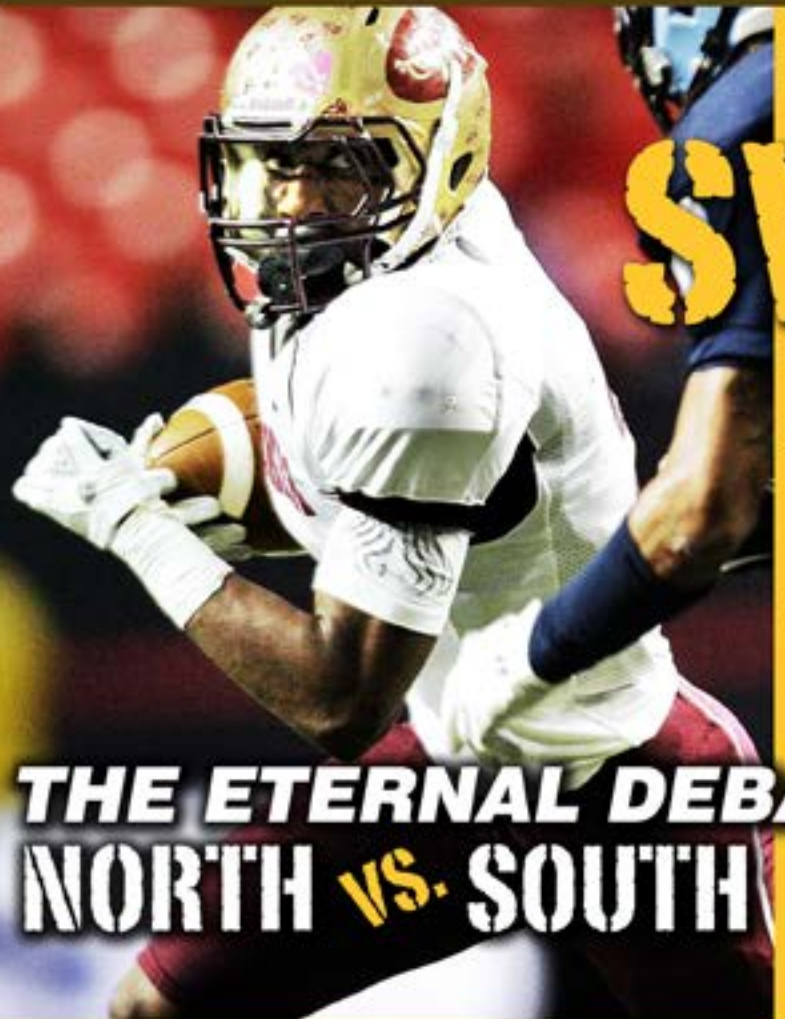


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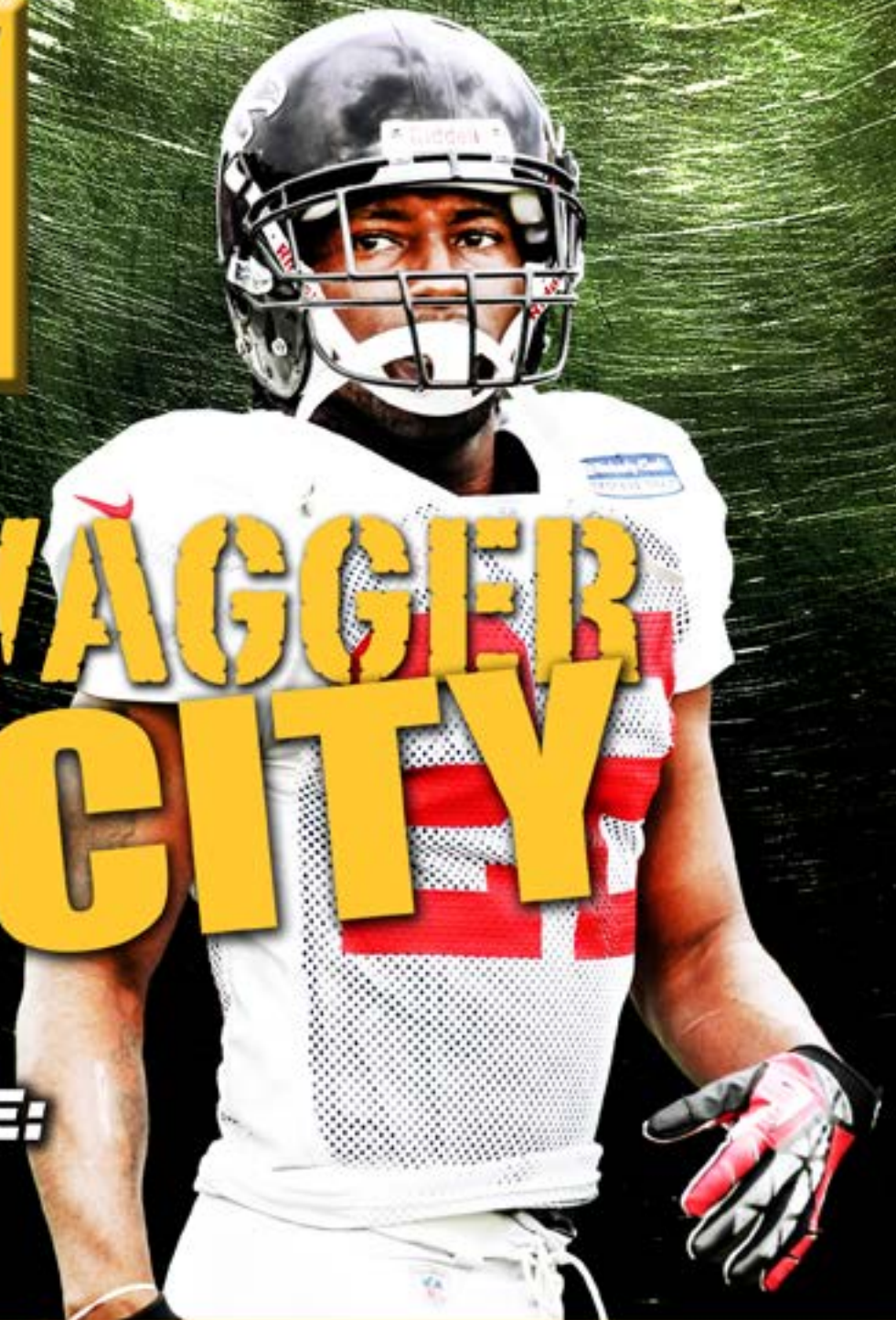
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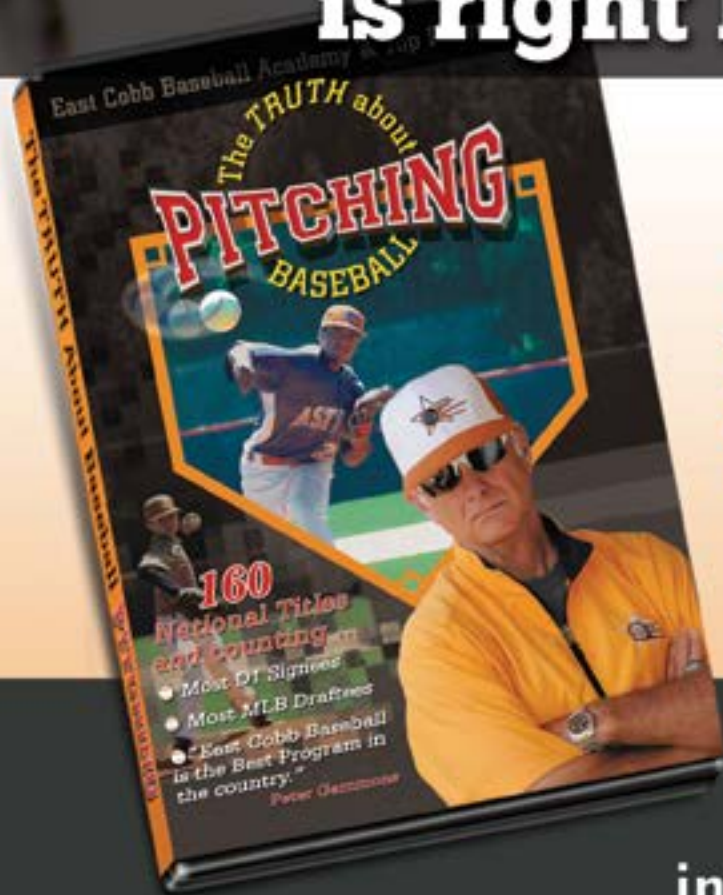
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CAN'T MISS THIS WEEK

- 4** Reporter Robby Kalland debuts his "Kalland's Corner" column by looking into recent moves the Braves, Falcons and Hawks have made in recent months.
- 5** Our Craig Sager, Jr., was at Falcons training camp scouting this year's version of our NFL team. He shares his thoughts on the team in this week's cover story.
- 7** Stephen Black and Fletcher Proctor debate the eternal question: north vs south in Georgia high school football.
- 8-9** Our staff has been writing high school football previews all summer, and we share eight of them in this week's prep section.

