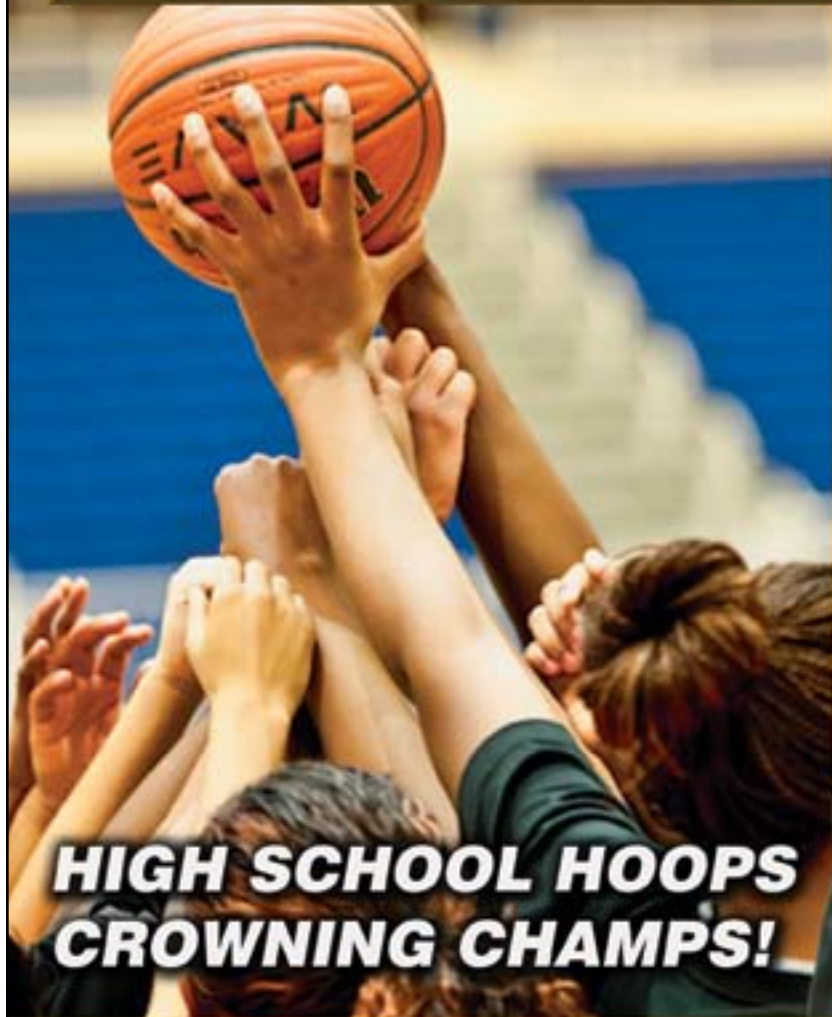


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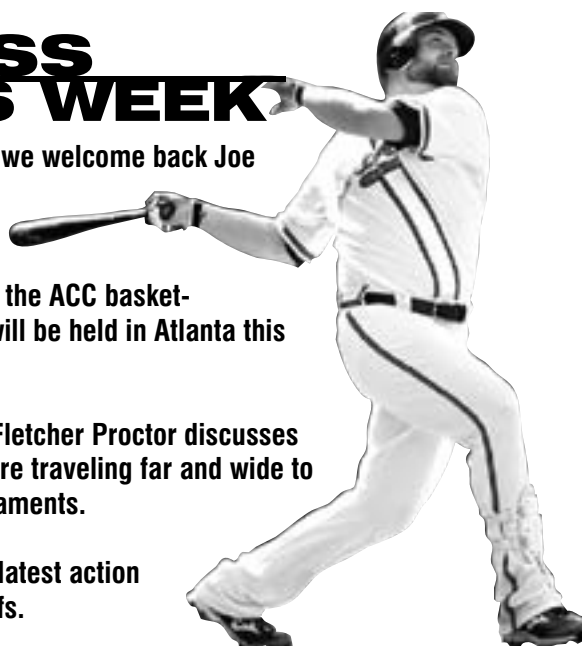
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CAN'T MISS THIS WEEK

- 4** On our columnists page, we welcome back Joe Deighton's "Cup of Joe."
- 5** Reporter Ryan Caiafa delves into the history of the ACC basketball tournament, which will be held in Atlanta this weekend.
- 7** In our prep cover story, Fletcher Proctor discusses how local hoops teams are traveling far and wide to play in prestigious tournaments.
- 8** Brian Jones reviews the latest action in the state hoops playoffs.



TEAM SCOOP AND VOICES

COVER DESIGN BY DJ GALBIATI
 COVER PHOTOS COURTESY OF GEORGIA TECH ATHLETICS
 AND TY FREEMAN

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INSIDE AT SCORE

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SHOT OF THE WEEK...



COSTLY DUNK: Milton's Charles Mann dunks in a quarterfinal game against North Gwinnett. After the play, Mann was teed-up for the second time and automatically ejected. The Eagles' senior is also suspended for the semifinal and, if Milton makes it, the state final. Photo by Ty Freeman.

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THE FLETCH



Starters not "Young Guns"; Saints tripping

By Fletcher Proctor

I had to smirk a bit when I read in the latest *Sports Illustrated* that the Braves' young arms are giving an SI writer 1991 flashbacks. With all due respect to this young wave of prospects, not as much is being asked of them as was being asked of the 1991-era arms. John Smoltz, Tom Glavine and Steve Avery were being counted on to anchor a staff that raced to back-to-back National League pennants.

