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CAN'T MISS THIS WEEK

- 4** The Fletch previews GPB coverage of the GHSA football playoffs.
- 5** In this week's cover story, Josh Bagriansky looks at the chances of metro Atlanta teams in the football semifinals and beyond.
- 7** Our prep cover story previews the metro Atlanta high school hoops season.
- 9** Are you ready for BOWLPALOOZA? Go here to preview our bowl contest, which will debut this year.



SHOT OF THE WEEK...



AMAZING TURNAROUND: Georgia continued its winning streak with a 31-17 win at Georgia Tech on Nov. 26. It was the 10th consecutive win for the Dawgs, who dropped their first two games of the season. Mark Richt and company will be back in town this weekend, when they face No. 1 LSU in the SEC championship game. Photo courtesy of Rob Saye.

TEAM SCOOP AND VOICES

COVER DESIGN BY DJ GALBIATI
 COVER PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOSH MARTINDALE, WALTER PINION, AND TUCKER HIGH SCHOOL

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INSIDE AT SCORE

ON THE Score Atlanta is looking for new sales associates as well as writing and graphic design interns. For sales positions, e-mail Bob Houghton at bhoughton@scoreatl.com. For writing internships, e-mail Stephen Black at sblack@scoreatl.com. For graphic design internships, e-mail DJ Galbiati at djgalbiati@scoreatl.com. Feel free to call 404-256-1572 to speak with someone about any of these positions.

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THE FLETCH



Football final fours shown on GPB

By Fletcher Proctor



The GHSA football playoffs have reached the semifinals and Georgia Public Broadcasting is all over it. GPB TV has televised countless 19 games this season and the web has featured all of those games as well as an additional 14 to choose from each Friday night. With the GHSA finals next week, Georgia Public Broadcasting will be live from the Georgia Dome Friday and Saturday before the kickoff of the first game until the final trophy has been handed out.

The broadcasting crews should be special this season too as some new voices will be bringing you the games and breaking down the action. Blessed Trinity head coach Tim McFarland, who won a state title with Roswell, will be in the booth for a pair of games and local play-by-play voice Bob Rathbun will call in the booth for the Class AA title showdown. Zach Klein of WSB will also call a game and the GPB.org web team of Bob Houghton and myself will be joined by a true Georgia high school football legend Tommy Palmer for the Class A game Saturday.

The GPB TV Football Friday's team of Gil Tyree, Trey McDaniel and former Brookwood coach Dave Hunter will announce two of the games. Niki Noto, Jon Nelson, Jackie Brittain and Mark Harmon will also be involved in the broadcasts. Class AA and AAAA games will be played Friday night

starting at 4:30 p.m. with the action beginning Saturday at 1 p.m. Score Atlanta will be blogging all weekend long, and you can weigh in on the interactive live chat on gpb.org/sports. The games will reair December 12-16 on GPB Knowledge with one game each night at 8 p.m.

Klein did a great job last year in the Class A game, and he has done a superb job this season on WSB's Thursday night games. It will be interesting to hear him in the booth with Coach McFarland, who should bring a tremendous insight to the broadcast. Rathbun has been calling college football the past few seasons and everyone knows his voice from his work with the Atlanta Hawks. His enthusiasm is sure to fit right in at the high school level. Also if anyone knows more about Georgia high school football than Tommy Palmer, please tell me. I am looking forward to working a game with one of the state's legends.

NO RESPECT ...

Sandra Golden brought up an interesting point on The Rude Awakening last Tuesday when she asked who LSU was playing in the SEC Championship. She was kidding of course, but it apparently is a foregone conclusion to everyone that LSU is going to roll over the Georgia Bulldogs in the SEC title game before moving on to face Alabama

(which didn't even win its own division) for the BCS championship. (Remember, in 2007, Georgia finished tied for the SEC East title but lost a tiebreaker. Alabama cannot even claim a share of the SEC West title this year.) ESPN crews Saturday night were failing to give Georgia a shot, including the team broadcasting the Egg Bowl.

The game wasn't interesting, so they started discussing the SEC championship game. At one point the announcer laughed when asked if Georgia had a shot. Matt Milten at least would entertain the possibility that Georgia could win, saying that Georgia has improved since he called the Dawgs game against South Carolina. The AJC's Jeff Schultz seems to believe that Georgia has more than a "puncher's chance," against No. 1 LSU. "That short-changes Georgia." Schultz would argue that Georgia is rolling and Aaron Murray is the best quarterback that the LSU defense will face this season, especially with his talented crop of wide receiver. Oh, yeah, the defense is pretty good too opines Schultz. He noted that Jarvis Jones and company "throttled the Tech option offense (last) Saturday."

There is also the chance that Georgia has done just enough the last two times out to keep it vanilla before throwing the chocolate swirl with sprinkles against LSU in the title game. You never know, and if LSU gets down early with the game not really mattering as BCS math already has the Tigers in the title game, perhaps Les Miles takes down the tents and lets Georgia have its day in the Dome. He has bigger and badder fish to fry.

FOOT-IN-MOUTH DISEASE ...

On his radio show leading up to the Georgia game, Georgia Tech head football coach Paul Johnson responded to a barking caller, "Anybody who calls into a radio show and barks is either retarded or doesn't have a life." Credit the AJC's Ken Sugiura, who covers the Tech beat for calling Johnson out after the coach apologized. "Not sure what to say. It was a poor choice of words," wrote Sugiura in his beat writer blog. While I hate parts of the PC world we live in these days where coaches such as Johnson are being stripped of their personalities as to not give away any honesty, using retarded is a harsh "cutdown" that shouldn't be used as such. You can make fun of choices a person makes, but when you use an unchangeable element such as a mental disability or sexual

orientation as an insult, that is crossing the line. I will stand up against that.

The evolution of Leo Mazzone continues on 680 The Fan's The Rude Awakening and, he has had me recently yelling at my radio. Normally "any press/attention is good press/attention," but not in this case. I remember not too long ago I felt like Doc Holliday/Val Kilmer in Tombstone whenever Mazzone piped up. "Oh Leo, I apologize; I forgot you were there. You may go now."

