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CAN'T MISS THIS WEEK

- 4** Check out the columnists page, where our writers give their opinions on the Atlanta sports scene.
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- 7** Fletcher Proctor previews the high school basketball playoffs.
- 8** Brian Jones and Chris Lionetti get you updated on the latest high school sports news from around the state.



TEAM SCOOP AND VOICES

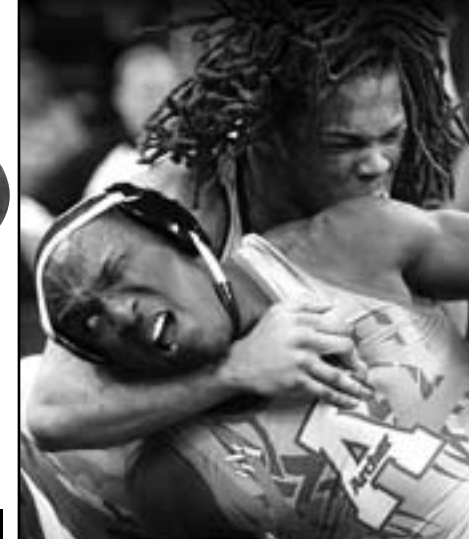
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INSIDE AT SCORE

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SHOT OF THE WEEK...



EXTRA EFFORT: Archer's Ernest Alexander tries to escape the grasp of Camden County's Michael Johnson during the Class 5A 195-pound championship match. Alexander won the match, but Camden County finished second overall to Archer's third. Photo courtesy of Rob Saye.

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THE FLETCH



Does Atlanta have a Jeremy Lin?

By Fletcher Proctor

Jeremy Lin and all of the Linsanity that surrounds the New York Knicks point guard will be coming to Atlanta towards the end of March. The Hawks faced off against Lin and the Knicks this past Wednesday, though the outcome was not available at press deadline.

News surrounding Lin has been Lin-ough to give anyone a headache but, of course, Atlanta has gone all in, as the city is one of the most NBA-frenzied cities in the country according to television numbers. The guys from 790 The Zone's "Mayhem in the AM" had several guests on to discuss the new Linsation, including ESPN personality Jay Williams, Knicks play-by-play man Mike Breen and au-

thor Buzz Bissinger. Breen also calls games for ESPN/ABC and is perhaps the best announcer currently going for NBA basketball and he offered a glowing assessment of Lin, though he also said he wanted to see it continue over time, not just in the small sample size of games we currently have for Lin.

As an outsider looking at the Lin situation, you have to be intrigued by Lin and wonder how several other teams cut Lin during just this season. You also have to wonder if perhaps Atlanta has ever had a Jeremy Lin-type of player. Have any of the Atlanta teams ever had a guy seemingly come out of nowhere and, against serious odds, excel so quickly?

Some people would point at Jeff Teague in last year's playoffs, but you could not include Teague in the conversation as he was outstanding at Wake Forest and the Hawks took him in the first round. Ivan Johnson is having a nice season; he may be the closest thing the Hawks have had this year to Lin.

O'DOMINANT ...

The Braves could throw Eric O'Flaherty at you, but outside of baseball people, hardly anyone could really tell you just how dominating EO was last year for the Braves. Jason Heyward and Jeff Francoeur had the type of Linsanity impact in their first few games, much like Lin did, but both came with huge expectations, the opposite of Lin.

The closest thing the city of Atlanta has would be Falcons cornerback Brent Grimes. The current free agent 5-foot-10 corner was signed as an undrafted free agent in 2006 out of Shippensburg University but was allocated to NFL Europe in 2007. He was signed to the practice squad following training camp. He was waived once during the year before being resigned to the practice squad and finally activated late in the year. Grimes would start

six games in 2008 before excelling in 2009 and making the Pro Bowl in 2010.

In 2011 Grimes was the best corner on the squad, earning the nickname Optimus Grimes after "shutting down" Calvin "Megatron" Johnson earlier in the year. Like Lin, Grimes "came out of nowhere," but unlike Lin, it took Grimes a while before he received league recognition with a trip to the Pro Bowl. Atlanta is still searching for a Lin but in the meantime, Hawks fans can go watch Lin later in March, assuming the Knicks guard is still in the lineup.

If a puck is dropped at center ice, but there isn't hockey in town, will people still care? I picked up a copy of Sports Illustrated a few weeks back and read a story about the Winnipeg Jets and how much the city of Winnipeg LOVES having hockey back in town. I had forgotten that the NHL season was going on. My bad. I knew the Gwinnett Gladiators were doing well in the ECHL, but had sort of forgotten about the NHL. I guess that's what happens when the NHL takes itself off ESPN and hijacks a hockey team from one of the 10 biggest cities in America. Oh well. Go Glads!

Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

DIMON CLUB



Hope springs eternal for Braves, not Jackets

By Ricky Dimon

It's time to start thinking about Atlanta Braves baseball, and not just because there has been very little to cheer when it comes to college and professional sports in this state in 2012. Pitchers and catchers reported to spring training last Sunday and position players reported on Friday.

After last season's epic collapse, the Braves and their fans obviously can't wait to get out there and erase the demons of 2011. Experts, however, are telling us—again—to "wait 'til next year." And why not? Atlanta did next to nothing in the offseason while the Marlins and Nationals went out and spent heaps of

cash. The Phillies aren't getting any younger and they will be without Ryan Howard for a while, but they are still the Phillies.

That being said, the Braves did not have to make radical changes and thus the front office did not panic. They just have to hope... for Dan Uggla to hit better than .233 this season, for Jason Hayward to hit better than .227, for Martin Prado's 2010 self to return and for Chipper Jones, Tim Hudson, Tommy Hanson and Jair Jurjens to stay in one piece. Technically, the Braves do not have any newcomers of note (aside from shortstop Tyler Pastornicky), but Hayward and Prado were basically

a wash last season and same goes for Uggla's first half and Jurjens' second half.

A lot has to go right for the Braves to contend this season, and I mean a lot. But spring is rapidly approaching and this is the time of year when we just have to think everything will, in fact, go right. Wait 'til this year!

HOW BAD IS TECH? ...

I can't figure out the Georgia Tech men's basketball team. I mean, obviously the question isn't whether or not the Yellow Jackets are good. Everyone knows they are downright wretched. But I can't decide if they are the worst team in all of Division I or if they are simply the worst team in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

On one hand, Tech has wins at Georgia and at N.C. State. Georgia is bad but not terrible and N.C. State is actually on the NCAA Tournament bubble. The Jackets also beat Virginia Commonwealth (a Final Four team in 2011, 23-6 this year having won 12 of its last 13 games) by 13 points. Some of their losses have been respectable, too: seven points to Duke, two points at Clemson and one point on

an overtime buzzer-beater at Virginia Tech.

At the same time, though, Georgia Tech has some inexplicably woeful bullet-points on its resume. Brian Gregory's squad lost to Alabama by 25, got blown out 70-38 at home by Virginia and just got clobbered 56-37 at home by Clemson on Tuesday. The Yellow Jackets are dead last in the ACC at 2-10 (yes, behind even Wake Forest!). Of 344 Division I basketball teams, they are 311th in points per game (61.0) and 314th in assists per game (10.7) as of Wednesday.

