 2012 edition

Unfortunately today's elementary school kids don't have it as good as we did back in the day. There are no more ribbons, and usually, no individual events. While little kids still look forward to Field Day, political correctness has changed this great day forever. That's just sad.

## Rajon Rando

C'mon man. The Celtics guard draws a technical foul in Game 1 of the playoffs versus the Hawks, then said it was unintentional, that he got "tripped." No Rondo, you bowed up your chest and went looking for trouble and found a ref. You're lucky you were only suspended one game.



# WHOS NOT

THUMBS DOWN TO TEMPERS

## SCORE LIST

BY BRIAN JONES

- 1** **DRAFT RECAP:** The NFL Draft has come and gone, and the Falcons picked players that addressed needs. Led by center Peter Konz, the Falcons selected two offensive linemen, two defensive linemen, one safety and one fullback. While those aren't "sexy" picks, the Falcons were going for depth in this year's draft and they were able to do that. I think Konz will play guard on the next level and could start by Day 1 if he has the same tenacity he did at Wisconsin.
- 2** **DUEL IN BEANTOWN:** On Friday, the Hawks will travel to Boston to face the Celtics in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Quarterfinals. Thanks to Josh Smith, the Hawks won the first game in convincing fashion, and they need to take the third game in order to have an upper hand in the series. If the Hawks do win the series, it will give them a lot of momentum heading into the second round of the playoffs. And by that time, they should have Al Horford back.
- 3** **GIFT FROM VICK:** Well, it's not really a gift from Michel Vick, but the Falcons will take it regardless. In the final move of the Falcons and Vick salary cap grievance, the NFL awarded the Falcons \$3 million in salary cap credits. This is good news because when the Falcons signed Asante Samuel, they just had a little over \$1 million of salary cap space. With the extra \$3 million, they should have just enough to sign the entire rookie class which has been something the Falcons have done on a consistent basis since Thomas Dimitroff arrived in 2008.
- 4** **OH CALEB:** We were hoping Caleb King would turn his life around when he entered the NFL, but that looks like it's not going to happen. Last weekend, King got arrested in Minnesota for assaulting a man, who was hospitalized with skull and facial fractures. The former Georgia running back was with the Minnesota Vikings last season, but was released earlier this week in wake of the allegations. Let's hope King gets the help he needs because if he doesn't, he could see a lot of jail time.
- 5** **CHAMPIONSHIP MONTH:** It's May and that means the high school season is drawing to a close. The soccer state tournament is underway, the girls track and field state championships take place this weekend in Albany, the lacrosse state tournament will start next week, the baseball state tournament will begin this weekend and the tennis state finals will take place next week in Jonesboro. I know that's a lot to digest, so if you want to updates on all the state championships, be sure to check ScoreATL.com all month.

## CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

BY RICKY DIMON

- 0** Home runs hit by new Los Angeles Angel Albert Pujols the entire month of April
- 1** Number of seasons suspended for Saints coach Sean Payton and LB Jonathan Vilma
- 2** Super Bowl rings for Falcons cornerback Asante Samuel (2003, 2004 with NE)
- 3** 40-point playoff games in Paul Pierce's career. He scored 36 vs. the Hawks in Game 2
- 4** Length of suspension, in games, for Saints' DE Will Smith.
- 5** Career interception returns for touchdown by Asante "Pick 6" Samuel.
- 6** Braves' MLB ranking in runs scored. They were 22nd last season.
- 7** Round in which Falcons' running back Jason Snelling was selected in the 2007 draft.
- 8** Consecutive games the Braves have lost to Philadelphia after Tuesday's setback.
- 9** Stolen bases by Jason Heyward in all of 2011. He already has eight this season.

## TRIVIA QUESTION

Since moving to Atlanta, what is the Hawks' record in playoff series against Boston?

Answer on Page 14

## SANITY AT LAST

*"When the Falcons were in the Super Bowl (1998 season), I was doing the 'Dirty Bird' with the rest of them."*

- Falcons second-round draft choice Peter Konz on being picked by Atlanta.

## MY TWO CENTS

In May, a total of 49 state championship trophies will be hoisted in the state of Georgia. Baseball, golf, lacrosse, soccer, tennis and track will each have state tournaments/meets in Championship Month. We will be all over the playoffs and meets, with our live scoreboard that is running five nights a week, our daily high school sports email newsletter and our websites (ScoreATL.com, GPB.org/sports, GaPrepNews.com).

If you're not already on the email newsletter, shoot me an email (sblack@scoreatl.com) and we'll add you. If you are a high school sports fan, you want to be getting our newsletter. Each day,



Mon-Fri, we feature stories on teams, coaches, players and schools throughout the entire state while also featuring rankings, top stories in other publications and our interactive polls.

Also, don't forget that we do all the high school sports coverage for Georgia Public Broadcasting's website, GPB.org/sports. We post stories regularly on the site, so be sure to check it out.