Now though I guess the bigwigs told him he needs to talk more on the show and he has been interjecting him into the conversation, bringing up bizarre points and killing the show's momentum. I will be driving and suddenly scream, "Shut up!" because I was trying to hear banter between Sandra and Perry Laurentino when Mazzone weighs in. When will it get better? He is starting to sound like my 91-year-old grandfather, who also used to play baseball for the Yankees. While I love my grandfather and believe he has forgotten more about sports than I will ever know, he doesn't deserve a radio show. Sound familiar?

Photo courtesy of Rob Saye. Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

CAN YOU BELIEVE... ...HE SAID THAT?

"Why you see me pushing his helmet down [is] because I'm trying to remove myself from the situation."

Lions defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh tried to explain his actions against the Packers that earned him a two-game suspension from the NFL. He continued, sort of. "What I did was remove myself from the situation in the best way I felt, me being held down in the situation I was in. And further, my intentions were not to kick anybody, as I did not, removing myself as you see, I'm walking away from the situation and with that I apologize ... for putting myself in the position to be misinterpreted and taken out of the game."



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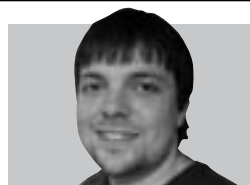
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STATE FINAL FOURS



Atlanta-area squads ready for semis

By Josh Bagriansky



Three weeks ago, 160 teams across Georgia opened up the state playoffs with one dream in mind: winning a state championship. Today, only 20 of them remain with the state semifinals set for this weekend.

Many fine teams in and around Atlanta have already met their match, seeing their seasons end in the tournament. But for the Walton Raiders, Lassiter Trojans, Buford Wolves, and Tucker Tigers, the dream is still very much alive.

FAMILIAR FOES ...

The state playoffs often deliver great matchups between two teams that are unfamiliar with each other. But that is not the case in Class 5A, where Cobb County and Region 5-AAAAA rivals Walton and Lassiter go head-to-head for the second time this season.

The undefeated Raiders got the best of the Trojans on Sep. 30, winning 34-10 although they only lead 13-10 at the half.

At Lassiter, the team quickly forgot about that game and won its next two outings. However, Jep Irwin's team struggled down the stretch, losing nail-biters to Etowah and Marietta. But entering the tournament as the No. 4 seed from one of the Peach State's strongest re-

gions, Irwin says his team still felt good about their chances.

"We lost senior night and homecoming against quality teams," Irwin said. "We were very focused and had great preparation. We knew we why we lost those games. Confidence and competitiveness were not issues all year."

The Trojans had to be confident, squeaking by Alpharetta in overtime in the first round, upsetting vaunted McEachern in round two and then taking down another favorite in M.L. King to reach the semis.

Thanks to a fine passing game paced by quarterback Eddie Printz, the Trojans are a difficult matchup for just about anyone. Printz has thrown 26 touchdowns this season, with 24 of them going to a strong trio of wideouts in Charlie Hegedus, Juwan Dicker and Willie Police. But Lassiter will likely face their toughest test yet on Friday against a Walton squad that has dominated from day one.

The Raiders come in at 13-0, and had beaten all of their opponents by double-digits until last week's 21-13 win over Dacula, who made Walton sweat a little in the fourth quarter. For a team that has been rolling through the competition all season, Hidalgo was counting

his blessings post game, even though his team was in control much of the way.

"We stunk up the joint," Hidalgo told the Marietta Daily Journal. "This was easily our worst game of the year. You hope it doesn't come during the playoffs, but ours did, and we are fortunate to get out of here with a win."

Hidalgo's initial reaction to the quarterfinal win spoke volumes about the talent at his disposal. The Raiders haven't been a team expected simply to win this season, but also to win convincingly.

Much of those expectations are because of star running back Tyren Jones. The Lassiter transfer has been virtually unstoppable this season, running behind an excellent offensive line and wearing defenses down in Walton's power running attack. Jones has run for more than 2,000 yards this season.

"He's an elusive kid. He can spin, make moves and break tackles," Irwin said. "If you give him a crease he'll hit it and has the potential to go the distance."

But Walton is about more than one player. Safety/wide receiver Zack Blaylock just might be the best two-way player in the state, and has gotten scholarship offers from the likes of Kentucky, Louisville and Maryland, and is getting serious looks from a slew of big time SEC and ACC schools.

They might want to take a closer look after his performance against Dacula. Leading 14-10 in the final quarter, the Falcons drove down the field and threatened to take the lead. But Blaylock was having none of it, picking off a pass deep in Raiders territory to preserve the lead. Then, on third-and-seven from their own three moments later, Blaylock caught a pass in the flat from Parker McLeod, made one man miss, and raced to the end zone for an incredible 97-yard touchdown.

Later, with his team up eight, Blaylock intercepted yet another pass in the end zone to clinch their birth in the semifinals.

"If there is a better football player in the state of Georgia, I want to see him," Hidalgo said. "I know we have guys in the county that have more than 100 tackles or have 24 sacks, but winners make things happen. How many other players have 10 interceptions and returned five for touchdowns?"

FAMILIAR FACES ...

If you know anything about GHSA football, then you aren't surprised by the presence of Franklin Stephens' Tucker Tigers and Jess Simpson's Buford Wolves in the state semis.

At Tucker, the Tigers have now incredibly qualified for the semifinals in four of their previous five seasons (winning a state championship in 2008). This year, they're as strong as ever, entering Friday's matchup with Northside (Warner Robins) at 13-0. It will be a tough test against a team that sports an identical record and will enjoy homefield advantage.

Perhaps underdogs for the first time this season, the No. 1 Tigers can take solace in the fact that they flourished under adversity in last week's 42-34 win over Flowery Branch, when they trailed 14-0 early and had to hold on late.

"It shows a lot about what this squad is about," said Stephens told the AJC. "We knew at some point we would have to overcome some adversity and tonight we did."

Leading the way is exciting junior quarterback Juwaan Williams, who rushed for three touchdowns in the win. He teams up with backs Jordan Landry and Yusuf Minor to form a monster backfield.