TEAM SCOOP AND VOICES

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COVER PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROB SAYE AND
JIMMY CRIBB/ATLANTA FALCONS

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INSIDE AT SCORE

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SHOT OF THE WEEK...



FAN FRIENDLY: Falcons quarterback Chris Redman signs autographs for the fans during training camp. The Falcons held their Friday Night Lights scrimmage at Peachtree Ridge last week, then scrimmaged the Titans in Dalton Monday night in front of thousands at Coahulla Creek. Photo courtesy of the Atlanta Falcons.

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MY TWO CENTS



Another sports talk station coming to town

By Fletcher Proctor

For sports nuts that are trapped in their cars during rush hour, soon the Atlanta airwaves will have a third sports radio option for station-switchers. The long-time rumor was finally confirmed that Dave FM will drop its music format later this year in favor of sports talk radio. It is not known at this time what local personalities, if any, will be a part of the sports launch, but Mitch Evans has been heard on Dave FM recently and he will likely have a role according to an article in the AJC.

It will be interesting to see if the new

station tries to pluck the 2 Live Stews away from 790 The Zone when their contracts are up. The Stews have gone from late night talk to a prime time slot in afternoon drive to nationally syndicated radio with Sporting News to midday to lumped in with a bunch of other co-hosts in their current show The Red Zone on 790's midday shift. Perhaps a fresh start is needed for the Stews and this new station could build around them the way 790 did at one time. It would make a big statement for the new station to pull in a show with the cache that the Stews have.

HEAVY HITTERS ...

TALKERS magazine has released its inaugural "Heavy Hundred of Sports Talk" list and several shows from Atlanta's two sports radio stations made the list. Interestingly enough, Archer & Bell of 790 The Zone was the highest-ranked Atlanta group, checking in at No. 30. The next Atlanta group to check in was 680 The Fan's morning show The Rude Awakening at No. 62, followed by several members of 790's Red Zone at No. 81 and finally Mayhem in the AM at No. 97. The Rude Awakening's Sandra Golden is one of only two females on the list, the other being Amy Van Dyken at No. 93.

What was interesting is that Buck & Kincade, the longest running sports show in the history of Atlanta, didn't make the list, neither did 680 The Fan's afternoon drive show Chuck & Chernoff. Chuck & Chernoff took home Creative Loafing's 2011 Best Local Sports Radio Show, and they are a great listen with Chernoff's wit and Oliver's knowledge on everything college football. Perhaps they were overlooked after part as their program

is hijacked by Braves coverage most afternoons. As for Buck & Kincade, the latter has the most talent in the city and ESPN thinks enough of him to give him a national show, so I am not sure how TALKERS sets its criteria.

ROSENBERG MENTIONED ...

If you were listening to the Braves' radio broadcast this past Monday, you would have heard Jim Powell and Don Sutton bring up Score Atlanta's own I.J. Rosenberg during a Phillies' pitching change the new pitcher brought in to face Atlanta was B.J. Rosenberg and Sutton casually asked "wasn't he the Braves' beat writer for the AJC a few years back?"

Powell responded he thought he was and Sutton countered with, "Pretty good writer, but he didn't know much about pitching."

Powell clarified the situation, saying that he sat down with IJ over the summer and that he was a great guy who still lives in the Atlanta area.

Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

KALLAND'S CORNER



An exciting, active summer for ATL

By Robby Kalland

Summer is often seen as the dog days of the sports calendar. Basketball and hockey have wrapped up their seasons, football is yet to start and baseball playoff races have yet to truly heat up. However, this summer has been quite the eventful one, especially for Atlanta sports teams.

Atlanta fans have been frustrated recently by the lack of activity by the Hawks, Braves and Falcons in free agency and trades. This summer the fans have had their wishes granted, especially with the Hawks and Braves.

FACELIFT ...

The Hawks have been the most active team in the NBA this offseason starting with the hiring of GM Danny Ferry. Since Ferry's hiring, the Hawks have completely remodeled their roster and their future cap space. Much of the ire of Hawks fans has been directed

at the contracts of Joe Johnson and Marvin Williams, which Ferry has inexplicably been able to move while making it look easy. Most impressively, he did not take a single bad contract in exchange for either player.

The Hawks still have a solid roster that will compete for a playoff spot and could even challenge for a four or five seed in the East. More importantly, Ferry has opened up an inordinate amount of cap room for the 2013 offseason and the Hawks could be major players for big-name free agents for the first time in, truthfully, franchise history. Ferry's ability to open up cap room without destroying the team's core makes the Hawks a very desirable destination for those wanting both the opportunity to win and make lots of money.

The Braves have been impressive this season as they seem inspired to send Chipper Jones off in style. Atlanta continues to

have one of the best bullpens in baseball, and, lately, the offense has found its rhythm. Young stars Freddie Freeman and Jason Heyward have led the charge, with veterans Brian McCann and Jones rounding into their usual mid-season form.

The Braves did not rest on their laurels this summer and made a number of trade attempts at the deadline. They failed to acquire Ryan Dempster, but may have worked themselves a better trade taking Paul Maholm and Reed Johnson from the Cubs for a pair of prospects, without giving up any of their top four pitching prospects.

Maholm is having a career year and gives the Braves' rotation another quality lefty while allowing them to move the struggling Jair Jurrjens to the pen. Reed Johnson can play every outfield position and gives them options to rest Heyward and Michael Bourn down the stretch to keep them healthy and fresh for September and October.

Johnson's presence also gives them flexibility with their do-it-all, super utility man Martin Prado, who has been, along with Bourn, the most valuable player on the Braves' roster this season. Prado now can move to the infield when needed without losing much defensively in the outfield, a luxury the Braves did not have earlier in the year. While Johnson and Maholm might not have been the biggest names the Braves could have acquired at the trade deadline, they might be the best fits for the Braves' needs at half the price.

LESS IS MORE ...

The Falcons, while less active, did make some important moves, including bringing in two new coordinators in Mike Nolan and Dirk Koetter. Their most notable player acquisition was bringing in Asante Samuel for just at seventh-round pick in this year's draft. Samuel is a former All-Pro and has been to the Pro Bowl on multiple occasions. He allows Dunta Robinson to move inside to the nickel corner spot, where he can be more of a physical player and help defend the run which maximizes his effectiveness and skill set in the Falcons' scheme.

The offensive line will be bolstered by draft pick Peter Konz, which will help keep Matt Ryan comfortable in the pocket to distribute the ball to his multitude of weapons. Julio Jones is in his second year with the Falcons and will continue to develop chemistry with Ryan which can only mean more trouble for opposing defenses that still have to think about Roddy White and Tony Gonzalez along with the vaunted rushing attack led by Michael Turner. The question for the Falcons remains whether they can push past that first-round wall, but fans cannot fault management for not putting the pieces in place to succeed.

Atlanta fans are much maligned, but this summer has to excite even the most skeptical of fans. All three teams are legitimate playoff contenders, and more importantly they seem to be taking the right steps to being championship contenders.

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GETTING DEFENSIVE



Hope, Samuel add confidence to Falcons

By Craig Sager II



In what has been perhaps the most important offseason in the Falcons' 46-year history, the coaches and players are leaving no stone unturned. As the offseason progresses, the Falcons have been revamping the team from top to bottom. There is an excitement and optimism around the Falcons, who have a good mix of youthful exuberance and veteran leadership on both sides of the ball.

