



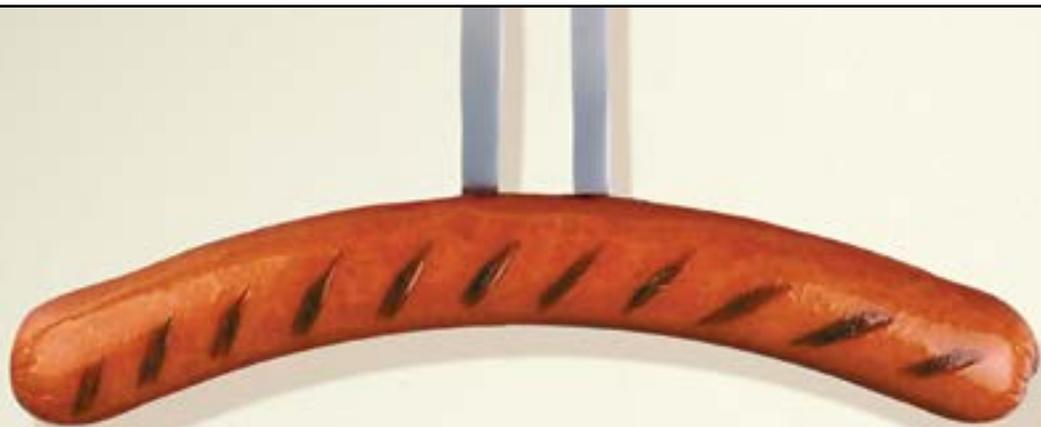
ATLANTA FALCONS



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ATLANTA FALCONS
**TRAINING
CAMP**

**FLOWERY BRANCH
JULY 25 - AUGUST 11, 2013**



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WELCOME BACK TO THE BRANCH!

PRESEASON SCHEDULE

AUG 8 8:00 PM EDT **BENGALS**
Georgia Dome

AUG 15 7:30 PM EDT AT **RAVENS**
M&T Bank Stadium

AUG 24 8:00 PM EDT AT **TITANS**
LP Field

AUG 29 7:30 PM EDT **JAGUARS**
Georgia Dome

TRAINING CAMP PRACTICE SCHEDULE

| | |
|---|---|
| July 25 3:30pm | August 4..... 3:30pm |
| July 26 3:30pm | August 5..... 3:00pm (Combined Practice with Cincinnati Bengals) |
| July 27 3:30pm | August 6..... 3:00pm (Combined Practice with Cincinnati Bengals) |
| July 28 3:30pm | August 10..... 3:30pm |
| July 29 3:30pm | August 11..... 3:30pm |
| July 30 3:30pm | |
| August 1 3:30pm | |
| August 2 6:45pm (Kia Friday Night Lights at Bobby Gruhn Field at City Park Stadium in Gainesville) | |

Bengals Preseason game presented by: UnitedHealthcare®

Schedule magnets at Jaguars preseason game courtesy of: **GEORGIA POWER**
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WHERE TO GO

HOW TO GET TO TRAINING CAMP

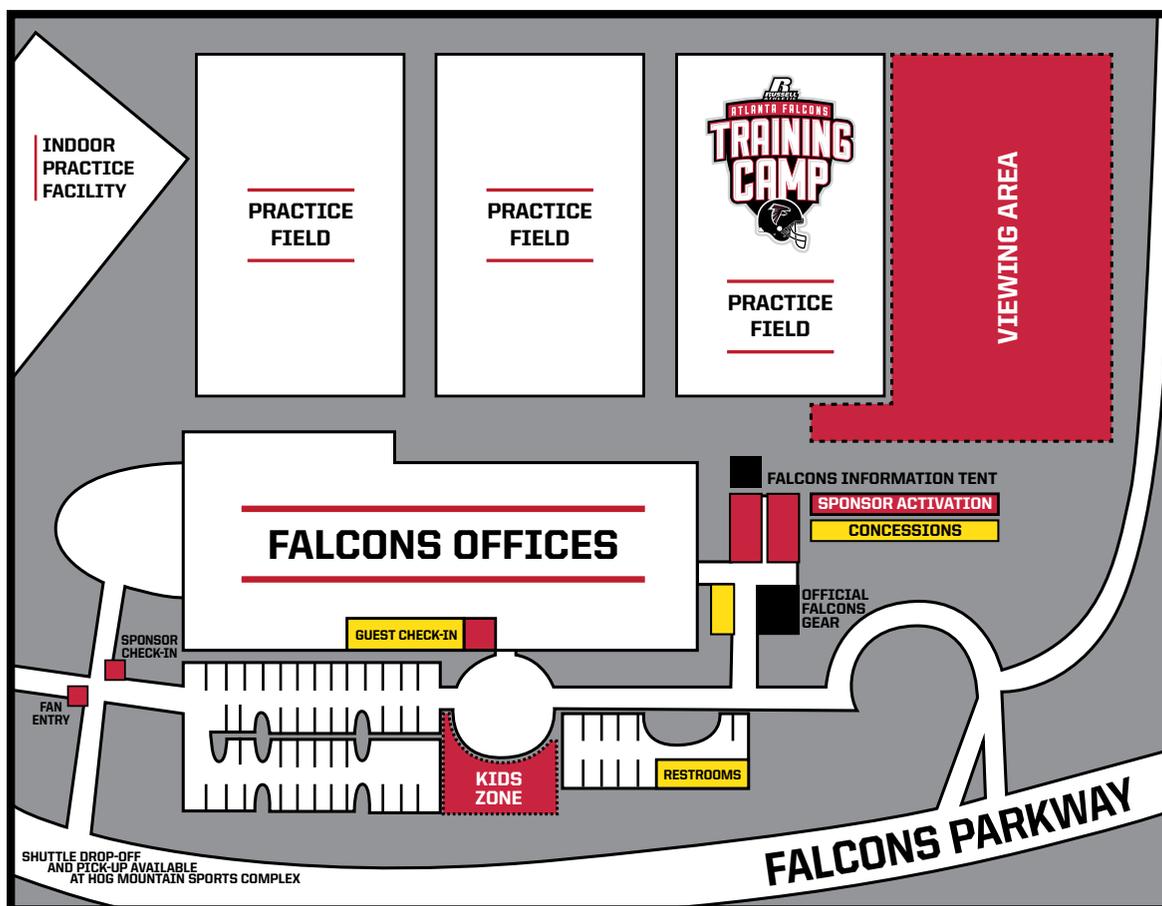
From the south: Take I-85 north. Exit to the left on I-985 toward Gainesville. Take exit 12 (Spout Springs Road). Turn left off the exit ramp onto Spout Springs Road. Go under I-985, travel 1/4 mile and turn right on Thurmond Tanner Road. Proceed on Thurmond Tanner Road for about one mile to the stoplight, then turn right on Atlanta Highway (Ga. 13). Go about a mile on Atlanta Highway (which becomes Falcon Parkway) past the Wrigley plant on the left and back over I-985. The Falcons complex will be on the left (4400 Falcon Parkway).

From the north: Take I-985 south to exit 12 (Spout Springs Road). Turn right off the exit ramp onto Spout Springs Road. From here, use the same directions as above.

LOOKING FOR AUTOGRAPHS?

Player autographs will be available on a first-come, first-served basis for 15 minutes following practice. Autographs can be obtained on the viewing hill. Please call the hotline number below if you have any questions.

FALCONS HOTLINE | 770.965.2752





ATLANTA FALCONS

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*Please refer to schedule and location of select player and cheerleader appearances. Dates and Locations subject to change.



TRAINING CAMP FAQs

THE 411 ON THE BRANCH



Russell Brands, LLC is proud to sponsor Russell Athletic® Atlanta Falcons Training Camp each year at the Falcons training facility in Flowery Branch.



For the sixth year, Friday Night Lights (at Bobby Gruhn Field in City Park Stadium, Gainesville, GA, Aug. 2, 6:45 p.m.) will once again bring the team to the fans. This grassroots event includes a fan fest with interactive inflatable games, sponsor activation, a post-event autograph session and a spectacular fireworks show. During the live scrimmage, several players including the Falcons quarterbacks will be mic'd, providing fans with an "under the helmet" experience.

PARKING INFORMATION ...

Training camp general parking is available at the Hog Mountain Sports Complex and C.W. Davis Middle School across the street from the Falcons complex. Fans with disability parking permits may park at the Falcons training complex. Permits must be properly displayed for law enforcement officials to grant entry. A designated seating area will also be provided for fans with disabilities.

WHAT YOU CAN BRING TO CAMP ...

Hats, jackets, rain gear, sunglasses, sunscreen, binoculars, blankets, umbrellas, lawn chairs and strollers are permitted at camp. Coolers are NOT permitted at Falcons Training Camp, unless they are being used to carry critical medical supplies (e.g., insulin for diabetics). Alcoholic beverages and glass containers are prohibited. In addition, please do not bring noisemakers, loud radios, large signs or wear inappropriate attire. Backpacks and bags larger than 8.5 inches wide by 13 inches long by 5 inches deep are not permitted at training camp. All people, bags and purses are subject to inspection. Any individual who refuses an inspection will be denied entry.