Williams' dynamic play carries over to the defensive end, where he starts at corner to lead a defense that surrenders just 11 points a contest. Keep an eye on Vandy commit Josh Dawson, as the 6-foot-4, 225-pound defensive end is constantly in the opponent's backfield.

Expecting Tucker to be in the state semis nowadays is a seemingly safe bet, but the Buford Wolves have reached the point where not winning a state championship would be a surprise. Jess Simpson's program has won the last four Class 2A titles, and this year has been more of the same, as Buford visits Carver (Columbus) this Friday sporting a 13-0 record.

As always, the Wolves are loaded. Look out for an intimidating defense that features two Division-1 commits at the linebacker position in Dillon Lee (Alabama) and Nathan Staub (North Carolina). They held Elbert County without a first down until late in the third quarter and limited all-state hopeful Tyshon Dye to just 39 yards on the ground.

Photo of Grayson courtesy of Jon Barash. Bagriansky can be reached at jbagriansky@scoreatl.com.

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WHOS HOT

THUMBS UP TO TURNAROUNDS



Mark Richt's mojo

Things looked pretty bleak in Athens early in September. The Dogs lost their first two games, and Richt was hardly the big man on campus. Now, Georgia has the third-longest winning streak in the FBS. The defense has been dominant, and quarterback Aaron Murray has been borderline brilliant lately.

Playoff Football

Our state is regarded as one of the top four producers of college football talent in the country every year. Where do these kids come from? Amazing high school programs. If you want to see some up and coming college stars (and some heated competition) go check out this weekend's semifinal matchups.

Roddy and Ryan

The two Pro Bowlers are officially synced-up and playing at a high level. Matt Ryan has notched a passer rating of 110.9 or better in three of the last four games. Roddy White has 267 receiving yards in the past two games, all from Ryan's passes.

Dome-field advantage

Why can't you people get to your seats and get loud before kick-off on Sundays? Seriously? The Falcons have won five of their last six games, four of which were home games, but fans still file into the Georgia Dome like they're lining up for a tetanus shot. Rise up!

NBA basketball

Frankly, there is just too much football going on right now to even begin to think about pro hoops. Sure, we're all glad the lockout is behind us, but we've got high school playoffs, Tech's bowl game, Georgia in the SEC Championship, the Falcons approaching the playoffs, the Chick-fil-A Bowl...

Bulldog running backs

Georgia's 10-game win streak has been helped by a makeshift corps of running backs down the stretch. In the last five games, the heralded running back trio of Isaiah Crowell, Carlton Thomas and Richard Samuel has a combined 417 rushing yards. Former walk-on Brandon Harton has 214 yards by himself despite playing in only three of those games.



WHOS NOT

THUMBS DOWN TO OVER-HYPED RECRUITS

SCORE LIST

BY BRIAN JONES & SCOTT ST. LIFER

- 1** **OUR DOME:** Georgia plays top-ranked LSU on Saturday in the SEC championship game for a spot in the Sugar Bowl. The Dawgs are 1-3 all-time against the nation's best with the lone victory coming in 1985 in a 24-3 beatdown of Florida. Do the Dawgs have what it takes to spoil LSU's national title hopes?
- 2** **CENTER STAGE:** The state semifinals occur Friday night with plenty of intriguing matchups in store. On GPB-TV, Colquitt County will square off against Grayson while Burke County and Gainesville will duke it out at 7:30 p.m. at gpb.org/sports. Don't forget to visit scoreatl.com for up-to-the-minute updates on your favorite school!
- 3** **TIS THE SEASON:** The holidays have become jolly once again as the NBA has resolved its issues with the NBPA in order to salvage the upcoming season. The season will tipoff on Christmas Day and will consist of a 66-game schedule. Many of those opponents will remain familiar, as 48 of the games will occur between conference foes.
- 4** **TEXANS TOAST:** The Falcons will look to win their eighth game of the year when they take on the Houston Texans on Sunday. It will be an interesting contest because even though the Texans are down to their third-string quarterback, they still boast the No. 1 defense in the NFL. It will be another tough, physical ball game, but we think the Falcons will pull it out at the end.
- 5** **TITLE QUEST:** After earning a first-round bye, Georgia Southern will begin its road to a FCS National title when they take on Old Dominion Saturday at Paulson Stadium. The Eagles had a good regular season as they earned a 9-2 record and were ranked No. 1 the majority of the season. Can they take down a team that has won seven of its last eight games? The game starts at 1 p.m. on Saturday.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

BY SCOTT ST. LIFER

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 33 | Wins by Tim Hudson during the past two seasons, more than Cliff Lee and Tim Lincecum |
| .909 | Mark Richt's winning percentage against Georgia Tech |
| 83.5 | Opponents' rush yards per game allowed by the Falcons, the second-best in the NFL |
| 4 | SECCG berths for Georgia under Mark Richt |
| 5,619 | Attendance at Phillips Arena for Georgia Tech's first "home" game at the venue |
| 66 | Tentative length of the upcoming NBA season beginning on Christmas Day |
| 5 | Games Georgia has played against the top-ranked team in the AP Poll including Saturday's matchup against LSU |
| 2 | Opponents remaining on the Falcons' schedule that currently have a winning record |
| 7 | Interceptions by Georgia safety Bacarri Rambo, second-most in the NCAA |
| 100 | Tackles by Falcons' linebacker Curtis Lofton |

TRIVIA QUESTION

Prior to Saturday's SEC championship game, what is the only SEC team to have a winning record against Les Miles' LSU teams?

Answer on Page 14

SANITY AT LAST

"Everybody always talks about the SEC Championship and championships, period, as big games, but it's still the same thing; we come in on Monday and do game reviews, we look over the scout report and you look at a team and you see there are 11 guys on the field."

- UGA WR Chris Conley on playing in the SEC championship game.

MY TWO CENTS

The best in high school sports is here in Georgia the next two weekends. More than 400 football teams have been reduced to just 20. And by Saturday, only 10 will remain.

Do yourselves a favor and get out to a high school football playoff game during the next two weeks. The best teams in the state will be fighting on the gridiron for state titles, and in Georgia, that means some of the best high school football anywhere.

