

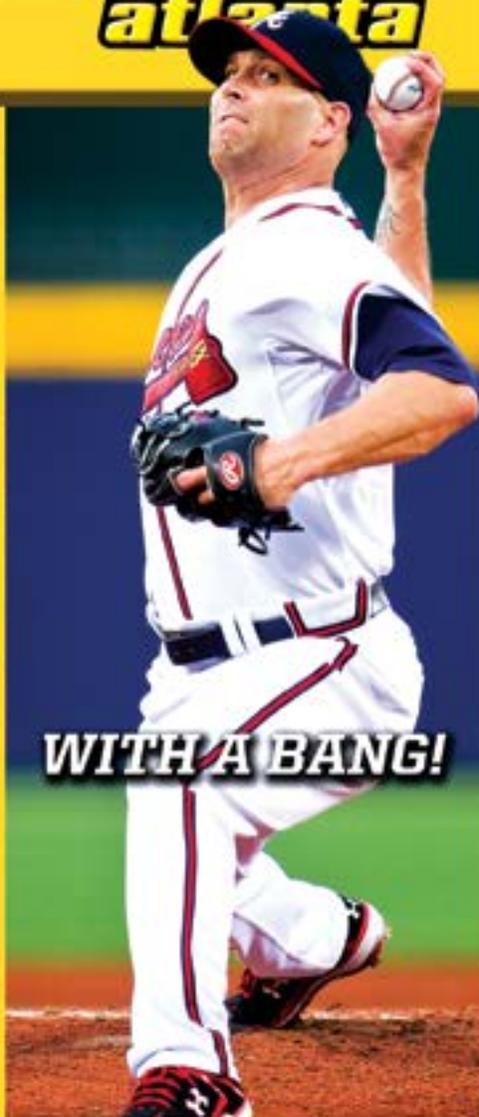
# SCORE

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THIS WEEK**

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**TEAM SCOOP  
AND VOICES**

*COVER DESIGN BY DJ GALBIATI BLALOCK  
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**INSIDE AT SCORE**  
**ON THE** Score Atlanta is looking for writing interns. Please e-mail Stephen Black at [sblack@scoreatl.com](mailto:sblack@scoreatl.com) or call 404-256-1572 for more information.

**SHOT OF THE  
WEEK...**

**DEACS DEMONIZED:** Georgia Tech catcher Mitch Earnest fires the ball to first base during the Yellow Jackets' series against Wake Forest over the weekend. Tech, ranked No. 15, won two of the three games and improved to 21-7 on the season. Photo courtesy of Jon Barash.

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# JAY'S JOURNAL



## Unheralded Hawks approach postseason

By Jay Underwood

The Atlanta Hawks have clinched a playoff berth for the sixth straight season and this may be the best coaching job Larry Drew has done with the Hawks. After trading away two main components from their playoff runs, Danny Ferry decided this wasn't going to be a rebuilding year, but he also wasn't going to tie up payroll in long-term contracts. With Joe Johnson in Brooklyn, Drew had to find offense from a variety of sources.

Having used 27 different starting lineups based on matchups and injuries, Drew has frequently put his team in a position to win. Unlike most teams the Hawks are unsure of who will be their leading scorer each night, but they do know that someone will step up. Down the stretch run, Jeff Teague has played with more intensity and pushed the tempo allowing the

Hawks to demonstrate their athleticism.

One issue that many experts have with this Atlanta team is its reliance on the three-point shot, but the Hawks have shown their ability to win ugly games as well. Devin Harris and Jeff Teague both have a knack for penetrating the defense and making things happen. The ability of Josh Smith and Al Horford to create mismatches allows the Hawks to go to them when the rest of their options have been unsuccessful.

With the season winding down, Josh Smith and the Hawks have their sights set on the fourth playoff spot and home-court advantage in the first round of the playoffs. While they don't know who their matchup will be, many will discount them and their ability to advance past the first round. This team has

been built with enough scoring weapons to put up enough points to compete with any team in the league. As long as they play their system, the Hawks will be a tough out for any team in the playoffs.

### A DIFFERENT FEATHER ...

The Falcons have made numerous off-season moves, but none will be as heartwarming as the signing of Brian Banks. Banks was a prep star committed to USC before he was accused of rape and sentenced to five years in prison. After having served his prison sentence and years on probation, Banks was finally exonerated of all charges when the woman who filed the original charges withdrew her claim and helped him clear his name.

The Falcons worked him out last year before he signed with the Las Vegas Locomotives of the United Football League. He will be worked at inside linebacker and given every chance to make the roster. With the changing defensive scheme, moving more towards an amoebic formation that shifts from a 3-4 front to a 4-3 front depending on the situation.

While the headlines will be graced by the names of Tony Gonzalez, Osi Umenyiora, Steven Jackson and others, the story that should be watched with care throughout spring workouts and OTAs is Brian Banks' fight to keep his dream alive and make the Falcons' roster.

### BRAVE DISPLAY ...

Opening Day has arrived and the new-look Braves did not disappoint. With the many storylines circulating throughout spring training it was nice for the players and fans for the season to arrive and the games start to matter again. In a pitch that signified the transition from the past to the future, Chipper Jones threw a strike to injured Brian McCann Monday night to officially begin the Braves' season, but it will be the last time Jones dons the Braves jersey this season.

Tim Hudson, the oldest player on the team, was the Opening Day starter and he was appreciative of the support. The Braves' offense seemed to thrive on the crowd's energy blasting three homers off Cole Hamels, chasing him after five innings. Justin Upton made his Braves debut memorable by hitting a Hamels offering 460 feet into the left-center seats causing Turner field to erupt and giving the Upton brothers their first chance to celebrate together on the same team in the major leagues.

If the intensity from the fans and players can maintain this level of excitement throughout the year, the race in the National League East between the Nationals and Braves could be one of the greatest ever.

*Underwood can be reached at [junderwood@scoreatl.com](mailto:junderwood@scoreatl.com).*

# DIMON CLUB



## NL East is a whole new ballgame

By Ricky Dimon

This isn't your grandfather's National League East. This isn't your father's National League East. Heck, this isn't even your older brother's National League East.

Gone are the days of consistent domination by the Atlanta Braves, of the Florida Marlins being a factor and of the Mets and Phillies playing the role of Atlanta's closest competitor. The Atlanta Braves and Washington Nationals started to give us a glimpse into the future during their 2012 campaigns, but this season, the mano a mano duel is likely to reach new proportions. Braves-Nats isn't simply going to be the hottest rivalry in the division; it's going to be the hottest rivalry in all of baseball...and not just this year, but for many years to come.

