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CAN'T MISS THIS WEEK

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- 5** Fletcher Proctor reviews the state basketball tournament in this week's cover story.
- 7** Craig Sager II gives us a rundown of this week's region tournaments in the prep cover story.
- 8/10** We catch you up on the state swimming and wrestling championships.

TEAM SCOOP AND VOICES

COVER DESIGN BY DJ GALBIATI BLALOCK
 COVER PHOTOS COURTESY OF DJ GALBIATI BLALOCK
 AND TY FREEMAN

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ON THE INSIDE AT SCORE
 Score Atlanta is looking for writing interns. Please e-mail Stephen Black at sblack@scoreatl.com for more information. Feel free to call 404-256-1572 for more information.

SHOT OF THE WEEK...



SPLASH WAR: Swimmers and divers from all over the state converged on the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center Feb. 8-9 for the swimming finals. First-time winner Lambert (girls) joined repeat champions Parkview (boys, 6A) and Westminster (girls, A-5A) as state champs. Photo courtesy of Sonny Kennedy.

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CUP OF JOE



Spring training isn't the same without Jones

By Joe Deighton

Spring Training just doesn't feel the same without knowing that Chipper Jones will be in the Braves' lineup. Jones made his mark as a Braves legend on a team that won 14 consecutive division titles. He helped Atlanta capture its one and only championship in professional sports.

It doesn't seem like that long ago that Jones was the young superstar on this team. It doesn't seem that long ago that fans at Shea Stadium were chanting, "Larry, Larry." Time is a weird thing. One day, you're a kid cheering for your favorite player and then, suddenly, he's an old man and has to retire. It doesn't seem that long ago.

Jones gave us so many great memories. Without question, 1999 was his best season.

He led the Braves to their fifth World Series appearance of the decade and won the National League MVP after hitting a career-high 45 home runs. In 2008, at 36-years old, he won the batting title, hitting .364. Whether he is a Hall of Fame player or not is up for debate, especially in this era. However, as far as Atlanta Braves legends are concerned, he belongs right alongside of Hank Aaron, Dale Murphy and John Smoltz.

SPRING CLEANING ...

Pitchers and catchers have reported and spring is in the air down in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. A new era has begun for the Atlanta Braves, but it feels like that old championship magic is back. B.J. and Justin Upton will

join Jason Heyward to form the best outfield in baseball. The Upton brothers are both capable of hitting 30 home runs and stealing 30 bases. We all know what Heyward can do and all three can run down any fly ball. The Braves haven't had an outfield this good since the early '90's with Ron Gant, David Justice, Otis Nixon and Deion Sanders.

If the trio of outfielders makes the Braves a contender, the pitching staff could make the Braves a champion. Tim Hudson, Kris Medlen, Mike Minor and Brandon Beachy are all capable of pitching long innings and winning games on their own. The key to this year is Minor. The left-hander won 11 games last year in 30 starts. If Minor can add five more wins, go deeper into games and lower his 4.12 ERA from a year ago, the Braves will be a force to be reckoned with in the NL East this year.

NO OFFSEASON ...

The NFL is the most popular sport in America. As soon as the Atlanta Falcons lost in the playoffs, people started talking about whom they should sign and what the draft was going to look like. This Falcons team is on the brink of the Super Bowl. Which player will push this team to the top? Will it be a free agent defensive end? Will it be a running back in the draft?

The defensive line was gashed by the

San Francisco 49ers in the NFC title game. The Falcons need a defensive lineman that can stop the run and rush the quarterback. Defensive end Cliff Avril of the Detroit Lions is a prime candidate. The free agent has 39.5 sacks in his five-year career and is still just 26-years old. Michael Johnson of the Bengals played college football at Georgia Tech and would fit nicely along the Falcons defensive line. Johnson had 11.5 sacks last year for a playoff team in Cincinnati.

Michael Turner may not return in 2013. His injuries and old legs are major concerns. Reggie Bush is a possibility, but he is not the every-down back the Falcons need. The draft is where Atlanta needs to look if they want to find a running back to replace Turner.

Many fans wouldn't mind seeing Alabama running back Eddie Lacy in a Falcons uniform, but look for Clemson running back Andre Ellington to be available in the second or even third round this year. Ellington has 4.4 speed and rushed for over 1,000 yards in his last two years at Clemson. He has been compared to Ray Rice because of his size and durability. Ellington piled up over 600 carries in four years with the Tigers. If a rookie running back is going to make an impact, don't be surprised if it's Ellington.

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DIMON CLUB



Decision time imminent for Hawks, Falcons

By Ricky Dimon

To stay or not to stay, that is the question. At least 'tis the question in Atlanta right now; that's for sure. Both on the hardwood and the gridiron, major decisions need to be made by the home teams.

For the Hawks, of course, the one turning the meter both on the court and in the locker room has been local product Josh Smith. His immediate fate had to be decided by the Thursday afternoon trade deadline, but nothing was set in stone as of Wednesday morning. Arguably the biggest NBA news during all-star weekend was a report that Hawks' general manager Danny Ferry was adamant about unloading Smith.

Ferry has already made several smooth front-office moves during his tenure in At-

lanta and getting rid of Smoove would constitute another one. Is Smith a very good player? Yes. Is he a franchise centerpiece worthy of the max contract that he would inevitably demand this offseason in order to stay in Atlanta? Not by any stretch of the imagination. Better to get something in return now than to lose him for nothing this summer. Better still to avoid the same mistake made by the previous regime, which gave max money to entirely un-max player (Joe Johnson).

One downside to trading Smith, of course, is that it hurts Atlanta's chances this season. Because J-Smoove is a free agent, he may be nothing more than a half-season rental for the receiving team. As such, there is no way the Hawks would get equal value in return. But

this Johnson-less franchise is in minor rebuilding mode. Is getting a low seed with a chance to win no more than one playoff series that much worse than nabbing a more favorable seed with a possibility of reaching the conference finals—at most? No. Certainly not to the extent that risking future success is warranted.

GOING, GOING, GONZO? ...

The Falcons are in a situation that is not quite as sticky. After all, the direction of their franchise does not hinge on this particular decision (and it's a decision of a player, not one of their own). They know who they are, where they have been and where they plan on going. Don't get me wrong, Tony Gonzalez is a huge piece to the puzzle. But the team is by no means building around him, and his fate—although likely to have an impact on the win-loss column in the standings—should not affect more than one position on the field in terms of personnel.

After helping Atlanta get over the recent playoff hump and reach the NFC Championship for the third time in franchise history, Gonzo said he was 95 percent sure he would retire. General manager Thomas Dimitroff, called it 50-50 following his full-court press of Gonzalez at the beginning of the season.