We hope you enjoy Championship Month! If you attend any events throughout the state, be sure to send us the final score for our scoreboard on ScoreATL.com. Email us at scores@scoreatl.com, tweet to @scoreatlanta or call us at 404-256-1572.



## Burgeoning programs look for first titles

By Stephen Black and Larry Fermin

During Championship Month, when the DGSFA will award 49 state champions in 11 sports (baseball, boys and girls golf, boys and girls lacrosse, boys and girls soccer, boys and girls tennis, boys and girls track and field), there will be some schools looking to win their first state championships. For some, it would represent the first in school history, for others, the first in program history.

Banneker boys track and field, North Atlanta girls tennis and Peachtree Ridge girls tennis are three of those teams. But, unlike many other programs that have yet to break through, these three programs have a reasonable chance at taking home a trophy unfamiliar to their schools.

### REPRESENTING THE CITY ...

Under the direction of first-year head coach Jorge Perez-Cisneros, a U.S. Marine Reservist, and assistant coach Peter Townes, the North Atlanta High girls' tennis team has had its most successful season possibly ever. The

No. 4 seed from Region 5 has worked extremely hard to make it all the way the quarterfinal round of the Class AAA girls' state tournament after defeating the second seed from Region 8, Gainesville, 3-2 Thursday. This is the farthest any girls' tennis team has advanced in school history and the Warriors are trying to become the first Atlanta public school to ever win a girls state tennis championship.

The Warriors' region is the most competitive region in all of Class AAA, according to Perez-Cisneros. Region 5 is stacked with two of its teams currently ranked top 10 in the state. The squad will be the underdog in a rematch with its region foe, St. Pius X, currently ranked No. 2 in the state, in the quarterfinal round. According to Perez-Cisneros, if North Atlanta can defeat St. Pius X, the state title becomes a real possibility.

### TROJAN HORSES ...

Banneker High School has never won a state title in any sport. But the boys track and

field team aims to change that. Ranked No. 1 in the ga.milesplit.com Class AAAA power rankings, the Trojans look poised to make history at the southwest Atlanta school.

"It would be great for our school and our community," said head coach Juval Winston. "Our athletes are pretty excited, but I tell them to stay humble and to let their talent speak for itself on the track."

One thing Winston doesn't have to worry about is talent. While many successful teams in a variety of sports throughout the state supplement their rosters with players who transferred into the district just in time for — or midway through — high school, Banneker's roster is full of kids from the same neighborhoods. And they come into high school their freshmen years ready to contribute to the track and field team.

"Most of our kids went to Banneker middle schools," said Winston. "We welcome them with open arms to our program, but we tell them 'if you plan on working, we plan on coaching you.'"

### JUNGLE QUEENS ...

Coach Chrissie Bolt has seen her Peachtree Ridge girls team advance deep into the playoffs after undefeated regular seasons

and region titles the past two seasons, only to have its season ended by Walton in the state tournament. After moving from Chattahoochee following the 2003 season, Bolt has built a perennial power at the Gwinnett school. But they have yet to win it all.

While the state championship is the team's ultimate goal, Bolt doesn't let it consume her players' thoughts.

"It's something we've been striving for," said Bolt. "I'd be lying if I said it wasn't our goal. But if we don't win it, you can't say we haven't had a great season."

This season, the Lions (15-2) have lost only to Lambert, albeit twice, after losing just twice total in the past two seasons (both to Walton). Bolt admitted her team got a nice draw in the state tournament. Her Lions won't get No. 2 Roswell or eight-time defending champion Walton until the finals.

Bolt and her program at the Ridge have accomplished a lot in her seven years, and the last remaining goal is the state title. This year looks as promising as any, as Walton finally appears to be down.

*Photos courtesy of Banneker High School and Marist. Larry Fermin contributed to this story. Black can be reached at sblack@scoreatl.com.*

# BASEBALL NEWS



## Metro teams gear up for playoffs

By Chris Lionetti

The Lassiter Trojans (17-9, 10-25-AAAAA) clinched the ninth region 5-AAAAA title in school history, and will enter the state tournament as a No.1 seed. While Lassiter usually enjoys success every season, this year was different for the Trojans. This season was the first since 2002 that the team had no Division 1 signees. The team graduated its three-man rotation and only returned three starters from last year. Even with so few players returning, the Trojans made the most out of their young talent and have been buoyed by their rotation of Caleb Kutsche, K.J. Sinclair and Tim Eber. Another reason for Lassiter's success is a .303 team batting average. The Trojans face North Forsyth in a Friday doubleheader in the first round of the playoffs.

### PROM PROBLEMS ...

The norm for the first round of the state baseball playoffs is to hold a doubleheader

Friday night and games the next day if the doubleheader is split. However, there are instances that cause this schedule to be changed. One such instance has arisen this season and will cause Colquitt County and Westlake to play their doubleheader on Thursday night. The Lions are holding their prom Saturday night and asked Colquitt County if they could move their matchup forward a day. Westlake has won four of its past five, but face an equally hot Packers team that has won its past three games.