CAMERAS ...

Still cameras with lenses less than 12 inches and without flash attachments are permitted during all training camp practices. Flash photography is not permitted at any time. Audio or video recording, including use of camcorders and cellular phones with video capabilities, is not allowed.

INFORMATION BOOTH ...

Any questions about training camp may be directed to Falcons associates at the Information Tent adjacent to the training camp fan field main entrance.

WEATHER INFORMATION ...

Check the Falcons website at www.atlantafalcons.com for updates or call the Atlanta Falcons Training Camp Hotline at 770-965-2752. Practice times are subject to change without notice.

FALCONS MERCHANDISE ...

Get your Falcons merchandise at the Falcons Fan Shop at Training Camp and at Kia Motors Friday Night Lights. The shop will be open before, during and after practice and feature exclusive training camp merchandise. The lost-and-found area is also at this location.

CONCESSIONS ...

The main concessions are located in the sponsor activation area.

BEATING THE HEAT ...

In an effort to ensure comfort for all fans who attend a Falcons practice during training camp, the club has a 10-foot-by-10-foot area at the top of the spectator hill for fans to get out of the sun and cool off.

SAFETY AND SECURITY ...

For your safety and protection, Atlanta Falcons security personnel — along with the Flowery Branch Police Department, Hall County Police Department and other local law enforcement officials — will be present at training camp. In serious cases of rowdy behavior or profane/abusive language, security will first issue a warning. If the disruptive behavior continues, the fan will be subject to removal or arrest. Multiple violations may result in the individual being banned from the Falcons complex.

FIRST AID ...

A Falcons first-aid station will be set up adjacent to the training camp fan field's main entrance. Authorized medical personnel from the Falcons and Hall County will be available one hour before each practice through one hour after each session.

KIDS ACTIVITIES ...

The Atlanta Falcons invite youth ages 17 and under to experience Youth Weekend at Falcons Training Camp in Flowery Branch on Saturday, July 27, and Sunday, July 28. Activities both days include the opportunity to meet Atlanta Falcons Cheerleaders and enter contests to win prizes.

SMOKING ...

For the comfort and health of all fans, the Falcons training complex is a smoke-free environment. There is no smoking allowed anywhere on the grounds or inside the buildings.

DAILY UPDATES ...

For updates on daily activities, visit www.atlantafalcons.com, check with an associate in the Falcons Fan Shop, or call the Training Camp hotline at 770-965-2752.

SPECIAL GUESTS AND VIPs ...

Special guest, VIP and sponsor check-in sites are located near the main building entrance of the Atlanta Falcons training complex.



The Falcons Training Camp Guide was produced and published by Score Publishing, a division of Score Atlanta. The publisher is I.J. Rosenberg, editor is Stephen Black and creative art director is DJ Galbiati Blalock. The photos in the Guide were taken by Falcons team photographer Jimmy Cribb unless otherwise noted. Score is a full-service marketing company and can be reached at 404-256-1572 and SCOREATL.COM.



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A WORD WITH ARTHUR BLANK

Arthur Blank is the Owner & Chairman of the Atlanta Falcons.

➤ Your franchise quarterback Matt Ryan was able to break through and get his first playoff win with the team. While you have experienced postseason success as an owner prior to last year, did the win in the Georgia Dome over Seattle stand out above the others in your tenure as owner?

AB: Winning in the NFL is difficult, and winning in the playoffs is even more difficult. We jumped out to a big lead early in that game, but it came down to the wire. One of the great things about Matt is his ability to throw the football – and throw it accurately – with the game on the line. I think Matt has recorded 22 wins for our team when we've either been tied or behind in the fourth quarter or overtime, which is the most in the NFL since 2008, and he was able to engineer one of those game-winning drives late in the game in our win over Seattle.

➤ Following the season, the team made some tough decisions about certain players. While GM Thomas Dimitroff makes many of those decisions, do you ever go to him with your personal feelings about a player and weigh in on the ultimate decision?

AB: While I'm certainly involved in the tough decisions, I need to lean on Thomas and Smitty's counsel and expertise in shaping our team. Every decision we make from a player, coach or front office perspective is made to make our team better or to give us the best chance to be successful. Thomas and Mike work very well together, and I have tremendous faith in the capabilities of both of those men.

➤ Earlier this summer, the Falcons unveiled state-of-the-art conceptual drawings of the new downtown stadium set to open in 2017. Give us your vision for the new stadium?

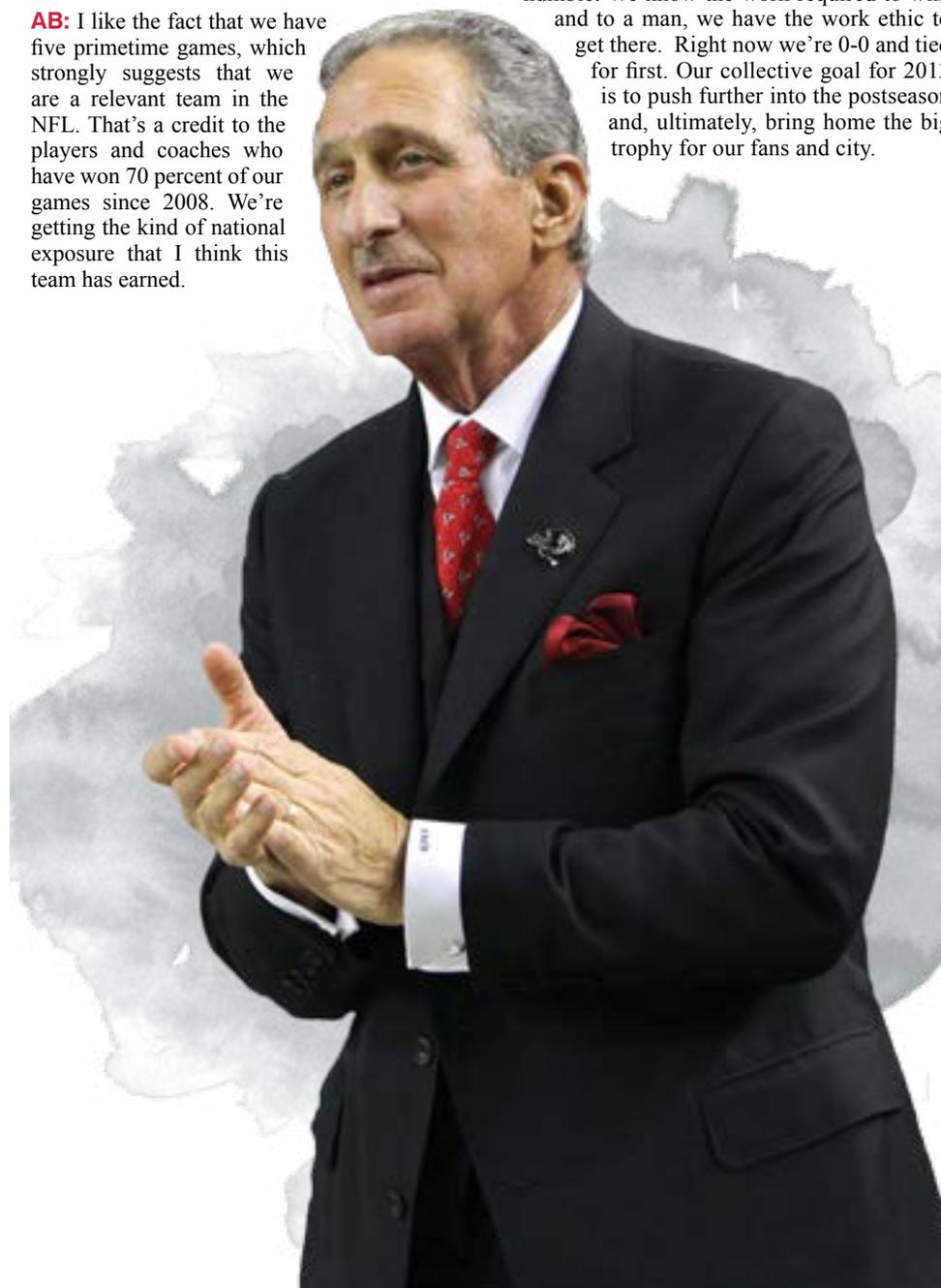
AB: We want the new stadium to be an iconic asset for the long-term vibrancy and health of Atlanta and our state. We want the stadium to be a key driver in maintaining all the important events currently hosted in the Georgia Dome, as well as in attracting new marquis events such as a Super Bowl or FIFA World Cup to Atlanta. We want the stadium to serve as a catalyst for long-term transformation and prosperity in the surrounding neighborhoods. Obviously, the stadium by itself cannot accomplish this element, but my family foundation is committed to working with the city and other parties to achieve this goal. 360 Architecture understands our vision, and I think their initial concepts reflect it.