Glen Rice Jr.'s indefinite suspension certainly does not help matters, but it isn't the difference between mediocrity and bottom-feeding. Rice may be the top threat for Georgia Tech, but he would be nothing more than a nice role player for any upper-echelon ACC team or any NCAA Tournament team.

Speaking of the ACC, this is not exactly an ideal year for the conference tournament to be held right here in Tech's own Philips Arena home. Oh well.

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PANTHER POWER



Hunter changing GSU hoops culture

By Robby Kalland



One year ago the Georgia State men's basketball team struggled to a 12-19 record and was bounced from the CAA tournament in the second round. After yet another poor season, Rod Barnes was let go as head coach and the Panthers brought in IUPUI coach Ron Hunter.

CH-CH-CHANGES ...

Many wondered how much of a difference Hunter would make in his first year considering the Panthers would have the same core group of players in 2011-12 as they had in 2010-11. The Hunter era got off to an inauspicious start as State dropped its first three games at the World Vision Classic in Seattle, but the

Panthers came back from the tough start undeterred and refused to slip into mediocrity, rattling off 11 consecutive victories. This streak included an impressive road win over VCU, a Final Four participant a year ago.

At 19-9 (10-6 CAA), Hunter has the Panthers on the verge of their first 20-win season since 2003-04, when they were members of the Atlantic Sun. Entering his first season at Georgia State, Hunter said his goal was to, "change the culture...[make it] where when people look at the program they think about winning. The expectations are not in wins and losses, but for people to believe the culture has changed."

Hunter is no stranger to success and cul-

tivating a winning culture at a program. He spent 17 years at the helm of IUPUI, which started off as a Division II school and in his tenure became a successful D-I program, including an NCAA Tournament appearance in 2003. Hunter's pedigree of taking a small program to heights previously unimagined fit perfectly into Georgia State's plans.

The Panthers enjoyed success in the Atlantic Sun, including a trip to the second round of the NCAA Tournament in 2000-01. A perennial contender in the Atlantic Sun, they took on the challenge of entering the Colonial Athletic Association in 2005, one of the best mid-major conferences in college basketball as evidenced by two separate Final Four teams in the past five seasons.

CONFERENCE UPGRADE ...

Since entering the CAA, Georgia State has toiled in mediocrity, never producing a winning season until this year. Hunter has brought an incredible amount of energy to the sidelines, which has helped to revitalize the entire program. His energy has not been confined just to the basketball court. He has been relentless in recruiting and has what could be the school's best class ever lined up for 2012, headlined by his son R.J. Hunter.

Hunter's energy is contagious; the team can't help but put forth tremendous effort because its coach wouldn't allow anything less. Hunter never sits down and refuses to stop coaching no matter what the score is. This was exemplified last Saturday against UTSA. The Panthers were up double-digits late in the second half when they allowed an easy Roadrunner layup. Hunter called timeout and lit into his team in the huddle. His frustration was not in allowing a bucket, but the way the Panthers gave it up without resistance.

Hunter's focus is always on improvement and this is part of his commitment to changing the culture of the team. He said that last year it seemed that "the guys were just going through the motions out there," but this year he wanted to instill a passion for the game. "I don't care what you do in life. If you don't have passion, you can't do it well," Hunter said. "One thing we can control is how hard we play and that's one thing I talked about is having passion for they game they love... basketball."

Under Hunter, the Panthers have undergone a major culture change. They have swapped their losing habits for winning ones. They now have the ability to withstand runs

by opponents and have the resiliency to come back from deficits. The Panthers have put a huge emphasis on improving defensively, led by senior center Eric Buckner and his dominance in the paint.

Buckner has demolished the school's blocks record both in a single season and for a career, despite only being a Panther since last season. Along with Buckner's presence in the middle, the backcourt rotation for the Panthers has become adept at trapping opponents and taking the ball away, leading to easy baskets in transition. As a whole the team has 266 steals and has accumulated 149 blocked shots, 98 of those by Buckner, and allows 59.3 points per game. Last year, the totals were 201 steals, 148 blocks and 64.1 points per game.

While steals and blocks have gone up, the Panthers have also cut back on fouls. They are averaging 16.2 fouls per game, compared to 21.2 last year, showing the commitment to playing tough, disciplined defense. Hunter attributes the change to players "buying into the system." The Panthers play a matchup zone in which they often full-court press their opponents and trap the ball-handler. Hunter said the defense could be defined as "organized chaos" and that the entire team has bought into his system and they put full effort into playing tenaciously on the defensive end of the floor.

Hunter has come in and done a remarkable job in making this team a contender. The Panthers have shown the ability to compete and beat the best teams in the conference, and they will be a dangerous team in the CAA Tournament. Hunter has succeeded thus far in his goal of changing the culture around the program. Fans flock to the Sports Arena for home games with students and alumni filling the arena like never before. The average attendance for games at the Sports Arena is up to 1,378 per game, compared to just 915 a game last season.

While Hunter has been pleased by the early success, he is not satisfied. "The easiest part is to build a winner, the hard part is to maintain it, and that's what I'll start right after the first day of the offseason is to maintain that winning attitude."

This constant drive to win and to succeed is what has made Hunter a successful coach, and it will be that drive that will continue to elevate the Panthers' basketball program.

Photo of Ron Hunter courtesy of GSU Athletics. Kalland can be reached at rkalland@scoreatl.com.



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WHOS HOT

**THUMBS UP TO
BRAVES BASEBALL**



Spring Training

After last summer's late-season collapse, Braves fans are excited for the beginning of spring training. The 2012 season brings some great story lines. Will this be Chipper's last stand? Can Jason Heyward regain his rookie form? And which young pitcher will make the biggest impact?

Lin-Sanity

If you're a sports fan, you have to love the underdog story of Jeremy Lin going from California's high school player of the year, to four years at Harvard, to undrafted free agent, and surprisingly, to the biggest star in Madison Square Garden. It's almost beyond your Lin-magination. (Sorry, couldn't resist).

NFL Combine

Just as spring training brings optimism to all baseball fans, the NFL combine is like a peak at your Christmas presents for pro football fans. This week, the brightest stars from college came meet in Indianapolis to formally begin their pro careers. There will also be some small school guys that jump on the scene over the weekend.

No throws

While the NFL combine will capture our imagination for the most part, top flight quarterbacks Andrew Luck and Robert Griffin III won't throw the football for scouts. Under the advice of their agents, they'll script their own workouts at their personal pro days on campus. That's not fan-friendly.

Manny being Manny

He's back. In less than 12 months Manny Ramirez has failed a Major League drug test, retired from baseball, unretired, was arrested for domestic violence in Florida, had his drug suspension reduced and has now signed with the Oakland Athletics. He's the "un-feel-good" story that won't go away. We just wish he would.

Sanders Commings

The Georgia defensive back was recently arrested for domestic violence after striking a woman in Athens. We're not upset when the over-aggressive UGA police arrest a UGA athlete for driving an unregistered moped, but violence against women is unacceptable. Commings deserves his punishment which is a two-game suspension and probation.