### HOT HORSES ...

Gwinnett County has 13 teams in the state playoffs this year and, while that includes last year's A, AA, and AAAAA state champions, no team enters the playoffs hotter than Brookwood. The Broncos have won their past seven games and are holding opponents to an average of a run per game over the

course of their winning streak. Lucas Sims, the team's ace, has played a large role in the team's success and stands a fair chance of being drafted in the first round of next month's 2012 MLB First-Year Player Draft.

The state baseball playoffs will begin Friday across the state as the top four teams from each region will compete in a 64-team field to determine champions for all five classifications.

In Class A, Hebron Christian will begin its title defense with a series against Region 7-A three-seed Glascock County. Meanwhile, Wesleyan, which won the 2009 and 2010 state titles, will face Region 6-A champion Mt. Paran in an interesting matchup involving metro Atlanta programs.

Defending Class AA champion Buford is the No. 2 seed out of Region 6 and will host Temple in a first-round series. The Wolves are trying to become the first repeat champion in the classification since Cartersville in 2001 and 2002.

Two-time defending Class AAAA champion again won Region 6, and will host Villa Rica in the first round. The War Eagles have won four of the past 10 state titles in Class AAAA.

In Class AAAAA, defending state champion Parkview will host Gwinnett County neighbor Collins Hill in the first round.

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# GYMNASTICS NEWS



## Blue Devils claim second straight title

By Stephen Black

Tift County edged Lambert 112.125 to 111.875 in the gymnastics state championship meet at Westminster Friday night. It is the Blue Devils' second straight title and the third for a South Georgia program since 2006, when Colquitt County took home the prize. Coupled with Newnan's state title in 2008, metro Atlanta schools have been held to just three first-place finishes since 2006. This relative drought comes on the heels of metro programs taking the state title every year from 1997 to 2003.

Beth Roberts led Tift County by winning three individual events and the all-around individual medal. Lambert's Paige Drehoff won the lone exercise Roberts didn't conquer, but it would not be enough for the Longhorns. Libby Barbour finished second in the floor and the beam for Tift.

Behind Lambert, was Alpharetta with 109.2, Newnan with 108.7, Lowndes with 106.875 and Lassiter with 105.325. For Al-

pharetta, Kelsey Kopec came in second in the overall competition. Kopec took runner-up in the uneven bars and third in the floor exercise and fourth in the vault.

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## FINAL RESULTS

### UNEVEN BARS

1. Beth Roberts - Tift
2. Kelsey Kopec - Alpharetta
3. Kenyadah Prime - Lowndes
4. Katie Stuart - Lambert
5. Sydney Goad - Newnan
6. Ashley McLeod - Tift

### FLOOR EXERCISE

1. Beth Roberts - Tift
2. Libby Barbour - Tift
3. Kelsey Kopec - Alpharetta
4. Katie Shelnuitt - Newnan
5. Trystien Charles - Providence Chr.
6. Kenyadah Prime - Lowndes

### BALANCE BEAM

1. Beth Roberts - Tift
2. Libby Barbour - Tift
3. Kenyadah Prime - Lowndes
4. Trystien Charles - Providence Chr.
5. Meg Stephens - Lakeside
6. Kelsey Kopec - Alpharetta

### TEAMS

- |                          |                       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Tift County - 112.125 | 4. Newnan - 108.7     |
| 2. Lambert - 111.875     | 5. Lowndes - 106.875  |
| 3. Alpharetta - 109.2    | 6. Lassiter - 105.325 |

### VAULT

1. Paige Drehoff - Lambert
2. Trystien Charles - Providence Chr.
3. Beth Roberts - Tift
4. Kelsey Kopec - Alpharetta
5. Kenyadah Prime - Lowndes
6. Taylor Pastor - Lambert

### ALL AROUND

1. Beth Roberts - Tift
2. Kelsey Kopec - Alpharetta
3. Kenyadah Prime - Lowndes
4. Trystien Charles - Providence Chr.
5. Libby Barbour - Tift
6. Katie Stuart - Lambert

# SOCCER NEWS



## Defending champs looking ferocious

By Joe Deighton

The defending 5A state champion Walton Raiders trounced Northview 7-0 in the opening round of the state playoffs on Monday. Senior fullback Douglas Miller notched the initial goal with 26:14 left in the first half. Sophomore forward Jad Elkhilil scored on a

breakaway goal with just over nine minutes left in the first half to put the Raiders up 2-0. Elkhilil nearly put Walton up three goals with a kick that caromed off the crossbar but could not find its way across the goal line. The Raiders added five goals in the second half to finish off a dominating performance. Goalkeeper Alex McCauley was not challenged much but did make a key save in the early moments of the second half to keep the two-goal advantage intact. Walton moves on to face Kenesaw Mountain in the second round.