"We have evolved and have been quite

outspoken about our interest in having Tony back," Dimitroff told the Atlanta Journal Constitution. "He's still a very adept and athletic tight end in our minds and can continue to help us win a lot of games. But again, it's ultimately up to Tony to make that decision for himself and his family."

LIVING IN AN UPTON WORLD ...

One home team that has already made its decisions is the Atlanta Braves. They made theirs loud and clear: we're going all in on the Upton brothers.

Did the Braves overspend or overtrade for B.J. and Justin? On the surface, maybe. B.J. signed a five-year, \$75.25M deal as a free agent. Justin followed via some blockbuster wheeling and dealing with Arizona, which bagged Martin Prado, Randall Delgado and pitching prospect Zeke Spruill from Atlanta. The younger Upton (25 to B.J.'s 28) is owed \$38.5M over the next three seasons. That's a lot of cash and a considerable amount of talent streaming out of Atlanta, but the Braves had to make a splash following the departure of legend Chipper Jones. And it's not like the Upton bros. are here simply to generate excitement. They are pretty darn good at baseball, too.

Dimon can be reached at rdimon@scoreatl.com.



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STATE PLAYOFFS



Metro teams aiming for success in Macon

By Fletcher Proctor



The GHSA will crown 14 basketball champions in Macon in early March, the first time in years all of the championships will be decided at one venue and the first time ever 14 brackets will stretch across the state of Georgia. After reclassification and the decision to split the Class A schools into separate public and private brackets, high school basketball fans will have even more action to follow over the new few weeks as the 2012-13 season races to beat the buzzer.

NEW FAVORITES ...

Due to GHSA probation, the Milton boys basketball program will not be able to defend its championship run of one year ago. Milton, behind Shaq Johnson, Evan Nolte and several other stars, won the Class AAAAA title in Gwinnett last year, but a new favorite has stepped up and taken over the mantle of big, bad wolf in Milton's absence. Tift County features the state's top recruit in Brannen Greene for the Class of 2013 and a candidate for 2014 top recruit in Tadric Jackson. The Blue Devils rode those two to a Region 1-AAAAA title as Greene tallied 36 points while Jackson netted 22 in a win over Brunswick.

Norcross is one team out of metro At-

lanta that could give the Tift County monster a serious run for its money. Brandon Goodwin scored 23 points and teams with Lorenzo Carter to give the Blue Devils a serious one-two punch that reminds many supporters in the House of Blue of championship teams past. Factor in Andre Chatfield and Terrance O'Donohue as complementary pieces and championship head coach Jesse McMillan and the Blue Devils should not be taken lightly.

Shiloh survived an SEC-like Region 8-AAAAA this year, winning the region tournament to earn the all-important No. 1 seed. Nate Mason and Trayvon Reed offer perhaps the best inside-outside combination in Georgia as Mason can shoot from anywhere while Reed is a double-double machine that uses his 7-foot frame to his advantage every time down the court. The Generals must run the gauntlet in order to reach Georgia Tech for the semifinals and Macon for the finals with Centennial/Peachtree Ridge looming in the second round and perhaps Wheeler or Chattahoochee in the quarterfinals. Norcross could see Archer in the second round and perhaps a dangerous Collins Hill, Berkmar or Roswell team in the quarters.

FAMILIAR FACES ...

For all of the new blood that could rule the day in AAAAAA, folks are quite familiar with Sharman White, the Miller Grove head coach, who is trying to lead his new-look Wolverines to a fifth straight title. While Tony Parker, Tony Evans and Brandon Morris are gone, White has Earl Bryant, Kyre Hamer and Keith Pinckney trying to help nail down title number five. Miller Grove has a difficult road early, but White's squad is battle tested, having won the always-tough Region 6-AAAAA.

In Class AAAA, Columbia has won that past three AAA titles but South Atlanta has had Columbia's number this year, including in the Region 6-AAAA tournament and isn't too far removed from a GHSA title in 2009. Watch out for those two teams meeting for a third time in the AAAA finals with Columbia's Tahj Shamsid-Deen and South Atlanta's Jonathan Range providing plenty of fireworks.

Greater Atlanta Christian scored a pair of titles in 2010 and 2011 before falling just short last season. This year, Eddie Martin has his squad back and ready to return to the top of the mountain in Class AA. GAC is on the easier side of the bracket and will look to ride Isaiah Wilkins, Collin Swinton and Cam Boyd, as well as a few key reserves, to yet another state title.

While much is made over the Buford girls program, and with good reason, the boys program could bring home a state title of its own from Macon. After falling in the finals two years ago, Buford looks poised to finish the drill with A.J. Davis, Kyle Doyle and Isaiah Williams all providing plenty of points and a large dose of senior leadership. Allen Whitehart has a team that does not fear the road and plays suffocating defense that will wear any opponent out.

Speaking of Buford, Gene Durden's girls program has suffered through plenty of tragedy this season and lost the nation's No. 2 recruit Kaela Davis several weeks ago to an injury. Despite the setbacks, the Wolves still managed to capture the Region 7-AAA tournament title as Kristina Nelson is starting to play up to her potential. Nelson notched 20 points in the championship game and is a force underneath the basket. Maya Dillard and MacKenzie Darrah are also stepping out of the shadows to contribute big points with more shots available.

SHOWCASE SHOWDOWN ...

In what could probably pass for a state final, Region 8-AAAAA champion Parkview will put its undefeated season on the line

against Norcross in the second round of the playoffs. Norcross, which fell in the Region 7-AAAAA finals to North Gwinnett, boasts former Georgia Gatorade Player of the Year Diamond DeShields as well as Shayla Cooper, who is headed to Georgetown. North Gwinnett is on the other side of the bracket and could face Woodstock in the quarterfinals and perhaps North Cobb or Tift County in the semifinals. Lexie Brown, Peyton Whitted, Baylee Rexing and Joshlyn Belcher all are thirsting to bring North Gwinnett its first girls basketball state title.

Elsewhere across the state, defending Class AAAAA champion Miller Grove has what appears to be an easier trip to the semifinals than the team that beat them for the Region 6-AAAAA title, Southwest DeKalb. Stephenson is a threat after beating Kell in the first-round.

Columbia is back on top of Class AAAA entering the state playoffs and no discussion of Georgia high school basketball is complete without mentioning the always-loaded Wesleyan Wolves. Jan Azar has this collection of talent brimming with confidence and ready for all comers as Wesleyan attempts to win the program's sixth straight title but first AA title since 2008. Wesleyan has captured nine titles since 2002 and has Katie Frerking, Britany Stevens and a host of other players that will take their talents to the next level ready to charge through the AA bracket.

Photos courtesy of Ty Freeman. Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.