WHOS NOT

**THUMBS DOWN TO
BULLDOG ARREST**

SCORE LIST

BY BRIAN JONES

- 1** **FEBRUARY MADNESS:** Forget about March Madness because the high school basketball state tournament kicks off this weekend and there are some interesting storylines that will unfold starting Friday. For starters, can defending 5A champion Norcross make another improbable run at the title? Can the McEachern girls remain undefeated and win the championship which will cement them as one of the greatest girls teams in state history? I can't wait for the action to tip off!
- 2** **BOYS OF SPRING:** Braves spring training got underway this week as pitchers and catchers reported to the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. One of the storylines of camp is the return of Martin Prado and if he stays with the team for the long run. Also, with Tommy Hanson suffering a concussion due to a car accident, how will Fredi Gonzalez use him during the duration of camp? Spring Training is off to a unique start for the Braves and it should make for an exciting preseason for Braves fans.
- 3** **ON THE MOVE:** Georgia State is looking to make its football program bigger in the next few years. By 2014, the Panthers hope they will be playing the FBS. If they do decide to make that jump, the Panthers will likely play in the Sun Belt division with teams like Arkansas State, North Texas and Troy. I'll be honest and say I don't watch a lot of Sun Belt football, but if the Panthers decide to move up to FBS, I'll watch quite a bit of it to support the boys in blue.
- 4** **NEW AWARDS:** Starting this season the Bulldogs will have two new awards named after two of the greatest players in the school's history. The Frank Sinkwich award will be given to "Georgia's Toughest Player" and the Charley Trippi Award will be given to "Georgia's Most Versatile Player". Sinkwich was Georgia's first Heisman winner and Trippi won the Maxwell Award 1946. Both players are in the College Football Hall of Fame and both players have their jerseys retired.
- 5** **NO-GO JOE:** Joe Johnson has injured his knee and has missed the Hawks' last two games. So there's a chance he could miss the All-Star game for the first time in his career. If I was Johnson, I would sit out this year's game and focus on getting healthy because the team needs him more than ever, especially with Al Horford injured and the team currently not playing well. It's a tough decision, but in order to get the Hawks back on track, Johnson should not play this weekend.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

BY THOMAS WATSON

- 174** Steals for Michael Bourn over the last three seasons, leading the league each year
- 36** Home runs hit by Dan Uggla last season, a career high
- .233** Batting average for Uggla last season, a career low
- .302** On-base percentage for Martin Prado in 2011, down 52 points from his all-star season in 2010
- 0** Hawks all-stars after Joe Johnson dropped out with a knee injury and Josh Smith was snubbed for a second time
- 3** Wins for the Hawks in 10 games prior to Feb. 22
- 105** Letters sent to Norcross RB Alvin Kamara by Alabama coach Nick Saban in one day
- 37** Points scored by the Georgia Tech men's basketball team in a loss to Clemson, their fewest since 1980
- 22** Consecutive in-state games played by the UGA baseball team to start the season
- 990** Career wins for Georgia Tech baseball coach Danny Hall through Feb. 21

TRIVIA QUESTION

When was the last time an opposing player scored 25 or more points on the Hawks as of Feb. 21?

Answer on Page 14

SANITY AT LAST

"I can't put my finger on that one. I wish I could. We are a team that at times we come out and play with a sense of urgency and at times we don't."

- Hawks coach Larry Drew on his team's inconsistent play.

COACH'S DIARY

New Centennial football coach Jeffrey Carlberg is quickly putting his fingerprints all over the Knights program, and he has invited Score along for the ride during his first year at the helm. Here are highlights from the last two weeks on the job.

The Centennial football program is getting hotter by the day it seems. I interviewed a candidate for a potential position on our freshman staff. We are still getting a lot of interest in our program from people wanting to be a part of it. The most important step a new coach must take is building a quality staff. To do that, you must hire good people then trust them to do a good job.



I met with our principal Dr. Miletto last Tuesday along with the candidate that we will hire as the new defensive coordinator. The meeting was to discuss a timeline for hiring and the position that he will have within the faculty.

The next day we met with two of our coaches to discuss the speed and conditioning program. That night I spoke at the Rising Freshman Program, addressing the parents of our rising freshman class about the Centennial program.

Finally we ordered new uniforms for our football team for the 2012 season. We will be returning to black uniforms and the players are excited about the change in color.



Stage is set for playoff basketball

By Fletcher Proctor

Squeaks, streaks, swishes and slam dunks will be all the rage over the next few weeks as the GHSA basketball playoffs will crown 10 champions. Schools such as GAC, Buford, Norcross and Wesleyan will be out to defend titles from one year ago while perennial powers such as Milton, Wheeler and Southwest DeKalb and newcomers like St. Francis and Morgan County will look to prevent repeats and three-peats. And plenty of eyes will be on Miller Grove to see if Tony Parker and company can pull off four straight.

GIRLS FAVORITES ...

The Wesleyan girls have won three straight Class A titles as well as a Class 2A crown in 2008. Meanwhile, Buford has taken the last three titles since Wesleyan moved down in classification. Andraya Carter is back

from injury and would like nothing more than to leave for Tennessee with a fourth state title in her back pocket. Buford junior Kaela Davis won a state title with Norcross in 2010 before picking up another with the Wolves last year. She is trying for her third in a row. Wesleyan, meanwhile, will attempt to win the title without a No. 1 seed, the first time that has happened since the Wolves moved down. The Wolves won the 2008 2A title as a No. 2 seed.

The Washington County Golden Hawks have won 59 straight games entering the playoffs and are looking to capture a second straight Class 3A girls title. Junior point guard Allisha Gray was hot in the region tournament and look for her to explode in the state playoffs.

The Milton Eagles cruised to the 2010 Class 5A boys title and reached the finals last year with perhaps the most impressive collec-

tion of talent in Georgia. Norcross had other ideas, however, and rallied in the finals to stun Milton. David Boyd's team has been shaped and primed for another title and seniors Evan Nolte, Charles Mann, Tevin Glass and Shaq Johnson are all on a mission to seize the state title. Nolte was a force two years ago in the championship game, canning jumpers from all over the court. The future Virginia Cavalier could once again play a huge role should the Eagles advance to the finals.

THREE'S COMPANY ...

Greater Atlanta Christian and Columbia will both be searching for a third straight title after each program won in 2010 and again in 2011. Class 2A defending champion GAC lost Malcolm Brogdon from those teams then saw A.J. Davis leave for region rival Buford, but head coach Eddie Martin still has some talent and his team owns the Score No. 1 ranking entering the playoffs. Collin Swinton and Delano Spencer will push the Spartans through the playoffs. Buford, last year's runner-up, appears to be some tough competition yet again, though GAC has

beaten Buford three times this season. T.J. Shipes, Kyle Kellam and Davis will be a tough out in the playoffs. Meanwhile Class 3A champ Columbia has a host of talented players including Jarmal Reid, Chris Horton, Damian Goodwin and Jhaustin Thomas down low looking to power the Eagles to yet another title.