Opening Day arrived on Monday and neither juggernaut disappointed. Atlanta's

vaunted offense crossed the plate seven times in a season-opening defeat of Philadelphia, in part thanks to another long home run from newcomer Justin Upton, a solo shot by Dan Uggla, two hits off the bat of Chris Johnson and three from Freddie Freeman—including a homer. Tim Hudson did not have one of his best outings, but the bullpen shut the door for the most part and Craig Kimbrel was up to his old tricks by not allowing a baserunner en route to the save. In Washington, the Nationals got the job done behind their two heralded youngsters. Stephen Strasburg threw seven scoreless innings against Miami and Bryce Harper provided the game's only runs with two solo blasts.

One day should not influence our vision for the next 161, and it didn't. What happened on Monday simply confirmed

what we already knew. Atlanta won 94 games last season and, although it lost Chipper Jones and Martin Prado, it added the Upton brothers. Washington led the bigs with 98 victories in 2012 and this time around it won't be shutting Strasburg down in early September. These two powerhouses are even more formidable than they were last year and—even scarier—they are only getting better and better. The Braves' 25-man roster is the youngest in all of Major League Baseball with an average age of 27.3. Not far behind are the Nationals, fourth youngest at 27.8.

"They've been on point," Uggla told the associated press during spring training, speaking about his team's division foe. "You could gradually see them over the years getting better and better and better. Then, once you saw all the moves they made between 2011 and 2012, I was like, 'Man, these guys are going to be for real.'"

What's going to be the real deal is the head-to-head battle for years to come, and making the rivalry all the more spirited is the increased importance of winning a division—something the Braves learned all too well last season when they lost a controversial one-game wild card playoff to St. Louis. You can be sure either Atlanta or Washington will partake in the second installment of that dreaded contest come this October. It may take all 162 games to decide which one it will be.

### FORGOTTEN TEAM ...

You have to feel for the Hawks. They are the only team in this city currently embroiled in the zenith of its season (seven games until the playoffs as of Wednesday afternoon), yet they cannot steal a headline or generate more than a smidgen of interest. Two fellow Atlanta clubs are more relevant despite having played a combined total of one game in the last 72 days as of press time, as are four sports—MLB, NFL, college basketball and golf. The Final Four is taking over the city this weekend and the Masters is taking over the state soon after. Throw in an improbable Cinderella (Wichita State), a gut-wrenching story (the injury to Louisville's Kevin Ware) and the resurgence of Tiger Woods and those two events have more buzz than Georgia Tech's mascot. The Falcons' offseason, meanwhile, has been riddled with more highlights than the Highlight Factory itself. With the NFL Draft on the horizon later this month, that isn't going to change anytime soon.

The Hawks are what they are and they cannot do anything about it until this summer—when intrigue will begin in earnest. For now, if they can just lose enough games to snag the six seed instead of the four or five and land on the opposite side of the East bracket from Miami, then it may finally be time to start paying some attention.

*Dimon can be reached at [rdimon@scoreatl.com](mailto:rdimon@scoreatl.com).*



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# OWLS FOOTBALL



## First head coach has strong ties to Peach State

By Sean Conway



KSU President Daniel S. Papp (L), football coach Brian Bohannon (LC), KSU AD Vaughn Williams (RC) and Vince Dooley were each key components in bringing football to Kennesaw State.

It's official. The football is teed-up and awaiting the opening kickoff at Kennesaw State. On March 26, KSU announced the hiring of Brian Bohannon as the first coach of the school's NCAA Division I football team slated for play in the fall of 2015. With the announcement, Bohannon becomes the face of the first D-1 football program outside Atlanta, but still in the metro-Atlanta area.

### THE PROCESS ...

The hiring of Bohannon, a long-time assistant to Georgia Tech head coach Paul Johnson, marks another milestone in a process that began in 1999. Long-time KSU president Betty Siegel then formed a committee to study the viability of adding a football program to the school that dominates the northwestern intersection of interstate 75 and Chastain Rd. in northern Cobb County.

Following the timeline of bringing college football to Kennesaw, it's an easy parallel with the school's ascendance from a junior college in the mid-1970s to becoming the state's third-largest university with almost 25,000 students. The brains at KSU recognized the importance of bringing football to their campus and also realized that a proper foundation was necessary to make the lengthy and uphill challenge worthwhile.

In 2009, legendary University of Georgia

head coach Vince Dooley was hired to lead a committee tasked with deciding if the timing was right for KSU. Dooley was a perfect fit for the job and added credibility to the process. Not only is Dooley legendary for his coaching exploits, he also served as the athletics director of UGA's nationally renowned athletics program. Dooley has expertise not just on the gridiron, but on how to start athletics programs from scratch, understands the role of facilities across different athletic teams within a university and is experienced with adding men's sports to programs in the Title IX era.

During Dooley's tenure as athletic director at UGA (but after he stepped down as football coach) one of his student-athletes was a wide receiver from Griffin named Brian Bohannon. "His wealth of knowledge and experience is beneficial to this athletic department," said Bohannon, speaking from the KSU athletic offices last week even before he knew his new email address. "He was one of the first contacts that I made when I knew I had interest in this job."

In 2010, KSU Stadium opened up a long field goal away from the main campus just east of I-75. In February, Fifth Third Bank agreed to join the momentum of KSU athletics and purchased the naming rights to the 8,300-seat facility already equipped with luxury suites and football locker rooms.

### SOUTHERN CULTURE ...

While Dooley was the face of the exploratory committee, his boss on campus, Vaughn Williams, has proven that he has the mettle to oversee the role of football as the flag bearer of athletics. Williams arrived at Kennesaw State in 2011, rising from the role of Associate AD at the University of Connecticut. Since arriving, Williams has already revamped the Owl uniform logos, tweaked the color scheme, added women's lacrosse, acquired a \$1 million video board for the Convocation Center and installed a new fight song. Williams also signed athletic equipment apparel and equipment powerhouse Adidas as a partner for all KSU athletics and is literally putting a brand on the program.

Williams may not have the name recognition of Dooley, but he is a man with a carefully constructed message and a game plan moving forward. Canvassing the scope of his broad job he says, "Athletics is part of the student experience. It has to be about the students. That's the job of athletics." Vaughn, speaking specifically about football, continued, "Football in the south is part of the culture. It's a part of is what we do."

If Bohannon has any say - and obviously he does - Dooley will be around for a while. Bohannon added, "Vaughn Williams (KSU's athletic director) and I just a couple days ago asked his opinion on a couple of different matters."