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WHO'S HOT

THUMBS UP
TO LEGENDS



Chipper Jones

The Atlanta Braves will officially retire the eight-time all-star's No. 10 in a ceremony this June and induct him into the franchise's hall of fame. Fittingly, his number will be the 10th number retired in team history. Jones gave his heart to Atlanta for 19 years and this is a great way to pay him back.

More Recruits

Just because National Signing Day has passed doesn't mean the process has ended. Georgia picked up a huge defensive tackle in Toby Johnson earlier this week and welcomed a host of 2014's best players last week-end. Don't sleep or you'll fall behind Alabama in the endless game that is recruiting.

Prep Grapplers

Last weekend saw the best high school wrestlers take part in the GHSA traditional state wrestling tournament in Macon. Archer and Gordon Lee earned the first team titles in their programs' histories while Gilmer, Pope and Jefferson took their familiar spots at the top of the podium in Macon.

Bloated Self-Opinions

Josh Smith priced himself out of Atlanta when he demanded a max contract. For some reason the hometown kid has been unhappy in Atlanta but he is willing to stay if the Hawks want to reward a 17-point per game player with a max deal that LeBron doesn't even get. Thanks but no thanks Smoove. See you later.

Basketball Upsets

While it is great that games are played on the court where anything can happen, to see a team such as North Gwinnett miss out on the GHSA state playoffs because of a 35-foot miracle shot is really a shame. The GHSA should consider expanding the power rating formula to all classes.

Basketball Struggles

Just when it seemed like the two in-state basketball powers were turning things around both Georgia Tech and UGA's seasons have slammed into walls. Tech was bashed by UNC at home earlier this week and UGA saw a five-game winning streak turn into a two-game slide.



WHO'S NOT

THUMBS DOWN TO
BAD HOOPS

SCORE LIST

BY BRIAN JONES

- 1 **IT'S OUR TIME:** It has been a long process, but Kennesaw State will finally have a football team. In the fall of 2015, the Owls will kick-off their inaugural season and the community could not be any happier. Last week, KSU had a celebration at the Convocation Center led by school president Daniel Papp and athletic director Vaughn Williams, and students as well as city officials were in attendance. Now the next step is hiring a head coach. I wonder who will be the first head coach in KSU football history?
- 2 **OGLETREE ARRESTED:** While one football community is celebrating a historic event, one football player is on the hot seat as former UGA line-backer Alec Ogletree got arrested for driving under the influence. Ogletree is expected to be drafted in the first round, but after the recent run-in with the law, many teams could hold off on Ogletree he could be picked in the later rounds. Based on where Ogletree is projected to go in draft, it's a move that could cost him \$4.5 million. As a Georgia fan, I hope Ogletree can get it together and learn from this mistake.
- 3 **SPRING BASEBALL:** The Braves are down in Florida as they train for the upcoming season. There will be a lot of questions that will be answered the next six weeks like who will be new leadoff man? Who will be the fifth starting pitcher? How will the Upton brothers work together? And who will be the leader of the clubhouse since Chipper Jones is retired? It will be a very interesting spring training for the Braves, but the level of excitement for this team could not be any higher.
- 4 **NOT MOVING:** Falcons owner Arthur Blank released a statement over the weekend saying the Falcons will not move to the suburbs and are doing whatever it takes to get a new stadium built in downtown Atlanta by 2017. There has been speculation that if the Falcons don't get a stadium deal done in the downtown area, they could have the stadium built in the metro area like Alpharetta or Doraville. Personally, I would not mind if the new stadium was built in the suburbs. It could be an easier drive and parking for the new stadium would be more fan friendly.
- 5 **JUNIOR DAY:** Over 100 high school juniors were in Athens the past weekend to take part in UGA's Junior Day. Players like Peachtree Ridge safety Nick Glass and Carrollton offensive lineman Jake Sanders meet with UGA coaches to discuss football, academics and listen to the coaches sell them on why they should attend Georgia. Some of them even left with scholarship offers. This was an important event for Georgia as they get an early start on the 2014 recruiting season. Hopefully, the Bulldogs will be able to sign a fair amount of the players that attended to the event.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

BY FLETCHER PROCTOR

- 3 State titles Camden County won under Jeff Herron, who left for Prince Avenue Christian
- 13 Coaches in Georgia history who have won titles at two different schools. Herron has won titles at Camden and Oconee County
- 8.2 Points averaged last year with Washington by Jasmine Thomas, who was acquired by the Dream Tuesday
- 0 Victories in five games for Georgia Tech against the ACC's top four teams (Duke, Miami, N.C. State and UNC)
- 2 North Carolina wins against Georgia Tech in Atlanta out of the past eight basketball games
- 12 Years since UNC has swept a season series with Georgia Tech
- 14 Strikeouts for Georgia Tech pitcher Buck Farmer against Akron in eight innings
- .615 Batting average for Georgia Tech freshman Matt Gonzalez, tops on the team
- 10 Jersey numbers soon to be unavailable to future Braves after the team retires Chipper Jones' No. 10 this June
- 24 Current members of the Braves Hall of Fame, a number to increase by one after Jones is inducted on June 28

TRIVIA QUESTION

What was the last team in the state's largest classification to win the state title besides Milton, Norcross or Wheeler, which have combined to win eight straight?

Answer on Page 14

SANITY AT LAST

"We can't look at this game as a game that is going to make us or break us. This is just another game. We are playing against the world champs."

- Hawks coach Larry Drew on facing the Miami Heat.

TOP 10 SWIM RESULTS

Class AAAAAA Girls

1. Lambert	292	6. Kennesaw Mtn	167
2. Peachtree Ridge	222	7. Etowah	149
3. Lassiter	197	8. Walton	127
4. Johns Creek	185	9. Archer	106
5. Brookwood	170	9. Milton	106

Class AAAAAA Boys

1. Parkview	234	6. Collins Hill	146
2. Chattahoochee	226	7. Johns Creek	129
3. Lassiter	211	8. Walton	123
4. North Gwinnett	169	9. Mill Creek	111
5. Alpharetta	148	10. Brookwood	89

Class A-AAAAA Girls

1. Westminster	306	6. Oconee County	98
2. Woodward Acad.	239	7. Pope	90
2. Marist	239	8. McIntosh	88
4. St Pius X	189	9. Wesleyan	84
5. Pace Academy	112	10. Northview	81

Class A-AAAAA Boys

1. Dalton	192	6. Marist	133
2. Westminster	173	7. Chamblee	131
3. Oconee County	154	8. Northview	115
4. North Hall	144	9. Starr's Mill	101
5. St Pius X	135	10. Holy Innocents	76



Region tournaments feature drama, upsets

By Craig Sager II

There were 94 region titles up for grabs this past week across the state of Georgia for girls and boys basketball. The drama was thick and the stars were shining. From a five-overtime game to breakout performances from freshmen and sophomores, the action never let up. Region rivals squared off and champions were crowned, but the real significance of these games comes from earning a spot in the state tournament.