After getting bullied out of the playoffs for the third straight year, the Falcons are intensely focused and committed to putting in the work required to push past the first-round wall. Whether it has been players like Matt Ryan bulking up, the veterans who are reloading the roster, or the new coordinators that have been scheming for every possible threat they may face this season, there is a well-defined plan for this team. The Falcons want to be the aggressors this time around.

The veteran leadership has boosted the confidence and experience of the team and has sped up the development of younger players. Offensively, Ryan has strengthened

his leadership responsibilities as he enters his fifth season. With an extended offseason following the disappointing playoff loss, Ryan chose to improve his overall shape. The Boston College product's strength and conditioning has definitely improved this offseason and he will be the driving force of an offense that features one of the NFL's best wideout combos in Roddy White and Julio Jones.

Ryan and new offensive coordinator Dirk Koetter's offense has faced an excellent Falcons secondary, defensive line and linebacking corps all offseason. The defensive looked sharp and their effort and competitiveness was brought to camp in the masses. Outside linebacker Sean Weatherspoon is another player who has stepped up as a leader on this team and has become an anchor of the defense in Curtis Lofton's absence.

There is a sense of urgency that exists within the Falcons, but instead of breeding tension and stiffness as the season approaches, the leadership is fueling competition and energy.

The most important part of the offseason is still to come with preseason games and closed camp, but through OTA's minicamp and the opens so far the competition has been outstanding and why would it be any other way? Not only are the players and coaches desperately trying to reach that next tier, but the hiring of two new coordinators has really added an emphasis into the refining of every position group.

NOLAN'S DEFENSE ...

Open camp has indicated what the Falcons defensive philosophy will be this year. The defense has looked lightning fast throughout camp, and will look to play this way all season. Former defensive coordinator Brian VanGorder's schemes were often criticized for being too elaborate, but Mike Nolan simplifies his calls. Nolan believes that by making his calls and schemes easier to recognize, his players can react and play faster. When the players do not have an overwhelming mental checklist and progression to run thru they will be able to react faster.

This quick and aggressive defense will require a solid secondary to act as a safety net. The Falcons have added two weapons this offseason to the secondary that have added a level of depth and talent that rivals any in the NFL. Cornerback Asante Samuel, who signed April 25, and safety Chris Hope, who signed June 29, bring Super Bowl experience, competitiveness and have helped to initiate the overwhelming change in confidence this offseason.

KING OF SWAG ...

If swagger is merely showing up with confidence, Samuel has given the Falcons that and more. In a secondary that already has two more than capable starters at corner in Brent Grimes and Dunta Robinson, Samuel has established himself as the vocal leader and hype man of the defense. When witnessing the defense in action this offseason, the confidence of Samuel echoes throughout the field whether he is making a play or offering a teammate a lift from the sideline.

Samuel is a 10-year pro and two-time Super Bowl winner, but is earning the respect of his coaches and teammates through his commitment to the team. The energy and leadership of Samuel has been invaluable to the entire team this offseason. Samuel and Hope have given the defense and assertiveness and have challenged the offense this offseason. It has been the defense that has trig-

gered and then escalated most of the battles this offseason, but neither side has hesitated to compete against each other.

"Everything is a competition to me," said Samuel. "Our offense has looked great all camp, but we [the defense] got it. [Matt] Ryan knows if he's coming to my side he better take that shorter drop step and get that ball in there earlier."

Samuel refers to pass break ups and interceptions as "making money" and after week one of training camp he voiced that this defense will be making lots of money this year.

"This is a mean defense now," Samuel clarified. "They don't want none and we won't give none."

The three-man rotation at corner between Grimes, Robinson and Samuel could be the Falcons' biggest strength this next season. Nolan has been finding ways to take advantage of this depth so they can be used as a rotating weapon next season.

"We will be doing a lot of moving around and we've got to get used to playing on both sides of the field," said Samuel.

Chris Hope, an 11-year veteran, is coming to the Falcons from Tennessee, and was a key factor in Pittsburgh's Super Bowl XL victory. Hope has been impressed with the cornerbacks he will combine forces with this season.

"In my opinion we have three of the best corners in the game in Asante, Grimes and Robinson," said Hope. "When you have corners as good as those guys it allows the safeties to be more effective in the defense."

Hope, William Moore, Thomas DeCoud and rookie safety Charles Mitchell construct a talented pool of safeties that is persistent in their pass coverage and ruthless against the running game.

The foundation of an effective Nolan defense builds from a strong pass rush and secondary, and this defense is tailor-made for Nolan's scheme. Samuel and Hope have a lot of pride in their games and believe this defense is on the doorstep of achieving great things this season.

"Yeah, winning is ultimately all that matters, but our goal is to be the best defense in the league this year," Samuel said. Hope nodded in agreement with the Samuel's thoughts.

Expectations surrounding the defense have never been higher and the pressure to perform is huge. Nolan and a defense deep with talent are more than capable to meet them.

Photo courtesy of Jimmy Cribb/Atlanta Falcons. Sager II can be reached at 404-256-1572.



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WHO'S HOT

THUMBS UP TO OLYMPICS FEVER



London 2012

Every four years, the summer Olympics come squarely onto the sports fan's radar. Some editions are utterly forgettable. (How many moments do you remember from Athens in 2004)? But the Brits have delivered a fantastic stage and our Americans athletes, including Missy Franklin and Sanya Richards-Ross, have grabbed gold and created incredible memories.

Ben Sheets

Is this dude — a Sydney 2000 Olympic gold medal winner — for real? In all five starts as a Brave, he's gone at least six innings and has given up a total of five runs. After missing about a year and a half to an elbow injury, the four-time All-Star is better than ever. Let's hope this continues!

Arthur Blank

The Falcons owner and Home Depot co-founder deserves a huge thank you from the Atlanta community. Blank has built our pro football team into a perennial winner and is always fan friendly. No matter what the time of year, players and staff are interacting with fans through charity work, physical education programs and pre-season practices at area high schools.

Philadelphia Phillies

In the final two months of the baseball season, the Braves have their rival Phillies on the schedule nine times. But for the first time in more than five years, the Phils were sellers at the trade deadline, not buyers. As the Braves fight for a pennant, the Phillie Phanatic is fighting to maintain sanity. Life is good.

Silly Olympic sports

It's fun to watch the Olympics, especially the "traditional" sports all of us played as kids. But seriously, synchronized diving, rhythmic gymnastics? The Olympics are cool, but some of this stuff is pure ... fluff. We don't need fluff. The Olympics should be about athletic skill, discipline and sportsmanship, not fluff.

Reckless high school coaching

As prep players begin to prepare for another season of Friday night lights, let's hope coaches and trainers are watching the kids closely. We all look forward to Friday night and want to see our team win, but it's more important to keep the brave players, pretty cheerleaders and talented band members safe.



WHO'S NOT

THUMBS DOWN TO UNSAFE PRACTICES

SCORE LIST

BY BRIAN JONES

1 **FALCONS FEVER:** It's finally here. The Falcons kicked off their 2012 season with their first preseason game on Thursday against the Baltimore Ravens. Results were not available at press time, but the goal for the preseason is not winning or losing. It's about getting better and the Falcons have done that since the start of training camp. They have another preseason contest Thursday against the Cincinnati Bengals, and the starters will play a little bit more than the first game.

2 **RED HOT BRAVES:** Don't look now, but the Braves are putting a lot of pressure on the Washington Nationals. As of Wednesday a major reason for their success is the starting pitching led by Ben Sheets and Kris Medlen. Sheets has been a nice surprise for the Braves after not pitching for two years and Medlen is maybe the most versatile pitcher on the roster because he can also be used in the bullpen.

3 **DAWG DAYS:** While the Falcons have kicked off their preseason, the Bulldogs started fall camp this past Sunday. And to no surprise, there has been no shortage of offseason news. First, Kolton Houston has yet to be ruled eligible after missing all of last year. Then, Chase Vasser has been suspended for the first two games due to a DUI arrest which happened earlier this year. Can we get through a week where there is no talk about any Bulldog players getting into any trouble? Please?