Check out the Battle of East Cobb when Lassiter faces Walton, or head over to Grayson to see Region 1-power Colquitt County and famous coach Rush Propst. On the southside of the city, check out traditional power Warner Robins

at Lovejoy or see Class A titans Landmark Christian and ELCA face off. Or see one of the most impressive dynasties in the history of the state as Buford tries to chase down its fifth Class 2A title in a row.

If you can't find a ticket for the semifinals, we understand as every game is likely to be sold out. But, for the state finals next weekend, there will be plenty of tickets left at the Dome to see the finals. Anything short of a military call up is not an excuse - you need to get out to the Dome. Games are on both

Friday and Saturday and you will not be let down by the games - we promise!

Black can be reached at sblack@scoreatl.com.





Shiloh impresses in early tournaments

By Fletcher Proctor

College football's first few weeks of the year always feature an interesting debate: challenge yourself and perhaps lose, or take the easy road and win games. High school basketball in the state of Georgia has started to face the same conundrum as many teams have begun challenging themselves with out-of-state tournaments, in-state events against some of the nation's top teams or just trips across the state to face the best of the Peach State.

GENERALS IN CHARGE ...

One team that made the most of the recent Big Apple vs. Big Peach Battle, pitting some of Georgia's best against some of the best from New York, was Shiloh High School. Newcomer Robert Carter helped Shiloh win its game against Bishop Loughlin with 20 points and eight rebounds. The Generals had

previously knocked off Centennial, and Shiloh has moved up the Score Atlanta poll.

Norcross, meanwhile, fell twice in the event, but the Blue Devils came out of the gate slowly one year ago before going on to win the Class 5A title. The team returned only one starter after graduation and transfers hit the program, but the Big Apple vs. Big Peach Battle gave head coach Jesse McMillan the chance to find a new rotation and work some players into the lineup. Brandon Goodwin scored 25 points in Norcross's first game of the two-day event while Derrick Herbert and Myles Autry each scored 10 points. Harold Givens is new to the program but was thrown in and he responded with nine points, six boards and three blocks. Norcross will next face another ranked team in Harrison in the Nike Explosion at Wheeler this Saturday. McMillan said of his team, "Typical early mis-

takes and nervousness but the guys seem to understand the target on their backs and are responding well."

EAGLES STILL SOARING ...

The Blue Devils defeated Milton last year in the playoffs, but Milton has too reloaded for a run at a second title in three years. David Boyd has assembled another quality team that has already steeled itself against some big competition. The Eagles easily dispatched of Class AA No. 1 Buford thanks in large part to Score 44 standout Evan Nolte. Milton also boasts Charles Mann, Shaquille Johnson and Tevin Glass and would give last year's core four of Shannon Scott, Julian Royal, Dai-Jon Parker and Jordan Lloyd a run for their money.

AJ Davis's transfer from GAC to Buford seemingly shifted the balance of power in Class AA from the defending champion Spartans to the Wolves, a state finalist one year ago. However Davis was on the bench in Buford's recent loss to Milton and has not played since switching schools. Both AA schools could also see some competition from

Thomasville and Willie Clayton, one of the top players in the state.

GIRLS BALLIN' ...

On the girls side, McEachern has already avenged last year's title game loss to Norcross with a 55-43 win over the Lady Blue Devils. McEachern is loaded with Score 44 talent and could challenge the Blue Devils' lock on the title. Parkview is another team that could make noise at the AAAAA level as new coach Tony Watkins has the Lady Panthers playing at a high level. Parkview defeated Alpharetta in the Parkview Tip-off Classic last week.

Buford will be without Andraya Carter for most of, if not all of, the season after the future Lady Vol tore an ACL during the off-season. The Lady Wolves program welcomed in Kristina Nelson from GAC to team with Kaela Davis, and they have Buford poised for yet another title run. Wesleyan has also played well against stout competition, winning the Turkey Tip-Off recently, thanks to Holli Wilkins, Kaelyn Causwell and Jordan Frazier.

Photos courtesy of Walter Pinion. Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.



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SEC FANFARE



Variety of activities awaits UGA, LSU fans

Members of the Georgia Bulldog Nation and proud LSU Tiger followers will be treated to plenty of football action Saturday, but the fun doesn't start with the game. The 2011 SEC FanFare is back Friday and Saturday, and this year may be the best experience yet. The hours have been changed to give all college football fans more time to indulge in everything that is the SEC. Friday the doors open at 1 p.m. and will stay open until 6 p.m. Saturday the doors will be open from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. Admission is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children under 12, though kids get in free on Friday.

The new layout should enhance the fan

experience by providing an intuitive path to allow the fans to move around the event. Fans can visit new sponsored zones/lands including the Dr. Pepper District, the Texas Pete SEC Tailgate, SEC LIVE!, the AT&T Speed Zone, Regions Financial District, the AllState Fan Zone and the MVP and Championship Villages.

Several of these zones have been upgraded and some are brand new to the FanFare experience. The Texas Pete SEC Tailgate has been redesigned to give the bar area an updated look and feel. The SEC Tailgate will bring together all SEC fans favorite tailgating activities and will serve as the food and

beverage hub. Fans should be able to grab refreshments, watch large video screens, play corn hole or relax in the Aaron's Dream Lounge. There will be a renovated press box desk and set as well as a renovated mini camp combine in the AT&T Speed Zone.

The Dr. Pepper District will be the centerpiece of this year's SEC FanFare. The horizontal field will provide a fresh perspective for fans and will allow for more seating for some unique programming and pep rallies. The District will contain the Dr. Pepper trailer, the display and two Dr. Pepper Game Zones.

Do you love the SEC? SEC LIVE! is the area at FanFare that will feature SEC sports facts and championship history in one interactive experience for SEC fans that love the conference's storied tradition of excellence in collegiate athletics. Fans will also get a chance to test their hands at facts about SEC Champions in golf, baseball and softball in addition to facts about football.

The Regions Financial District is a long-

standing sponsor of the 3-on-3 challenge field, and SEC fans will get a chance to watch the amazing and artistic cyclists from the Regions' television commercials four times Friday and an additional four times on Saturday. The 3-on-3 events will include basketball, softball and baseball, as well as a real field goal kick with turf and netting. The AllState Fan Zone will give fans a chance to test their "good hands," and the Championship and MVP Villages are important destinations for any fan that loves the SEC.