HOOP DREAMS ...

In the states highest classification, Tift County proved to a major contender heading into the state tournament. Brannen Greene scored 36 points and Tadic Jackson notched 22 as Tift County cruised to the Region 1-AAAAAA title over Brunswick 88-72. Tift County has lost just once this season to a Georgia team (to Coffee on Jan. 19). One of the best individual performances of the region tournaments came from Campbell sophomore guard Dante Scott

who put up 42 points and nine rebounds in Campbell's 80-78 five-overtime win over McEachern.

Region tournaments are the perfect way to gain momentum for the tournament and Druid Hills enters the AAAAAA playoffs with some serious momentum after knocking off Region No. 3 Lovejoy, No. 2 Luella and No. 1 Rockdale County en route to their 2-AAAAAA title. Norcross is a team that is always in contention and Brandon Goodwin is also capable of leading the Blue Devils to the state title. Goodwin scored 23 points in the Region 7-AAAAAA championship and with a strong supporting cast showed Norcross is a mammoth heading into state tournament time.

Speaking of Region 7-AAAAAA, Meadowcreek pulled off one of the most thrilling upsets of the region tournaments, knocking off Collins Hill 56-53 with a half-court buzzer-beater to earn the region's No. 3 seed. Jones County's Jarquez Smith recorded a seventh straight triple-

double in the Region 2-AAAAA title game, but Northside-Warner Robins was able to outscore Jones County 76-70 to earn the title and snap Jones County's nine-game winning streak.

In Class AAAAA, Miller Grove is eyeing a fifth straight title after taking the Region 6-AAAAA title. Gainesville captured the program's first region title since 2009 with a 72-61 win over Salem. Shaquan Cantrell had 21 points to pace the Red Elephants. Buford is a program that is a favorite on the boys and girls side and A.J. Davis scored 18 points to take North Hall 50-36 in the boys Region 7-AAA title game. One of the state's best juniors, Ahmed Hill scored 32 points as Aquinas took out Wilkinson County to win the Region 7-A tournament.

LADIES NIGHTS ...

One of the many highlights of the weekend came out of Region 4-AAAAAA as North Cobb edged past McEachern 53-52 in a game featuring the defending state champion Indians. Region tournaments bring intense rival games and Cherokee was able to battle through 5-AAAAAA and beat neighboring Woodstock 56-55 to take the championship. Alpharetta boys and girls earned

one seeds with region titles and the Lady Elephants beat North Forsyth 35-27 in the 6-AAAAAA title. Southwest DeKalb upset Tucker and Miller Grove on its way to a shocking tournament championship in Region 6-AAAAA.

In a game that had many eyes across the country watching, North Gwinnett topped Norcross in the Region 7-AAAAAA title game. Allatoona remains one of the hottest teams entering the tournament and eased past Villa Rica in the 5-AAAAA championship game 53-40. Kell was able to string together a strong performance as well and topped Osborne 53-44 for the region title.

Region 8-AAAAAA had the most adversity in their final seedings. Salem was the No. 4 seed heading into the region tournament but ended up beating Clarke Central 59-41 to claim the top seed for the state tournament. The region tournament's No. 1 seed Flowery Branch took another slide and lost 54-38 to Cedar Shoals in the game for third place. St. Francis was another big winner this weekend claiming Region 6-A titles in both girls and guys and may have something to say in the Class-A Private tournaments.

Sager can be reached at csager@scoreatl.com.

STATE SWIMMING FINALS



Parkview, Westminster repeat swim titles

By Stephen Black

The Dalton boys and Westminster girls won Class A-AAAAA state swimming and diving championships Feb. 9 at the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center.

It is yet another swimming and diving title for Westminster, which are as familiar to the school as West Paces Ferry Road, the avenue that runs just by the Buckhead school. It is the second girls championship in a row for Westminster and 21st overall.

The Wildcats took the girls championship fairly easily with 306 points, well ahead of runners-up Woodward Academy and Marist, which tied with 239 points. St. Pius came in fourth and Pace Academy rounded out the top five.

"We've got some pretty good talent that we're definitely going to miss," said Westminster coach Pete Higgins, who has been at the school since 1960. "I'm going to have to start coaching next year instead of just filling out the entry blank."

Senior Nicole Stafford led Westminster with wins in the 200 freestyle and 100 butterfly.

fly. Stafford, a Stanford signee, won the 200 freestyle event all four years of her career.

"Nicole Stafford is a real swimmer. She's the real deal," Higgins said. "She'll get after you. She's a competitor."

Dalton became the first boys swimming team from outside of metro Atlanta to win a state championship since another group of Catamounts did it in 1993, when there was only one title to be won. Coach Charles Todd's team won two of the three relay events and got wins from senior Georgia-signee Taylor Dale in the 100 backstroke and 100 butterfly to pull away from Westminster in the boys meet. Dale led his team despite suffering from mononucleosis recently.

"As a matter of fact, yesterday, we took him to the hospital after his 400-free," Todd revealed. "His blood-sugar was low, his iron was low, they were afraid his spleen was enlarged. But he toughed it out and I'm really proud of him."

Todd knew his team would have to come up with something unexpected to beat its top

competition, traditional powers Marist and Westminster.

"My relay for the 400 free was like 32nd (in the state) with a slow time entered because they just had't swam any meets this year, and we moved up from 32nd to first," Todd said. "No one in Atlanta had seen this coming. We had a left hook waiting for them. We put it on them yesterday and we just stayed on top of them today."

Another big break for Dalton came in the 200 medley relay, as Marist's team forfeited due to jumping before the touch. That cost the War Eagles up to a possible 40 points and helped cause Marist to finish sixth with 133 points. Dalton totaled 192 while Westminster was runner-up with 173.

Four state records were set Feb. 9 in Class A-AAAAA, three by Westminster. Records fell in the boys 200 medley relay (Dalton, 1:32.93), the girls 200 medley relay (Westminster, 1:43.96), the girls 300 freestyle (Nicole Stafford, Westminster, 1:45.29) and the 400 freestyle relay (Westminster, 3:26.22).

6A FINALS ...

The Parkview boys won their second boys championship in a row behind a deep team that, despite not winning any individual or relay races, was able to outpoint the rest of the field. Chattahoochee came in second with 226 points and Lassiter took third with 211.