Moving forward, Bohannon is obviously the keystone of the football program, and no one in the state of Georgia can claim his qualifications. Bohannon played at Griffin High School in the 80's for his father, Lloyd, the winningest coach in that program's history. After becoming a starting wide receiver at Georgia, he worked as a grad assistant at West Georgia. Since, he's coached in state at Georgia Southern, at the Naval Academy and most recently served as the quarterbacks/B-backs coach at Tech since 2008. His recruiting responsibilities at Tech included Cobb County. Bohannon knows football in this state like no one else.

Bohannon also knows that he wears many hats as the lead Owl. He'll be the face, salesman, fundraiser, recruiter and eventually the "Head Ball Coach." He hits the recruiting trail hard around April 15 as he continues to build his staff. The first football recruits will begin classes next February.

The recruiting pitch is straightforward and reflects the athlete as part of a bigger entity. "The state of Georgia is key," said Bohannon. "You have a chance to stay close to home, and you get first chance to play. They're going to play. There is a vibe on this campus unlike any I've been around in a long time. That's amongst the students, administration and faculty, not just about football but about everything going on at this university."

With obvious ties to Tech's Johnson and

the Yellow Jackets' offense, the Owls will incorporate some elements of the triple-option, but Bohannon added, "We'll also have a package in the shotgun, somewhat like the San Francisco 49ers and Washington Redskins. I definitely want a dual-threat quarterback."

Bohannon also stressed that they will custom fit packages and play calls to reflect the strengths of the players on the KSU roster.

More than bother worrying too much about the finer points of strategy before even the first player arrives on campus, Bohannon stresses true football fundamentals, "Three things have got to happen. We've got to run the football, we've got to play great defense and be sound on special teams."

Kennesaw State University has waited 30 years for football and Bohannon has waited 17 years to become a head coach. Optimism is justifiably high in Kennesaw. Williams spelled out the common goal for football and beyond at Kennesaw State: "Our goal is to be the best mid-major program in the southeast. In student academic welfare, service to the community, and of course, excellence in competition."

Photos courtesy of Kennesaw State Athletics. Conway can be reached at [sconway@scoreatl.com](mailto:sconway@scoreatl.com).



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BY FLETCHER PROCTOR

# WHOS HOT

THUMBS UP TO BIG EVENTS



## Kevin Ware

Watching former Rockdale County basketball star Kevin Ware writhe in pain during Louisville's Elite Eight win over Duke was stomach-turning; however, the sophomore was quick to post positive messages and photos on his twitter account and he could be in the Georgia Dome Saturday, supporting his teammates at the Final Four.

## The Masters

When the azaleas start to bloom in Georgia, it marks the arrival of two major events: the Masters and allergy season. If you are lucky enough to have a Masters badge, enjoy the magical week in Augusta. If you are unlucky enough to have allergies, grab a box of tissues and watch the Masters on television.

## Opening Day

All spring long we heard that the Braves were going to rely on the long ball in order to score runs. Opening Day proved that theory correct as the Braves mashed three dingers to take out the Phillies 7-5. Newcomer Justin Upton crushed a homer in his Braves' debut and could set a new personal best for taters.

## Injuries

The Hawks lost Lou Williams (knee) to an injury earlier this year and will now be without Zaza Pachulia (Achilles) for the remainder of the year. To make matters worse, recent sensation Devin Harris (foot), Al Horford (illness) and John Jenkins (concussion) have missed some time. The team needs to get healthy quick before postseason play begins.

## Atlanta Traffic

Anyone that was out and about Monday when the Hawks hosted Cleveland and the Braves opened the year against Philadelphia was likely stuck in major traffic. Why in the world did MARTA not plan a stop near Turner Field when the stadium was built for the Olympics? Poor planning by MARTA means more traffic during the hot summer.

## New Uniforms

The University of Georgia and Nike unveiled a new secondary logo and new football and basketball uniforms that will be used for 2013. While I'm sure the fabric is easier to move in, why would you mess with one of the best looking uniforms in all of college football?



# WHOS NOT

THUMBS DOWN TO CHANGE

## SCORE LIST

BY BRIAN JONES

**1** **FINAL FOUR:** The college basketball world will migrate to Atlanta to see which team will be called national champion. Can Louisville win it all for the injured Kevin Ware or will Wichita State, Michigan or Syracuse have some other plans in mind? It should make for an exciting weekend for basketball at the Georgia Dome.

**2** **G-DAY:** The Georgia Bulldogs will have their annual spring game between the hedges Saturday, which should bring out much of the Bulldog Nation. One thing I will be watching is the play of Brice Ramsey and J.J. Green. They did big things at Camden County and now it's time for them to do it with the Dawgs.

**3** **BRAVE WEEKEND:** The Braves got their season off on the right foot with a win against the Phillies on Opening Day. Now the Cubs visit on opening weekend at Turner Field. Dan Uggla, Justin Upton and Freddie Freeman all hit homers Monday. Can they do even more damage for the fans coming this weekend?

**4** **WELCOME TO KSU:** Kennesaw State has found its first football head coach as Brian Bohannon will be leading the Owls when they kickoff in 2015. Bohannon was previously the quarterbacks/B-backs coach at Georgia Tech and has spent his 17 years of coaching with current Tech head coach Paul Johnson.

**5** **NEW THREADS:** The Bulldogs will have a slightly new look when they hit the football field this fall. This past Tuesday, the Bulldogs introduced updated home and away uniforms made by Nike as well as a new secondary logo. Personally, I like the new changes and I can't wait for the looks to debut in the fall.

## CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

BY RICKY DIMON

**4** Games played by the Braves last season before they earned their first victory. It took them one game this season

**12** Games into last season before Dan Uggla hit his first home run. It took him one at-bat Monday

**13** Home runs of at least 450 feet since the start of the 2009 season for Justin Upton, most in the MLB in that span

**49** National League-leading number of home runs hit by the Braves in spring training. They hit three more on Opening Day

**3** Games out of the Braves' first 21 this season (Washington, April 12-14) against teams that had a winning record in 2012

**1** Current Eastern Conference playoff team against which the Hawks have a winning record this season (Milwaukee)

**2** Games separating seeds four through six in the NBA's Eastern Conference. The Hawks are fifth as of Wednesday

**6** Consecutive playoff berths, including this season, by the Hawks. It is the longest active streak in the Eastern Conference

**18** Points for Al Horford in the last National Championship game played in Atlanta (2007). His brother Jon plays for Michigan

**32** Consecutive games scoring in double-figures for Horford as of Wednesday, one game short of his career-high streak

## TRIVIA QUESTION

**How many times has Atlanta hosted the men's Final Four?**

**Answer on Page 14**

## SANITY AT LAST

*"I've had the opportunity of seeing both sides of the human spirit. My journey has been crazy."*

- New Falcon Brian Banks on his tumultuous past that includes a false, then overturned conviction.