The Macy's Star Challenge will also be hosting an interactive scavenger hunt that will require fans to cover every square inch of the FanFare in order to win a \$500 Macy's gift card.

Other changes that folks may notice are the upgraded seating around Dr. Pepper field and the Region field as well as new signage and two new redesigned entrances. Before you head down to the Dome for the SEC Championship game, make sure you stop by the SEC FanFare for an experience you will never forget.

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BASKETBALL NEWS



Hoops season beings with tournies

By Brian Jones

With football season coming to an end, basketball season has arrived and many teams got seasons underway last week taking part in tournaments. Milton, the top-ranked team in Class 5A, traveled to Charlotte, N.C. last week to take part in the Iverify Invitational. The Eagles had a very good showing as they took out Harding (N.C.) 74-58 and Hunter Hess (N.C.) 75-44. Both Shaquille Johnson and Evan Nolte made the all-tournament team. The Eagles made their way back to Georgia on Tuesday to face Buford and came away with 75-51 win.

KENNESAW EXPLOSION ...

If you want to watch some of the best basketball teams in the state but don't want to travel far away from home, then head over to Kennesaw State on Saturday as the Nike Explosion Showcase will feature four games at KSU's Convocation Center. The first game will feature Buford and North Gwinnett. The Wolves are the top ranked team in Class 2A and the Bulldogs are led by Chris Bolden, who recently transferred from Norcross.

Game 2 will be between Columbia and GAC. The Eagles, the defending Class 3A champions, are led by Oregon State com-

mit Jarmal Reid, while the Spartans, who are the Class 2A champions, are looking to get a big win after suffering losses last week to Peachtree Ridge and Mill Creek.

The defending champs in 5A, Norcross, will go up against Harrison in the third game, and Wheeler will take on Southwest DeKalb in the final game of the showcase. Norcross is looking to rebound after going 0-2 in Big Apple vs. Big Peach Battle at Shiloh last week. Wheeler will look to start its season on the right foot with a big win against a team that features Memphis commit Shaquille Goodwin and Auburn commit Jordan Price.

DIAMOND DEVIL ...

The Norcross Lady Blue Devils won the 5A title last year, and it looks like they could win it again this year. They lost to state runner-up McEachern on Nov. 16, but bounced right back with wins over Columbia and Fayette County in the Lady Blue Tip-Off Classic. The Lady Blue Devils are led by Diamond DeShields, who is considered by ESPN as one of the six best players in the country.

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FOOTBALL NEWS



Lassiter, Landmark embrace underdog role

By Fletcher Proctor

The Lassiter Trojans and the Landmark Christian War Eagles both were road warriors in the truest sense, each winning three road games as a No. 4 seed to advance to the semifinals in Class AAAAA and A, respectively. The Trojans first edged No. 1 seed Alpharetta before going on the road again to edge No. 2 McEachern and No. 1 ML King. Landmark Christian knocked off No. 1 Darlington, No. 3 Calvary Day and No. 2 Aquinas. Each will once again be on the road as Lassiter faces No. 1 seed (its third in four weeks of playoff matchups) in Walton, a region foe that prevailed 34-10 on Sept. 30 in the "East Cobb Super Bowl." The War Eagles face ELCA, a team that thumped them 35-14 back on Oct. 14 in region play.

Lassiter will face Walton for a spot in the state title game and history is assured a chance of being made. No Cobb County school has hoisted a state football crown since Marietta in 1967. Lassiter and Walton both opened their seasons in the Georgia Dome, the site of the state championships this year.

The Grayson Rams will meet the Packers of Colquitt County in Loganville for the right to go to the Georgia Dome for the second straight season. Last season Rush Propst's squad prevailed 31-24 before falling

to Brookwood in the title game. Mickey Conn and the Rams enter the game 13-0 and ranked No. 5 nationally in the latest USA Today poll, up two spots from one week ago. Colquitt County was unranked one week ago but now checks in at No. 14.

STREAK BUSTED ...

The Sandy Creek Patriots had won 41 straight games which included the 2009 Class AAAA state title and the 2010 Class AAA crown before falling at Gainesville last week. The Red Elephants won a coin toss for the right to host the Patriots last Friday, and sophomore Deshaun Watson did the rest, racking up five scores in a 35-21 victory. Buford now owns the longest streak with 26 wins dating back to last year's 14-0 loss at Carver-Columbus. The Wolves return to the same site to face the Tigers with a date in the Georgia Dome going to the winner. Buford is aiming for its fifth straight state title.

Finally, Duluth's Corey Jarvis and Lowndes Randy McPherson were both named assistant coaches for the January US Army All-American Bowl. Each will coach on the east team for the high school all-star game.

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SWIMMING NEWS



Teams back in pools after break

By Ryan Caiafa

Thanksgiving break saw a moratorium for swim teams across the state, but the season is gearing back up for some key upcoming competitions. Peachtree Ridge will take on Brookwood Saturday at Mountain Park. Coming off another strong meet against Duluth, Campbell and Kennesaw Mountain, the Lions will have their hands full against a tough Brookwood Broncos team. The Broncos are coming off a successful outing from both the boys and girls teams against Parkview and Alpharetta, where the boys took second overall and the girls won. Brookwood will need to put on a similar overall team performance to take down a strong Peachtree Ridge squad.

RAMS-EAGLES ...

After sweeping the tri-meet against Berkmar and Meadowcreek, Grayson returns to the pool to take on Collins Hill on Saturday. The Rams were dominant at the meet, with both the boys and girls team combining for a score of 628 to second place Meadowcreek's 202 combined total. Collins Hill is coming off a closely-contested meet against North Gwinnett, which saw the boys team edge out the Bulldogs 171-143, while the girls team narrowly lost 160-151. "We're looking forward to the challenge," said Grayson coach Rebekah Bullock, "and we have a lot of strong and hard-working swimmers."

On the boys side for the Rams, Nick White, Mason McIntyre and David Liska are expected to lead Grayson against Collins Hill's top swimmers, while Mason's sister, Morgan, along with the Gehle sisters, Anna and Hope, will lead the charge for the girls. Several of Bullock's swimmers, including Mason and Morgan McIntyre, Ryan Murray and David Liska have already made the cuts for the state competitions.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE ...