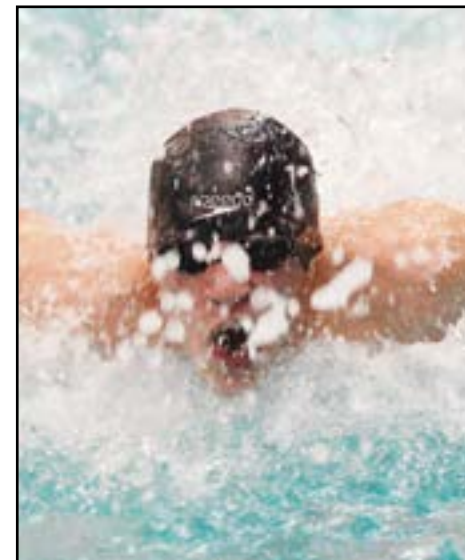
Lassiter won two of the three relays while senior Jimmy Yoder won the 100 butterfly and 200 freestyle, including a state record in the 100 fly. Yoder will swim for Stanford University next year. Chris Powell of Mill Creek

won the boys 50 and 100 freestyle races, and his team came in ninth.

The Lambert girls won the girls championship for the first time by totaling 292 points, well ahead of second-place Peachtree Ridge's 222. Lassiter took third while Johns Creek and Brookwood rounded out the top five.

Individually, Rebecca Postoll won the 200 freestyle and 500 freestyle. Lambert won on the strength of two victories in the three relays and seven top-five finishes in the individuals.

Photo courtesy of Sonny Kennedy. Black can be reached at sblack@scoreatl.com.



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BASKETBALL RANKINGS

CLASS AAAAAA

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. Tift County | 6. Westlake |
| 2. Shiloh | 7. Alpharetta |
| 3. Norcross | 8. Druid Hills |
| 4. North Cobb | 9. Chattahoochee |
| 5. Wheeler | 10. Hillgrove |

CLASS AAAAA

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Miller Grove | 6. New Manchester |
| 2. Effingham County | 7. Jones County |
| 3. Northside-Columbus | 8. Stephenson |
| 4. Whitewater | 9. Allatoona |
| 5. Gainesville | 10. Tucker |

CLASS AAAA

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Eagle's Landing | 6. Jonesboro |
| 2. South Atlanta | 7. NW Whitfield |
| 3. Statesboro | 8. Rutland |
| 4. Westover | 9. Marist |
| 5. Columbia | 10. Glenn Hills |

CLASS AAA

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Cartersville | 6. Woodward Acad. |
| 2. Buford | 7. Johnson-Savannah |
| 3. Savannah | 8. Washington Co. |
| 4. Morgan County | 9. Carver-Columbus |
| 5. Thomson | 10. North Murray |

CLASS AA

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. GAC | 6. Pelham |
| 2. Vidalia | 7. Jefferson |
| 3. Westside-Augusta | 8. Taylor County |
| 4. Calhoun | 9. Laney |
| 5. Jordan | 10. Bleckley County |

CLASS A-PRIVATE

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. North Cobb Chr. | 6. Landmark Chr. |
| 2. W.D. Mohammed | 7. Athens Christian |
| 3. Greenforest Chr. | 8. St. Francis |
| 4. Excel Christian | 9. Holy Innocents' |
| 5. Aquinas | 10. Calvary Day |

CLASS A-PUBLIC

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Wilkinson Co. | 6. Portal |
| 2. Mitchell Co. | 7. Treutlen |
| 3. Wilcox County | 8. Jenkins County |
| 4. Seminole County | 9. Dooly County |
| 5. Turner County | 10. Hancock Central |

CLASS AAAAAA

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Parkview | 6. Alcovy |
| 2. North Gwinnett | 7. North Cobb |
| 3. Norcross | 8. Langston Hughes |
| 4. Cherokee | 9. Hillgrove |
| 5. Alpharetta | 10. Woodstock |

CLASS AAAAA

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Tucker | 6. Osborne |
| 2. Kell | 7. Cedar Shoals |
| 3. Miller Grove | 8. Forest Park |
| 4. Stephenson | 9. McIntosh |
| 5. SW DeKalb | 10. Effingham Co. |

CLASS AAAA

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Columbia | 6. South Effingham |
| 2. Redan | 7. Marist |
| 3. Cross Creek | 8. Woodland-Henry |
| 4. Mary Persons | 9. Sandy Creek |
| 5. Jonesboro | 10. Madison County |

CLASS AAA

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Washington Co. | 6. Beach |
| 2. St. Pius X | 7. North Oconee |
| 3. Buford | 8. Central-Carroll |
| 4. Sonoraville | 9. Decatur |
| 5. Chapel Hill | 10. Dodge County |

GIRLS

CLASS AA

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Wesleyan | 6. Thomasville |
| 2. Laney | 7. Pelham |
| 3. Kendrick | 8. Westside-Augusta |
| 4. Calhoun | 9. McIntosh Co. Acad. |
| 5. Dublin | 10. GAC |

CLASS A-PRIVATE

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. SW Atlanta Chr. | 6. George Walton Acad. |
| 2. Holy Innocents' | 7. Paideia |
| 3. Darlington | 8. Mt. Paran |
| 4. Calvary Day | 9. Atlanta Intl. |
| 5. St. Francis | 10. Providence Chr. |

CLASS A-PUBLIC

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Randolph Clay | 6. Irwin County |
| 2. Gordon Lee | 7. Treutlen |
| 3. Towns County | 8. Wilkinson County |
| 4. Claxton | 9. Mitchell County |
| 5. Turner County | 10. Marion County |

TRADITIONAL FINALS



Archer, Gordon Lee capture first titles

By Fletcher Proctor

Four years ago, Tom Beuglas started the Archer wrestling program and last Saturday in Macon, he coached the Tigers to a legendary sweep. After winning the duals title last month, Archer cruised to the Class AAAAAA traditional title, becoming the first program to sweep both GHSA titles within the program's first four years. Archer finished with four individual champions including Ernest Alexander (195), M.J. Couzan (285) and brothers Daniel and Thomas Bullard (138 and 145, respectively). Defending champion Collins Hill finished second and Camden County finished in third. Camden County earned one individual championship while Collins Hill wrestlers took home two. Archer, which qualified 14 wrestlers for the tournament, placed 12 wrestlers to bring a 113-point lead into the finals round before winning by 131.5 points.

Gordon Lee held off Holy Innocents' 187-171 to capture the Class A traditional title, the first in program history. Head coach Brent Raby brought 13 wrestlers to Macon

and 12 placed sixth or better, including three champions. Jonathan Ragsdale (113) won his second straight title with a technical fall over Holy Innocents' John Hiles while Alex Spires (138) defeated Treutlen's Tyler Heath in a 12-8 decision. Holy Innocents' was also seeking its first traditional title. The two programs split the 2012 duals title.

BACK ON TOP ...

Gilmer fell just short of a traditional team title last year, but Sam Snider's squad managed five finalists to slip past Carrollton 182.50-161. The title is Gilmer's fourth in the last six seasons. Individual champions Cameron Perry (126) and Johnie Flakes (138) helped the Bobcats to the team title. Southeast Whitfield's Carlos Fraire (220) earned a tough 2-1 decision, appearing to injury his knee early in his bout against Griffin's Telly Sloan. He would rally on one leg to take the individual title.