### BRONCOS ADVANCE ...

The Brookwood Broncos took a 2-0 first-half lead and held on to defeat Peachtree Ridge 2-1 in the first round of the 5A state playoffs. The Region 8-5A champions took control early with a goal from left wing Kelson Brunelle. The initial tally was scored after junior Bryan Dorsey threw in from the right sideline to the penalty kick area, where Brunelle headed in the goal.

After the Broncos built a 2-0 edge, the Lions scored late in the first half on a tip-in goal by Jeremy Rector. Both teams had their chance to score in the second half but were unable to do so. Brookwood will face Newn-

an in the second round.

### PROWLING PARKVIEW ...

Despite not gaining a top seed in the 5A playoffs, the Parkview Panthers came into the first-round playoff match with North Gwinnett as a confident team. Parkview lost the region title to Brookwood but had won their previous 11 games. The Panthers' confidence showed in the early minutes of the first half, as they took a quick 2-0 lead. Jose Diaz scored the first goal just four minutes into the game with a hard kick at the top of the box. Five minutes later, Abel Nguyen scored the second goal for Parkview.

Raymond Muro gave the Panthers an insurmountable 3-0 lead with a goal in the 28th minute of the first half. North Gwinnett made things interesting, as the Bulldogs snuck to within one goal in the 73rd minute. Panthers goalkeeper Diego Casillas made sure that there would be no comeback when he made a diving save on a free kick late in the game. Parkview is looking for a state title for the first time since 2005. The Panthers will face Tift County in Round 2.

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week at Blessed Trinity (10-4) and John's Creek (10-2). They have scored in double-figures in 16 of 17 contests and they have won by double-digit margins seven times.

Seeking their second 5A state title (2010), the top-ranked Milton boys wrapped up April with a flurry of competitive games. After winning at Lovett 13-10 on April 18, the Eagles lost in overtime 11-10 at second-ranked Alpharetta in a preview of a possible state championship clash. The one-goal games continued last week for Milton, which owns a 13-3 record as of Wednesday. Following a 10-9 home win over Walton, the Eagles again fell in overtime, this time 10-9 at Harrison on Monday.

### COLLISION COURSE ...

The Westminster girls are two-time defending champions in A-4A, and they are playing like it. In the last two weeks against stiff competition, the Wildcats compiled a 3-1 record—losing only to 5A Lassiter. That setback was preceded by a 17-3 win over Kell (ranked third in A-4A behind McIntosh and Westminster) and followed by blowouts of Riverwood last Friday and Lambert on Monday. While the Wildcats are 15-2, McIntosh

boasts a 10-1-1 overall record (including 10-0-1 in state and 7-0 in classification). The Chiefs crushed Whitewater 21-9 last week heading into Wednesday's regular-season finale at Holy Innocents' (results not available).

Class 5A also features a two-time defending champ in Milton, which triumphed in 2010 and 2011 and has won six titles in the seven years since lacrosse became a GHSA-sanctioned sport. The Eagles are 13-4 overall and 7-0 against Georgia competition (all in Class 5A). They wrap up their regular season with a big matchup at home against Lassiter on Friday after testing themselves in Washington, D.C. last weekend. Milton went 1-2 against D.C. competition, ending in style with a 12-9 victory over Bishop Ireton (Va.).

Lassiter is also in fine form heading into Friday's showdown. The Trojans are 14-3 overall (10-1 in state) and have won nine of their last 10 games. Since losing to third-ranked Walton 9-6 on April 17, Lassiter has bounced back in style. After a 16-9 win over Westminster on April 21, the Trojans downed Kell 22-13 last Friday.

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# LACROSSE NEWS



## Lambert looking for second straight title

By Ricky Dimon

With the state tournament beginning on Monday, the Lambert boys' title defense is unblemished (heading into a regular-season finale against South Forsyth on Thursday; results not available at press time). Lambert is 17-0 and atop the A-4A rankings ahead of Pope, Chattahoochee and Westminster. The Longhorns earned road wins last

# DREAM NEWS



## Atlanta heads into 2012 with big dreams

By Joe Deighton

While the Atlanta Hawks are firmly entrenched in the NBA playoffs, the Atlanta Dream are preparing for their fifth WNBA season, which begins on May 19. The team is in the midst of training camp, which will feature a preseason game on Saturday against Tulsa. Atlanta is focused on vying for a third straight Eastern Conference title and first-ever WNBA title.

### NEW ADDITIONS ...

Training camp started with a Nike Elite Girls Clinic at Norcross High School. Three new members were added to the squad and will have a chance to make the team over the next few weeks. Forward Chelsea Regins and Aishah Sutherland along with guard Brittany Johnson come to Atlanta with a lot of talent and accolades.