4 **PANTHER PROWL:** Georgia State football started practicing in full pads on Sunday and there are some questions the Panthers need to answer before they kickoff their season at the end of the month. Can they improve on the defense? Will they have consistent quarterback play? Will the offensive line come together? And more importantly, will they improve on their 3-8 record? Head coach Bill Curry loved the way his team has worked this week, but do they have the talent to achieve their goals for the 2012 season?

5 **TRAGIC LOSS:** The Hawks and the city of Atlanta got some shocking news on Tuesday. Former Hawks all-star Dan Roundfield passed away after drowning off the coast of Aruba. Roundfield was trying to save his wife who was swimming off of Baby Beach. She made it to shore, but Roundfield was taken out to sea. Roundfield played six seasons with the Hawks in the late 70s and early 80s. He was named to the All-Star team in 1980, '81 and '82 and was second-team All-NBA in 1979-80. Thoughts and prayers go out to the Roundfield family for this terrible loss.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

BY FLETCHER PROCTOR

7 Straight wins for Atlanta over Philadelphia before the Braves fell Tuesday night

0 Winning seasons for the Northview Titans in the program's 10 seasons

3 Straight seasons the Falcons have practiced against another NFL team in the preseason

4 Wins by right-hander Ben Sheets in his first five starts for the Braves

5 Medals for UGA swimmer Allison Schmitt after she won gold in the 4X100 medley relay

6 Receptions, including two touchdowns for Marlon Brown in UGA's first scrimmage Wednesday

7 Innings pitched by 2011 Braves' first-round pick Sean Gilmartin in his G-Braves' debut

4 High school all-state honors for new Hawk Louis Williams while at South Gwinnett

11 Points scored by Atlanta Dream forward Angel McCoughtry for Team USA in a quarterfinals win

13 Players the Georgia Bulldogs are below the NCAA limit of 85 scholarship athletes

TRIVIA QUESTION

What current UGA swimmer is tied for second in the Olympics as of Wednesday in total medal count with five?

Answer on Page 14

SANITY AT LAST

"When we get there we've got to play better football. We've got to coach better football. ... All playoff teams have talent; it's the teams that play their best games in the playoffs that move forward."

- Falcons coach Mike Smith on achieving postseason success.

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 weekend.

Practice has begun as we are just weeks away from a scrimmage at Marist and then the season opener at Roswell. Two seniors have been picked as permanent team captains for this season. Quarterback Chase Rosenberg and linebacker Ryan Bennett will be full-time captains and the team will vote each week on two additional players to serve for that game.

It hasn't been all work and no play this summer for Centennial. The key to a successful foot-

ball program is finding the right balance between focusing on football and enjoying football. With this in mind, one of our biggest and most important pieces on the offensive line

Vincent Calhoun and I took part in a burger eating contest Saturday at Lucky's Burger and Brew. We faced off against representatives from other schools such as Blessed Trinity, Roswell and King's Ridge with the six-pound "Grim Reaper" burger serving as the main course. Vincent destroyed both the burger as well as the competition, and Lucky's donated \$500 to our program.

The burger was really good but I still was not hungry as of Monday. Overall the contest was fun, yet painful.





The great Georgia football argument

By Stephen Black & Fletcher Proctor

Stephen Black and Fletcher Proctor break down Georgia's great debate of where the best high school football takes place. Black argues the best football is found below Macon while Proctor says that talent lives in metro Atlanta and talent is king.

WINNING AT ALL LEVELS ...

In South Georgia, high school football is the big game in town. While Atlanta has multiple professional franchises and Athens boasts the University of Georgia, South Georgia excels on the high school gridiron.

Beginning with Fitzgerald's state championship in 1948, the southern half of the Peach State has been dominating high school football in Georgia. What makes the domination more impressive is that many of the programs don't have the facilities or large populations that schools in the metro Atlanta have.

Year after year, South Georgia programs compete for and win state titles. And year after year, players from this part of the state are also being recruited by some of the top programs in the nation.

In direct contrast to metro Atlanta high school football, which is generally dominated by the goliath AAAAAA programs and the elite private schools in the smaller classifications, South Georgia wins at all levels.

Lowndes County alone boasts 26 state titles between Valdosta and Lowndes, who compete in the state's largest classification. This year, Camden County enters their region to make it even tougher.

Meanwhile in Region 2-A, Charlton County, Clinch County and Wilcox County have combined for eight state titles in the past 13 years.

In AAA and AAAA, Peach County, Thomas County Central and Statesboro have ruled the state in recent decades, each taking home mul-

tiples state titles.

As Georgia heads into a new era of reclassification, high school football fans in the state can expect South Georgia to have programs winning at the highest level in all classifications.

HOME OF THE TALENT ...

Ever since 2000, the power has shifted to just north of I-20, and to Gwinnett County in particular. Lowndes and Camden County have combined to win six titles since 2000, the same number as Buford alone. Parkview, Brookwood, Peachtree Ridge and Grayson have each brought state titles back to Gwinnett County, with Parkview pulling home three. In a direct North Georgia vs. South Georgia stretch of games, Brookwood beat Colquitt County for the 2010 Class AAAAA title and Grayson took out Colquitt County in the 2011 Class AAAAA semifinals.

The one element that truly separates North Georgia from South Georgia is sheer talent. If one were to just look at Gwinnett County, he or she would see the nation's top player in Grayson's Robert Nkemdiche, who is back for a run at another state title. North Gwinnett is seemingly always in the state title discussion, and

Norcross, South Gwinnett, Central Gwinnett, Dacula, Mill Creek, Archer and Collins Hill have each had moments of late and should make noise once again this year.

Cobb County is just as lethal when it comes to talent. Walton will be featured on ESPN this season after appearing in the Class AAAAA state title game last year. Lassiter has athletes bursting through the seams after making a run to the semifinals last season. Both East Cobb powers have quarterbacks with BCS commitments with Walton's Parker McLeod headed to Alabama and Eddie Printz committed to UCLA. And Anthony Jennings is headed to LSU after playing for Marietta this season.

Fulton County has its share of talented individuals as well. Milton's Carl Lawson is the No. 5 player in the country in the ESPN 150. Alpharetta's Joshua Dobbs was a recent Elite 11 finalist.

History is one thing that South Georgia has, but it may be time to start looking at titles earned before 1980 as not as impressive as ones earned in recent years. This is truly the golden age of Georgia high school football.

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

CLARKE CENTRAL FOOTBALL



Johnson paces consistent Glads

By Craig Sager II

Composure is typically not the strength of a young football team, but the Clarke Central Gladiators could be the exception to that in 2012. Leroy Ryals is entering his sixth season as the head coach and comes into 2012 fresh off a string of five consecutive playoff appearances.

Last season's success was driven by a rising star in Cameron Johnson, who quarterbacked the Gladiators to a 10-2 record and share of the region title as a sophomore.

"The poise of Johnson last season as just a sophomore was really what impressed me most about him," said Ryals.

Being composed in pressure situations is one of the most valuable assets a quarterback can have, and Johnson may have developed his poise on the basketball court. Johnson, who stands 6-foot-3, is still filling out his frame, and has already turned into an excellent basketball player. Ryals points to the hardwood as preparing him for the spotlight last season.

"Johnson is a great basketball player and was used to competing before he stepped in for us last year," said Ryals.

REGION CHANGE ...

In 2011, the Gladiators were in an 11-team

region and played the entirety of their schedule in region play. GHSA reclassifications have bumped them up into Region 8-AAAAA and now with a region of nine teams, they will get two non-region matchups to start the season.

"It will be good to play two tough opponents that can prepare us for the region," said Ryals. "We have to take advantage of those games and we have to use them to get better."

The big loss for the Gladiators is 2011 running back Quenshaun Watson who will be with the Tennessee Vols this year. Senior Jalani Payne and Cedar Shoals move-in Rodney Willingham will both star in the Gladiators backfield this season and have enough talent to match the productivity of last year's backfield. Defensively the Gladiators are stout and will be improved from last season.

Johnson is the core of a talented class of juniors that will lead both sides of the football for the Gladiators in 2012, and Ryals is excited for the upcoming season and the future of the Gladiators.

"We have a lot of juniors starting for us this season, but the thing is they are all experienced. We've got a lot of talent returning this year."