Earlier this season the Miller Grove Wolverines were ranked No. 2 nationally by ESPN, but they faltered against some national powerhouses. Regardless, Sharman White's Wolverines are in prime position to challenge for a fourth straight Class 4A title. Seniors Tony Parker, Tony Evans, Justin Colvin, Christian Houston, Davante Provost and Brandon Morris are all looking to go out on top. Meanwhile, Shaq Goodwin and Southwest DeKalb are looking to overcome the monster that is Miller Grove to try and capture a title. Alcovy, Chattahoochee, Fayette County and Jonesboro could also deny the Wolverines a fourth title.

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

BASKETBALL NEWS



Region tourneys spring upsets, playoff berths

By Brian Jones

The time is now.

After months of regular season action, the basketball state tournament is upon us and there are some interesting storylines as the tournament progresses the next few weeks. But let's take a look back at some of the action of the region tournaments in the metro Atlanta area and see how some the teams got to where they are now.

WARRIOR DASH ...

After a sub-par 2010-11 season for the North Cobb boys, they bounced back in a big way and finished the regular season and Region 4-5A Tournament with a 24-4 record. This past weekend, the Warriors defeated South Cobb 70-52 in the region championship and the win marked head coach Terry Gorsuch's 200th in his career.

"It's an awesome feeling," Gorsuch told the Marietta Daily Journal after the game. "The kids have worked so hard, playing as a team, playing hard. We worked all year for this and

I couldn't be prouder of the kids for accomplishing this."

Lee Moore scored 22 points for the Warriors while Dennis Young-Coleman added 10. This was the first region title for Gorsuch, and his team will host Bradwell Institute in the first round of the state tournament.

South Cobb, the region runner-up, is just happy it is playing in the state tournament considering it lost nine of its last 10 regular-season games. The Eagles, who have a 13-14 record and came into the region tournament as a No. 5 seed, will enter the state tournament as No. 2 seed with the loss to the Warriors. The Eagles were able to clinch at least a No. 2 seed when they took down top-seeded Harrison 52-50 in the region semifinals.

"I'm glad our guys are excited about going to the championship of the tournament," South Cobb head coach Gregory Moultrie told the MDJ. "We had high expectations at the beginning of the year, starting out 7-1. We had a rough skid, but we got it together. We had a great run when we needed to, in the second half of the season. Eight teams came in (to the tournament) and only two came out with trophies. We wanted to win the region tournament, but region runner-up — we'll take that."

The Eagles will host Jenkins in their first-round contest.

FAVORITE UNDERDOG ...

In the Boys 5A brackets, the usual suspects such as Milton, Westlake, Centennial, Wheeler and Savannah are there. But one usual suspect and defending state champion, Norcross, comes in a somewhat of an underdog.

After losing its last two regular-season games, the Blue Devils were able to bounce back and defeat Meadowcreek in their first region tournament game. But they could not clinch one of the top two seeds because the Blue Devils feel to Mill Creek 61-49.

Norcross will travel to Berkmar this weekend in the first round of the state tournament.

Meanwhile, 2011 5A runner-up Milton cruised through the

Region 6 Tournament and will host Walton this weekend. The Eagles clinched a home playoff game when they dominated Alpharetta 97-64 and did the same thing to Centennial 100-73 in the region championship.

In 4A, Miller Grove looks to be on track to win its fourth consecutive title as they defeated Southwest DeKalb 67-63 in the Region 6 Tournament thanks to a big effort by Christian Houston. The Wolverines will begin defending their title when they face New Manchester this weekend.

Also in 4A, North Clayton won its first region title since 1993 with a 57-50 win over Jonesboro in the Region 4 Championship. Marcus Hunt led the Eagles with 19 points while Dionte Agard added 12. The Eagles will look to carry the momentum in the state tournament starting this weekend when they face Dutchtown.

THE BIG THREE ...

Over on the girls side, there will be three teams to watch for in the 5A bracket. The first team is two-time defending state champion Norcross, which now has a healthy Diamond DeSheilds in the fold. The Blue Devils took on North Gwinnett in the Region 7 championship last weekend and thanks to 24 points scored by DeSheilds, Norcross won 53-38 and has a No. 1 seed going into the tournament.

The second team to watch for is McEachern, last year's state runner-up. This year, the Indians are hungry to get over the hump because they have yet to lose a game. In the Region 4 title game, the Indians cruised past Hillgrove 63-36 to win their second region championship in three years. Pachiyanna Roberts led McEachern with 22 points while Te'A Cooper added 11. The Indians will host Camden County in the first round of the tournament.

But wait a minute, because there's another team that has an unblemished record and that is the Parkview Panthers. Last year, Parkview had a disappointing end to its season with a 46-36 loss to Milton in the first round of the state tournament. This time around, the Panthers are determined not to let that happen again, and 28 games later, they are one of the favorites to win the entire thing. In the Region 8 title game, the Panthers took care of Brookwood 53-37. Erika Joseph led the Panthers with 15 points

while Marissa Mandelove added 11, six of which came in the final frame.

In 4A, Fayette County may be the favorite to win the title, but Jonesboro is not far behind. After a not-so-great 2010-11 season, the Cardinals turn things around by winning over 20 games for the first time in four years. Last weekend, Jonesboro took on Forest Park in the Region 4 Championship and the Cardinals came away with a 55-45 overtime win. Victoria Florence led the Cardinals with a game-high 21 points, including 14 points in the second quarter. The Cardinals will host Woodland, Henry on Friday night while the Forest Park will host McIntosh in its first-round contest.

Photo of Diamond DeSheilds courtesy of DJ Galbiati. Jones can be reached at bjones@scoreatl.com.



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PREP ROUNDUP



Multiple spring sports getting started

By Chris Lionetti

The temperatures across the state are warming up and that means one thing: pitchers popping mitts and goalies making diving saves. Spring sports have finally started across the state of Georgia and area lacrosse, baseball, golf, tennis, soccer and track teams are all in action.

BOYS OF SPRING ...

Buford (0-2) opened its season against Forsyth Central (1-0) on Monday and fell 9-1 to start its season in the loss column. Buford

returned to action the next day to face Hebron Christian. Hebron Christian (1-0), the defending Class A champ, beat Buford, the defending Class 2A champion, 3-2 to give Hebron its first victory of the season. Mason Felt hurled five scoreless innings to earn the win for the Class A defending champion.

Wesleyan (1-0, 1-0 Region 5-A) erupted for 11 runs against region opponent Pinecrest Academy for an 11-1 victory in the season opener. Senior Joseph Sheffield went 2-for-4 against Pinecrest with a double, a home run and three RBIs.

Greater Atlanta Christian (1-0) defeated Tucker (0-1) in a 6-5 nailbiter Tuesday night to start its season in the win column. Patrick Schultz was the catalyst for the Spartan offense and went 2-for-3 with two doubles with three RBIs.