➤ Are you excited about the 2013 Falcons schedule?

AB: I like the fact that we have five primetime games, which strongly suggests that we are a relevant team in the NFL. That's a credit to the players and coaches who have won 70 percent of our games since 2008. We're getting the kind of national exposure that I think this team has earned.

➤ What are your expectations for the 2013 Falcons?

AB: I feel very good about our team and our coaching staff. I think our Offensive Coordinator Dirk Koetter and Defensive Coordinator Mike Nolan will both be even better in their second year than they were in their first given their experience with our players. Both of those men are outstanding coaches. They bring different perspectives, new energy, and scheme changes that helped us last year. I always ask myself if we're getting better as a team and, as it relates to the upcoming season, the answer is yes. We have a strong coaching staff, we addressed needs in the draft, and we acquired strong veteran leaders in free agency. I'd say we're going into the season confident, but humble. We know the work required to win, and to a man, we have the work ethic to get there. Right now we're 0-0 and tied for first. Our collective goal for 2013 is to push further into the postseason and, ultimately, bring home the big trophy for our fans and city.






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REGULAR SEASON *SCHEDULE*

SEP 8 1:00 PM EDT FOX AT SAINTS Mercedes-Benz Superdome

Former Falcon Curtis Lofton made an impact in his first year with the Saints, leading the team with 123 total tackles. Lofton was the lone linebacker to start all 16 games last year and the team will likely count on him to lead under new defensive coordinator Rob Ryan.

SEP 15 1:00 PM EDT FOX RAMS Georgia Dome

Playing in perhaps the toughest division in all of the NFL last year, Sam Bradford managed to pass for a career-high 21 touchdowns to help the Rams finish 7-8-1, including a 1-0-1 record against the NFC Champion San Francisco 49ers. Bradford surpassed 300 yards through the air three times.

SEP 22 4:05 PM EDT FOX AT DOLPHINS Sun Life Stadium

Quarterback Ryan Tannehill didn't lead his team to the playoffs like two other rookies last year, but he started 16 games and passed for 3,294 yards, more than Russell Wilson or Robert Griffin III. Miami must also protect him better after allowing 35 sacks.

SEP 29 8:30 PM EDT PATRIOTS Georgia Dome

The New England Patriots have turned over the roster plenty since last hoisting the Lombardi Trophy in 2004, but Tom Brady and Bill Belichick remain the two constants in the Patriots' dynasty. Belichick has won 151 games with the Patriots, 136 with Tom Brady under center.

OCT 7 8:40 PM EDT JETS Georgia Dome

While his team has missed the postseason the last two years, Jets Head Coach Rex Ryan has four playoff wins under his belt in just four seasons. The loss of cornerback Darrelle Revis will hurt the Jets secondary.

OCT 20 1:00 PM EDT FOX BUCCANEERS Georgia Dome

Josh Freeman passed for 4,065 yards in 2012 in a bounce-back year after throwing for 3,592 with 22 interceptions in 2011. The four-year vet passed for a career-high 27 touchdowns as the Bucs finished 7-9. Freeman threw for a combined 478 yards against the Falcons last year.

OCT 27 4:25 PM EDT FOX AT CARDINALS Univ. of Phoenix Stadium

With new Quarterback Carson Palmer in the fold, look for Arizona to be a little more comfortable passing the ball in 2013. Four different quarterbacks combined to pass for 3,383 yards last season for the Cardinals, while Palmer finished with 4,018 in just 15 games for Oakland.

NOV 3 1:00 PM EST FOX AT PANTHERS Bank of America Stadium

The Carolina defense improved from 27th in the NFL in points allowed and 28th in yards allowed in 2011 to 18th and 10th, respectively, in 2012. Luke Kuechley sparked the team with 103 tackles and five turnovers while Charles Johnson and Greg Hardy combined for 23.5 sacks.

NOV 10 1:00 PM EST FOX SEAHAWKS Georgia Dome

In a year featuring high peaks and deep valleys, Quarterback Russell Wilson enters his second year with great expectations after leading the Seahawks into the playoffs last season. Wilson won his playoff debut despite passing for just 187 yards.

NOV 17 1:00 PM EST FOX AT BUCCANEERS Raymond James Stadium

Teams passed at will against Tampa Bay in 2012 as the Bucs finished 32nd in the League in yards surrendered. Nine teams put up at least 290 yards, taking advantage of rookie Mark Barron. The team added Darrelle Revis to shore up the secondary. The Falcons managed 558 passing yards in two games.

NOV 21 8:25 PM EST SAINTS Georgia Dome

New Orleans quarterback Drew Brees made his fifth straight Pro Bowl last year after completing 422 passes and a league-leading 5,177 yards. His 43 touchdowns also led the League, but opponents picked off 19 passes in 2012 including six in two games by the Falcons.

DEC 1 4:05 PM EST FOX AT BILLS Rogers Centre - Toronto

New head coach Doug Marrone will have a new signal-caller under center this year after the Bills pulled the plug on Ryan Fitzpatrick. While Kevin Kolb should begin the year as the starter, Marrone could look elsewhere if Kolb struggles as he did in Arizona.

DEC 8 8:30 PM EST PACKERS Lambeau Field

Green Bay's explosive offense begins with Quarterback Aaron Rodgers. Last year, the 2011 MVP passed for 4,295 yards and 39 scores and made his third Pro Bowl. Randall Cobb is the leading returning receiver after hauling in 80 receptions while James Jones snagged 14 touchdowns in 2012.

DEC 15 1:00 PM EST FOX REDSKINS Georgia Dome

Robert Griffin III made the Pro Bowl last year, though his season ended with a knee injury in the playoffs. Washington hopes to have the 2012 AP Offensive Rookie of the Year back early in 2013 as he served as a catalyst for the resurgent franchise.

DEC 23 8:40 PM EST 49ERS Candlestick Park

Jim Harbaugh's team has been one of the best in football the past two seasons, totaling 24 wins and making the NFC Championship Game both seasons. QB Colin Kaepernick was fantastic after becoming the starter, rattling off a 7-3 record and making the Super Bowl in 2012.

DEC 29 1:00 PM EST FOX PANTHERS Georgia Dome

Last season, Carolina Quarterback Cam Newton quickly put to rest any notion of a sophomore slump by passing for 3,869 yards and 19 touchdowns. He rushed for 741 yards with eight additional scores. In just two seasons, Newton has accounted for 62 touchdowns.

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A WORD WITH THOMAS DIMITROFF

Thomas Dimitroff has been General Manager of the Falcons since 2008. He has helped the Falcons become one of the League's most consistent teams.

➤ *The win over Seattle in the playoffs was the team's first postseason victory under the current regime. Does it feel like a burden has been removed from everyone's backs to get that first win out of the way?*

TD: First of all, that was an unbelievable game. There were a lot of emotions during that game, but ultimately, we did get the win. I think it meant a lot to the fan base, Mr. Blank and to the city of Atlanta. It was nice to get that win, but I can assure you that our goals are much higher than winning one playoff game. We still have a lot of work to do and that is one of the reasons we are excited about the start of the 2013 season.

➤ *Every year it seems the Falcons organization loses someone from your department to become a general manager or director of player personnel with another organization. Is this something to take pride in or do you worry that all of your help leaves every year?*

TD: I could not be happier for both Les (Snead) and Dave (Caldwell). They are both great men and I believe will be successful team builders in this league. They were an integral part of our success in Atlanta, but we have guys like Lionel Vital who are ready to step up and lead our personnel department. I have known Lionel for 20 years and I have complete confidence in him leading our personnel department.

➤ *You have continued your tradition of bringing in another big name each offseason with the addition of Osi Umenyiora. He has seemingly fit right in with the Atlanta community thus far. What are your expectations for Umenyiora?*

TD: I think Osi has been very open about his own expectations, but we expect him to come in here and be himself and provide increased veteran leadership on the defensive side of the ball. He has done exactly that during the off-season program and we expect that to continue throughout the season. Osi brings a championship pedigree and that is one thing that you can never have enough of on your football team.

➤ *Steven Jackson was another big name you brought in this offseason. With many of the successful offenses, including the Falcons, going to the air more often, does his versatility stand out to you or is he the player that will bring balance to the offense and provide a consistent spark at tailback?*

TD: Steven is a very physical, strong and athletic running back who can do a number of different things. He has the ability to catch the ball out of the backfield and has caught almost 400 passes in his career. Most people forget that he caught 90 balls his third year in the League. He is a versatile player who will add another dimension to our offense. One of the things Steven expressed to me while we were discussing bringing him here was his drive to win a championship. It spoke volumes about this character, leadership and who he is as a person, and we knew we needed to add him to our football team.