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

LAMBERT FOOTBALL



Longhorns jump two classes to 6A

By Travis Stigall

Lambert coach Sid Maxwell racked up a 97-67 record over 15 years at Sequoyah before transitioning to Lambert in 2009 to take over the junior varsity squad. A year later, Lambert fielded a varsity team with Maxwell at the helm. After two 8-3 seasons each featuring a first-round playoff loss, Maxwell hopes the Longhorns can keep making strides and get over the first-round bump.

"Last year our entire secondary missed key games, but you can't make excuses," Maxwell said. "Making the jump to AAAAAA will make it more grueling but our guys should be prepared and we need players to step up."

One of the players Maxwell was referring to happens to be his son, Brock, a rising senior who will be taking over at quarterback for the Longhorns this season. Daniel Myers is another impact returning player. He is coming off a 1,023-yard season, one where he also scored eight touchdowns.

"We had a stout senior offensive line last year, so this season Myers will have a very young front line, but hopefully Dan can use his experience and efforts from last season to still get quality YAC(yards after contact) numbers," Maxwell stated.

DEFENSIVE KEYS ...

The Longhorns are without seven starters

from last season's standout unit. The Longhorns' defense allowed 10 points or fewer in four of its first five contests, as Lambert started the season 5-0. Key injuries led to a depleted secondary for the latter part of the season and culminating with Clarke Central scoring 35 points.

"Our young guys and first-timers will have to step it up on the line, our defense, though, will have the veteran leaders of inside linebacker Russell Monyette and free safety Danny Edgeworth, so the newcomers will be able to center around their leadership and experience," Maxwell said.

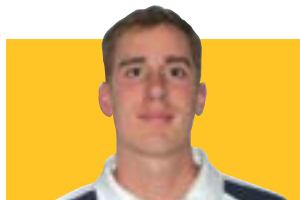
Lambert was slated into Region 7-AAAA for its first two seasons, and following recent success and a large school endowment, the Longhorns have made the jump to the new AAAAAA for the 2012 season. The Forsyth County school located in Suwanee, Ga., opens the season on Aug. 31 against Cherokee County representative Etowah in a non-region game.

"Being from Cherokee County, I am very ecstatic with starting off the season against Etowah," Maxwell acknowledged.

The Longhorns will now compete along with Alpharetta, Centennial, Chattahoochee, Johns Creek, North Forsyth, South Forsyth and West Forsyth in Region 6-AAAAA.

Stigall can be reached at 404-256-1572.

ROSWELL FOOTBALL



Roswell looks to bounce back

By Fletcher Proctor

Last year was a rough year for the Roswell Hornets. Just five years after winning a share of the Class AAAAA state title, the Hornets went 0-10 under first-year coach Justin Sanderson. Now, as Roswell seeks to end an 11-game losing streak dating back to 2010, plenty of players return to both sides of the ball with an hunger for success.

"The players have shown great leadership and have worked hard everyday to improve themselves and get the bad taste of 2011 out of their mouths," said offensive coordinator John Ford. "There is renewed focus and a tremendous sense of urgency displayed each day."

Ford will have plenty of experience back on his side of the ball as eight starters return. Quarterback Ryan Monty and tailback Andrew Kwateng both return to starring roles in the Pro-I, play action-based offense. Three starters from the offensive line return in Zach Adams, Justin Auer and Kevin Austin.

"We will be young on offense at fullback, as we break in a new starter," said Ford. "We will have young depth at wide receiver, tailback and on the offensive line."

Defensively, the Hornets gave up 32 points per contest last season. Five starters return from last year's unit. Up front, Hunter Hill will man

one of the tackle spots while Patrick Sheehan, who played center in 2011, will slide outside to defensive end. Richard Delphin returns at linebacker and the Hornets will move safety Grant Beidel closer to the line of scrimmage to play linebacker. The secondary will be headlined by free safety Alex Brandeis and cornerback Obos Ikpefan.

OLINE STATUS ...

The offensive line should be a strength of the attack, despite the loss of Alex Porter and Panchito Blanco. The Hornets should be able to create plenty of time for Monty to find his receivers.

"The offensive line has a lot of starts under their belt and Arowoselu has worked hard this offseason," said Ford. "Offensively, Kwateng, Barton and Albert should have very good years. We will have a good mix of veterans and youth."

The Hornets have moved up in classification to Region 5-AAAAAA but face familiar foe Centennial at home to start the season. Last year the Knights needed a late field goal to top the Hornets and Roswell has not forgotten.

"I understand its a cliché, but we are just worried about Game 1 right now," said Ford.

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ARCHER FOOTBALL



Archer primed for postseason run

By Fabianna Blanco

After making the postseason one year ago, the Archer Tigers are hungry for more and anxious to chase a state championship in their third year at the varsity level. But a run to the postseason starts with the first opponent, and right now the Tigers are only worrying about Mountain View.

"Last season was a great accomplishment for our football program," said Archer head coach Andy Dyer. "In our second season of varsity football, we saw the fruits of our labor."

The Tigers will return some key players in the defensive secondary such as Deondre Singleton, John Gill and Trevellous Cheek as they attempt to return to postseason play. Singleton led Gwinnett County in interceptions last year, and, according to Dyer, he is a smart and talented player. Cheek, who has committed to Cal, will start at the other corner spot.

"He is aggressive and a good tackler," said Dyer of Cheek. "I expect to see him pick a bunch of balls off this year as well."

Up front on defense, the Tigers have one of the of the state's top defensive linemen, Antonio Riles, who committed to the Florida Gators over the weekend. He will anchor the defensive line and will also play some tight end.

"He is a big kid with a lot of talent,"

said Dyer.

Graduation took its toll on the Archer offense, and the Tigers are looking for a new quarterback. Dyer confirmed that K.J. Parmer is the projected starter in Archer's two-back, pro-style offense.

"He had a great spring and a great summer," said Dyer. "We are looking forward to see him doing big things."

RUNNING GAME ...

Parmer will have a pair of outstanding backs to hand off it in Ernest Alexander and Sean Fowler. Look for Cheek to also play some running back in 2012.

On the offensive line, the Tigers have Marcus Lightford back at center, along with Kyle Brooks and J.P. Silver. The Tigers also boast some impressive tight ends. Expect big things from Connor Redmond, Andre Smellie and sophomore Nick Williams according to Dyer.

The Tigers have worked this summer on playing in various 7-on-7 events and have tried to get their defense and offense stronger. If Archer is to chase a region and state title in 2012, it will all start with strength up front.

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GAINESVILLE FOOTBALL



Watson, Gainesville seeking more

By Robby Kalland

The Gainesville Red Elephants finished last season 12-2 and were knocked out of the Class AAA state semifinals by Burke County. Entering 2012, the Red Elephants are looking to build off of last year's success as they move up to Class AAAAA. For coach Bruce Miller, the goal for this team remains the same despite the step up in competition.

"Our goal every year is to try and get to the state championship," said Miller.

Gainesville returns six starters on offense, including junior star quarterback Dashaun Watson. Watson has already pledged his commitment to Clemson, and after a stand-out sophomore year where he threw for over 3000 yards and rushed for more than 1000, Watson is poised to take the Red Elephants to the next level. As Watson develops, so does the offense, and this year he will be given more responsibilities at the line of scrimmage such as checking off plays and audibling in his third year as the field general.

"He is taking over out there, checking off, changing the plays and he's got a very good handle of what we are trying to do and what we're trying to develop in a field general," said Miller.

The Red Elephants also return their starting

running back and three of their leading receivers from 2011. This will allow the offense to open up the playbook and run more intricate plays than last year.

"We're going to be able to do a lot of things offensively," said Miller. We feel like we have a lot of weapons and we plan on using them."

NEW LINES...

The biggest challenge for Gainesville will be replacing four of last year's starting linemen, but Miller noted that is nothing new for this team.

"It seems like we've been in this situation the last two years," said Miller. "We had a bunch of guys jump in there and fill in the blanks and it ended up being a great year, and I think that'll happen again this year."

Defensively, Miller pointed out two players, linebacker Devon Stringer and strong safety Fred Payne, who he feels will have big impacts this coming year. The defense has six new players coming into starting roles, but behind the leadership of Stringer and Payne, Miller feels his defense will be a force to be reckoned with.