Lassiter and Westminster will compete in their annual dual meet on Dec. 6. Trojans coach Glenn Meeden is looking forward to what he considers to be a great experience every year for his team. "They [Westminster] are always an excellent team with a great coaching staff and we look forward to competing with them at their pool." Meeden will look to build off their performance in the dual meet against Pope on Nov. 19, which saw the girls team win its competition, while the boys team narrowly fell to the Greyhounds. The Trojans hope David Yap, Zachary Bunner and Drew Cutic will lead them past a tough Westminster in the boys meet, while Jordan Drake and Sarah Williford are expected to carry much of the load for the veteran girls team in their competition.

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WRESTLING NEWS



Rams set the bar at Alexander Duals

By Robby Kalland

While swimming took Thanksgiving week off for the most part, the wrestlers did not. The Alexander Duals and the Parkview Thanksgiving Duals have been two of the biggest early-season tournaments this year. In the Alexander Duals Collins Hill once again asserted themselves as a top team in the state winning the tournament with a dominating performance. Archer placed second, with Ola third, and host Alexander fourth.

CAGEY COUGARS ...

Alexander coach Sean Moistner hopes to build on this performance and feels his team can compete for state titles in February. The team will be led by three-time state champion Chad Starnes and two-time state placer Jamie Prescott. They will have seven new starters this year, but they are excited about the youth on the team led by freshmen Bryce Hollomon and Roman Boylen.

"We feel like we can contend for the title in both the duals and individual state championships even with the youth of the team," said an ambitious Moistner. He hopes that his team will be able to grow and develop over the course of the year and by wrestling against top teams early in the year they will gain experience that will help them in the state championships in February.

Alexander also competed in the

Parkview Thanksgiving Duals, placing fifth. Last year's Class AAA team duals champion Gilmer won the tournament defeating Woodland 43-33 in the finals. The tournament featured a number of good teams, including Peachtree Ridge and Loganville, which finished third and fourth, respectively. The top five teams from this tournament plan to figure into the state championship equation for each of their classes.

LIONS DEN ...

This weekend the Peachtree Ridge Lions Duals will take place Friday and Saturday. The 16-team field is highlighted by host Peachtree Ridge, Milton, Alexander, Dacula, Eastside and Roswell. Roswell is coming off of a second-place finish in the Kennesaw Mountain Duals this past weekend, and Alexander and Peachtree Ridge will look to build on their finishes in the Parkview Duals.

Collins Hill will travel to Tampa, Fla., to participate in the Cougar Invitational this weekend along with Camden County and Valdosta representing the state of Georgia. This tournament will be the first of six trips for the Eagles out of the state and they will look to prove that they are deserving of their national ranking.

Kalland can be reached at 404-256-1572.

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PANTHER PROWL



Basketball wins third straight game

By Dave Cohen

After dropping all three games in Seattle to open the season, the Georgia State basketball team (3-3) returned south and has won its last three games, beating McNeese State, Samford and then Liberty University last Saturday night 72-50. In the win over Liberty, Jihad Ali came off the bench to score 16 points (6-for-6 from the field), including

14 in the second half to lead the way. Ali has now scored 36 points in the last two games. Sophomore Devonta White added 15 points, and Eric Buckner blocked a career-high seven shots, to go along with nine points and seven rebounds. Buckner's seven blocks tied for the second most in single-game history, trailing only Sylvester Morgan's nine against Mercer

on Jan. 23, 2005. In just his second season, Buckner moved into Georgia State's career top 10 list in blocks as well and now has 70, eighth most in school history.

"Our team continues to gain confidence every minute, every half and every game, and that is what we need to do," said head coach Ron Hunter. "We keep talking about being at our best in February and tonight's win definitely helps us toward that goal." The Panthers upcoming schedule includes a road game at South Carolina State and a home game with Florida International. (Listen on WRAS-FM 88.5)

LADY PANTHERS ...

In women's action, Kendra Long scored 20 points and Cody Paulk added 10 points, seven rebounds and three blocks as the Georgia State women's basketball team (1-3)

earned its first victory of the season with a 70-56 win over Campbell in the opening game of the Starwood Hotels of Atlanta Thanksgiving Classic last Friday at the GSU Sports Arena. The Panthers lost the second game of the tournament, falling to Appalachian State 82-58. Turnovers were the problem as the Panthers gave the ball away 31 times. The All-Classic Team included Eastern Kentucky's Marie Carpenter, Campbell's Tonisha Baker, Georgia State's Kendra Long and Chan Harris, and Appalachian State's Kelsey Sharkey and MVP Chakeitha "TC" Weldon...

Georgia State football closed out its season with a 42-35 win over Campbell to finish the season at 3-8.

Dave Cohen is in his 28th season as the "Voice of Georgia State Athletics" on WRAS-FM (88.5) and WCFO-AM, Newstalk 1160.

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BULLDOG BEAT



Dawgs ready for top-ranked LSU

By Stephen Black

It has been a busy few weeks for the Georgia Bulldogs.

On Nov. 12, Georgia got revenge on Auburn for last year's loss on the Plains. In a 45-7 win, the Dawgs looked dominant for the first time all year against an SEC team. The following week, Mark Richt's team clinched the SEC Eastern Division and a trip to the Georgia Dome for the SEC championship game with a win over Kentucky. And finally, the Dawgs won the Governor's Cup with their 10th win in 11 meetings with arch rival Georgia Tech last week.

Now it's on to No. 1 LSU at the Georgia Dome. The Dawgs have faced American's top-ranked team only five times in their illustrious history with just one win- a 24-3 shellacking of Florida in 1985.

It is Georgia's fourth appearance in the SEC championship game, and its third meeting with LSU in the Dome. Georgia is 2-1 in previous conference championship games and 1-1 against the Tigers. In fact, the last time the Dawgs were in the big game, they upset No. 3 LSU 34-14 in 2005.