➤ *You have built quite the team since taking over before the 2008 season and the results have shown the Falcons to be one of the League's top teams over that time span. Not trying to take anything away from your current skills as a negotiator, but do you have to do much selling on potential free agents? Can't you just point to your success as a GM, as well as Mike Smith's success as a head coach, and that would be enough?*

TD: I say this humbly, but we have become a team that free agents want to play for. We have

an owner in the NFL who provides us with the resources we need to be competitive and it is Coach Smith's and my job to ensure we put the best team possible on the field. When you get guys like Tony Gonzalez, Steven Jackson, Asante Samuel and Osi, who want to be part of your organization, you know you are taking the right steps. We are proud of what we have built here, but we are not satisfied. We still have some work to do and goals to achieve and that is where our focus is right now.



A WORD WITH MIKE SMITH

Mike Smith has been Head Coach of the Falcons since 2008. He is the first coach in Falcons history to have winning seasons in each year of his career with the team.

➤ *The decisions you made in regards to the coordinators last offseason really seemed to pay off as Dirk Koetter and Mike Nolan both excelled in their first year with the team. Working with them as you have all season long, what is one thing that impresses you about each coach?*

MS: "Both of these men are excellent people first who also happen to be outstanding coaches. I worked with Dirk when we were together as coordinators in Jacksonville, so I was very familiar with the kind of offensive mind he had. I also worked on the same coaching staff with Coach Nolan in Baltimore, so I was familiar with him as well. I felt like both men played key roles in our success last season, and I am looking forward to having both of them back on our staff to work with our players for a second season."

➤ *Matt Ryan won his first playoff game last season. What does he need to do to take the*

next step in progressing towards being an elite quarterback in the League?

MS: "He simply needs to keep growing and improving at the position. We've said this many times in the past, but it bears repeating here: Matt Ryan is an elite quarterback. Quarterbacks in our League are judged on accuracy and winning, and Matt has excelled in both of those categories since he became our starter in 2008. He had an outstanding season in 2012 and set all kinds of team records for yards, completion percentage, attempts, etc. But I think the most impressive statistic for Matt last season was that he led all NFL quarterbacks with a 68.6 completion percentage, which is really, really good. The great thing about Matt is that all he talks about are the plays he didn't make and how much he needs to improve. When one of your team leaders thinks like that, it bodes well for the rest of the team."

➤ *The win over Seattle in the playoffs was also your first postseason victory as a head coach. Does it feel like a burden has been removed from your back to get that first win out of the way?*

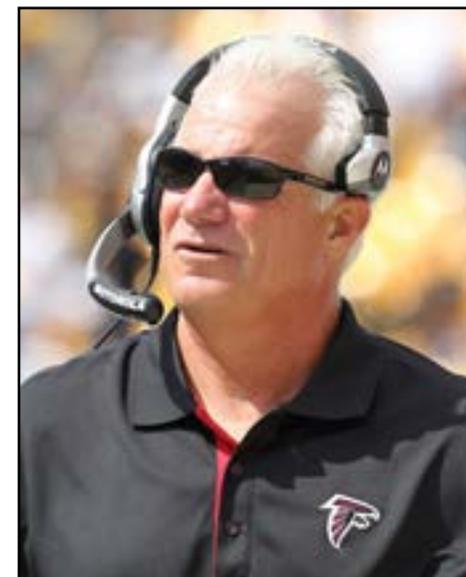
MS: "My job as the head football coach for the Atlanta Falcons is to have our team ready to play each time we are scheduled to play. Our guys did a nice job in our win over Seattle, but that's last year. We put 2012 to bed a long time ago, and we are now about the business of preparing ourselves both mentally and physically for the rigors of the 2013 NFL season. Each and every year is different and every team you coach is different. My job is to get our 2013 team ready to play and that's why we have training camp. We use every second of every day to improve all facets of this football team, and that will be our sole focus when our guys report and get ready to go to work on July 25."

➤ *The addition of Steven Jackson will help Matt Ryan in a number of areas whether it is keeping a safety close to the line to open up receivers, catching a pass out of the backfield or toting the ball to provide more of a threat for the run. How has he worked his way into the offensive game plan thus far?*

MS: "Steven is a veteran, so he knows how to train, he knows how to practice, and some of his work habits have been contagious to some of the younger members of our team. I was talking to him earlier during the off-season training program, and he is excited to be a member of our team. He's got to make the adjustment of learning a new offensive system and scheme, but he is an extremely intelligent football player who has played this game at an extremely high level for a long time. He runs hard, he's a threat out of the backfield, and we think he is going to make us a better football team."

➤ *While last year's schedule was quirky with a home-away-home-away rotation, this year is a little more normal. As a coach, how much do you pay attention to how your schedule plays out when the schedules are released?*

MS: "We focus on a variety of factors as they relate to the schedule. From a coaching perspective, we had some discussions, but the bottom line is that we have to play the schedule that the League sends us. We have five primetime games this season and we will deal with those accordingly."



2013 ATLANTA FALCONS

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Thursday, August 8
8:00 PM



Thursday, August 29
7:30 PM



Sunday, September 15
1:00 PM



Sunday, September 29
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Sunday, November 10
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Thursday, November 21
8:25 PM



Sunday, December 15
1:00 PM



Sunday, December 29
1:00 PM

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FALCONS OFFENSE

QB



Matt Ryan, No. 2 (6-4, 220) - The Boston College graduate is coming off a a season in which he set franchise records for passing yards, attempts and touchdowns, and became the first Falcons quarterback to guide the team to an 8-0 start. He engineered six game-winning drives in 2012, also a team record. Ryan was named to the Pro Bowl team last year for the second time.

Backups: Dominique Davis, No. 4 (6-2, 198) - Davis enters his second year with the Falcons out of East Carolina. ... Sean Renfree, No. 12 (6-3, 219) - Renfree was a seventh-round selection out of Duke University in the 2013 draft. ... Seth Doege, No. 9 (6-1, 197) - Doege was picked up as an undrafted rookie free agent out of Texas Tech.

RB



Steven Jackson, No. 39 (6-2, 240) - In nine years with the Rams, Jackson rushed for 10,135 yards and 56 touchdowns. The Oregon State product was a weapon in the passing game, with 407 receptions for 3,324 yards and eight scores. He is a three-time Pro Bowler and was the NFC rushing champion in 2009.

Backups: Jacquizz Rodgers, No. 32 (5-6, 196) - Rodgers is in his third year out of Oregon State. He has scored four career touchdowns. ... Antone Smith, No. 35 (5-9, 190) - The former Florida State Seminole is in his fifth NFL season. ... Josh Vaughan, No. 30 (6-0, 225) - Vaughan saw action in two seasons for Carolina. ... Donald Russell, No. 33 (5-11, 209) - Russell is a rookie free agent out of Georgia State.

FB



Bradie Ewing, No. 34 (6-0, 245) - Ewing was drafted in the fifth round of the 2012 draft. He was a walk-on at Wisconsin where he lettered all four years.

Backups: Jason Snelling, No. 44 (5-11, 223) - Since 2007, Snelling has rushed for 1,256 yards and seven scores while catching 139 passes for 1,033 yards and six touchdowns. He ran for a career-high 147 yards in the 2009 win at Tampa Bay. After playing at Virginia, the Falcons selected Snelling with the 244th pick in the seventh round. ... Patrick DiMarco, No. 42 (6-1, 243) - DiMarco played for Kansas City last season after being signed as a free agent by San Diego in 2011. ... Devonte Campbell, No. 43 (6-2, 235) - Campbell is a rookie free agent signee out of Maryland.

TE



Tony Gonzalez, No. 88 (6-5, 243) - The former Cal Golden Bear holds the NFL record for most touchdown receptions by a tight end (107) and most receiving yards by a tight end (14,268). Gonzalez is second all time with 13 Pro Bowl appearances.

Backups: Chase Coffman, No. 86 (6-6, 250) - Coffman is in his second year in Atlanta and fifth overall in the League. ... Levine Toilolo, No. 80 (6-8, 260) - A 2013 fourth-round selection out of Stanford. ... Tommy Gallarda, No. 87 (6-5, 259) - In his third year out of Boise State. ... Colin Cloherty, No. 81 (6-2, 252) - Has played for three teams in four years in the League. ... Andrew Szczerba, No. 85 (6-6, 256) - Was signed as a free agent by the Cowboys last year.

WR



Roddy White, No. 84 (6-0, 212) - White is a three-time Pro Bowler and holds the Falcons record for single-season receiving yardage (1,389), which he set in 2010. White was also the NFL season receptions leader in 2010 with 115 catches.

Backups: Harry Douglas, No. 83 (6-0, 182) - Douglas is entering his sixth year out of Louisville after being drafted by the Falcons in the third round of the 2008 draft. ... Tim Toone, No. 17 (5-10, 185) - Toone was drafted by Detroit in the seventh round of the 2012 draft. ... James Rodgers, No. 18 (5-7, 185) - James is the brother of Falcons RB Jacquizz and is in his second year with the Falcons. ... Marcus Jackson, No. 16 (6-1, 195) - The Lamar product is entering his second year in the NFL.