Woodward Academy coach Pete Fritts didn't believe his team was a favorite entering

the weekend, but thanks to a pair of individual champions, Fritts and championships Chad and Chandler Pyke took the traditional title back to Woodward Academy for the first time since 1972. Oconee County finished with 101 points, 37 points out of first. Fourth-place Buford won three individual championships. One of those was junior Chip Ness (182), who earned his third individual title. He won at 152 pounds in 2011 and at 170 pounds last year. Ness improved his career record to 137-1 by scoring a pin on Dawson County's Gavin Brown.

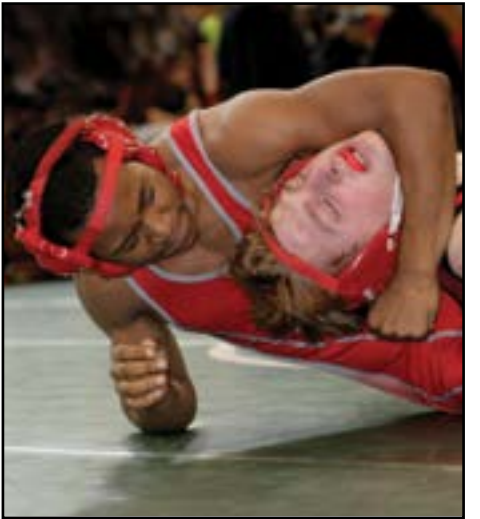
FAMILIAR CHAMPIONS ...

Despite a loaded field complete with four-time defending Class A champion Bremen ready to try and end the Dragons' dynasty, Jefferson scored 192 points to win its 13th straight traditional title. Jefferson had five wrestlers compete in the finals Saturday with four winning individual titles. The Dragons also had five third-place finishers. Bremen finished second with 133.50 points, 58.5 points behind Jefferson. The Blue Devils won three individual titles with two more runner up finishes. Joe Bexley (285) of Bremen won his third career title and capped a 54-0 season. He will head to The Citadel to continue his wrestling career.

Pope won the program's third straight traditional title, claiming the AAAAAA crown after winning the last two Class AAAAA titles. Pope scored 215.5 points to blast past Ware County who finished second with 99 points and Ola, who finished with 80 points as a

team. Jake Henson (152) won for the second-straight year with a 7-1 decision over Sprayberry's Thomas Cook. Billy Meek (160) atoned for a triple overtime loss one year ago with a title by major decision. Northgate's Tyler Askey (170) captured his fourth state title and capped a perfect high school career with a win Saturday. His prep career comes to a close with a 196-0 record. Askey's feat had not been accomplished in 30 years and he is just the fourth grappler in Georgia history to win four titles in four undefeated seasons.

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



WRESTLING RANKINGS

Class AAAAAA

1. Archer
2. Camden County
3. Collins Hill
4. North Gwinnett
5. Roswell
6. Kennesaw Mtn.
7. Etowah
8. Cherokee
9. Lowndes
10. Parkview

Class AAAAA

1. Gilmer
2. Carrollton
3. Alexander
4. West Laurens
5. Marist
6. Heritage-Catoosa
7. Locust Grove
8. Southeast Whitfield
9. Chestatee
10. Lumpkin County

Class AA

1. Jefferson
2. Bremen
3. Lovett
4. Social Circle
5. Toombs County
6. GAC
7. Fitzgerald
8. East Laurens
9. Monticello
10. Spencer

Class AAAAA

1. Pope
2. Ware County
3. Whitewater
4. Ola
5. Creekview
6. Loganville
7. Woodland-Cartersville
8. Starr's Mill
9. Apalachee
10. Union Grove

Class AAA

1. Woodward Acad.
2. Banks County
3. Oconee County
4. Morgan County
5. Buford
6. Sonoraville
7. McNair
8. Rockmart
9. Jackson County
10. Elbert County

Class A

1. Gordon Lee
2. Holy Innocents'
3. Commerce
4. Mount Zion-Carroll
5. Athens Christian
6. Darlington
7. Irwin County
8. Strong Rock Chr.
9. George Walton Acad.
10. ELCA

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BULLDOG BEAT



Men's basketball takes step back

By Chris Nieman

The 2012-13 season for the men's basketball team has been nothing short of an emotional roller coaster. After winning five consecutive SEC games for the first time since 2001, the Dawgs dropped two straight, including a heart-wrenching road loss in overtime against the Ole Miss Rebels last Saturday.

This was a game in which the Dawgs held the Rebels to a dismal 38-percent from the field, led by six at halftime and were even aided by a double-double from sophomore guard, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope. However, the Dawgs served up 18 turnovers and were at the mercy of the Rebel's exceptional free throw shooting percentage, a night where the Rebels nailed 30 of 36 from the charity stripe.

Sitting at 12-13, 6-6 entering Thursday's game against Arkansas, the Dawgs' hopes of making the NCAA tournament have been diminished to perhaps coach Mark Fox and his staff managing to rally the troops to win the SEC tournament in March at the Bridgestone Arena in Nashville, Tenn. If the Dawgs can run the gauntlet, they'll be awarded an automatic bid to partake in March Madness, a feat that hasn't been accomplished by the Georgia men's basketball team since the 2008 season. Georgia has made the NCAA tournament just once under Fox, earning an at-large bid in 2011.

UP AND DOWN ...

The No. 13 women's basketball team was upset by the Lady Bengals of LSU on Feb. 10 in Baton Rouge due to a lackluster performance that consisted of an onslaught of missed layups and easy buckets.

The Lady Bulldogs returned to the win column last Sunday, defeating Florida 62-57. The Lady Bulldogs own the all-time series with Florida (49-14).

OPENING FOLEY ...

The baseball team did not start the 2013 baseball campaign the way that coach David Perno had envisioned, losing two out of its first three games to Georgia Southern in Statesboro.

The Diamond Dawgs returned home to Foley Field earlier this week to host Kennesaw State. The result was not available at deadline.

ATHENS SHAKE ...

The men's dive team is not only making waves in the pool, but also on Youtube. The Harlem Shake has gone beyond viral and the dive team has taken it to a new extreme, accounting for over 19,000,000 views, courtesy of the team's epic meme.

Nieman can be reached at cnieman@scoreatl.com.

TECH BUZZ



Jackets continue improved ACC play

By Ryan Caiafa

Saturday's 57-56 road victory over Wake Forest gave Georgia Tech its second straight ACC road victory and improved the conference record to 4-8 after starting 0-5 in ACC play. The Jackets continues to get a boost from their freshman, particularly Marcus Georges-Hunt, who scored 16 points in the win over Wake Forest and has averaged 13 points per game in his past three games, during which the team went 2-1.