Georgia will have to hope for another upset this time around, as the Tigers are a 14-point fa-

vorite. Both defenses rank among the top units in America, as LSU is No. 2 in total defense while UGA is No. 5. Both teams are especially tough against the run as the Tigers rank No. 4 against the rush while the Dawgs check in at No. 6. Georgia's biggest advantage is in passing offense, where the Bulldogs rank No. 47 to LSU's No. 100.

HOOP HOUNDS ...

Mark Fox's basketball squad began the season 4-3 but has lost three of its last four. However, the Dawgs did avenge last season's loss to Notre Dame when they defeated the Irish 61-57 in the third-place game of the CBE Classic in Kansas City. Georgia had lost earlier in the tournament 70-46 to No. 23 California.

The Bulldogs followed up the win over Notre Dame with losses to No. 12 Xavier and Colorado, which has not lost in 26 consecutive non-conference games at home.

Georgia now moves on to a game with Georgia Tech in Athens on Wednesday. The Dawgs have not lost to Tech in Athens since the rivalry moved to the campuses in 1994.

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TECH TALK



Johnson setting records after four years

By Thomas Watson

Despite this season ending on a sour note, Georgia Tech fans should look over the first four years of Paul Johnson's tenure and use this holiday season to be thankful for the team's best coach since Bobby Dodd himself.

Only four coaches in the history of the ACC have won more games than Johnson in their first four years in the league, and no coach has ever done what Johnson has in winning coach of the year in each of his first two seasons. Johnson's 21-11 conference record is the ninth best in the history of the ACC, and he is only the fourth coach in the ACC to beat all 11 conference opponents. Maybe even more impressive is that Johnson's teams are a combined 16-2 when holding opponents to 20 points or less, 20-5 when playing at home, 26-4 when leading at the half and 29-2 when leading after three quarters.

Outside of the ACC, Johnson's career .712 winning percentage is seventh-highest among active FBS coaches, and only 12 active FBS coaches have more career wins. His teams at Tech are a combined 22-1 when scoring more than 30 points; however, Johnson has yet to win a bowl game at Tech.

The most likely destination at this point seems to be the Sun Bowl, though if Clemson loses badly enough in the ACC championship, the Tigers could fall and subsequently push Tech further down the ladder.

HOOPS UNDERWAY ...

The Brian Gregory era began with a two-game win streak, but as the Jackets have played tougher competition, they have lost three out of the last five to fall to 4-3. A 76-60 loss to Northwestern Tuesday night marked three losses in three games against opponents from major conferences.

Glen Rice, Jr. has proven to be the Jackets' top player this season, though he has had issues seeing eye-to-eye with Gregory. Despite being forced to come off the bench, Rice has scored in double figures the last four games after dropping 10 points on Northwestern. Jason Morris scored 16 points in 15 minutes during the first half. Morris finished with 21 points. After a game against Tulane, the Jackets' basketball team will get its shot at arch-rival Georgia on Wednesday.

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HAWKS HAVEN



Lockout ends, season to be shortened

By Josh Bagriansky

After nearly 150 days of being locked out and countless hours of negotiations, NBA fans and players finally received confirmation that there would indeed be a 2011-12 season, with training camp and free agency tentatively scheduled for Dec. 9, and opening day falling on Christmas Day for the first time in league history.

With a shortened season, the Hawks can expect an extremely congested schedule that calls for 66 games beginning on Dec. 25 and ending April 26. Teams will play 48 conference games and 18 non-conference games. Even more interesting will be impending games on three consecutive evenings, during which all 30 teams will have to play at least once but no more than three times.

KEEPING CRAWFORD ...

The principle piece of business for the Hawks now becomes re-signing Jamal Crawford. The 2009-10 NBA Sixth Man of the Year has been a key cog for Atlanta in past seasons, giving the Hawks a scorer to take the pressure off of Joe Johnson in the backcourt, and a spark off the bench not many teams can offer. Add in a slew of clutch shots hit by the

combo guard, and it's clear that losing Crawford would be a tough pill to swallow.

But after failing to extend Crawford last summer, having little money to spend and even less time to get a deal done, his days in Atlanta could be numbered.

Crawford switched agents last month, signing with New Jersey-based firm ASM Sports. According to Frank Isola of the New York Daily News, that move that could result in a move back to the New York Knicks.

Crawford played four seasons in the Big Apple before being traded to Golden State 11 games into the 2008-09 season in a cost-cutting move. But the former Knick holds no ill will and would be all ears if talks continue to stall in Atlanta.

"I don't think the trade was personal," he said. "It was all about 2010 and the players you can possibly get. I love Atlanta. I want to work out an extension here, but if I become a free agent it's not the end of the world. 'I'll definitely listen [to the Knicks]. If the extension isn't working out, I would definitely listen for sure."

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FALCONS FLIGHT



Falcons try to extend road streak

By Sean Conway

In the Falcons' 24-14 victory over the Minnesota Vikings Sunday at the Georgia Dome, quarterback Matt Ryan and the defense's front seven played possibly their best game of 2011.

Ryan relied on his two most trusted weapons, tight end Tony Gonzalez and wide receiver Roddy White, to put up All-Pro caliber numbers: Ryan's stat line Sunday looked Aaron Rodgers-esque, Ryan was 27-34 passing for 262 yards and three touchdowns without an interception.

Gonzalez was workmanlike in the short passing game with nine catches for 69 yards, while White caught 10 passes for 120 yards and his fourth touchdown of the season. Wide receiver Harry Douglas and tight end Michael Palmer caught Ryan's two other touchdowns.

Head coach Mike Smith liked the saw out of the efficient passing game, "We felt like if we could get our short passing game going that would basically be like a running play. ... The timing was impeccable and we were able to get those five, six and seven yard completions." Also of note for the offense: they scored touchdowns on each of the three drives they ran a play inside the Vikings' red zone.

The defense also had a great day against

the run and pressuring rookie quarterback Christian Ponder. Reserve defensive end Lawrence Sidbury led the statistics page in terms of pass rush with two sacks. Cornerback Christopher Owens and linebacker Sean Witherspoon also brought down Ponder once each behind the line of scrimmage.

The Falcons (7-4) held Minnesota's fifth ranked NFL rushing attack to just 64 yards.

GOING WEST ...