LT



Sam Baker, No. 72 (6-5, 307) - The former Southern California Trojan was one of two first-round selections by the Falcons in the 2008 draft, the other being Matt Ryan. Baker has started 53 of his 62 career games. His father, C. David, was commissioner of the Arena Football League and mayor of Irvine, Calif.

Backups: Ryan Schraeder, No. 73 (6-7, 300) - Schraeder, a rookie free agent, was an All-American at Valdosta State, alma mater of Falcons great Jessie Tuggle. He also played at Butler Community College, where his team played for the NJCAA national championship. ... Terren Jones, No. 74 (6-7, 320) - Jones was an AFCA All-American at Alabama State, where he was a three-time All-SWAC player. He is a rookie free agent.

LG



Justin Blalock, No. 63 (6-4, 329) - In his sixth year out of Texas, Blalock has started 94 games for Atlanta. A second-round selection in the 2007 NFL draft, Blalock started his first game as a rookie. The Plano, Texas, native has started all 16 games of every season since 2008. While in college, Blalock and his Longhorn teammates won the 2005 BCS National Championship.

Backups: Phillipkeith Manley, No. 68 (6-5, 309) - Manley started two seasons in college at Toledo and help lead the Rockets to two bowl appearances. He was a rookie free-agent signee in 2012. ... Jacques McClendon, No. 65 (6-3, 324) - The Cleveland, Tenn., native was selected in the fourth round of the 2010 draft by the Colts. McClendon also had stints in Detroit, Pittsburgh and Indianapolis.

C



Peter Konz, No. 66 (6-5, 314) - The former Wisconsin Badger will battle with Joe Hawley for the starting center job. Konz was drafted in the second round of the 2012 draft with the No. 55 overall selection. He started at guard the final 12 games of last season, including the two playoff games.

Backups: Joe Hawley, No. 61 (6-3, 297) - The fourth-round selection out of Nevada-Las Vegas has played in 37 games since his rookie season in 2010. Hawley has also played guard during his career. He started 12 times at center and guard during the 2011 season. ... Matt Smith, No. 67 (6-4, 296) - The former Kentucky Wildcat was inked as a rookie free-agent signee after the 2013 draft. Smith started for three seasons at center in college.

RG



Garrett Reynolds, No. 75 (6-7, 317) - In his fifth year with the Falcons out of North Carolina, Reynolds has started 13 games and played in 27 at the NFL level. He was a fifth-round draft choice in the 2009 draft. The Knoxville native is a nephew of former NFL linebacker James "Hacksaw" Reynolds, who played 15 seasons in the League. Reynolds started six games for Atlanta in 2012.

Backups: Harland Gunn, No. 69 (6-2, 310) - The former Miami Hurricane is in his first season with the Falcons after being picked up by Dallas following the 2012 draft. Gunn was on New Orleans' practice squad in 2012. He started two seasons in college. ... Theo Goins, No. 77 (6-4, 317) - Goins is a rookie free agent out of Central Florida.

RT



Mike Johnson, No. 79 (6-5, 312) - The Alabama product is competing with Lamar Holmes for the starting right tackle job. Johnson was a third-round pick in the 2010 draft by Atlanta. In 2012, Johnson started an NFL game for the first time and played in all 16 regular season games. His team won the BCS national title his senior year of college.

Backups: Lamar Holmes, No. 76 (6-6, 323) - In his second season out of Southern Miss, Holmes was a third-round pick in the 2012 draft. He played in one game during the 2012 season, the Falcons 34-0 domination of the New York Giants. ... Alec Savoie, No. 64 (6-7, 309) - Savoie is a rookie free agent selection out of McNeese State. The LaFayette, La., native was named All-Southland Conference in college.

WR



Julio Jones, No. 11 (6-3, 220) - In his third year with Atlanta, Jones has amassed 2,157 receiving yards and 18 touchdowns. The No. 6 overall pick in the 2011 draft caught 25 more passes in 2012 than in his rookie season and increased his receiving yards by 239. Jones was named to his first Pro Bowl last year.

Backups: Drew Davis, No. 19 (6-1, 205) - Davis caught his first NFL touchdown last year at Philadelphia. ... Kevin Cone, No. 15 (6-2, 216) - Cone was signed as an undrafted free agent in 2011. ... Rashad Evans, No. 89 (5-9, 187) - Evans is an undrafted free agent. ... Darius Johnson, No. 13 (5-10, 175) - Johnson is an undrafted free agent. ... Martel Moore, No. 14 (6-0, 183) - Moore is an undrafted free agent. He was on three national championship teams at Alabama.

K



Matt Bryant, No. 3 (5-9, 200) - Bryant is in his fifth season with the Falcons. The Baylor product has kicked multiple game-winning field goals for Atlanta, none more notable than his 49-yarder to beat Seattle in the playoffs last season. Bryant has not missed an extra point and has made 95 out of 108 field goal attempts in his career with the Falcons. The Orange, Texas, native has also kicked for the New York Giants, Dallas, Indianapolis, Miami and Tampa Bay in the NFL as well as the Iowa Barnstormers, Frankfurt Galaxy and Florida Tuskers.

Backups: Jeremy Shelley, No. 1 (5-10, 165) - Shelley is a rookie out of Alabama, where he set school records for the Crimson Tide with 166 career PATs and 63 in 2012.

KR



Jacquizz Rodgers, No. 32 (5-6, 196) - In addition to playing running back, Rodgers also returns kickoffs for the Falcons. He returned 23 kicks for 592 yards last season for an average of 25.7 per return. A fifth-round pick in the 2011 draft, Rodgers was a three-time All-American at Oregon State and was named Pac-10 Offensive Player of the Year in 2008. Rodgers rushed for 3,877 yards in college and scored 46 touchdowns.

Backups: Dominique Franks, No. 24 (5-11, 194) has proven to be a reliable punt returner and had kickoff return experience at Oklahoma where he had a season-long return of 37 yards in 2007 against North Texas.

FALCONS DEFENSE

LDE



Kroy Biermann, No. 71 (6-3, 260) – The sixth-year pro recorded 52 tackles (37 solo) with four sacks in the 2012 season. Biermann was a fifth-round draft pick in the 2008 draft.
Backups: Malliciah Goodman, No. 93 (6-4, 276) – The rookie from Clemson was drafted with the 127th pick in the fourth round. In his senior season he had 28 tackles, 9.5 for loss, seven sacks, eight quarterback pressures, two pass breakups and four forced fumbles. ... Cliff Matthews, No. 98 (6-4, 268) – Matthews had six solo tackles, two of which came in the Falcons' 30-28 win against the Seahawks in 2012. ... Brandon Thurmond, No. 70 (6-2, 226) – Signed as a rookie free agent. In his 2012 season at Arkansas-Pine Bluff, he had 70 tackles, 25 tackles for loss and 17.5 sacks.

DT



Jonathan Babineaux, No. 95 (6-2, 296) – The nine-year veteran out of Iowa has 268 career tackles and 22.5 sacks. In 2012, he had 31 tackles (25 solo), 3.5 sacks, forced one fumble and recovered another for a touchdown. Babineaux was a second-round pick in the 2005 draft.
Backups: Travian Robertson, No. 92 (6-4, 303) – This South Carolina product had two solo tackles in seven games of action last season. ... Adam Replogle, No. 67 (6-3, 294) – The rookie from Indiana posted 184 tackles (95 solo) in his career with the Hoosiers. Replogle also had a total of 15 sacks and forced three fumbles in his four seasons at Indiana. ... Neal Huynh, No. 64 (6-4, 315) – The rookie had 29 tackles and two sacks last season with the Ohio Bobcats.

DT



Corey Peters, No. 91 (6-3, 295) – The fourth-year pro from Kentucky had 15 tackles (11 solo) in the 2012 season, including five tackles in Atlanta's 31-18 win against the Lions. Peters has 74 career tackles (57 solo). He also has an interception, a forced fumble and four sacks in his Falcons career.
Backups: Peria Jerry, No. 94 (6-2, 294) – Jerry is in his fifth year out of Ole Miss. He had 14 tackles (11 solo) in the 2012 season, four of which came in the Falcons' 30-28 win over the Seahawks. ... Micanor Regis, No. 97 (6-3, 305) – Regis was signed by the Falcons on Jan. 21, 2013. He played at University of Miami where he racked up 112 tackles, 52 of which were solo tackles. In the 2011 season with the Hurricanes he had 41 tackles, including 19 solo.

RDE



Osi Umenyiora, No. 90 (6-3, 255) – Umenyiora was previously with the Giants, where he had a total of 376 tackles (261 solo) and 75 sacks. In the 2012 season he had 43 tackles, six sacks and two forced fumbles. He is a two-time Pro Bowler and led the NFC in sacks in 2005.
Backups: Jonathan Massaquoi, No. 96 (6-2, 270) – Had two tackles in the 2012 season. During his two years at Troy he recorded 128 tackles and 19.5 sacks. ... Stansly Maoponga, No. 99 (6-2, 256) – Drafted by the Falcons with the 153rd pick in the fifth round. Played for TCU and was named first-team All-Big 12 his senior year. ... Cam Henderson, No. 73 (6-5, 245) – This rookie played in 25 games in two seasons at the University of Central Florida logging 61 tackles (33 solo).