Even with upperclassmen Daniel Miller and Mfon Udofia remaining key factors in the team's rotation, the freshmen have been the overall story all season for the Yellow Jackets, as the team's top two scorers, Georges-Hunt and Robert Carter Jr., who also leads the team in rebounding, are both first-year players. Those two, along with Chris Bolden, have become mainstays in Tech's starting lineup, and despite a somewhat disappointing season, give the program reason to believe it can become a force in the ACC for the next few seasons. With just a handful of games remaining, including tough contests against Maryland, N.C. State, and Miami, there is still time for the Jackets to improve

their place in the standings and secure a much more favorable draw in the ACC Tournament.

HOT START ...

A three-game home sweep over Akron is how the Georgia Tech baseball team began its 2013 season. On opening day, a 3-0 win over the Zips, senior Buck Farmer struck out a career-high 14 batters in eight shutout innings. Farmer's performance on the mound made up for a lackluster offensive performance, which was led by Sam Dove's two-RBI day. The offense came to life in the second game of the series as the Jackets rode a 4-for-4 day from Daniel Palka, which included a home run, to crush Akron 10-3. The final game of the series saw a 5-3 victory for Tech, including a 3-for-5 showing from Kyle Wren.

The Jackets complete their opening seven-game homestand with a matchup against cross-town rival Georgia State and a series against St. John's. Currently ranked No. 20 in the nation, the Jackets are looking to improve on last season's tough finish, when they were ousted in the Gainesville Regional by then top-ranked Florida.

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PANTHER PROWL



Panthers trying to close strong

By Jay Underwood

Georgia State is looking to close out the basketball season on a strong note after starting out the year with a rough record against a difficult schedule. Having improved their record to 9-7 in the conference and 14-15 overall, the Panthers have a chance to end the season with a winning record if they are able to bring home victories in their last two games. Winning both games will not be an easy task, however. The next two games are against the top two teams in the conference, Northeastern and James Madison.

The Panthers know that they are capable of beating each of these teams, having scored victories against each already once this season. Freshman R.J. Hunter is going to have to take over the games and provide much of the scoring similar to his performance against Northeastern earlier this season where he scored 27 to lead the Panthers to victory.

Hunter may be one of the least talked-about freshmen superstars in the nation, but don't tell his father. Georgia State head coach Ron Hunter wants to keep it that way since he preaches team basketball. The eldest Hunter has enjoyed his son's successes, but he has enjoyed the late season turnaround for Georgia State even more. Finishing the season over .500 would be a mi-

nor victory for the coach who scheduled anyone and everyone to begin the season to prove to his players that they should not be scared and not back down from anyone.

Hunter can point to the difficult games against BYU and Duke as teaching points as well as turning points for the program. The final scores may have been lopsided, but anyone who watched the games can recognize that those contests were where the team started to form out of players. While it won't show up in the win column, Hunter can claim those as moral victories.

BATTER UP ...

While basketball season may be drawing to a close, the Panthers have taken the field for baseball and started the season with a 2-2 record. After taking two of three in a series with Butler, the Panthers fell to the crosstown Yellow Jackets 16-5. Georgia State has another marquee matchup this Tuesday against the University of Georgia at the GSU Baseball complex at Panthersville. This should be one of the more crowded games this season as the team looks to pick up a victory over an SEC foe.

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OWL OUTLOOK



Owl's football nesting until 2015 kickoff

By Brian Jones

Ever since Kennesaw State has existed, the No. 1 question that has been asked by everyone is when is the school going to get a football team?

And after years of research, evaluation and planning, the football team is coming as they will kickoff in 2015.

Last week, KSU president Daniel Papp and athletic director Vaughn Williams presented a detailed business plan to the Board of Regents which outlined the start-up and operating expenses of the football program. The board approved and the school celebrated the next day at the Convocation Center.

"This is a great day for Kennesaw State University, and another step in the tremendous growth this university is experiencing," Williams said during the celebration. "It is important for us to acknowledge all of those who made this day possible, and there are many who supported our dream to bring football to this campus. Personally, I want to thank Dr. Papp and Vince Dooley for giving me the opportunity to be a part of it. We still have a lot of work ahead of us, but for now we celebrate and begin the countdown to kick off in 2015."

Another person (or group of people) Williams thanked was Fifth Third Bank as they became the major source of funding for the

Football program. In fact, Fifth Third Bank has reached an agreement with the Georgia Regional Office to have naming rights for KSU Stadium. So for at least the next 10 years, the KSU Stadium will be called Fifth Third Bank Stadium. Renovations to the 8,300-seat stadium will be made prior to the inaugural season.

THE NEXT MOVE ...

So now we know a Division 1 football team is coming to the metro area in two years. Now the question is what happens next?

There is a national search for a head coach and Williams has said that he wants a guy that is from Georgia and has had success. There is not a leading candidate yet, but Williams said he has a short to medium list of candidates that he has worked on the last year. The pay for the head coach will be around \$200,000 per year.

Also, KSU will have to find a new conference to join since the Atlantic Sun does not support football. Some of the conferences that the Owls are looking at are the Big South, Ohio Valley and Southern Conferences which are all part of the FCS.

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HAWKS HAVEN



Hawks ready to make "Smoove" move

By Ricky Dimon

By the time you're reading this, Josh Smith is probably jacking up three-pointers in some other city for some other team. The NBA trade deadline was on Thursday afternoon, but results of the Smoove sweepstakes were not available at press time.

Speaking of available, the Hawks reportedly made it known to anyone and everyone who would listen that their mercurial forward would be moved. That was the big trade-deadline news coming out of all-star weekend, with possible swapping partners rumored to be Boston, Brooklyn, Milwaukee and Phoenix—among several others.

"It is what it is," Smith told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "You have to understand, this is a business first. Once you get that in your head that it's a business first—it's never personal—you'll be pretty good in this league."

Which is exactly what Smith has been in Atlanta. In almost nine full seasons, he has averaged 15.2 points, 8.0 rebounds and 2.2 blocks per game. The former McEachern High School standout is shooting a career-best 35 percent from beyond the arc in 2012-13, but he has made a mere 29 percent of his treys overall. Playoffs have become the norm for this franchise, but not once has Smith led the Hawks to the Eastern Conference Finals. All in all, it has been a mixed bag for Smith in terms of both individual and

team accomplishments.

The Hawks are not going to make the same mistake twice—that mistake being a max deal for a player who does not deserve max money (Joe Johnson, of course, was the beneficiary of Atlanta's first such blemish). They certainly aren't going to make that mistake with a competent Danny Ferry running the show. With Smith set to enter free agency this summer, a trade right now makes a lot more sense than losing him for nothing four months from now.