Regins should be familiar to local fans

after playing four years at Georgia Tech. The 6-foot-2 forward is versatile and can play on the block or on the wing. In 2011-12, she helped the Yellow Jackets to their best season ever by reaching the Sweet 16 in the NCAA tournament. As a junior and senior, Chelsea played in every game and started five last year. Regins completed her senior season by averaging 5.3 points and 4.1 rebounds per game. It will be tough for Regins to make the team and become a contributor, but she could help the Dream with her size down low.

Aishah Sutherland was one of the top players for the Kansas Jayhawks last year as she led them to a Sweet 16 appearance for the first time since 1998. Over four years at Kansas, Sutherland topped 1,000 points and 500 rebounds, becoming just the 15th player in program history to do so. Sutherland was

a key contributor to the Jayhawks throughout her college career. As a freshman, she averaged nearly a double-double (11.8 points, 9.2 rebounds) during five games of the NIT. As a sophomore, she ranked second on the team in rebounding, fourth in scoring and led the team in blocks. As a junior, she ranked second on the team with 41 blocks. The 6-foot-2 forward averaged 13.9 points and 9.1 rebounds per game as a senior. Sutherland was also a great defender in 2011-12, averaging over a steal and block per game. Look for Sutherland to push the veterans in training camp and possibly earn a spot off the bench.

Guard Brittany Johnson is one year removed from her college career at Ohio State. Johnson played in Greece last year with Panionios Athens and averaged 21.1 points per game. She started every game as a junior and senior for the Buckeyes. Johnson led Ohio State to three NCAA tournament appearances. The biggest attribute that the 5-foot-11 guard brings to the Dream is outside shooting. Johnson finished her college career as Ohio State's third all-time three-point shooter with 216 made from outside the arc. Last year, she shot 41.5 percent from outside, while playing in Greece. Johnson should learn from guard Lindsey Harding during camp and could challenge for a roster spot.

### PRESEASON CAMP ...

Practices during training camp will give head coach Marynell Meadors a glimpse of the type of squad she expects to see this season. The real test will come when the Dream host Tulsa on Saturday at Philips Arena. The rookies and new players will have a chance to show their skills against real competition and that will show Meadors who should be on this team.

It will be interesting to see how draft pick Tiffany Hayes fares in her first taste of professional basketball. Hayes will get plenty of minutes and be able to display her dynamic game that brought so much success to the Connecticut Huskies. Hayes was an all-around player under Gino Auriemma, averaging double figures in points and posting 5.8 rebounds per game to go along with 3.3 assists and 2.3 steals per game.

The three free-agent signees, Regins, Sutherland and Johnson, will all have their share of playing time against Tulsa. Whether they make the team or not depends on how they perform in the exhibition contest. Tulsa has been one of the worst teams in the WNBA since relocating from Detroit back in 2010. Last year, the Shock had just three wins in 34 games. Despite the lack of competition, the preseason game should be a good tune-up for the Dream.

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# PANTHER PROWL



## Bilukidi becomes first NFL pick

By Ryan Caiafa

Georgia State football added another accomplishment to its brief history during the NFL Draft, as defensive lineman Christó Bilukidi became the first Panther to be selected. The 6-foot-5, 290-pound lineman was taken by the Oakland Raiders in the sixth round with the 189th overall pick.

Last season, Bilukidi tallied a team-high five sacks and nine tackles for loss to go along with his 38 tackles. The two-year starter finishes his GSU career with 10 career sacks. Bilukidi transferred to Georgia State from Eastern Arizona Junior College in 2010, just before the program's inaugural season.

The first NFL draftee in Georgia State football history comes on the heels of the announcement of GSU's admission into the Sun Belt Conference of the FBS, which opens the doors for more national exposure and postseason bowl eligibility. With the pick of Bilukidi, the Raiders are looking to bolster a defensive line that struggled throughout the season and finished amongst the NFL's worst in all major defensive categories.

### MUASAU TO GIANTS ...

Bilukidi may not be the only Panther to make an NFL roster next season. Former GSU

linebacker Jake Muasau has been invited to attend the New York Giants rookie camp, which begins next week. Muasau was an integral part of the Panther defense in his two-year career, bringing high energy and playmaking skills to the field. He racked up 106 tackles, three interceptions, four forced fumbles and four fumble recoveries in his career.

### PANTHER SOFTBALL ...

Entering the final series with an impressive 34-15 record, which includes a shocking upset of second-ranked Alabama, the Georgia State softball team is set to defend its conference championship in the CAA Tournament, which begins May 9. The Panthers will have their hands full against top-seeded Hofstra, which is perfect in conference play entering the final series of the regular season. GSU was able to take out the Pride in last year's conference tournament, sweeping them in the final series. The team will once again look to reach the Women's College World Series, where last season they had the tall order of facing the Georgia Bulldogs, who were ranked sixth at the time, and the Florida State Seminoles.