OLB



Sean Weatherspoon, No. 56 (6-1, 239) – The third-year Falcon had 97 tackles (72 solo) and two sacks for 20 yards lost in the 2012 season. Weatherspoon, named captain last season, was the Falcons first-round draft pick in the 2010 draft out of Missouri.
Backups: Robert James, No. 51 (5-11, 220) – In 2012, James had 11 tackles, three of which came in the 23-19 win against the Cardinals. ... Paul Worrlow, No. 49 (6-1, 232) – The rookie was a four-year starter at the University of Delaware. While with the Blue Hens, he had 377 career tackles and won the MVP award for the 2012 season and the 2013 Edgar Johnson Award for exhibiting qualities of hard work, dedication, leadership, fairness and striving for excellence.

MLB



Akeem Dent, No. 52 (6-1, 239) – Last season Dent had 65 tackles (42 solo) and deflected two passes while starting in every game. The former Georgia Bulldog posted a career-high nine tackles in the Falcons' 30-28 win against the Seahawks. Dent was a third-round draft pick in 2011 and has amassed 85 total tackles in the NFL. The Atlanta native was named to the Pro Football Weekly All-Rookie team in 2011.
Backups: Pat Schiller, No. 50 (6-2, 235) – The second-year pro from Northern Illinois earned second-team All Mid-American Conference honors from Phil Steele and was named NIU's Linebacker of the Year. ... Brian Banks, No. 53 (6-2, 250) – Signed by the Falcons on April 3, 2013, after playing with the Las Vegas Locomotives.

OLB



Stephen Nicholas, No. 54 (6-2, 230) – In 2012 he led the team with 97 tackles (72 solo) and had two sacks, four passes defended and one interception. The seventh-year pro out of the University of South Florida also had a forced fumble and fumble recovery. Nicholas has four fumbles recovered and two interceptions in his career, along with 263 tackles.
Backups: Nick Clancy, No. 55 (6-3, 232) – The rookie from Boston College had 187 tackles (109 solo), defended 12 passes and led the ACC with 145 tackles his senior season. ... Joplo Bartu, No. 59 (6-2, 230) – The rookie from Texas State University earned All-WAC second team after posting 95 tackles and 5.5 sacks. In the last four games in his collegiate career he had 62 tackles.

RCB



Desmond Trufant, No. 21 (6-0, 184) – The rookie out of Washington was drafted with the 22nd pick of the first round. In his senior year, he was named first-team All-Pac-12. The Tacoma, Wash., native ran a blazing 4.38 40-yard dash at the NFL Combine prior to the draft. Trufant's brothers, Marcus and Isaiah, also play cornerback in the NFL.
Backups: Robert Alford, No. 23 (5-10, 186) – The rookie from Southeastern Louisiana was drafted with the 60th pick in the second round of the 2013 draft, and was named first-team All-Southland conference his senior year. ... Saeed Lee, No. 26 (5-10, 182) – The rookie from Alabama State participated in the Falcons rookie mini-camp. In his senior season Lee had 34 tackles.

LCB



Asante Samuel, No. 22 (5-10, 185) – In the 2012 season he had 36 tackles (34 solo), 19 defended passes and five interceptions. The 11-year pro also recorded his sixth interception return for a touchdown with a 79-yard sprint in the Falcons 23-20 win against the Raiders. Samuel has been named to the Pro Bowl four times (2007-2010).
Backups: Robert McClain, No. 27 (5-9, 195) – In the 2012 season he recovered two fumbles and had 61 tackles (53 solo), 10 defended passes and one interception. ... Dominique Franks, No. 24 (5-11, 194) – Had 14 tackles (11 solo) and two passes defended in 2012. ... Terrence Johnson, No. 30 (5-9, 195) – The first-year Falcon signed with the team on Sept. 11, 2012, after playing with the Colts and the Patriots.

SS



William Moore, No. 25 (6-0, 218) – Posted 75 tackles (59 solo) one sack, eight passes defended and four interceptions in 2012. The former Missouri Tiger was named to the Pro Bowl after the 2012 season.
Backups: Kemal Ishmael, No. 36 (5-11, 206) – The rookie was selected as the first of three seventh-round (243rd overall) draft choices. He had 368 tackles (213 solo) in his career at UCF. ... Zeke Motta, No. 41 (6-2, 213) – Drafted by the Falcons as the 244th pick in the seventh round of the 2013 draft. The former Notre Dame star ended his collegiate career with 77 tackles including 16 in the 2013 BCS National Championship game against Alabama. ... Troy Sanders, No. 40 (6-0, 214) – Sanders is a rookie from Appalachian State.

FS



Thomas DeCoud, No. 28 (6-0, 193) – The 2008 third-round draft pick led the Falcons with six interceptions in the 2012 season. DeCoud also defended nine passes and had 76 tackles (62 solo) one sack and one recovered fumble. The former California Golden Bear was named to the Pro Bowl after the 2012 season. In his career, DeCoud has 310 tackles, 14 interceptions, three quarterback sacks and four forced fumbles.
Backups: Charles Mitchell, No. 20 (5-11, 205) – The second-year pro from Mississippi State recorded a tackle against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers last season. ... Shann Schillinger, No. 29, (6-0, 202) – Placed on injured reserve for the 2012 season. The fourth-year pro had 11 tackles in 2011.

P



Matt Boshier, No. 5 (6-0, 202) – The third-year pro punted 60 times for an average of 47.5 yards in 2012. The former Miami Hurricane booted a long of 63 yards, and landed inside the 20-yard line 22 times. Boshier will also be the holder and kickoff specialist for the 2013 season. The Jupiter, Fla., native was named the Falcons Man of the Year in 2012 for his charitable work. Boshier was named to the All-Rookie team in 2011 after averaging 42.7 yards per punt. At Miami, he was named All-ACC three times.
Backups: Sean Sellwood, No. 6 (6-2, 203) – The rookie from Utah booted 51 punts of 50-plus yards in his career. He averaged 43.8 yards per kick on 190 punts with 54 landing inside the 20-yard line.

PR



Dominique Franks, No. 24 (5-11, 194) – In his first season as the starter (2012), he returned 21 punts for 163 yards. Franks' longest return was 28 yards and he averaged 7.8 yards per return. In the 2012 preseason, he had a 45-yard return against the Ravens that was downed at the 14-yard line. The Oklahoma product served as the punt return backup to Eric Weems in 2011 and had one return for no gain.
Backups: Harry Douglas, No. 83 (6-0, 180) – Returned five punts for 42 yards last season. Had a long of 11 yards and fair caught one punt. As a rookie in 2008, returned 19 punts for 226 yards and one touchdown.



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A WORD WITH RICH MCKAY

Rich McKay is the President & CEO of the Falcons and has been with the team since 2003. He is also the Chairman of the NFL Competition Committee.

➤ *While there is much left to do, the Falcons can now officially call downtown Atlanta home for many years to come as the new stadium will stay within the city limits. Was the No. 1 priority to keep the team as close to downtown as possible?*

RM: Arthur has said from the very beginning of the stadium process that trying to keep the team in downtown Atlanta was our top priority.

➤ *Will the new stadium be modeled after another stadium from around the League?*

RM: The answer is no. As we've said many times publicly, the object of the stadium is to create an iconic stadium that signifies the best of Atlanta and creates a destination that is recognizable by

everyone. I think the current design and concept approved by the Georgia World Congress Center Authority begins to achieve that goal. With respect to the fan aspects of the stadium, we are undertaking a lot of work to try to ensure that we "move the needle" in regards to the fan experience and really try to create something special for the next 30+ years for all of our fans.

➤ *What will be the next step for the League to take to ensure further player safety?*

RM: Player safety has been a priority for the League for a very long time and will continue to be. The game is in a pretty good place with respect to player safety at the current time. But that doesn't mean there won't be more rule changes and more evolution of equipment to make the game even safer over time. This year, there was a major rule change with respect to the crown of helmet and our hope is this rule change will likewise modify conduct and not simply lead to penalties.

The Falcons have five games on national television this year. Is simply winning these games enough to grow the Falcons brand or is sustained playoff success required to become a "national" brand?

RM: I think sustained success is the most important thing you can achieve to become a national brand. The more people that see you compete at the highest level, the more comfortable they become with your brand and the more familiar they are with you. We have achieved a lot over the last five seasons under Head Coach Mike Smith and General Manager Thomas Dimitroff, and we have great expectations going forward.

➤ *How much does a person in your position take fan feedback into account when making decisions that impact the future of the franchise?*

RM: Anytime you think you know the answers to the questions, you usually get the wrong answer. So the better way to approach any question regarding your fans is to ask them. I think we do a good job as an organization in trying to do that in many different ways, whether it's direct engagement at the stadium, fan forums or surveying our fans. We also have a fan service department that focuses on all of our season ticket holders and tries to get as much feedback as they can. We then try to take that feedback and adjust our conduct or change the game day experience to fit the fans' expectations.