## OUR TWO CENTS

Score Atlanta prides itself on delivering high school sports the way you want it because no one covers Georgia high school sports quite like we do. In addition to ScoreAtl.com and GaPrepNews.com, Score is helping provide high school sports content for the Atlanta Journal Constitution this spring. Each Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, Score accepts soccer, lacrosse and baseball scores that appear in the following morning's paper as well as on the AJC.com prep zone blog site. Our talented writers also cover the major spring sports with weekly blogs that can be found on AJC.com's sports page.

We are even providing coverage for sports that have never received coverage before. Looking for gymnastics information? Fletcher Proctor has you covered. Interested in tennis, lacrosse or track and field? He's all over those sports too. Stephen Black has his fingers on the pulse of baseball and he can tell you exactly what is happening across the state in soccer and golf.

Score also creates rankings for several sports which can consistently be found at the beginning of each week. Looking for lacrosse rankings? Check AJC.com Sunday evening. Soccer on Mondays and baseball Tuesdays.

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## Academy mandate cuts deep in metro Atlanta

By Stephen Black

This season has brought major changes to the world of Georgia high school soccer. The U.S. Development Soccer Academy is now requiring certain high school students to leave their high school teams to join the academy teams, two of which are based in metro Atlanta. Based on invite-only, the academy's goal is to "improve the everyday environment for the elite youth player," according to the U.S. Soccer Federation website.

### EXTREME WAYS ...

Founded in 2007, the academy is a partnership between U.S. Soccer and the top clubs around the nation to eventually produce stronger candidates for the U.S. National Team. However, it wasn't until this school year that the academy began requiring players to leave high school teams altogether to join academy clubs full time. This, predictably, has made waves in the high school soccer community.

Some of the top teams in Georgia were stripped of key players prior to the 2013 season,

including defending Class AAAAAA champion Collins Hill and traditional powers Lassiter and Walton. Collins Hill, which has won state titles in three of the past four years, lost six returning players to the Development Academy.

"You can't fault a player for trying to play at the highest level even if it affects them (negatively)," said Collins Hill coach Michael Burrell. "I just wish there was some way we could work it out where they could do both. Maybe that's something we could evolve into. Pro and con, the kids love playing for their high school and their friends."

Centennial coach Phillip Thomas, whose team is currently ranked No. 2 in Class AAAAAA, did not lose any players this year. But Thomas still does not like how the academy is treating high school players.

"My issue about the academy is that in the United States right now, the next level of soccer for a teenager is college soccer," said Thomas. "And a key component to being able to play college soccer is academic requirements. And when you eliminate high school

soccer from a kid's experience in playing soccer, you eliminate that accountability in the academic world and getting used to a five-day work schedule."

High school players must be passing four of five classes to be eligible while academy players have no such requirements.

### AT WHAT COST? ...

The drastic change in how the academy goes about managing its players has been attributed mostly to the United States Soccer Federation youth soccer technical director, Claudio Reyna, a former U.S. National team player and member of the U.S. Soccer Hall of Fame. While the academy teams in the past would select players for 16-and-under teams and 18-and-under teams, they never required 10-month participation and mandatory training sessions that prevented high school participation. But prior to the 2012-13 school year, the USSF handed down its latest requirements for academy participation.

"The biggest thing I have for this being the first year the USSF put this into place and they just came out, made a rule, made a statement and that's it," said Lassiter coach Sam Dietrich. "There wasn't really a lot of discussion about it. There's a lot of seniors out there from a lot of schools who had to make a tough decision on whether or not

they'd play high school this year. In my opinion, for them to play freshman, sophomore, junior year, and then their senior year someone tells them they can't or they have to make a choice, it's put a lot of boys in some hard circumstances where they've had to choose one over the other."

Walton coach Bruce Wade, who lost two returning players to the academy, had another point on the issue. Wade believes the academy takes players who don't necessarily have the talent or skill to fit on a national team and therefore are wasting their high school years playing for the academy.

"(The academy) forced the kids to make a decision I don't really care for," said Wade. "And some of them were starting to quit the developmental league because they weren't getting a lot of playing time. Kids want to play. Not everybody's going to be a pro some day. So if you miss out playing your high school years and you don't play pro or major college, basically you sat around and wasted your time."

The Development Academy has the noble goal of improving the nation's soccer prowess, but, according to some coaches, may be going about it at the expense of high school and college soccer.

*Photos courtesy of Mauricio dos Santos and Debbie Leonardo. Black can be reached at [sblack@scoreatl.com](mailto:sblack@scoreatl.com).*

# FOOTBALL TRANSFER



## Cobb County's top wideout leaves Wheeler

By Craig Sager II

Wheeler was perhaps the biggest surprise of the 2012 football season as the Wildcats battled for a spot in the state playoffs for the first time since 2006. Leading the Wildcats was a talented group of juniors that including quarterback Elijah Staley and his all-Cobb County wide receiver Emanuel Beal. Staley is a towering 6-foot-6, two-sport star with FBS offers from all over the country. Staley finished the season completing 154 of 287 passes for 1,801 yards with 12 touchdowns and four interceptions.

### ELECTRIC CONNECTION ...

The Staley-to-Beal connection manifested itself early in the season and the 6-foot-1, 200-pound receiver finished the year with 855 yards and seven touchdowns. No Cobb County receiver returning to the field in 2013 accounted for more yards than Beal did last season.

This dangerous duo made the playoff berth possible and returned Wheeler to relevancy after the program stumbled to a 1-29 record over the 2008-10 seasons.

The Wildcats are still in contention of

earning the 5-A region title in 2013 but will have to manage the departure of Beal, who will instead suit up for an already-potent Hillgrove offense his senior season. Hawks coach Phillip Ironside has a slew of playmakers returning at receiver this season, but the addition of Beal could help push this offense to heights never before seen in Cobb County.

"This is as deep as we've been at wideout," said Ironside.

Operating the offense at quarterback will be Ironside's son, Elijah, who looks to be on the verge of a breakout season. Ironside started as a sophomore, but was injured before the 2012 season, and senior Troy Thompson got the starting job. Ironside came on in relief in several games and completed 32 of 61 passes for 519 yards and eight touchdowns in limited action. The 6-foot-1 quarterback is a dual threat and can take off and scramble at any point. Having a football coach for a father has benefited the passer in his progression and decision-making and he has shown the ability to protect the football. Turnovers, especially early in games, were a major hitch in the

Hawks' offense last season but the younger Ironside has the ability to fix that.

"Our main goal this year is to turn the ball over less and Elijah did a great job last year by not throwing any interceptions," said Ironside.