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# OWL OUTLOOK



## Lady Owls clinch share of A-Sun title

By Chris Lionetti

After being dismantled earlier in the week by the Georgia Bulldogs, the Kennesaw State Lady Owls softball team (30-22, 14-4) closed their regular season on a high note by taking both games of a doubleheader against Mercer. The Owls took the first game 9-1 and the second game 7-3. Freshman Kaylee Williams fueled the team's sweep of Mercer with two home runs in the doubleheader. Williams was named the Atlantic Sun Player of the Week after going 3-for-8 with two home runs. She is batting .272 on the season with 29 RBIs, which is second among A-Sun freshmen.

With the sweep of the Bears, the Lady Owls clinched a share of the A-Sun Conference title. FGCU has a doubleheader later this week that will determine whether or not the Owls will share or own the title themselves. For there to be a split title, FGCU must sweep their doubleheader against North Florida. Any other result will give the Owls the conference title. Regardless of the result of the doubleheader, KSU owns a top-two seed in the A-Sun Conference Tournament.

### ACCUMULATING ACCOLADES ...

Coming off of its first-ever A-Sun Conference Championship, the Lady Owls were recently named the No. 20 seed in the 2012 NCAA Division I Women's Golf Championships. The Owls will be making an appearance in the championship for the first time in school history and will be doing so with the youngest team in the country. The program also had five players and its coach honored for their achievements. Ket Preamchuen, Lea Charpier, Ines Lescudier and Kaew Preamchuen all received All Conference honors and head coach Rhyll Brinsmead was named the A-Sun Coach of the Year. Ket Preamchuen also received Academic All-Conference honors.

### NEW AND NOTES ...

Nitra Perry was recently named the head coach of the women's basketball program. Perry starred at Mississippi State from 1996-2000. ... The Diamond Owls lost to FGCU on Sunday and will be idle for 11 days until they play an important series against conference rival USC Upstate.

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# BULLDOG BEAT



## Diamond Dawgs avoid sweep at LSU

By Stephen Black

Georgia salvaged Game 3 of its three-game series at No. 4 LSU with a 5-3 win Sunday. Justin Bryan hit two home runs while Jay Swinford, Chase Hawkins and Earl Daniels combined to shut out the host Tigers in five innings of relief.

A four-run fourth inning staked Georgia (25-20, 9-12) a 4-2 lead. From there, the Bulldogs held the potent Tigers to just one run the rest of the way.

The win was crucial for a Bulldogs squad that had lost four in a row and six of seven. But Georgia dropped two of three in the series to lose their fourth straight road SEC series this year.

"We survived and got one today," said Georgia coach David Perno. "We played well, got a big inning and everybody pitched well. I'm proud of the team for hanging in there because LSU is a great team and this is a tough place to play."

Next up for the Diamond Dawgs is a three-game series against Auburn in Athens.

### HUNGRY HOSTS ...

The No. 2 men's tennis team will host the first and second rounds of their NCAA tournament draw. Manuel Diaz's second-ranked squad opens with South Carolina St. on May 12 for a chance to face the winner of Boise St.

and Florida St. on May 13. The Bulldogs will also host the later rounds as well as the individual and doubles championships from May 17-28. It is the 30th time Athens has hosted the championships.

"This is a tremendous tribute to the hard work the guys put in all year," said Diaz. "It speaks to the sacrifices they made and what they did all year. To be seeded No. 2 is a testament to that. We knew it was a toss-up between Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5, and now it's time to go earn our seeding every step of the way."

### DRAFTED DOGS ...

Seven former Georgia football players were drafted onto NFL teams over the weekend. Offensive lineman Cordy Glenn (Buffalo) was taken in the second round with pick No. 41 on Friday, while six Dawgs were taken on Saturday in the remaining rounds.

Center Ben Jones (Houston), kicker Blair Walsh (Minnesota), tight end Orson Charles (Cincinnati), cornerback Brandon Boykin (Philadelphia), offensive lineman Justin Anderson (Indianapolis) and defensive end DeAngelo Tyson (Baltimore) were also selected.

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# TECH TALK



## Hill drafted by Jets in second round

By Thomas Watson

Only one player from Georgia Tech was drafted in the 2012 NFL Draft, but he could turn out to be a very important one, as the talented Stephen Hill was drafted 43rd overall by the New York Jets. When asked if Hill reminded him of any NFL wide receivers, Jets college scouting VP Joey Clinkscales said, "Calvin Johnson, maybe? And I'm not going to put that label on him but from a height, weight, speed moniker. He's just a unique athlete."

Johnson and Demaryius Thomas have made the transition from the triple-option offense in college to become very productive NFL receivers, and Hill hopes to do the same. Johnson finished last season with 96 receptions, 1,681 receiving yards and 16 touchdowns. Thomas came on late last season and finished with 32 catches for 551 yards and four touchdowns.