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NORTHVIEW FOOTBALL



Northview hopeful for success

By Stephen Black

Northview has been a hard-luck program the past few years, being the smallest school in Class AAAAA. But all that changes this year as larger schools move into the new Class AAAAAA, while the Titans remain in the classification they've come to know. However, the opponents will be different this year, as will the outlook of the young program.

The program, which began in 2002, has never had a winning season, but is poised to improve in head coach Chad Davenport's third year.

"This has been the best offseason we've had since I've been here," said Davenport of his team's participation in summer programs.

The Titans look to improve on a 3-7 season in 2011 when they were a one-point loss to Centennial away from earning a postseason berth. Leading the charge in 2012 is senior running back Terrence Upshaw.

"He's our leader," said Davenport of his star back. "He's a leader in the weightroom and on the field."

QB SITUATION...

While the running back position is in good shape, the quarterback spot is up in the air. Two

sophomores will battle it out for the starting job as D.J. Pearson, who started six games at wide receiver last year, and Justin Westbrook will battle it out for the starting job in fall camp. Westbrook started for the junior varsity squad last year and has a slight edge heading into the fall due to his knowledge of the team's offense.

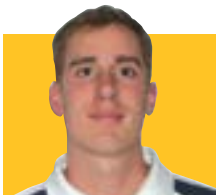
"Justin has the advantage right now," said Davenport. "But they'll both play early and we'll figure out who the starter will be and go with him the rest of the year."

In the Titans' favor this year is the schedule. While Davenport's troops were pitted against larger area schools last season like Alpharetta, Milton and Centennial, Northview will now face a hodgepodge of north Atlanta programs that were mostly in different regions last season. The new division includes Cambridge, which is in its first year of varsity football, Creekview, Forsyth Central, North Springs and Sequoyah. None of the schools in the subregion made the playoffs last year.

"All of the coaches in the subregion feel like we each have a better chance of success this year," said Davenport of Region 7A-AAAAA.

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FELLOWSHIP CHRISTIAN FOOTBALL



Fellowship Christian makes splash

By Fletcher Proctor

The Fellowship Christian Paladins finished the 2011 campaign 5-5 with just a 1-5 record in Region 5N-A play. Fellowship Christian easily outclassed non-region foes but surrendered nearly 27 points per contest in region play. With reclassification bringing in several new foes on the schedule, the Paladins have a shot at making the playoffs for the first time since 2007.

Head coach Hunter Chadwick made several changes on his coaching staff, but the biggest move was bringing in Ryan Zimmerman as defensive coordinator.

Zimmerman comes to the Paladins program with some high school coaching experience at West Hall and East Hall, but most recently, Zimmerman worked on the Georgia State University staff, coaching inside and outside linebackers as well as special teams.

"Ryan is an accomplished coach who is a great addition to the Fellowship program," Chadwick said. "He brings a wealth of valuable experience to us."

Chadwick, who also serves as AD at Fellowship Christian, was pleased that he was able to hire a coach with college experience as well as a proven high school track record. While in Hall County, Zimmerman helped more than 20 players go on to the next level, and four of his teams in

three different classifications made the postseason.

"Ryan's strengths include his ability to teach the fundamentals and develop defensive strategy," said Chadwick. "We are expecting an aggressive defense that is strong on fundamentals this year with an ability to stop both the run and the pass. He is a great addition to our staff."

Zimmerman, along with new backs coach Dan Parsons, has jumped right into the position, as the Paladins look for a postseason berth.

"Ryan has been great with our kids," Chadwick said. "He brings a new tempo and a student of the game attitude, along with a knowledge of the game that he puts into a form that young kids understand. He has adjusted well to our system here."

NEW BLOOD...

Offensively, the team must replace Stephen Lantz, who rushed for 729 yards and 13 scores last season. Tyler Hart also received plenty of carries for the Paladins in 2011, racking up 689 yards on 121 carries. Hart is expected to carry the load in 2012. Under center, Blais Furse departs after passing for just 472 yards but running for 264 yards with seven combined touchdowns.

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LAKESED FOOTBALL



Lakeside set for fresh approach

By Patrick Tighe

The past screams success for Lakeside-DeKalb football. The Vikings captured three state titles in 1970, 1972 and 1991. Since those glory days, the Vikings have been trapped in transition, including three coaches in the past three seasons.

The purple and gold have experienced the misfortune of three 0-10 seasons since 1999. New Viking leader, Mike Rozier, looks to cease the drowning and bring the Vikings back to prominence.

"I'm excited about being at Lakeside," Rozier said. "It will be an extremely tough challenge with the region (6-AAAAA) we play in. I try to tell Lakeside people to forget about the past and remember the past. In the 70's and 80's and 90's Lakeside was the team the beat. I also told them to forget about the past. There is nothing you could do about the last five years, you just got to move forward and get it going."

Rozier, a Towers graduate and player, spoke on what new wrinkles will be popping up with the Viking program this year.

"We got a lot of good things going on at Lakeside," Rozier said. "We've got a new weight room coming, a new practice field, a new locker room, the other things we need to get going are some W's on the board."

The Vikings bump up to Region 6-AAAAA

this fall. This region is stuffed with titans including Tucker, Stephenson and Southwest DeKalb.

PLAYOFF ATMOSPHERE ...

Lakeside should receive each squad's best crack, beginning Aug. 24 against Holy Innocents'. After Aug. 24, region play covers the rest of the docket, and for Lakeside, every Friday night will be like a playoff game. September will be the four-week test of walking across the coals for the Vikings.

Lakeside invades North DeKalb Stadium to play Dunwoody, Panthersville to visit Southwest DeKalb, and finishes September with matches against Stephenson and Tucker.

"I look forward to the challenge but we have got a long way to go," Rozier said. "Great Coach Wayman Creel, Phil Lindsey, talking to the players and bring the community back where it needs to be."

Boasting 11 state titles, three region titles and a .620 winning percentage, Lakeside is far from the pit as many may think. With new facilities and a rejuvenated coach and program mentality, the Vikings should be back on top sooner than many think.

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DREAM NEWS



Dream Olympians excelling in London

By Joe Deighton

Much like the NHL takes a break in the middle of the season every four years for the winter Olympics, the WNBA is on hiatus this month for the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. The Atlanta Dream have been off since July 13 and will not play again until Aug. 17.

ANGEL SHINES ...

Meanwhile, All-Star forward Angel McCoughtry is leading Team USA towards a gold medal in Olympic women's basketball. The United States women have yet to be challenged at the games and thoroughly defeated Canada last Tuesday 91-48 to advance to the semifinals. McCoughtry scored 11 points in 15 minutes off the bench. Despite not being in the starting lineup, McCoughtry is tied for the team lead in scoring with guard Diana Taurasi with 12.7 points per game. Atlanta

head coach Marynell Meadors is an assistant coach on the staff led by Geno Auriemma.

McCoughtry has been one of the best all-around players at the Olympics. She brings a lot of energy and enthusiasm along with her spectacular play off the bench.

"I have accepted my role in coming in and trying to give as much energy to the team as I can," McCoughtry said. "We have a lot of players that bring energy like Lindsey (Whalen) and Maya (Moore), but I have accepted that role to be one of those girls that come in and feed some energy to the team whether its rebounding, trying to get steals and doing little things the team needs."

McCoughtry has done more than just the little things in the Olympics. In six games, she ranks 11th in scoring (12.7), first in field goal percentage (.667), 14th in rebounding (6.0) and second in steals (2.67) among all

the players in London. She is also shooting 80 percent from the free throw line. In all probability, Team USA will win its fifth straight gold medal and Angel McCoughtry is a major reason why. This will be the first gold medal for McCoughtry in her initial trip to the Olympic Games.

"We are getting better and better each game," said McCoughtry through USA Basketball. "We don't have a lot of time together because we all play WNBA. We've only been together a month so to see the improvement we've made in less than a month. Each practice, we're only getting better."

McCoughtry isn't the only Dream player participating in the London Games. Erika de Souza suited up at post for Brazil, though Brazil did not qualify for the medal rounds after going 1-4 in pool play. She did have a strong showing, leading all scorers with 16.2 points per game in her five games of action. She averaged 31:50 minutes per game and notched 81 points during pool play on 30-for-54 shooting. She also canned 21-of-28 free throw attempts.

BACK TO WORK ...