### SPREADING IT OUT ...

Ironside has always stressed his intent to spread the football offensively, and this will allow him to maximize the depth at receiver. Effectively sharing the football was evident last year when the Hawks came into the season without star running back Kenyan Drake. The offense split the touches and matched the productivity with an armory of playmakers.

Omar Black, Errol Breaux, Justin Denton and Zach Katz are all starting caliber receivers and the corps will have four players in rotation this year that found the endzone in 2012. Evan Ingram played a lot of tight end while having the versatility to flex out wide. He ended the year as the team's leading receiver and will suit up for Ole Miss next season. Without Ingram, the receivers will become a bigger part of the offense and Hillgrove has the personnel for it.

"It [the depth] helps us because we will play four wide with Zach Katz at the slot," said Ironside.

Katz was just one of the many Hillgrove players injured last season, and a healthy team in 2013 will leave Ironside with a multitude of options.

Running back Richardre Bagley broke his ankle last season, but showed glimpses of what Ironside expects to be his major role this season.

"I think he [Bagley] is going to be the guy to get us moving next season," said Ironside.

Spring practice is about a month away so there is still time before coach Ironside will get to see the full display and his newest exterior weapon take the field.

"He [Beal] is fitting in well," said Ironside. "Our kids always have a really good work ethic, so we will make sure he has our work ethic too."

Beal is ranked in the top 25 best players in Georgia heading into the season and has offers from Georgia Tech, Arkansas, Missouri and Vanderbilt.

Photo courtesy of Walter Pinion. Sager can be reached at [csager@scoreatl.com](mailto:csager@scoreatl.com).



# SOCCER RANKINGS

SCORE  
atlanta

## BOYS

## GIRLS

### CLASS AAAAAA

- |                     |                  |
|---------------------|------------------|
| 1. Lassiter         | 6. Brookwood     |
| 2. Centennial       | 7. Roswell       |
| 3. Central Gwinnett | 8. Harrison      |
| 4. East Coweta      | 9. South Forsyth |
| 5. Lambert          | 10. Meadowcreek  |

### CLASS AAA

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. St. Pius X      | 6. West Hall    |
| 2. Blessed Trinity | 7. Cartersville |
| 3. Dawson County   | 8. Cross Keys   |
| 4. North Murray    | 9. North Hall   |
| 5. Woodward Acad.  | 10. Grady       |

### CLASS AAAAA

- |                     |                   |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. McIntosh         | 6. Allatoona      |
| 2. Glynn Academy    | 7. Clarke Central |
| 3. Starr's Mill     | 8. Lithia Springs |
| 4. Houston County   | 9. Lakeside-Evans |
| 5. Heritage-Conyers | 10. Greenbrier    |

### CLASS AA

- |                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. GAC              | 6. Thomasville     |
| 2. Calhoun          | 7. Atkinson County |
| 3. Westminster      | 8. Benedictine     |
| 4. Westside-Augusta | 9. Murray County   |
| 5. Coosa            | 10. Lovett         |

### CLASS AAAA

- |                        |                  |
|------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Dalton              | 6. Alexander     |
| 2. Chestatee           | 7. Grady         |
| 3. Carrollton          | 8. Spalding      |
| 4. NW Whitfield        | 9. Mary Persons  |
| 5. Johnson-Gainesville | 10. SE Whitfield |

### CLASS A

- |                     |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Atlanta Intl.    | 6. Galloway           |
| 2. Paideia          | 7. Fellowship Chr.    |
| 3. Hebron Christian | 8. Holy Innocents'    |
| 4. Pacelli          | 9. Savannah Chr.      |
| 5. Pace Academy     | 10. Savannah Ctry Day |

### CLASS AAAAAA

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Mill Creek    | 6. Collins Hill |
| 2. Parkview      | 7. Brookwood    |
| 3. South Forsyth | 8. Grayson      |
| 4. Lassiter      | 9. Tift County  |
| 5. Harrison      | 10. Hillgrove   |

### CLASS AAA

- |                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Blessed Trinity | 6. Jackson County |
| 2. Buford          | 7. White County   |
| 3. St. Pius X      | 8. Chapel Hill    |
| 4. Dawson County   | 9. North Oconee   |
| 5. Woodward Acad.  | 10. Cartersville  |

### CLASS AAAAA

- |                     |                   |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Northview        | 6. McIntosh       |
| 2. Heritage-Conyers | 7. Glynn Academy  |
| 3. Whitewater       | 8. Houston County |
| 4. Starr's Mill     | 9. North Paulding |
| 5. Lakeside-DeKalb  | 10. Gainesville   |

### CLASS AA

- |                        |                  |
|------------------------|------------------|
| 1. GAC                 | 6. Vidalia       |
| 2. Calhoun             | 7. Bremen        |
| 3. Westminster         | 8. Temple        |
| 4. Oglethorpe Co.      | 9. Putnam County |
| 5. St. Vincent's Acad. | 10. Dublin       |

### CLASS AAAA

- |                     |              |
|---------------------|--------------|
| 1. Marist           | 6. Chestatee |
| 2. Heritage-Catoosa | 7. Alexander |
| 3. Locust Grove     | 8. Spalding  |
| 4. Cairo            | 9. Veterans  |
| 5. Columbus         | 10. Grady    |

### CLASS A

- |                      |                     |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. First Presb. Day  | 6. Holy Innocents'  |
| 2. Hebron Christian  | 7. Providence Chr.  |
| 3. Mount Paran       | 8. Calvary Day      |
| 4. Savannah Ctry Day | 9. Paideia          |
| 5. Strong Rock Chr.  | 10. Fellowship Chr. |

# RANKINGS SUMMARY

**SCORE**  
ATLANTA

## New No. 1's in baseball, soccer

**By Score Atlanta**

Each week, we produce rankings for baseball, lacrosse and soccer. These estimates at where high schools teams in the GHSA rank amongst their counterparts are posted on ScoreATL.com as well as AJC.com.

Here is a breakdown of this week's rankings.

### BASEBALL ...

Class AA has a new No. 1 as Westminster swept a three-game series from previously-top ranked Lovett. Bremen and Pepperell, riding long winning streaks of 14 and eight games respectively, rocketed up this week while Cook re-entered the list at No. 10 after wins over Valdosta and Fitzgerald.

The state's largest classification saw some of its top teams lose this past week, including Mill Creek, which fell to No. 10, and Parkview, which dropped to No. 6.

### BOYS SOCCER ...

The lone change at the top this week was Atlanta International taking over for Paideia at No. 1 in Class A as the Eagles upset the Pythons 2-1 last Tuesday. Paideia, however, rebounded to whip Galloway 6-0 Thursday while AIS beat Pace 3-2 Thursday. Fellowship Christian leapt into the rankings at No. 7 after beating former No. 4 Holy Innocents'.