The Jets believe Hill can make the same transition and tested him many times before drafting him. "We really feel [Hill] can run all the routes we'll ask in our offense," Jets GM Mike Tannenbaum said in a press conference after the draft. "Again, he was a very good blocker in a run-oriented offense. He has very good football acumen and we feel the transition can happen really quickly."

### ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT ...

Georgia Tech will hold its Spring commencement ceremonies Saturday at the Georgia Dome, and for 82 student-athletes, managers and trainers it will mark the beginning of a new career.

Seventeen football players, including Mario Edwards, Richard Watson, Nick Claytor and Embry Peoples, will receive their degrees. Players from 12 different sports will walk across the stage with the notable exception of men's basketball. LaQuanisha Adams, Mo Bennett, Sasha Goodlett, Chelsea Regins and Metra Walthour, all members of the women's basketball team, will be handed their diplomas. Men's and women's track/cross country teams each have nine members who will receive their degrees this weekend, both tying for the most graduates for their respective team.

Seven athletes will be receiving Master's degrees. Those ceremonies will be held on Friday night and the recipients are Hunter Clasen (men's track/cross country), Jill Davis (women's track/cross country), Brian Dempsey (baseball), Kelsey Duffy (men's swimming), Luke Haag (cheer), Jose Muguruza (men's tennis) and Andy Nguyen (men's track/cross country).

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# HAWKS HAVEN



## Hawks split home games with Boston

By Robby Kalland

The Hawks split the first two games in their first-round matchup with the Boston Celtics. In Game 1, the Hawks came out with great energy and jumped out to a quick lead that they were able to maintain throughout on their way to an 83-74 win.

Boston was behind for most of Game 2, but made a strong comeback in the final five minutes to pull out an 87-80 win on the road. Atlanta now has to go to Boston and do something they've rarely done in franchise history: win a road playoff game in Boston.

### POSITIVES ...

The bright spots for the Hawks have been Josh Smith and Jeff Teague, who have played with great energy in both games and have really been the catalysts on both ends of the floor. Smith has 38 points and 30 rebounds in the first two games, but his status is in question for Game 3 after he left with 4:20 left in the fourth quarter of Game 2 with a knee injury. The official report on the injury is a strained tendon in his left knee and his status is day-to-day. Teague has had 33 points, 11 rebounds and four steals thus far

in the series, and has played with high energy and quickness.

Atlanta has yet to get a typical performance from Joe Johnson, who has struggled to get into his offensive rhythm that the Hawks have become accustomed to. Joe has gone 10-for-32 from the field, and 3-for-17 from three-point range in the first two games. His struggles were magnified in Game 2 as his counterpart Paul Pierce went off for 36 points and 14 rebounds. For Atlanta to win, especially if Smith is limited or even out, Johnson will need to return to top form and play better down the stretch in late-game situations. Hawks fans have become accustomed to Johnson making clutch baskets, but so far he, like the rest of the Hawks, has struggled in the fourth quarter.

Atlanta will need to play with pace and energy in order to win a game in Boston and reclaim home-court advantage. That will have to start in the backcourt, with Teague and Johnson. The Hawks have a tough task in front of them, but they have fought through injuries all season.

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# FALCONS FLIGHT



## Falcons acquire six draftees, Samuel

By Ricky Dimon

The Falcons made six selections in last week's NFL Draft, starting with Wisconsin offensive lineman Peter Konz at No. 55 overall in the second round. Konz mostly lined up at center for the Badgers and he could back up Todd McClure this season in Atlanta or contend for a starting guard spot.

"Just getting the opportunity is amazing," Konz said in a conference call with the media on draft day. "It doesn't matter where I fell to because I love the team that picked me. I have nothing but great respect for the organization. Now I get to help be part of a winning tradition.... When the Falcons were in the Super Bowl (1998 season), I was doing the 'Dirty Bird' with the rest of them."

Atlanta rounded out its draft with offensive tackle Lamar Holmes (third round), fullback Bradie Ewing (fifth), defensive end Jonathan Massaquoi (fifth), safety Charles Mitchell (sixth) and defensive tackle Travian Robertson (seventh). Holmes played left tackle at Southern Miss while Ewing was a teammate of Konz's at Wisconsin. Massaquoi is cousins with former University of Georgia receiver Mohamed Massaquoi (currently with the Cleveland Browns) and former Vikings tight end Visanthe Shiancoe (currently a free agent).

### ENTER PICK 6 ...

Of course, the Falcons did a lot more with their 2012 draft than the simple selection of six new players. It started at last year's proceedings, when Atlanta sent its 2012 first-round pick to snag wide receiver Julio Jones at No. 5 overall. It also included a shrewd move to acquire veteran cornerback Asante Samuel from the Eagles in a trade with Philadelphia last Wednesday (the Eagles received Atlanta's seventh-round pick). Samuel is four-time Pro Bowler and he won Super Bowls with New England in 2003 and 2004. He has 45 career interceptions, five of which he returned for touchdowns.