New Security Procedures to take effect in Georgia Dome

This season, all NFL teams are implementing new measures designed to provide a safer environment and expedite fan entry into stadiums on game day. The Falcons are committed to ensuring your game day experience is second to none, and the safety of the Georgia Dome is essential to maintaining this experience.

The new safety measures affect the type and size of bags that are permitted into the stadium - not the items that you normally need to bring to a game. The best approach is to not bring any bags, but if you need to, the following bags are permissible in the Dome:

- **Bags that are clear plastic, vinyl or PVC and do not exceed 12" by 6" by 12"**
- **One-gallon clear plastic freezer bag (Ziploc bag or similar) per person**
- **Small clutch bag or purse approximately the size of a hand, with or without a handle or strap**
- **Approved bags must be carried when approaching the queue lines prior to entry into the stadium.**
- **Prohibited bags include purses larger than a clutch bag, coolers, briefcases, backpacks, fanny packs, cinch bags, luggage, seat cushions, computer bags and camera bags. Exceptions will be made for medically necessary items after proper inspection.**

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By Craig Sager II
& Stephen Black

NFL PREVIEW

League competitive balance puts each division up for grabs

The League's top established quarterbacks dominated the regular season last year, but rookies showed a ton of promise as Indianapolis, Seattle and Washington made the postseason with first-year signal-callers. Quarterbacks will again be the focal point of the League this season as Matt Ryan, Peyton Manning, Aaron Rodgers and Tom Brady lead some of the Super Bowl favorites. Meanwhile, Baltimore will attempt to defend its World Championship without longtime defensive stalwart Ray Lewis, among other departed Ravens.

▶ NFC EAST

Last season saw Washington earn a division title for the first time since 1999. Rookies Robert Griffin III and Alfred Morris teamed up to produce the League's top rushing attack. RGIII had ACL surgery on Jan. 9 and the success of this season will rely on his recovery.

The Dallas Cowboys annual rollercoaster ended in a 28-18 loss at Washington the final week of the season. A win would have

won Dallas the division, but instead resulted in three Tony Romo interceptions. Monte Kiffin takes over at defensive coordinator and will adapt the 4-3 look.

The Giants missed the playoffs with a 9-7 record after winning the Super Bowl the previous season. Eli Manning will head the offense with Hakeem Nicks and Victor Cruz stretching the field at receiver.

The Eagles finished 4-12 last season and, after 14 seasons, cut ties with Head Coach Andy Reid. In comes former Oregon coach Chip Kelly, and quarterbacks Michael Vick, Nick Foles and Matt Barkley all appear to have a chance at working into the offense this season.

▶ NFC NORTH

In Chicago, Lovie Smith was fired by the Bears after a 10-6 season. New Bears Head Coach Marc Trestman spent the past five years coaching in Canada. The Bears signed Tight End Martellus Bennett who will give Quarterback Jay Cutler another target.

The Detroit Lions finished 4-12 last year. They ranked third in total offense and 13th in total defense, but turnovers and poor execution plagued them. Calvin Johnson set an NFL record with 122 receptions and 1,964 yards, but scored just five touchdowns.

The Green Bay Packers went 5-1 in the division last year and the addition of running back Eddie Lacy will boost their running game. Lacy will complement Quarterback Aaron Rodgers (pictured left), who comes off his second straight season of posting the League's best passer rating (108.0).

Adrian Peterson paced the Vikings into the playoffs with 2,097 yards rushing and was named the MVP last year. Rookie Kicker Blair Walsh set a League record with 10 50-plus yard field goals. The Packers defense is spearheaded by end Clay Matthews, who has 42.5 sacks in four NFL seasons.

NFC SOUTH

The Carolina Panthers haven't made the playoffs since 2008 and have only made it once since 2005. Cam Newton is the key to getting back to the postseason and the third-year quarterback helped the team improve to 7-9 last season. Carolina took defensive tackles in their first two picks of the draft with Star Lotulelei and Kawann Short.

Tampa Bay was not bad in Head Coach Greg Schiano's first season, going 7-9 including wins in four straight at one point. The Bucs were dead last in passing defense but first in rushing defense. They looked to improve the pass defense by trading for Cornerback Darrelle Revis. Tampa Bay has only

made the playoffs twice since 2002.

Behind Drew Brees' arm, New Orleans led the League in passing last season but did not make the postseason. The defense struggled mightily, finishing near the bottom in many major categories. Head Coach Sean Payton is back and brings in Defensive Coordinator Rob Ryan.

▶ NFC WEST

San Francisco added receiver Anquan Boldin after Michael Crabtree tore his Achilles during OTAs after an 1,105-yard receiving season last year. Ted Ginn, Randy Moss and Alex Smith were some of the team's departures, but the club added players like Nnamdi Asomugha, Glenn Dorsey and Colt McCoy.

The Seattle Seahawks might have been the most well-rounded team last year. The defense ranked fourth in the League and first in total points allowed. As a rookie, Quarterback Russell Wilson established himself as one of the League's rising stars. He will have Percy Harvin to throw to this year along with Sidney Rice and Golden Tate.

The Cardinals were 4-0 to start the season but lost 11 of their last 12. Arizona gutted its coaching staff and Bruce Arians steps in as the new head coach. Carson Palmer was acquired to handle the quarterback duties.

Former first overall pick Sam Bradford will have rookie Tavon Austin to spark big plays for the Rams. Chris Long led a defense that posted 52 sacks last season. Replacing running back Steven Jackson will have to be a collective effort.

▶ AFC EAST

Rex Ryan continues to sit on the Jets hot seat and Quarterback Mark Sanchez will be in a competition with rookie Geno Smith. Tim Tebow was waived and cornerback Darrelle Revis was traded to Tampa Bay. Brian VanGorder was added as linebackers coach under new Defensive Coordinator Dennis Thurman. Marty Mornhinweg is the new offensive coordinator.

In New England, Danny Amendola will try to replace Wes Welker, who averaged 112 catches the past six seasons. New England also added Tim Tebow in hopes of bringing another dimension to their efficient offense. The loss of Tight End Aaron Hernandez to off-the-field issues was devastating. The Patriots other star tight end, Rob Gronkowski, is on the PUP list entering the preseason.

The Dolphins were possibly the most active team during free agency this season. They added Receiver Mike Wallace, Tight End Dustin Keller and three defensive starters (Phillip Wheeler, Dannell Ellerbe, Brent Grimes).

The Bills shocked everyone when they drafted E.J. Manuel over Syracuse quarterback Ryan Nassib. Former Syracuse coach Doug Marrone takes the head coaching duties as the Bills try to end a 13-year playoff drought.

▶ AFC NORTH

In the AFC North, defending Super Bowl champion Baltimore parted with key guys as Lewis and Matt Birk retired, and Bernard Pollard and Brendan Ayenbadejo were not re-signed. However, Baltimore was able to re-sign Quarterback Joe Flacco and add Defensive End Elvis Dumervil.

The Bengals made the playoffs for a second straight year and, with Baltimore seem-

ingly heading down, Cincinnati may be the favorite in the division. They added former Steelers Linebacker James Harrison to one of the best defenses in the League.

The Steelers added Jarvis Jones to fill Harrison's vacancy and look to rookie Le'Veon Bell to upgrade the running game. Landry Jones was drafted to back up Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger as the Steelers are trying to bounce back from an 8-8 season.

The Browns had an offseason makeover and will hope Offensive Coordinator Norv Turner and Head Coach Rob Chudzinski can turn Brandon Weeden into a franchise quarterback. Cleveland traded former starting Quarterback Colt McCoy to San Francisco and signed Outside Linebacker Paul Kruger to aid the pass rush.

▶ AFC SOUTH

The division sent the Texans and Colts to the playoffs last year. The Texans ride the running ability of Arian Foster and the defense of J.J. Watt. After a mediocre first nine years as a franchise, the Texans have won 22 games the past two seasons. However, Houston has not yet made the conference championship game.

After a one-year dip post-Peyton Manning, the Colts won 11 games last season behind rookie Quarterback Andrew Luck. Colts Head Coach Chuck Pagano will have nine potential starters that were added in free agency.

Jacksonville sunk to 2-14 last year, a franchise-worst season. With the second pick this year, they drafted Left Tackle Luke Jockel, who will try to improve the offensive line. Gus Bradley enters his first year as head coach with an unproven quarterback situation and a defense that was among the League's worst last year.

Titans Quarterback Jake Locker will also see an improvement on his offensive line with guards Andy Levitre and Alabama All-American Chance Warmack in the trenches. Tennessee has not made the postseason since 2008.

▶ AFC WEST

Denver returns as the team to beat in the AFC West and possibly the conference. Peyton Manning has Wes Welker to work with along with rookie Running Back Monte Ball. Last year's 13-3 record was its best in the regular season since 2005.