Also occurring this week was Blessed Trinity (0-1) losing to St. Pius X (1-0) 2-1. The Kell Longhorns (1-0) defeated King's Ridge Christian (0-1) 6-5 in eight innings. Harrison (1-0) beat Marietta (0-1) 6-0 on Monday afternoon for its first win. Holy Innocents' (0-1) was routed by Walker (1-0) in its first game of the season, 12-6. M.L. King (0-1) took on the Southwest DeKalb Panthers (1-0) but fell to the Panthers, 6-5, in their first action of the season.

SPEED MERCHANTS ...

At the Landmark High School and Middle School meet on Saturday, Druid Hills had four first-place finishes. Omar Scruggs finished first in the 400-meter dash and 800-meter run. Scruggs' teammate, Brandon Presha, placed first in two events as well. Neighboring Towers had seven first-place finishes. Towers had relay teams win both the 4x100 and 4x400 relays. Bryan Earl and Dwayne Johnson both won two events and teammate Daeymon Hassell won the 200-meter dash.

Westlake hosted a meet on Tuesday and was quite successful on its home track.

Westlake had six first-place finishes, two of which came courtesy of Landon Jenkins. Bannek-

er had three athletes — Todd Wooten, Dallas Loney and Ryan Clark — finish first in their events. Grady had two students, Jericho Smith and Zane Coburn, place first at the meet in their respective events.

The Westlake girls also did a good job of winning on their turf, as they won eight out of 13 events. The only events not won by Westlake were the 1600-meter run, 3200-meter run, 100-meter hurdles, 300-meter hurdles, and the shot put. Those five events were won by Berkmar.

The Landmark meet was once again dominated by the teams from Towers and Druid Hills. However, Lovett had a good showing at the meet. Towers won 10 events at the meet, dwarfing the amount of first-place finishes by Druid Hills and Lovett, which had two and three, respectively.

KICKIN' THE BALLS ...

This week's games appealed to two different types of soccer fans, those that like scoring and those that prefer low-scoring matches. Grayson (2-0-1) went to toe-to-toe with Loganville (1-1-1) but neither team could score. Grayson's goalie Callen Rhodes had 11 saves in the team's tie. Heritage (0-2-1) and Parkview (1-0-2) also played to a scoreless tie. Unlike the two aforementioned games, Johns Creek (1-0-2) and Northview (1-1-1) managed to earn a tie with a final score of 3-3.

There was no chance of a tie in the Stone Mountain (2-0-0) and Southwest DeKalb (0-2-0) game. The Pirates continued their winning streak by routing Southwest DeKalb 10-0. Decatur (1-0-0) beat Maynard Jackson (0-2-0) 10-1 to earn its first victory of the season. Another rout took place in Gwinnett, as Brookwood (2-1-0) defeated North Gwinnett (0-3-0) 6-1.

Unlike their male counterparts, the Grayson (2-1-0) girls were able to defeat Loganville (2-1-0) 2-1 on Tuesday. Duluth (1-1-0) got its first victory by taking North Cobb (2-1-0) to overtime. The game came down to penalty kicks with a final score of 1-0 Duluth. North Gwinnett (1-2-0) also earned its first win Tuesday night by beating Brookwood (1-2-0) 4-3 in overtime.

Marist (2-0-0) and Cherokee (3-0-0) did not need overtime to win their games and remained undefeated. Marist defeated Allatoona (0-3-0) 3-1. Cherokee shut out South Cobb (0-3-0) 6-0 Tuesday night, also keeping its opponent out of the win column.

NETMINDERS ...

Collins Hill (4-0) remained perfect this season by sweeping the Grayson Rams (0-1) 5-0. North Gwinnett (1-0) got its first victory of the season by defeating Northview (0-1) 3-2. Parkview (1-0) also notched its first win against Archer (0-1) 4-1, winning all but the No. 1 singles. Fol-

lowing the trend in metro Atlanta, Hebron Christian Academy (1-0) also won its first match 3-2 against Fellowship Christian (0-10). Hebron won all of its singles matches.

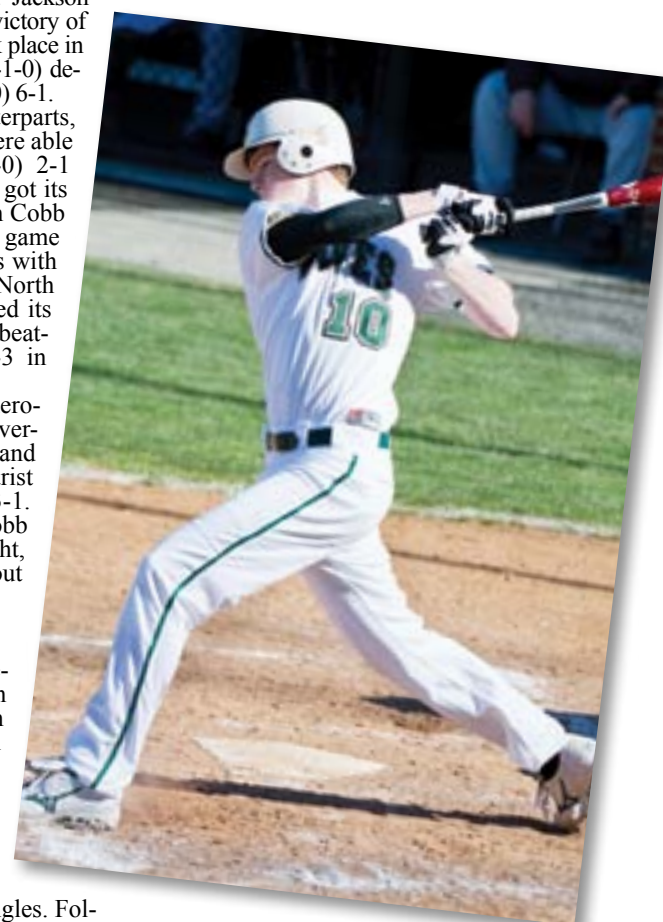
Johns Creek (2-0) gave Flowery Branch (1-1) its first loss of the season by defeating the Lady Falcons, 4-1. The Parkview girls blanked Archer, 5-0, to improve their record to 1-2 on the season. Collins Hill also improved its record by defeating Grayson, 5-0. Collins Hill is now 2-2 on the young season. Wesleyan improved to 2-0 and gave Pace Academy (0-1) its first loss after beating the Knights, 4-0, by taking two singles matches and both doubles matches.

CROSSING THE STICKS ...

The Duluth Wildcats (2-0) coasted to their first victory after defeating Mountain View (0-1), 19-0. Charlie Hall had six goals for the Wildcats and two of his teammates, Brendan Eckard and Ben Loyal, both had four goals. Duluth got its second victory on Tuesday night by defeating Brookwood (0-1), 5-2. Etowah (1-0) and Walton (0-1) went to OT to decide their game but Walton ended up falling to the Eagles 12-11.

There was no lack of scoring in girls lacrosse this week as multiple teams routed their opponents. Duluth (1-0) beat Mountain View (0-1), 19-6, for its first victory of the year. St. Pius X (1-0) and Mill Creek (1-0) beat their opponents, Pace (0-1) and Parkview (0-1), respectively, 17-1 for their first wins. Also on Tuesday, Walton (1-0) blanked North Cobb (0-1) 14-0 to start its season.