This weekend the Falcons face a tough task in a road game at the AFC South leading Houston Texans (8-3). Despite being without their top two quarterbacks, Matt Schaub and Matt Leinart, the Texans have a premier offense thanks to the third best rushing attack in the NFL. Running backs Arian Foster and Ben Tate have rushed for a combined 1,512 yards and 10 scores. Former Pope high school star T.J. Yates will get the start at quarterback.

The Houston defense has been even more formidable than the offense. The unit is ranked fourth against the run and second against the pass in the NFL. Five players have notched at least 4.5 sacks for the Texans, led by Connor Barwin's 8.5.

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CHOP SHOP



Hudson expected to be ready for season

By Fletcher Proctor

Starting pitcher Tim Hudson recently went under the knife, and the team announced that the surgery to repair a herniated disc in his back was successful. In a release from the team, GM Frank Wren said, "Based on (Monday's) procedure, we are happy that this will help alleviate some of the discomfort that Tim felt. The prognosis is positive for him to be ready for Spring Training and to be able to pitch during the Spring Training Schedule." Hudson was 16-10 one year ago with a 3.22 ERA.

The Atlanta Braves will wrap up spring training north of Florida as the team has done the last few years, but unlike in years past, the Braves will head to Coolray Field in Gwinnett. Atlanta will square off against a squad of prospects at the home of the organization's Class AAA affiliate. Pitchers and catchers report to the team's spring training facility on Feb. 19 for the first team workout on February 20. Position players report four days later and the first full-squad workout for the 2012 season is Feb. 25.

BRIGHT FUTURE ...

Two Braves farmhands were honored recently for their efforts in the Arizona Fall League. Joe Terdoslavich and Christian Bethancourt were named to the Arizona Fall

League Top Prospects Team, which recognizes the best players based on their performance in league play as well as how they project at the MLB level. Bethancourt is a catching prospect while Terdoslavich can play either infield corner position.

GONZO GONE-ZO ...

The Braves will have a new shortstop when the season rolls around. The team announced that salary arbitration was not offered to free agent Alex Gonzalez. It is believed that Gonzalez is seeking a two-year deal which the Braves were not offering, but by not offering the arbitration, the team will not receive a compensatory, supplemental draft pick from the team that signs Gonzalez, a Type B free agent. Compensation for Type B is a pick following the first round. Type A free agents give a similar pick plus the first-round pick of the team that signs the player. The former Brave likely would have received a raise from his 2011 \$2.5M salary. He hit just .241 with a paltry .270 on-base percentage. Tyler Pastornicky is an option, though he is projected to need more seasoning at the minor league level.

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GWINNETT GLADIATORS



Overtime loss spoils division lead

By Joe Deighton

The Gladiators' lead in the South Division is gone after South Carolina handed Gwinnett a 5-4 overtime loss in North Charleston. Gwinnett was lucky to leave South Carolina with a point, as the Glads trailed 4-2 midway through the second period. Forwards Pat Galivan and Ryley Grantham scored for Gwinnett to tie the score going into the third period. It would remain tied into overtime when Stingrays forward Trent Campbell put home the game-winner. Gwinnett now trails the Stingrays by two points in the standings. At the quarter point of the season, the Gladiators are 9-6-3-2.

FREQUENT OVERTIMERS ...

In just 20 games, Gwinnett has already played seven overtime games, which is the most in the ECHL. The Glads have a 2-0-3-2 record after regulation and are on pace for a record-tying number of overtime contests. The league record is 18, set when the Gladiators were known as the Mobile Mysticks back in 2002. More wins in regulation would be a good idea with the standings being as close as they are. Earning just a point will set the Gladiators back, especially against division opponents like South Carolina and Florida. The Everblades have 20 points and are nipping at the heels of the Glads. With three

games coming up with Florida, two points are essential in each game.

RATED ROOKIE ...

Forward Bryan Brutlag has been a key contributor in his rookie season for Gwinnett. The 22-year old has played all 20 games and posted seven points (4 G, 3 A). Brutlag has 43 shots on goal, four penalty minutes and is even on plus/minus. The rookie scored his most recent goal on a penalty shot against the Stingrays.

NEAR-RECORD PACE ...

The Gladiators' all-time goal scoring record is 36, set by Colton Fretter back in the 2006-07 season. Forward Pat Galivan has already scored nine goals in the first 20 games, on pace for 32 this season. The 25-year-old should break his own mark of 20 goals scored back in 2008-09. Galivan has scored most of his goals on the power play, and he leads the team with five special teams tallies. He should add to his scoring mark this week against Florida. Galivan leads the Gladiators with three points in three games against the Everblades this season.

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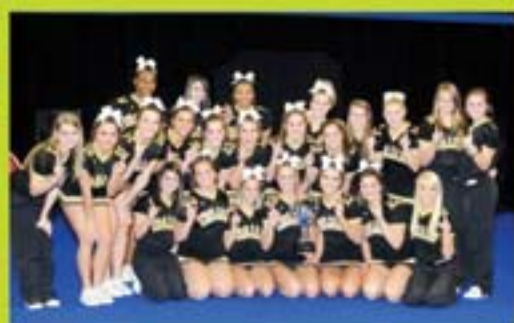
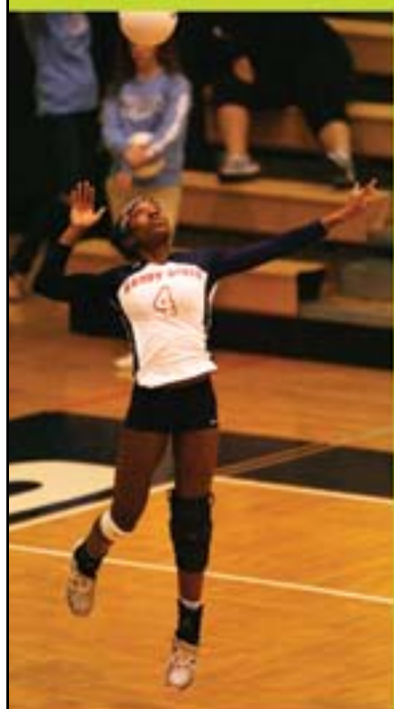


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