The Olympics will soon be over and the Dream will be back in action on Aug. 17 against the Chicago Sky. Three of the first four games after the break will come on the

road, including the first game against Chicago. Atlanta will quickly turnaround for a game at Indiana. A quick stop back in Atlanta against Chicago on Aug. 22 will let Atlanta unpack and repack for a trip to Washington. Atlanta currently sits in third place in the WNBA's Eastern Conference with a 9-10 record. The Dream lead Chicago for the No. 3 spot, but both sit six games back of Connecticut. Atlanta has struggled within the conference, posting just a 3-8 record before the Olympic break.

GIVING BACK ...

This Saturday, the Atlanta Dream, in collaboration with the American Diabetes Association and Sanofi US, will host a Dribble to Stop Diabetes event during the Dream Skills Academy at Tucker High School.

"Dribble to Stop Diabetes is an important part of our ongoing efforts through the NBA/WNBA FIT program to promote a healthy lifestyle for fans of all ages," said NBA Executive Vice President, Social Responsibility and Player Programs Kathy Behrens in a release. "We are excited to tip off the campaign's second year and to provide continued support in the fight against diabetes."

Fletcher Proctor contributed to this story. Deighton can be reached at jdeighton@scoreatl.com.

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PANTHER PROWL



Curry pleased with conditioning

By Brian Jones

Believe it or not, the football team will kick off its third season in less than three weeks at the Georgia Dome when they face South Carolina State. This means the team has started to prepare for the contest with the start of fall practice.

Sunday was the first practice in full pads for the Panthers, and head coach Bill Curry was pleased with the way his team off the field to get ready for the grueling month ahead of them.

"It's evident that our team is in good physical condition because they worked so hard in the offseason," head coach Bill Curry told the AJC after practice. "I'm pleased with our conditioning level, but we need to continue to improve our execution and concentration."

The Panthers turned it up a notch on Tuesday when they had their first two-a-day session of the year. One of the things that Curry noticed about the Panthers' first two-a-day practice was the play of defensive linemen Joe Lockley and Melvin King. Both players are working with the second team right now, but they are expected to see a lot of playing time.

Another player that stood out in practice is D'Mario Gunn, who is playing free safety as well as the "wolf" linebacker position. Gunn tallied 24 tackles and one interception last year.

Another interesting battle to watch will be at quarterback position. Many think that Kelton Hill will win the spot over Ben McLane. However, McLane was named the starter after having a strong spring season. He does not have the same game experience as Hill, but offensive coordinator John Bond said the redshirt freshman constantly puts the team in good positions.

STILL WAITING...

The Panthers would like to have all the help they can get for the upcoming season, so they are hoping that the NCAA lets three transfers play this year. Ronnie Bell, Theo Agnew and Nermin Delic have been practicing on the team, but it's still uncertain if the three are allowed to play this year. The reason for it is the fact that Georgia State is making the transition of becoming an FBS school, and it has complicated the process.

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OWL OUTLOOK



Golfer's run ends; Jenkins gets the call

By Brian Jones

KSU athletes are doing big things. Golfer Kaew Preamchuen qualified for the U.S. Amateur Championship back in July, and this week she had a strong opening round in stroke play, shooting a 4-over par 76 in the opening round.

Her chance at advancing to match play ended on Tuesday when she shot a 7-over par 79. Preamchuen was six strokes shy of advancing which would have made KSU history. But history was already made by playing in the tournament because she is only the second KSU golfer to compete in the event. The first is oddly enough her sister, Ket, who competed in the event last year.

Preamchuen will now focus on KSU's 2012-13 golf season, which opens on Sept. 10 at the Old Waverly Bulldog Invitational at the Old Waverly Golf Club in West Point, Miss.

CALLED UP...

The Owls have always had a rich history of producing quality baseball players. Chad Jenkins was a standout player for the Owls a few years back and was drafted in the first round by the Toronto Blue Jays back in 2009.

This past Sunday, Jenkins' dream came true when he got the call to the Major Leagues

after spending time in New Hampshire pitching for the Blue Jays AA team. Jenkins will work in the bullpen, which is something he has not done since he was a freshman at Kennesaw State.

He made 20 starts this season with the New Hampshire Fisher Cats and compiled a 5-9 record with a 4.96 ERA. But it was his last 10 appearances that caught the attention of the Blue Jays as he tallied a 3-3 record with 3.84 ERA. He would also strike out 98 batters in 92 innings during that span.

GEORGIA OPEN...

Four of KSU's golfers made the cut at the PGA Georgia Open at Chateau Elan, but one was very close to taking home first place.

Matt Nagy fell one stroke short of defeating Jonathan Fricke to win the Georgia Open. Although Nagy was disappointed, he was glad he was able to keep pace with the leader despite the slow start.

"Unfortunately I didn't play my best this weekend, but I managed my game extremely well and it kept me close to the leader board," Nagy told KSUOwls.com. "It just wasn't enough."

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BULLDOG BEAT



Mitchell splits time; Schmitt medals

By Chris Lionetti

After a disappointing end to the 2011 season, the Georgia Bulldogs have had a strong start to their fall camp. For the first time in Mark Richt's tenure as head coach, there is no one rehabbing any serious injury, and, overall, the team is healthy.

However, just as in every other year there are questions, but those questions have received answers during the first week of camp.

CAMP CHRONICLES...

Many wondered about how Malcolm Mitchell would split time in practice, but the young athlete has spent most of his time on defense. Richt's plan for him is to focus on defense going into the season while spending some time in the offense's meetings. At the start of the season Mitchell will play more defense than offense, but Richt expects the corner to see increased snaps on offense as the season goes on.

A factor that will determine Mitchell's snaps on offense is the return of his defensive back teammates from suspension, one of

whom was released from his suspension over the weekend. Branden Smith was found to have passed his drug test after being detained, which, under a university policy, makes him eligible to play. Smith's return to the starting lineup lessens the necessity of Mitchell playing defense full time and will lead to increased snaps on offense down the road.

GOLDEN DAWG...

Allison Schmitt took a year off from swimming at Georgia last year in order to swim with Michael Phelps' coach, Bob Bowman. It paid off. Schmitt will return from the 2012 Summer Olympic Games with five medals in five events. She received a gold medal in the 200m freestyle, 800m freestyle relay, and 400m medley relay. Schmitt received a silver medal in the 400 freestyle and a bronze medal in the 400m freestyle relay. After her success in London, the rising senior will return to school and continue swimming for the Bulldogs.

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TECH BUZZ



Washington, Days battle for starting job

By Ryan Caiafa

With fall camp underway at Georgia Tech, there is some uncertainty as to who will be guiding the offense for the season-opener on Labor Day against Virginia Tech.

Incumbent starter Tevin Washington is trying to improve on his first full season as the Jackets' quarterback, where, in the run-heavy triple-option offense, he rushed for just shy of 1,000 yards to go along with 14 touchdowns. His passing is the biggest question mark of his skill set as his completion percentage was under 50 percent and his interception total of eight nearly equaled his passing touchdown count of 11.

QB QUESTIONS...

Many are calling for the fifth-year senior to be replaced by sophomore Synjyn Days, who showed flashes of brilliance in his four brief appearances. One of those bright spots included the final game of the regular season against Georgia, when he replaced the struggling Washington and led the Jackets to multiple productive drives in the loss to the Bulldogs.

While Days seems to be a popular choice to take the reins, Jackets coach Paul Johnson isn't too quick to give up on Washington, who took over for Josh Nesbitt mid-

way through the 2010 season.

"Tevin Washington is the starter and it would take something out of the ordinary for that to change," Johnson said in a press release. "I expect him to be the starter when we go to Blacksburg."

Even if Days is unable to unseat Washington as the starting quarterback, he is expected to take on a much larger role in the Jackets' offense, which utilizes a multitude of backs while the passing attack is used mostly in long situations. While Johnson is publicly stating that the starting quarterback position is not up for competition, the debate is undoubtedly going on behind the scenes.

MEDAL MISS...

Former Tech hurdler Angelo Taylor just missed getting onto the medal podium in the final of the 400-meter hurdles at the Olympics in London as he finished fifth in the event, just a few hundredths of a second behind bronze-medalist Javier Culson of Puerto Rico. The Jackets are also represented at the games by high jumper Chaunte Lowe, who will look to qualify for the high jump final Saturday.