Photo courtesy of Brian L. Morgan. Lionetti can be reached at 404-256-1572.



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PANTHER PROWL



Panthers roll to five wins in six games

By Robby Kalland

The GSU men's basketball team has won five of its last six, the only loss coming in overtime to Delaware. The Panthers' most recent victory came in a Bracketbusters game against UTSA on Feb. 18. Led by Rashaad Richardson's 16 points off the bench, the Panthers beat the Roadrunners 82-71.

Georgia State (19-9, 10-6 CAA) will have two more games to reach the 20-win mark for the first time since 2003-04. The remaining schedule for the Panthers included a home game Wednesday against Old Dominion (result was not available at press deadline) and a road contest at William & Mary. The team is peaking at the right time heading towards the postseason. "I think we're playing our best basketball right now," said head coach Ron Hunter. "We're playing equally well at both the offensive and defensive ends. We'll be a tough out (the rest of the season). The kids are playing with the same swagger they had during our 11-game winning streak, and I think that makes us a very, very dangerous team."

DIAMOND CLUB ...

The Panthers' baseball team took three of four in their opening series against Western Illinois. After dropping game one of last Fri-

day's doubleheader 7-5, they rebounded taking the next three 7-0, 11-9 and 9-4. Patience at the plate was key as the Panthers drew 27 walks in the series and batted .287 for the four-game set. The Panthers host a three-game home set beginning tonight against Austin Peay.

HITTING THE LINKS ...

The men's golf team won the title at the Wexford Plantation Intercollegiate this week, shooting a total team score of 892 (plus-28) over the 54-hole tournament. The Panthers beat out Furman by six strokes to claim the title. Freshman Damon Stephenson's even par 216 earned him low medalist honor, while sophomore Tyler Gruca placed second with a 3-over 219. The team victory was the first for the Panthers since the 2007-08 season in a full field 54-hole event.

The Panthers will look to carry their confidence over to the Seminole Invitation hosted by Florida State March 9-11. With two young stars in Stephenson and Gruca, the future is bright for coach Joe Inman and the Panther golf team.

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OWL OUTLOOK



Men's track takes conference indoor meet

By Sean Conway

The Kennesaw State athletic programs continue to trend upward up 1-75. Recent successes include a championship and diamond victory over a team from the Atlantic Coast Conference.

BURGEONING DYNASTY ...

Last week at the Atlantic Sun Conference indoor track meet, the men's team edged host (and defending champion) East Tennessee State. The title is the Owls' third over the last five years in the A-Sun. Senior Brian Graham led the way by capturing a gold medal in the heptathlon. Graham also took second in the 60m hurdles, just behind teammate, Kendall Parks.

Head coach Andy Eggerth was selected as the A-Sun indoor Coach of the Year at the meet. The award comes on the heels of his winning the same honor for the 2011 outdoor season. The Owls now have less than a couple weeks to savor the victory. They begin their spring season next weekend in Jacksonville at the UNF Spring Break Outdoor Invitational.

MORE OWLS ...

On the baseball field, the Owls began their season last weekend by hosting Bradley

and Virginia Tech. After dropping one game to each visitor on Friday, the Black and Gold rallied to beat Virginia Tech 6-3 on Sunday. Freshman outfielder Jacob Bruce from Woodstock went 3-3 in the victory.

Over the next couple weeks, head coach Mike Sansing's team will play 10 road games including contests at Ga. Tech, Ga. State and a game against Georgia at the home the Gwinnett Braves, Coolray Field in Lawrenceville. The Owls look to improve on last season's 32-25 record, 18-13 in the conference.

The Lady Owls basketball team recently won four straight games and are just under the .500 mark at 13-14 for the season. They close out the conference schedule by hosting Belmont and Lipscomb this weekend, before the A-Sun tournament begins next week in Macon. Redshirt freshman guard Taylor Mills leads the team 12.7 points and 4.3 assists per game.

The men's squad (3-25) looks to win its first conference game with weekend games against Belmont and Lipscomb before they too travel to Macon for the conference tournament.

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BULLDOG BEAT



Diamond Dawgs sweep, rise to No. 9

By Stephen Black

Georgia's baseball team opened its season with a three-game sweep of visiting Presbyterian last weekend. With the sweep, the Bulldogs started 3-0 for the first time since 2009 when they started the season 14-0.

Georgia defeated the Blue Hose in Game 1 of the series behind a masterful pitching performance by Alex Wood, who gave up one earned run on five hits in six innings of work.

In Game 2, Georgia edged Presbyterian 5-4 after junior Brett DeLoach knocked in two runs on a walk-off double to win the game. It was DeLoach's only at-bat of the game, as he was inserted as a pinch-hitter.

The final game of the series was not as dramatic as Game 2. The Diamond Dawgs skunked the Blue Hose 11-0 to complete the sweep. Led by starter Taylor Hicks, five Georgia pitchers combined on the shutout.

After the season-opening series, Baseball America ranked Georgia No. 9, while Collegiate Baseball has the Bulldogs No. 14 and the NCBWA ranks them No. 17.

On Wednesday, the Dawgs hosted Georgia State (results were not available at press time) before taking on Winthrop in a three-game series over the weekend.

HOOP HOUNDS ...

An exhilarating road win at No. 20 Mississippi State beget two consecutive losses to South Carolina and Vanderbilt. Mark Fox's troops had four players score in double figures in the overtime win at State, including Kentavious Caldwell-Pope, who had 20 points. However, the star of the game may have been Gerald Robinson, who scored eight of his 13 points in overtime.

In Columbia, Malik Cooke scored with 20 seconds left to give the Gamecocks their margin of victory in a 57-56 win over Georgia. In a rough shooting night in which they hit 35.1 percent of their shots, the Bulldogs had just one scorer in double figures - Robinson, who tallied 11.

A six-point halftime lead melted into a nine-point loss to Vanderbilt on Saturday in Athens. Robinson again led Georgia in scoring, this time with 19 points. He was again the lone double-figure scorer for the Bulldogs.

On the docket for Georgia is a Wednesday night game at LSU (results were not available at press time) and then a home game against No. 11 Florida.

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TECH TALK



Jackets open the season at Rock Hill Classic

By Thomas Watson

The Georgia Tech baseball team entered the season ranked ninth in the country but lost its season opener 5-0 to Kent State in Rock Hill, S.C. It was the opening game of the Rock Hill Coca-Cola Classic, and Kent State starting pitcher David Starn went eight scoreless innings to hand Tech its first opening day loss in five years.

Starn had nine strikeouts during his eight innings, scattering just four Yellow Jacket hits. Tech's Buck Farmer posted nine strikeouts through six innings but gave up two runs and was credited with the loss.

JACKETS RALLY ...

The Yellow Jackets rebounded in the tournament, however, and reeled off three straight victories. The first of those wins came in the second game of a doubleheader on opening day. Tech beat Winthrop 5-0, but the bigger story was the first combined one-hitter since 1994 for the Yellow Jackets (Mark Pope threw a complete game one-hitter last season). Matthew Grimes went seven strong innings, giving up the one hit while striking out seven and not allowing a single walk. Zane Evans pitched in

his first collegiate game, completing the one-hitter with two flawless innings striking out four of the six batters.