Meadowcreek broke through in Class

AAAAAA with wins over Mill Creek and Clarke Central. The Mustangs are now 9-2 and ranked No. 10. Lambert lost again, this time to Centennial, but rebounded to beat Walton and remain in the top five.

### GIRLS SOCCER ...

Mill Creek takes over the top spot in class AAAAAA after posting two victories last week. Parkview is the new No. 2 team after the Panthers handed St. Vincent's Academy its first loss of the year. South Forsyth moves up to No. 3 after defeating Johns Creek, which dropped the Gladiators from the poll.

Buford moves up to No. 2 in Class AAA based on a scoreless streak that dates back to March 12.

Finally, Fellowship Christian returns to the Class A poll after a victory over previous No. 2 Holy Innocents'. Fellowship Christian takes the spot of Eagle's Landing Christian Academy.

### LACROSSE ...

The Milton boys suffered their first loss of the year over the weekend, falling to Florida power St. Thomas Aquinas, but the Eagles hold on to the top spot while Centennial stays at No. 2 despite a loss to the Bolles School out of Jacksonville after a pair of impressive wins over Georgia schools. Chattahoochee is new to the rankings at No. 9.

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S A - B R K

## LACROSSE RANKINGS

### BOYS

#### Class AAAAAA

1. Milton
2. Centennial
3. Mill Creek
4. North Gwinnett
5. Lambert
6. Lassiter
7. Johns Creek
8. Roswell
9. Chattahoochee
10. Walton

#### Class A-AAAAA

1. Northview
2. Decatur
3. Allatoona
4. Blessed Trinity
5. Westminster
6. McIntosh
7. Lovett
8. Whitefield Academy
9. Holy Innocents'
10. Marist

### GIRLS

#### Class AAAAAA

1. Milton
2. Centennial
3. Lassiter
4. Walton
5. Mill Creek
6. Chattahoochee
7. West Forsyth
8. Kennesaw Mountain
9. Grayson
10. Alpharetta

#### Class A-AAAAA

1. Cambridge
2. Westminster
3. Kell
4. McIntosh
5. Northview
6. Woodward Academy
7. St. Pius X
8. Starr's Mill
9. Blessed Trinity
10. Columbus

## BASEBALL RANKINGS

#### Class AAAAAA

1. Lambert
2. Walton
3. Marietta
4. East Coweta
5. Johns Creek
6. Parkview
7. Milton
8. McEachern
9. South Gwinnett
10. Mill Creek

#### Class AAAAA

1. Loganville
2. Greenbrier
3. Gainesville
4. Starr's Mill
5. Riverwood
6. Whitewater
7. Ola
8. McIntosh
9. Winder-Barrow
10. Dunwoody

#### Class AAAA

1. Crisp County
2. Columbus
3. Marist
4. Eastside
5. Alexander
6. Carrollton
7. Lanier
8. Wayne County
9. Redan
10. Spalding

#### Class AAA

1. Blessed Trinity
2. Buford
3. North Hall
4. Pierce County
5. Cartersville
6. Tattall County
7. Appling County
8. Oconee County
9. Woodward Acad.
10. St. Pius X

#### Class AA

1. Westminster
2. Jefferson
3. Lovett
4. Wesleyan
5. Berrien
6. Bremen
7. Pepperell
8. Calhoun
9. Benedictine
10. Cook

#### Class A - Private

1. ELCA
2. George Walton Acad.
3. First Presbyterian
4. Darlington
5. Mount Paran

#### Class A - Public

1. Charlton County
2. ECI
3. Gordon Lee
4. Baconton Charter
5. Johnson County

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# BULLDOG BEAT



## Lady Dogs eliminated in quarterfinals

By Chris Nieman

Playing in its first Elite Eight game since 2004, the fourth-seeded UGA women's basketball team lost in overtime to the second-seeded California Golden Bears 65-62 in Spokane, Wash., on Monday night. Georgia had three players eclipse double-digit points and even led by double digits at one point in the second half, but the team could not hold off a fierce rally by the Golden Bears.

When regulation ended and overtime began, California looked like a different team, scoring nine straight points to put the game out of reach. Georgia made the final score look more respectable with a couple of free throws in the final seconds.

The loss ended the Lady Dogs' run in March Madness just days after the team upset the top-seeded Stanford Cardinal.

### G-DAY FUN ...

The football team has been hunkering down for spring practice over the past month to try and improve for the upcoming season. Mark Richt and his staff will take part in the annual G-Day scrimmage this Saturday. Fans will pack Sanford Stadium for an early preview of this year's team.

Keep an eye out for middle linebacker Amarlo Herrera as he will be replacing Alec Ogletree. Herrera has game-time experience, and it should be interesting to see how defen-

sive coordinator Todd Grantham utilizes him in his game plan.

The University of Georgia Athletic Association and Nike are now in a partnership to provide state-of-the-art jerseys for the football team, men's and women's basketball teams and track and field teams.

The updated uniforms offer the university a "consistent, distinctive" look for all the athletic teams with an updated letter and number font. Even though changes and improvisations were made, Nike still implemented the rich tradition of the Georgia "G" as the university's primary logo. The changes appear to be a hit with the team.

"I feel great in them," said Aaron Murray. "When you put them on you feel like you're not wearing much. It's a lot more flexible and breathable. I really enjoy wearing them."

### CHANGE NEEDED ...

The Diamond Dawgs have a chance to stop the season-long bleeding with a winning streak this weekend. Ever since Georgia won an early March series against Liberty, the team has not been able to put together a winning streak. Georgia has just four wins since March 9. After beating KSU Tuesday, the team welcomes in Missouri this weekend.

Nieman can be reached at [cnienan@scoreatl.com](mailto:cnienan@scoreatl.com).

# TECH BUZZ



## Wren stays hot for baseball team

By Ryan Caiafa

While the wins haven't come at the pace they did at the start of the baseball season, the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets have continued to get strong play from several players at the plate and on the mound. Kyle Wren has maintained a 17-game hitting streak through April 2, which leads the ACC. He is also coming off a week in which he went 10-for-15 at the plate, a .667 average. He has maintained a batting average over .400 the entire season and is among the top five in average in the conference.

While Buck Farmer and his perfect record have been the story from the pitching side of things, there was another Jacket pitcher, Dusty Isaacs, who stole the spotlight away from Farmer this week. In the first game of Saturday's doubleheader against Wake Forest, Isaacs struck out eight and allowed just one hit over seven shutout innings in the Jackets' 8-1 victory over the Demon Deacons. His performance was enough to be named ACC Pitcher of the Week as he earned his fourth victory of the season. Another highlight of the weekend was Daniel Palka, who homered in four consecutive games last week, bringing his home run total to eight for the season.