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HAWKS HAVEN



Hawks continue active offseason

By Robby Kalland

The Atlanta Hawks have kept busy this off-season starting with the hiring of Danny Ferry as the new GM. Ferry wasted no time making his mark on the Hawks and hit the ground running drafting John Jenkins and Mike Scott in his first week on the job.

MULTI-TASKER ...

Once initiated into the job, Ferry got to work remodeling the roster by trading away all-star guard Joe Johnson to the Nets and former second-overall draft pick Marvin Williams to the Jazz. In return the Hawks received Devin Harris, Anthony Morrow and DeShawn Stevenson to join Jenkins and Jeff Teague in the backcourt rotation.

Ferry was not done making moves as he signed free agent and former South Gwinnett star Louis Williams to give the Hawks even more depth in the backcourt. It remains to be seen what Williams' role will be on the team — he has been one of the top sixth-men in the league over the past few seasons — but could find himself thrust into the starting spot in Johnson's absence. Kyle Korver was also added this offseason in a trade sending the Bulls cash for the sharp-shooting small forward. Korver is

currently the only true small forward on the roster, but it seems likely that Ferry has plans to add one more player, most likely at the three.

Ferry sent Willie Green to the Clippers in a sign-and-trade where the Hawks received rights to Greek league player Sofoklis Schortsanitis as well as a trade exception that will be between \$1.65 and \$2.75 million. That trade exception gives the Hawks a lot of flexibility with which to acquire yet another new face for this ever-changing roster.

The new-look Hawks seem geared towards scoring and playing more of an open, up-tempo style. With Teague, Harris, Williams and Morrow in the backcourt rotation, the Hawks have four players that can handle the ball, get to the basket and score. That scoring depth was something lacking from last year's squad which would go into severe droughts when the bench players were in the game. This squad has much more firepower from the guard positions and looks like a team that could lead the league in three-point percentage with sharp-shooters like Jenkins and Korver coming off the bench.

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FALCONS BEAT



Koetter inherits loaded offense

By Craig Sager II

The anticipation towards the Falcons using a more open offensive attack this season is beginning to gain ground behind new offensive coordinator Dirk Koetter. This offseason has revealed that the Falcons hold many potential mismatches in their favor and Koetter has been meticulous in exploring his potential armory.

THE ARSENAL ...

Matt Ryan is well equipped to have another career season and will collaborate with one of the most lethal receiver tandems in the league in Julio Jones and Roddy White. Jones is primed to have a breakout sophomore season, and White comes off of his fourth straight pro bowl appearance. Each is a No. 1 target and an absolute menace with single coverage.

"They can't double us all," White laughed. Most of the attention will be directed towards corraling White and Jones and there will be opportunities that the rest of the receiving core can capitalize on. Harry Douglas has looked great this offseason, and second year wideout Michael Calvin continues to show his athleticism and speed. Calvin quickly became a fan favorite during the Falcons Friday Night Lights game this past week by hauling in an over the shoulder catch from John Parker Wilson.

Defense is said to win championships but the Giants, Packers, Saints, Colts, Steelers and Patriots offensively all have similarities. They all have three or more effective targets at the

receiver position and spread the ball throughout the offense. The Falcons will finalize their receiving core as the regular season approaches. The 16-year veteran Tony Gonzalez has been a spectator for much of camp. This has been a great opportunity for the young tight ends to take reps with Michael Palmer getting valuable experience.

THUNDER AND LIGHTNING ...

The Falcons' running game looks to have added a weapon of their own this offseason. Michael Turner and Jason Snelling have been a revolving onslaught of hard down hill running for the Falcons. This offseason with those two well established, the bulk of the details this camp has surrounded Jacquizz Rodgers. Rodgers introduces elusiveness and swiftness into the backfield, and will play a much larger role than he did in his rookie campaign last season. Rodgers has been dangerous catching the ball and running the ball during camp, and in combining with Turner and Snelling, can create a three-dimensional assault for Koetter.

Defensively, it has all been about the talent-filled secondary and the addition of veterans Asante Samuel and Chris Hope. There have been some unexpected standouts like defensive end Lawrence Sidbury who received the game ball after a solid tackling and a two-sack performance.

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

CHOP SHOP

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Braves keep rolling after trade

By Fletcher Proctor

After losing 12 straight Monday games to open the 2012 season, the Braves have now won two straight after first beating the Miami Marlins then knocking off the Philadelphia Phillies. The win over Philadelphia extended the Braves' winning streak over the reigning NL East champions to seven straight games.

Ben Sheets picked up the win after pitching 7.1 innings and running his record to 4-1 on the season. He surrendered seven hits but just one run in the victory. Jason Heyward knocked his 18th home run of the season as he approaches the 20/20 club. Heyward is trying to become the first Braves player to reach the 20-steal, 20-home run club since Andruw Jones accomplished the feat in 2000.

In Tuesday's game, Cole Hamels shut down the Braves 3-0. The Braves managed just five hits.

NEW MINDSET ...

The Braves finally made a trade with the Chicago Cubs for a pitcher before the MLB trade deadline, but Ryan Dempster was not involved. The Braves acquired Paul Maholm and Reed Johnson from Chicago in exchange for Jaye Chapman and Arodys Vizcaino.

The left-handed Maholm fell to Houston

in his first start for Atlanta, giving up three runs on six hits over seven innings. He had been 5-0 with a 1.00 ERA since June 29 before the loss.

"As a pitcher, I expect to win every outing," said Maholm. "I expect to go out there and compete. You're not going to win every game, but you come in here and play with the same attitude to make sure you are prepared to win."

Johnson noted that jumping into a pennant race immediately changes your mindset.

"You're not really scoreboard watching, but you're always interested in what the teams in the NL East are doing and what the teams in the wild-card race are doing," said Johnson.

MEDLEN STARTS ...

Kris Medlen has gone back and forth between the bullpen and the rotation this season, but his last two starts have the Braves considering a six-man rotation when Tommy Hanson returns from the DL. Medlen has recorded two starts since July 31, both Braves victories, and he has pitched 10.1 innings, surrendering just two runs on nine hits with nine strikeouts.

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GWINNETT BRAVES



Mejia flourishes, team still flounders

By Joe Deighton

The G-Braves started an eight-game home-stand by losing to Norfolk 7-4 on Monday night. Starting pitcher Randall Delgado had a strong game on the mound, pitching 5.2 innings with seven strikeouts, four walks and three runs on five hits. The loss was the first in eight meetings with the Tides this season.

First baseman Ernesto Mejia reached base for the ninth straight game with a single. Mejia has been on a tear over the last 10 games, batting .316 with 12 hits including two home runs and 10 RBI. Mejia is leading Gwinnett in batting, homers and RBI. The G-Braves will conclude the long homestand with four games against the Louisville Bats this weekend.

GILMARTIN'S DEBUT ...

The Braves 2011 first-round draft pick Sean Gilmartin was called up to Gwinnett last week from Double-A Mississippi. In his debut against Charlotte, he threw seven innings, allowing four runs and five hits with four strikeouts. Against Durham, his performance was almost identical, giving up four runs on seven hits in 6.2 innings of work.

The left-handed Gilmartin has been steadily improving this season in Mississippi. He has thrown 119.1 innings with 86 strikeouts and a 3.54

ERA. Gilmartin's best performance with the M-Braves was back on July 6 when he threw nine innings with seven strikeouts in a no-decision against Jackson. After that game he was named Southern League player of the week for the week of July 8.

Gilmartin was the 28th pick out of Florida State last year. The 22-year old is not a power pitcher, but he does have good control over his breaking ball and change-up. Keep an eye on this southpaw because he has already surprised a lot of people in the Braves organization.

ON THE DOCKET ...

The G-Braves remain in last place in the International League South division behind Charlotte, Norfolk and Durham. The playoffs do not look likely for Gwinnett this season but for a lot of players, this time of year is important because of the position of the parent club in Atlanta. Louisville comes to Coolray Field on Friday night for a four-game weekend series. The G-Braves are 1-3 this season against the Bats and were outscored 40-19 including a 22-1 drubbing in that four-game series in Louisville back in July.

Deighton can be reached at jdeighton@scoreatl.com.



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