The Kansas City Chiefs did not win an AFC Game last season and finished 2-14. New Head Coach Andy Reid will be running things, and former 49ers Quarterback Alex Smith will be a big improvement at quarterback. The Chiefs used this year's No. 1 overall pick on Left Tackle Eric Fisher.

The Oakland Raiders will turn to Matt Flynn to handle the quarterback position and work with rookie backup Tyler Wilson. The Raiders have not had a winning record nor have they made the playoffs since 2002.

Ex-Denver Offensive Coordinator Mike McCoy steps in as San Diego's head coach this year. Philip Rivers, Ryan Mathews, Malcolm Floyd and Antonio Gates come back to lead the offense. They added former Patriot Running Back Danny Woodhead in the off-season and drafted Linebacker Manti Te'o.

Photo of Aaron Rodgers courtesy of AP Images. Sager can be reached at csager@scoreatl.com and Black can be reached at sblack@scoreatl.com.





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By Sean Conway

ROOKIE ROUNDUP

Cornerbacks head talented group of draftees

Every year when the National Football League holds its April draft, it's a mini-holiday for football fans everywhere. Like Opening Day in baseball or holiday shopping on the day after Thanksgiving, anticipation and optimism is sky high. For Atlanta Falcons fans, the excitement around this year's draft made the weekend more special than ever. Falcons fans are looking for the next piece to add to their roster, the cherry on top of the sundae.

HOME IMPROVEMENTS

Last fall and winter, the Falcons soared. The team carried a 13-3 record into the postseason and hosted the NFC Championship Game. General Manager Thomas Dimitroff added two Pro Bowlers to the already talent-laden roster in running back Steven Jackson (acquired from the St. Louis Rams) and defensive end Osi Umenyiora, (from the New York Giants).

The Falcons also succeeded in convincing future Hall of Fame tight end Tony Gonzalez to strap on the pads for another shot at football's biggest prize, the Vince Lombardi Super Bowl trophy. The crop of rookies selected in the April draft look to be the pieces that give the Falcons organization the strength to hoist the big trophy next February at Met Life Stadium in the New York/New Jersey market.

Early in the preseason the rookies showed they are obviously athletes, not just football players. As they learned and competed at the Falcons mandatory minicamp in June, it was clear why fans should be excited. The young players are blending with veterans as they trade practice reps, learning the "Falcon Way" and getting adjusted to the life of an NFL player.

The rookies are already understanding the traits of their leader, Head Coach Mike Smith. Like Smith, they have a quiet confidence that's equally humble and professional. They also have a competitive fire that burns true when they talk about the opportunity to help push this team to February football.

From first-round pick Desmond Trufant (pictured left) to every first-year Falcon, it's obvious these guys want to win. Trufant, a cornerback from the University of Washington, brings a football pedigree to the Flowery Branch complex. He has two older brothers (Marcus and Isaiah) that have been on NFL rosters.

Trufant is a player. In college, Trufant quickly assumed the role of a leader for the Huskies. He started 47 of 50 games for the Huskies, and his accolades include being selected as a team captain in 2012 and being named second-team All-American and first-team All-Pac-12. He also won the team's most outstanding defensive player award in 2012 and the Guy Flaherty Award, the highest honor for a Husky football player. Maybe the greatest testament to Trufant's ability is that he only notched six interceptions in his college career despite starting since his freshman year. Teams were clearly afraid to throw the ball in his direction.

During minicamp Trufant had a sort of "initiation by fire." He faced Pro Bowl wide receiver Roddy White or Julio Jones almost every snap. He came away impressed by their talent, but not bowed by their reputation.

"[White and Jones] are helping me get better everyday, to be honest," said Trufant. "They're big, they're strong, they're fast. I'm thankful, though. I try to learn from as many people as possible."

"CORNER" STONES

Trufant has the size and measurables that will allow him to take on the game's top receivers. He's a six-foot cornerback that has the bulk to muscle up with larger receivers thanks to his 190-pound frame.

Trufant finds himself learning and competing with another talented rookie cornerback, Robert Alford (pictured right). Alford was selected with the 60th overall pick in the draft, 28th in the second round.

Alford comes from a school unfamiliar to a lot of football fans, Southeastern Louisiana University, but he can make an impact for the Falcons all over the field. Alford, 5-foot-10 and 186 pounds, has been auditioning for Smith as a cornerback. Like Trufant, he is a

former high school track star with speed to burn and was targeted less by opposing quarterbacks during his final season in college.

Alford plays a physical style of cornerback and isn't afraid of contact either, pressing receivers at the line of scrimmage and supporting in run defense. Guys with Alford's playing style tend to thrive in the schemes preferred by Smith and Defensive Coordinator Mike Nolan.

Alford and Trufant will be linked together because they were the top two Falcons picks in April's draft, but they welcome each other.

"I met Rob[ert] at the Senior Bowl," said Trufant. "We bonded instantly. We've been growing together and getting better together, competing."

DEFENSE-HEAVY

After Alford and Trufant, Dimitroff kept working on improving the team on the defensive side of the line of scrimmage, selecting defensive end Malliciah Goodman in the fourth round. Goodman has prototypical size for an end at 6-foot-4, 276 pounds. He'll be expected to join the rotation of Umenyiora and Kroy Biermann.

Fans can expect Goodman to be a quick learner. (He graduated from Clemson last December). Goodman appreciates that he landed with the Falcons.

"I'm close to home, close to my school," said Goodman. "The family can come visit, come to the games a lot easier. It's a great team [too]. It's a win-win situation any way you look at it."

Competing with Goodman and the veteran defensive ends will be Stansly Maponga, a former TCU Horned Frog. The Falcons snatched Maponga (6-foot-2, 265 pounds) in the fifth round. Recovering from foot surgery in March, his speed will be an asset come this fall.

Between Goodman and Maponga, the Falcons selected Tight End Levine Toilolo from Stanford in the fourth round of the draft.

Toilolo has the opportunity of a great apprenticeship. He'll spend all of training camp learning from the habits and professionalism of the master, Gonzalez. Listed at 6-foot-8 and 276 pounds, Toilolo will be a big target for Ryan in the preseason.

The theme of selecting defensive players to compete with other rookies continued for a third time in the 2013 Falcons draft when safeties Kemal Ishmael and Zeke Motta both got a draft day call from Flowery Branch in the seventh round.

EYES ON PRIZE

Fans can expect to see a little more speed out of Ishmael (6-foot, 206 pounds) and a little more size from Motta (6-foot-2, 216 pounds). Ishmael is a product of former Georgia Tech Head Coach and NFL defensive assistant George O'Leary's Central Florida program, so he should be well-prepared for the transition to the NFL. Motta should be ready for the big stage as well, if for a different reason. He played his college ball on national TV every weekend in the spotlight of the Notre Dame program.

After selecting six defenders and Toilolo, the Falcons rounded out the draft by selecting Duke quarterback Sean Renfree. Renfree possesses the size and intellect to man the quarterback position in the NFL. He's 6-foot-5, weighs 225 pounds and is already pursuing a master's degree in humanities. Renfree is recovering from shoulder surgery and will compete with free agent Seth Doege from Texas Tech for preseason playing time.

Although undrafted, another rookie in Falcons camp is getting more than the usual attention: Linebacker Brian Banks. Banks was falsely imprisoned for five years before being exonerated. Now, he's working toward his life's passion of playing in the NFL. With hard work, the 27-year old is gaining momentum as the preseason gets closer on the calendar. Banks is 6-foot-2, 250 pounds and keeps getting better.

"It's all starting to just make sense and click," said Banks. "That's been my biggest thing is, once it clicks, watch out, because when it clicks, it's over."

As the rookies prepare for their first season in America's premier professional sport, there will be an overwhelming level of attention directed at them, as well as temptations and distractions. Dimitroff and Owner Arthur Blank know all about the opportunities for NFL rookies. That's probably one of many reasons why they selected Smith to be the head coach a little over six years ago.

One of Smith's best skills is keeping an even keel and his eyes focused on the horizon. When asked about his newest Falcons, Smith is his typical straightforward self.

"Be accountable to yourself first, then to your team," Smith tells rookies. "And, I also tell them if you have to ask yourself 'Should I be doing this?', you probably shouldn't."

The Falcons are clearly mixing in the final ingredients to complete their football masterpiece in the Blank/Rich McKay/Dimitroff/Smith era. The trio has talented coaches like Nolan, Offensive Coordinator Dirk Koetter and Special Teams Coordinator Keith Armstrong, and Pro Bowl leadership from Tony Gonzalez, Matt Ryan, Roddy White, Julio Jones and Asante Samuel. Now, they've got talented rookies that are competing to help the Falcons fly even higher.

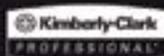
Photos courtesy of Jimmy Cribb/Atlanta Falcons. Conway can be reached at sconway@scoreatl.com.





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