SECOND-HALF OUTLOOK ...

With or without Smith, the Hawks are a virtual lock to make the playoffs. They are seven games inside the cut line (ahead of ninth-place Philadelphia) and would be the No. 6 seed in the Eastern Conference if it ended now. That would pit Atlanta against Indiana in the first round. More importantly, Larry Drew's squad is three games clear of eighth-place Milwaukee, a spot it hopes to avoid because a series against anyone other than No. 1 Miami would be winnable.

"I know the players were looking to get away from the game and get away from each other," head coach Larry Drew told the AJC, "and just trying to get a fresh mind and finish the season on a strong note."

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FALCONS BEAT



Gonzalez question lingers for Birds

By Craig Sager II

The Falcons are ready to begin making roster moves this offseason, but have shifted focus to what they feel is the most important question that needs to be answered. The possible return of Tony Gonzalez continues to top the bulletin board. The talent and productivity Gonzalez brings to the team is a key reason for wanting Gonzalez to come to a decision, as well as the financial resolves that would follow his decision. If Gonzalez returns, the Falcons will likely have to trim contracts elsewhere on the team and make room for the would-be 17-year veteran. Ownership has added pressure on Gonzalez to find an answer soon so they can begin the rest of their offseason deals without question or hesitation.

"Simply stated, the sooner we know, the better, and yet there are no deadlines on this for Tony," said Dimitroff. "Tony needs to come to his decision and be at peace with his decision."

THE BIG PICTURE ...

The broad focus of the organization this offseason is to find pieces that will improve Mike Nolan's defense. The absence of a somewhat praiseworthy pass rusher across

from John Abraham is something that has irritated Falcons' fans and critics for years. The defense has continuously struggled to get pressure on opposing quarterbacks so this will likely first on the Falcons' agenda.

Free-agency period begins March 12, and will then segue into the April draft. Falcons Pro Bowl safety William Moore will be a free agent and is reported to be interested in testing the open market.

The Falcons could possibly place the franchise tag on Moore before March 4, otherwise they may find themselves in a bidding war over one of the most valuable players on their defense last season. In 2012, the franchise tag did not hold any luck, after it was spent on Brent Grimes who ended up missing the entire season with a torn Achilles. The Falcons were the oldest team in the NFC last season, so some of these veteran players can be released or asked to take a lower salary to accommodate the team's needs. Taking a pay cut may be something that certain veterans may accept, because this team is definitely gearing to make a Super Bowl run in 2013.

Sager can be reached at csager@scoreatl.com.

CHOP SHOP



Braves to retire Chipper's No. 10

By Fletcher Proctor

The Atlanta Braves announced Tuesday plans to retire former third baseman Chipper Jones' No. 10 in a ceremony on June 28 and induct him into the team's Hall of Fame that afternoon. The team will hold the ceremony at the Atlanta Marriott Marquis, then honor Jones in a pregame ceremony before facing the Arizona Diamondbacks.

"Chipper was a Brave from the beginning to the end of his career and his legacy will forever live in our record books," said Atlanta Braves President John Schuerholz in a statement released by the team. "There is no greater honor that we can bestow upon him than to induct him into our Hall of Fame and retire his iconic number 10."

The Braves organization has retired nine previous numbers including Hank Aaron (44), Eddie Mathews (41), Dale Murphy (3), Phil Niekro (35), Warren Spahn (21), Greg Maddux (31), Tom Glavine (47), Bobby Cox (6) and John Smoltz (29). All of Major League Baseball retired the No. 42 to honor Jackie Robinson. Jones will be the 25th member of the Braves Hall of Fame, joining former teammates Smoltz, Maddux, Glavine and the only manager he ever played for in the big leagues, Cox.

Jones certainly earned his spot in the Braves Hall of Fame, and he has made his case for inclusion in Cooperstown over his 19 years in the Majors. Jones was an eight-time All-Star who won the NL MVP in 1999. He would later win the National League Batting title in 2008 to go with a pair of Silver Slugger awards. He also is the only switch hitter ever to average .300 while knocking at least 300 home runs. He owns 11 Braves franchise records and is second in seven more.

Jones has been seen at the team's spring training facility as a guest instructor.

CALL OF DUTY ...

The entire team finally arrived last week and the spring training schedule kicks off Friday as the Tigers visit the Braves' spring training facility in Kissimmee. The Yankees will travel to Champion Stadium at ESPN Wide World of Sports Saturday, then Atlanta heads out to Bradenton to face the Pirates before returning for exhibition games against the Marlins and Nationals. The team will then travel to face the Tigers in Lakeland and the Phillies in Clearwater this Wednesday and Thursday, respectively.

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GWINNETT GLADIATORS



Gwinnett back on top of division

By Joe Deighton

The first-place Gwinnett Gladiators picked up a win by overcoming a two-goal deficit against Wheeling Feb. 15. Trailing 5-3, the Glads scored two quick goals off the sticks of forwards Joey Haddad and Justin Bowers. The goals came just 20 seconds apart and gave Gwinnett an improbable opportunity to win. Cody Brookwell put home the game-winner at 6:52 of the third period and the Glads hung on for a 6-5 victory.

The win put the Gladiators into first place in the ECHL's South Division. Unfortunately, Gwinnett dropped two straight games to the Florida Everblades over the weekend. The Glads have just a one-point advantage over second-place Greenville as of this past Wednesday. Two games against struggling Orlando this week provides a golden opportunity for two wins and could help maintain the lock on the top spot in the South.

DOMINGUE REASSIGNED ...

The weekly transaction for the Glads this week saw goalie Louis Domingue move to the AHL's Portland Pirates. The 20-year-old goaltender has been solid between the pipes for Gwinnett in 26 games this season. Domingue had a 16-8-2 record with a 2.94 goals against

average and a .894 save percentage in his time with the Gladiators. The rookie played last season in the SPHL with the Mississippi Surge. Domingue was the Phoenix Coyotes fifth-round pick at 138 overall in 2010.

SCORING LEADER ...

Through 56 games in the 2012-13 season, Gladiators forward Casey Pierro-Zabotel is leading the ECHL in scoring. The 24-year-old has 62 points (17 goals, 45 assists) – this year. Pierro-Zabotel leads Gwinnett in plus-minus with a plus-18.

He was a third-round draft pick in 2007, taken by the Pittsburgh Penguins. Pierro-Zabotel has bounced around the ECHL since then, playing for three other teams. This season, he has found a home in Gwinnett and has posted career-highs in every offensive category.

The right-wing forward is adept at creating scoring opportunities for both himself and his teammates. Pierro-Zabotel has 144 shots on goal this year. Number 18 is a prime candidate to win the CCM U+ MVP if he can continue leading the league in scoring and help the Glads to a division title.

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