### JUST SHORT ...

Even with the strong individual performances, the Jackets stumbled a bit in the final game after a late-inning rally came up short in an 8-6 loss. Two three-run home runs from Palka and A.J. Murray turned a blowout into a close game, but the Jackets couldn't quite complete the comeback. The Jackets then traveled to Macon to take on Mercer. The Bears have managed an impressive start in the Atlantic Sun Conference. Tech dug itself into a hole early and couldn't recover after allowing the Bears' bats to get hot. Tech fell 10-1.

### RUDNIK RECOGNIZED ...

Jackets' catcher and third baseman Alysha Rudnik earned ACC Player of the Week honors for the second time this season after hitting a scorching .750 from the plate. The junior went 9-for-12 with three doubles and a home run over four games. She contributed much of that in a crucial series win on the road at N.C. State, helping to improve the team's record in conference play to 4-2 despite hovering around .500 overall.

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# PANTHER PROWL



## Move to Sun Belt offers challenges

By Jay Underwood

Football spring practice has begun under the new leadership of Trent Miles. Georgia State will be preparing for its first season in the Sun Belt Conference in 2013 after spending the past three seasons in FCS. Players are looking to gain understanding of the new systems on offense and defense. With every coach on the staff being replaced, look for there to be positions battles taking place all across the field during spring drills and continuing all the way up until the season opener.

### OPEN COMPETITION ...

New offensive coordinator Jeff Jagodzinski will have to identify who he wants to be under center to lead the offense in 2013. All of the quarterbacks return from last season, but Jagodzinski could look for a freshman to step up and take the reins. New running backs coach Thomas Brown has to replace the production lost with Donald Brown's graduation.

The best and most proven player on the roster is Albert Wilson, so the coaches will be looking for creative ways to get the ball into his hands to let him make plays in the open field. This spring, Miles will be attempting to figure out how to get his best players on the field and how to position his team best for success.

### TALENTED TRANSFER ...

The men's basketball team received a boost recently with the transfer of Ryan Harrow from Kentucky. Harrow will be able to man the point and facilitate the offense, creating more efficient opportunities for R.J. Hunter, who is coming off an outstanding freshman season. This addition will also create a solid rotation to go with Devonta White, who was second on the team in scoring last season while leading the team with 3.9 assists per game.

Next season will be the first for the Panthers in the Sun Belt Conference and coaches will need to see development in their young forwards for the team to find success at the next level. With no true center on the roster for next season, Ron Hunter will need to use the athleticism and speed of his team to run his trapping zone and get out in transition to score easy buckets. Rebounding will have to be done by committee next year and will have to see more production from Markus Crider and T.J. Shipps. If the Panthers are able to play within their system, they should compete for the Sun Belt title next season.

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# OWL OUTLOOK



## Bohannon hired as program's first coach

By Brian Jones

Tuesday, March 25 was a day that Kennesaw State will long remember as a day that started a new era. The school introduced Brian Bohannon as its first head football coach for a program that will kick off in 2015.

"Let me just first say how humbled and honored I am to be here today," Bohannon said in front of a standing-room only crowd inside the locker room at Fifth Third Bank Stadium. "This is something you look forward to in our profession and I'm honored to be a part of an institution that is as special as this one is. I'm truly excited and it's surreal for me to hear 'first head football coach' at Kennesaw State."

Bohannon is a coach who has plenty of experience in Georgia, which is the one thing athletic director Vaughn Williams said he was looking for. Bohannon spent the last five years as the quarterbacks/B-backs coach at Georgia Tech with prior stops at Navy, Georgia Southern and Gardner-Webb. He has also coached with current Tech head coach Paul Johnson at each of those schools.

### HIGH PRAISE ...

"I commend Athletic Director Vaughn Williams for a superb choice among some top candidates for the head football coach at Kennesaw State University," Johnson said shortly after

Bohannon was hired. "Brian Bohannon has an excellent background in the state of Georgia both as a player and coach at the University of Georgia, Georgia Southern and Georgia Tech."

Because of the background Bohannon has with the option offense, it is likely the Owls will employ the same offense Tech has run the last five years. However, Bohannon has said that there will be some pistol and shotgun mixed in as well.

Bohannon said his next course of action will be to hire a coaching staff and focus on recruiting. The 2014 class will be the program's first and will need to be ready to play in 2015.

### GET YOUR TICKETS ...

Bohannon is getting ready for the inaugural season and KSU is making sure the fans are also. This past Monday, the school started accepting Letters of Intent for fans that want to purchase season tickets.

The LOI program is a formal request that requires a deposit to enter into the Priority Seating Program that uses points to distribute priority when selecting seat locations among donors. The Owls will play at the Fifth Third Bank stadium, which holds 8,300 people.

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# HAWKS HAVEN



## Hawks jostling for playoff position

By Ricky Dimon

With seven games remaining as of Wednesday afternoon, the Atlanta Hawks are in a furious fight for seeding in the Eastern Conference playoffs. Spots four through six are currently separated by two games in the standings. Atlanta (42-33) stands in fifth place, one game ahead of Chicago and one back of Brooklyn for home-court advantage in the first round. If the Hawks hold their ground or pass Brooklyn, they will be part of the 4-5 opener with the winner likely to meet top-seeded Miami. Should Atlanta drop below the Bulls, it would face either New York or Indiana in round one.

Larry Drew's squad has no more remaining dates against either Brooklyn or Chicago. It wrapped up the season 2-2 against the Nets and 1-2 against the Bulls. Among its final seven are two meetings with the Knicks (results of Wednesday's showdown were not available at press time) and two with the 76ers. The team will also battle San Antonio, Milwaukee and Toronto.

Heading into this final stretch, Atlanta picked up some important momentum by winning two in a row for the first time since a three-game surge from March 13 to March 17. The Hawks beat Orlando last Saturday and took care of Cleveland on Monday.

### INJURY BUG ...

Many NBA teams are feeling the brunt of 70-something games during their stretch runs of the regular seasons and the Hawks are no exception. The most serious injury, of course, is to Zaza Pachulia. The veteran center had been dealing with an Achilles problem since mid-January and he announced last weekend that he would undergo season-ending surgery. Pachulia is set to become an unrestricted free agent, so he may have played his last game with the Hawks.

"After thoroughly reviewing the possible options with Zaza, we all felt this was the best decision to ensure Zaza's complete recovery so that he can be at 100 percent going forward," general manager Danny Ferry told the Atlanta Journal Constitution. "Zaza is a professional with a strong work ethic. The Hawks will continue to be completely supportive as he tackles the return to play process."