"I felt like it was a good bounce back after not playing very well in the first game," said head coach Danny Hall. "It was a tough way to start the season and anytime you play a doubleheader it's not easy, but I was happy to see us bounce back and play well. Grimes was in complete control of the game and Evans threw the last two innings great as well."

After going 3-1 in the tournament, Tech dropped to No. 10 in the standings, and will prepare for a midweek matchup against Georgia Southern before the home opener against Ohio State this weekend. Jonathan Roberts will start versus the Eagles, the sophomore's first career start. Georgia Southern is 3-0 this season and ranked No. 30 in the country. The Yellow Jackets won three out of the four matchups against Southern last year, and Hall is 58-16 against the Eagles over his career. The long-time coach is nearing a major career milestone. Hall is only 10 wins shy of 1,000 victories.

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HAWKS HAVEN



Hawks grounded by myriad problems

By Ricky Dimon

The Hawks dropped to 3-7 in their last 10 games after losing a Presidents' Day afternoon special in Chicago, 90-79. Jannero Pargo came off the bench to score 19 points in 26 minutes for Atlanta, but it was nowhere near enough as the Bulls surged to a ridiculous 35-17 lead after one quarter and coasted without much trouble the rest of the way.

Nothing has been going particularly right for the Hawks of late and the trend continued on Monday. Derrick Rose had missed five straight games due to a bad back, but he returned just in time to face Atlanta and promptly contributed 23 points, six assists and five rebounds.

The Hawks were the most recent opponent in New York's "Linsanity" craze as they played a road game against Jeremy Lin and the Knicks on Wednesday night. Results were not available at press time.

TEAM IN TURMOIL ...

The injury bug is only getting worse for the Hawks. Al Horford continues to be sidelined and could miss the rest of the season with a torn pectoral muscle. Backup center Jason Collins has not played since February 2 and he will be out another 2-4 weeks after it was recently discovered that a dam-

aged elbow ligament is not healing properly. To cap it all off, Joe Johnson's knee tendinitis is showing no improvement. In fact, Johnson had to leave Monday's loss in the third quarter and he did not return.

As if the injuries aren't enough, now some alleged griping is permeating the Hawks' locker room. Reportedly, neither Tracy McGrady nor Marvin Williams is happy with his respective playing time and production.

McGrady played a mere four minutes in Saturday's blowout loss at Portland. "I'm tired of this [bleep]," McGrady told the AJC after that contest. "You can put that in the paper, I don't give a [bleep]." He logged 22 minutes on Monday, finishing with six points and five rebounds.

Williams' beef may or may not be reality, having been reported exclusively by gossiping Chris Broussard of ESPN in his "True Hoop" blog. "Frustration abounds in Atlanta right now, and sources say Marvin Williams wants out because he wants to play somewhere where he'll have an increased role offensively," Broussard wrote. "Williams is averaging just 9.6 points per game, his lowest since his rookie season."

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FALCONS FLIGHT



Top brass heads to Indy for NFL combine

By Sean Conway

At this week's NFL combine inside Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Falcons general manager Thomas Dimitroff and head coach Mike Smith will be looking for a diamond or two (or three) in the rough.

WAITING GAME ...

Last April, Dimitroff traded five draft picks to the Cleveland Browns to move from the 27th spot in the first round to acquire Julio Jones with the sixth overall pick. The Falcons gave up three picks in last year's draft plus this year's first and fourth-round picks. As a result, the Falcons' first selection in April will be late, the 55th overall pick.

In the Dimitroff/Smith era, there's been mixed success in the draft, regardless of where the picks are slotted. On the good side, little-known Montana linebacker Kroy Biermann was selected in the fifth round of the duo's first draft in 2008. Biermann has proved to be serviceable in the defensive end rotation through the years. On the other hand, defensive tackle Peria Jerry is an example of a first-round pick (2009) that has been more often injured than effective.

The Falcons have said they want to sign about 10 of their current group of free agents plus find help for the offensive line. Adding another defensive end and possibly a corner-

back are possibilities. Here are three faces the Falcons will take a long look at in Indy. Most likely these players will add depth and not be expected to play at a Pro Bowl level in their rookie campaign.

Casey Hayward, a 5-foot-11 cornerback from Vanderbilt, grabbed seven interceptions in for the Commodores in 2011 and 15 total in his career. He also provides a little local flavor. (The second team All-American is from Perry, Ga.)

Another potential Falcon with local ties is pass-rush specialist Bruce Irvin from West Virginia who actually played wide receiver at Stephenson in Stone Mountain. Current defensive end John Abraham is a free agent entering his 13th season, and it seems likely the Falcons will only sign him for a maximum of two years, if at all. Irvin is a little on the small side at 6-foot-2 and 245 pounds but has great quickness and is considered to be a tough, highly motivated player. He had eight sacks for the Mountaineers last fall.

With tight end Tony Gonzalez likely to retire after this season, the Falcons may draft an understudy to spell the future Hall of Famer. One possibility may be Stanford's Coby Fleener, who caught 10 touchdown passes last fall.

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CHOP SHOP



Braves converge for spring training

By Fletcher Proctor

Pitchers and catchers reported to the Atlanta Braves' Orlando spring training facility last weekend, though several other position players were there to greet them and get a jump on the today's reporting deadline for all position players. Chipper Jones, Eric Hinske and Jason Heyward were a few of the position players also getting down to Florida early in preparation for the 2012 season. The team will hold its first full squad workout tomorrow.

AILING ARMS ...

Several pitchers are trying to bounce back after injuries during the 2011 calendar year. Peter Moylan missed much of 2011 after recovering from back surgery and late-September shoulder surgery. He was resigned by the team to a prorated deal after being non-tendered during the offseason. The right-hander could be back as early as May, returning to a loaded bullpen with reigning Rookie of the Year Craig Kimbrel, Jonny Venters and 2011 sensation Eric O'Flaherty. Kris Medlen, Arodys Vizcaino, Robert Fish and Anthony Varvaro will also likely see some action out of the pen.

Jair Jurrjens, an All-Star last year before missing the end of the year, showed up to camp with a special orthotic insert for his shoes. According to reports from Florida, the

orthotics will help with a toe condition, which will in turn help out with Jurrjens' balky knee that hindered him in 2011. Another pitcher with a dominant first half and a less-than-stellar second half, Tommy Hanson, has reportedly removed a hitch in his delivery that could alleviate some of the shoulder fatigue issues that haunted Hanson the last two years and ended his season last year on August 6. Hanson was involved in a one-car wreck while reporting to spring training in which he sustained a mild concussion.

HUDDY'S HEALTH ...

Staff ace Tim Hudson is recovering from November back surgery and is throwing again. He will start the year on the disabled list, but the 36-year-old could return near the beginning of May. The staff ace won 16 games last year with a 3.22 ERA after winning 17 games and appearing in the All-Star game in 2010. Anyone worried that Hudson's age may be catching up with him is wrong. Last year he posted his lowest WHIP since 2003 and his strikeout-to-walk ratio was the best of his career. He also upped his strikeouts/nine innings to 6.6, his highest since his arrival in Atlanta.