Samuel posted the following on Twitter shortly after being dealt: "Falcon Nation it is show time. Pick 6 is on the job". He also spoke with AtlantaFalcons.com in a Q&A earlier this week.

"I think the most I bring is knowing how to win, expressing winning and how important it is to win," Samuel explained. "I think it's all the things I went through when we were winning that I learned and saw. I bring the confidence of a winner."

*Dimon can be reached at rdimon@scoreatl.com.*

# CHOP SHOP

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## Phillies still a nemesis for Braves

By Ricky Dimon

The Braves played their first of 17 regular-season games against the Phillies on Tuesday at Turner Field and the result was no different from what transpired throughout much of 2011. Atlanta erased a 2-0 deficit to tie the game, but Philadelphia rocked Jonny Venters for four hits and two runs in the eighth inning to secure a 4-2 victory.

"We were all set up to win that ballgame and it kind of hurts," manager Fredi Gonzalez told the AJC afterward. "It wasn't Jonny's day. A couple balls got through the infield it seemed like all night... a couple balls off the end of the bat or going through that hole there. But it's just one of those days. I'm really pleased the way we swung the bats early in the game. It just wasn't our night."

Dating back to last year, the Braves have now lost eight consecutive games to the Phillies—including a season-ending sweep to knock Atlanta out of postseason contention. The Braves have not scored more than three runs in any of the last 10 nine-inning games against Philadelphia (they won an 11-inning contest 4-1 on July 9 of last season and have not defeated Philly since). This week's two-game set wrapped up on Wednesday with a

showdown between Tommy Hanson and Roy Halladay (results not available at press time).

### BOURN SUPREMACY ...

Atlanta finished fourth to last in the major leagues in stolen bases last season. Michael Bourn led the majors with 61 thefts, but he was not acquired until a trade-deadline deal with Houston. Bourn is off to a strong start to what will presumably be his first full season with the Braves. Through 100 at-bats he is hitting .330, tops on the team by far among full-time starters. He is tied for seventh in the majors with seven steals, one fewer than the surprising Jason Heyward. Thanks to the fleet feet of Bourn and Heyward, a normally hesitant Atlanta squad is seventh in the bigs with 18 swipes.

"He's been solid," Gonzalez said of Bourn. "That's what he does. Now we need to get him to drive in some runs; hit some home runs. Am I asking for too much?"

Answer: no. In a loaded NL East and in the midst of the aforementioned skid against Philadelphia, the Braves need all of this and maybe even more from Bourn if they want a division title.

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# GWINNETT BRAVES



## Homestand plants Gwinnett in first place

By Ryan Caiafa

We're a month into baseball season already and the Gwinnett Braves have been on a roll to start the campaign, with the International League's best record at 17-7 through May 2. Gwinnett has seen strong offensive production from outfielders Jordan Parraz, who is hitting a team-high .367, and Jose Constanza, who has driven in 12 runs to go along with his .313 average. Newcomers Ernesto Mejia and Joey Terdoslavich have provided the power for Gwinnett, each contributing three home runs and Mejia leading the team in RBIs in the young season.

A 7-1 homestand in April really got the Braves going, as they not only got plenty of offense from several players, but also the pitching to start the year has been spectacular. Yohan Flande has been superb, with a microscopic ERA of 0.90 through four starts. In addition, Eric Junge has delivered big time, winning his last three starts, to go along with an ERA of 3.52.

### FAMILIAR FACES ...

Gwinnett welcomed two Atlanta mainstays to Coolray Field when Tim Hudson made two rehab starts as he recovered from

offseason back surgery, and Jair Jurrjens was sent down from Atlanta in order to attempt to regain his all-star form from 2011, where he went 13-6 with a 2.96 ERA. Hudson's two rehab starts were not only beneficial in his recovery, but also great for Gwinnett as he went 2-0, while only allowing one earned run. He has since returned to the Atlanta lineup, where he has already picked up a victory for the major league club, with a win over the Pittsburgh Pirates.

The hope for Jurrjens is that he regains the confidence that he displayed throughout much of last season, where he was an instrumental part of the Atlanta rotation. His first two major league starts were rough to say the least as he went 0-2 with a 9.37 ERA with opponents hitting .411 off of him. He is off to a solid start in Gwinnett as he pitched seven innings in his first start, allowing four hits and one earned run. The G-Braves will look to Jurrjens to not only return to his dominant form, but to contribute to a rotation that has been integral to the team's impressive start to the season.

*Caiafa can be reached at rcaiafa@scoreatl.com.*



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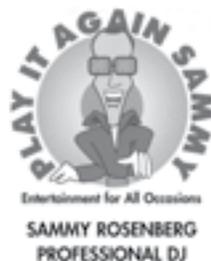


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