Among the other walking wounded are John Jenkins and Devin Harris. Jenkins missed games on Saturday and Monday due to a mild concussion, while Harris was sidelined by a sore left foot for three contests before returning with a bang (17 points vs. Orlando and 25 points vs. Cleveland). Al Horford is injury free, but he missed two games last week with a stomach virus.

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# FALCONS BEAT



## Falcons set to honor retired McClure

By Craig Sager II

Todd McClure announced his retirement March 25, ending a 13-year career for the team's starting center in 2012. McClure was a seventh-round pick in the 1999 draft and his career was temporarily halted before it got started as McClure suffered a torn ACL during training camp his rookie year, sidelining him for the season. The following year, McClure earned the starting center spot and would keep it for the next 12 seasons, missing only one game. He holds the franchise record with 148 consecutive starts.

### BIG HONOR ...

Following McClure's announcement, owner Arthur Blank indicated that there will be an invitation to join the team's Ring of Honor in McClure's future.

"You deserve to be in that Ring of Honor and we will get you there as soon as we can," said Blank.

Only eight former Falcons players have earned banners in the Ring of Honor. The greats include William Andrews, Jessie Tuggle, Mike Kenn, Claude Humphrey, Steve Bartkowski, Jeff Van Note, Deion Sanders and Tommy Nobis.

The defense made headlines the next day by signing 31-year-old defensive end Osi Umenyiora. The former Giant will be used to

help improve a pass rush that ranked No. 28 in the league last season. Umenyiora helped the Giants win the 2011 Super Bowl and earned All-Pro honors in 2010.

### FREE AT LAST ...

Wednesday, the Falcons added much-needed depth to the linebacker position by signing Brian Banks. The 27-year old was exonerated last year after being falsely accused in a California rape case and serving more than five years. Banks had tryouts for Seattle, San Diego and Kansas City last year but failed to make a roster. Banks' frame convinced general manager Thomas Dimitroff that he could be able to contribute to this team.

"He has worked extremely hard for this chance over the last year and he has shown us that he is prepared for this opportunity," said Dimitroff.

The NFL Draft begins April 25 and history indicates the Falcons could maximize their large quantity of picks to make a trade. The current roster would not allow them to draft and sign 11 players, making a trade likely if the team feels an end is available.

Cornerback is also a position of need as Brent Grimes was not re-signed.

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# CHOP SHOP



## Atlanta's offense shines on Opening Day

By Fletcher Proctor

With spring training now in the rearview mirror, the Braves opened the 2013 season with a flurry of home runs to beat the Philadelphia Phillies 7-5. Freddie Freeman and Dan Uggla each crushed home runs in their first at-bats of the season and new left fielder Justin Upton added a home run to help Atlanta chase Phillies starter Cole Hamels from the game.

"It's a great start, I'll tell you that," said Upton to reporters following the game. "Being able to contribute to the first win of the season my first game here, it's a great feeling. Hopefully we can just keep going out and playing good baseball."

Upton finished 1-for-4 with the solo home run. He struck out twice in his Braves' debut while brother B.J. Upton went 0-for-4 with one strikeout. Freeman collected three hits and drove home three runs. Uggla was 1-for-3 with two runs scored while Gerald Laird was 2-for-4 in his Braves' debut.

### BRAVES PITCHING ...

Opening Day starter Tim Hudson was staked to a 4-0 lead entering the fifth inning, but Hudson, making his sixth career Opening Day start, could not make it out of the frame as Luis Avilan came on after Hudson labored through 90 pitches in 4.1 innings of work.

Avilan earned the win and Craig Kimbrel pitched a perfect ninth to record his first save of the year. The bullpen is readjusting after news broke that reliever Jonny Venters would have to visit Dr. James Andrews over elbow discomfort. Jordan Walden will likely see his role increase if Venters' stay on the disabled list grows into something more serious.

### DEBUTING BRAVES ...

Several other players made their Braves' debuts in Monday's victory. Chris Johnson looks like a budding star at third base, making a tough play look easy on the game's first ball put into play. At the plate, Johnson was 2-for-3 with one run scored as he looked the part of a crafty veteran, scoring on a double-play. Ramiro Pena also entered the game as a first-time Brave. He grounded out as a pinch hitter in the eighth inning.

Evan Gattis will likely make his debut this week either at catcher or as a pinch hitter. The 26-year old won a spot on the roster with an incredible spring and showed off some serious power with a massive home run in Atlanta's 10-0 win over the Future Stars in a final exhibition. Gattis blasted six home runs in spring training.

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# GWINNETT GLADIATORS



## Gwinnett repeats as South Division champs

By Joe Deighton

For the second straight season, the Gwinnett Gladiators are champions of the ECHL's South Division. The Glads finished the regular season by winning seven of their last eight games, including a 4-1 win over Greenville to clinch the division on the season's final day.

Winning the division means that Gwinnett will have home-ice advantage in the first round of the Kelly Cup playoffs. The Gladiators will open the postseason at the Arena at Gwinnett Center against division-rival South Carolina Friday night. The first-round, like each round of the playoffs, will be a best-of-seven.

### PLAYER RECOGNITION ...

Forward Casey Pierra-Zabotel and defenseman Sacha Guimond were both named to the 2013 All-ECHL First Team after turning in remarkable regular seasons. Pierra-Zabotel finished fifth in the league in scoring with 75 points in 66 games. The forward had 22 goals and 53 assists during the 2012-13 season.

Guimond was also named to the ECHL All-Rookie team after posting 47 points in his first season with Gwinnett. He led all ECHL defenseman with nine power-play goals, 29 power-play points and 20 power-play assists.

Pierra-Zabotel played five games in the AHL with Charlotte but has been called back

to the Gladiators and will be in uniform when the playoffs begin.

### PLAYOFF PREVIEW ...

The quest for the Kelly Cup begins this weekend against the South Carolina Stingrays. The Gladiators finished third in the conference and the Stingrays finished sixth. Just over a week ago, the teams split two games in a home-and-home series, which could be a harbinger of how this series could go. Gwinnett won eight of the 14 games against South Carolina this season and each game was tightly contested. This should be a seven-game series.

If the Glads want to win this series, they will have to depend on rookie goaltender Louis Domingue, who allowed just two goals on 42 shots in the last two regular season games. Domingue won 23 games with a .904 save percentage this season. The 21-year old recorded three shutouts in the regular season and has shown that he is capable of stealing a game or two.

A big plus for the postseason is the return of Pierra-Zabotel. He will be counted on to make plays and put the puck in the back of the net if the Gladiators are to have a successful run in the playoffs.

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