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GWINNETT GLADIATORS



Glads hanging on to first place

By Joe Deighton

A rare weekday afternoon game resulted in a 3-2 Gladiators loss to the Cincinnati Cyclones on Presidents' Day. Despite the loss, Gwinnett remained atop the South Division and held onto first place in the Eastern Conference with 69 points as of Wednesday. The Glads are 9-2-1 in the last 12 games. With just 18 games remaining, points against conference opponents will be critical to winning the conference and challenging for the Kelly Cup (championship trophy of the ECHL).

ROSTER CHANGES ...


Defenseman Josh Burrows was acquired from the AHL's Chicago Express last Saturday. In exchange the Gladiators sent forward Ryley Grantham to Chicago. Burrows is in his second season of professional hockey after playing four years at the University of Vermont. The 24-year old spent last season with the Bakersfield Condors, scoring one goal in seven games. Burrows tallied 11 points (three goals, eight assists) in 43 games with Chicago this year. Defenseman Stephen Mallaro was picked up from Cincinnati, as well. In three games with the Gladiators, Mallaro has a plus-one rating. The addition of two defensemen gives Gwinnett some much needed depth at a position that is crucial to the team's success, especially with inexperience in goal.

It was only a matter of time before talented forward Joey Haddad's services would be needed again at the next level. The AHL's Hamilton Bulldogs called Haddad up last week and depending on his performance, his return to Gwinnett this season is in question. The 23-year old has been the Glads' most complete player this season. In 38 games, Haddad has 15 goals, 15 assists and 88 penalty minutes. This is Haddad's second call-up to the AHL, but first to Hamilton this season.

ON TAP ...

Gwinnett will continue its roadtrip with two games at South Carolina this weekend. The Glads currently have a seven-point lead on the third-place Stingrays. Two wins and four points on the road could bury Carolina's chances to catch the Glads. Gwinnett has won four of the past five meetings against the Stingrays. Three of those victories came in the form of a shutout, including a 1-0 win in Charleston on Dec. 17. The biggest difference now is that Gwinnett will not have the man responsible for those shutouts, goalie Jeff Jakaitis. Goalie Joe Palmer should get the start on Saturday and will try to improve his 2.96 GAA. Palmer has struggled over his past three starts, allowing 11 goals in all.

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TRIVIA ANSWER

The last time the Hawks gave up 25 or more points was in a Jan. 14 game against Minnesota, when Kevin Love dropped 30. It is the longest such streak in the shot clock era (since 1954-55).

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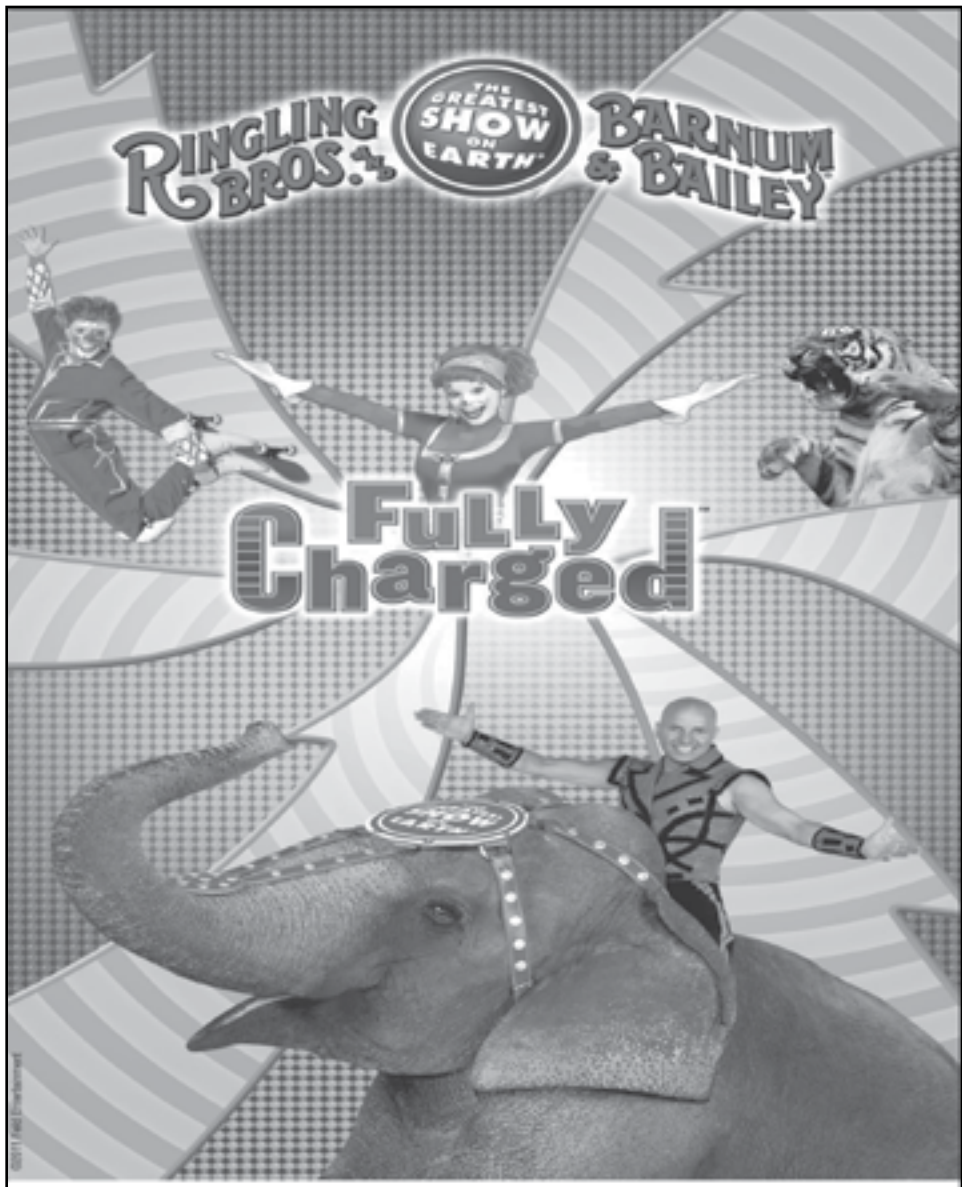
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FEB. 15	FEB. 16	FEB. 17	FEB. 18	FEB. 19	FEB. 20
7:30 PM	7:30 PM	10:30 AM*	11:00 AM	11:00 AM	11:00 AM
		7:30 PM	3:00 PM	3:00 PM	3:00 PM
			7:00 PM	7:00 PM	

*No Pre-show activities.

FEB. 23 - 26 

Thu.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
FEB. 23	FEB. 24	FEB. 25	FEB. 26
7:30 PM	10:30 AM*	11:00 AM	11:00 AM
	7:30 PM	3:00 PM	3:00 PM
		7:00 PM	7:00 PM

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