I am encouraged by this current crop of pitching prospects in Julio Teheran, Randall Delgado, Arodys Vizcaino and Mike Minor, but those players are being asked to fill in the back of the rotation behind All-Stars Tim Hudson and Jair Jurrjens as well as Tommy Hanson. Should the Braves make it to Game

7 of the World Series, you have to believe that it will be Hudson getting the ball, not Teheran as Smoltz did in 1991.

I certainly hope this group goes on to boast a pair of Hall of Famers with 200-plus career wins apiece, but let us please take a moment of pause before we crown them, right Dennis Green?

BAD SAINTS ...

You should never take delight in the misfortunes of others, but Falcons fans certainly must be smiling to themselves a bit with each bit of negative press that comes out from New Orleans. The Saints' first bit of bad news came down when the NFC South team announced it would have to slap the franchise tag on free

agent quarterback Drew Brees.

Everyone knows that Brees will be back, but because the team could not work out a contract that would make the system quarterback the highest-paid player in NFL history, the team was forced to waste its exclusive extension tag on Brees. Now wide receiver Marques Colston and guard Carl Nicks could be allowed to walk as free agents, and 790 The Zone's Dave Archer believes that Nicks is one of the best guards in the game today and could be a player the Falcons' target to improve the offensive line. If the Saints lose one of their most important linemen, that would be a big blow. But the blow would be magnified if he were to go to a division rival.

Later it was revealed that the NFL may be looking into "Bounty-gate," which stemmed from former Saints defensive coordinator Gregg Williams instituting a bounty process that paid players for late and excessive hits that targeted opposing stars with the intent to knock out or injure the player. As Mark Bradley pointed out in the AJC, "it couldn't happen to a more deserving bunch."

The Saints lost a lot of the positive PR from being a post-Katrina success story by shamelessly going for records in blowouts,

reportedly urinating on the Georgia Dome field during a postgame celebration, ducking various media obligations and possibly covering up a prescription drug abuse scandal. Forgive Falcons fans for feeling the slightest bit pleased that the Saints' coaches could be suspended/fined by the NFL and by the possible loss of future high draft picks.

Former Falcons linebacker Coy Wire confirmed on 680 The Fan's *The Rude Awakening* that the Falcons do not have a bounty system, though Wire did play in one in Buffalo when Williams was the head coach.

WALL-TO-WALL ...

Don't miss this weekend's GHSA basketball coverage on GPB TV. The coverage tips off Friday with the GHSA AAASP Wheelchair game live from Gwinnett Arena. The AAAA girls and boys will follow, then the AAAAA girls and boys finish off Friday night. The action resumes tomorrow in Macon with the girls Class A finals at 11 a.m. and ends with the AAA boys title game at 8:45 p.m. For complete coverage, check out ScoreAtl.com and GaPrepNews.com.

Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

CUP OF JOE



Braves start slow; NFL free agency nears

By Joe Deighton

Spring training started this week for the Braves, but it looks like a little 'spring cleaning' needs to be done before the season gets underway. It may only be the exhibition season, but giving up nine home runs and 18 runs to the Detroit Tigers was embarrassing.

Grapefruit League games are not normally given much attention, but this game was a cause for concern. The starters usually play the first three innings or so and, after three innings, the Tigers led 11-0. Julio Teheran gave up six hits, all homers, in two innings of work. The 21-year old is trying to earn a spot as the Braves' fifth starter after spending last

year with Gwinnett. The six home runs were more than he gave up all of last season in over 144 innings. If the Braves are going to rely on Teheran, the young gun has to have a better outing in his next start. The outcome of this game (18-3) was lopsided, but in actuality won't have a bearing on this year and probably won't be remembered when the season starts in about a month. However, Atlanta's fifth starting spot is now highly in question.

NFL FREE AGENCY ...

The most wonderful time of the year is almost here for the football junky. Free agency represents the beginning of a new football

year and 2012 will be one of the most interesting offseasons in a long time. The New Orleans Saints' bounty scandal and Peyton Manning's exit from Indianapolis have set the stage for a shift of power that may be unprecedented in league history. Will any defenders want to sign with the Saints after the 'pay for pain' fiasco? Who will sign Manning? Will he be the superstar quarterback that he's always been? In my opinion, the best fit for Peyton will be the Arizona Cardinals. The Cardinals have the best receiver in the league in Larry Fitzgerald and went to a Super Bowl with an aging Kurt Warner four years ago.

The Falcons have already re-signed starting safety Thomas DeCoud, something that was expected given his consistent play throughout his career. Kroy Biermann, of *Real Housewives of Atlanta* fame, could get big money once he is re-signed as the Falcons' top defensive end. It would seem that defensive end John Abraham's days in Atlanta are over since his wishes of over \$12 million per season are unlikely to be granted. Abraham will be 34 this year and that is the main reason he may not be re-signed. Look for Atlanta to go after a linebacker or lineman

in free agency. Two possible Falcons pick-ups could be Detroit Lions linebacker Stephen Tulloch or Baltimore Ravens defensive tackle Corey Redding.

J-SMOOVE ...

The Hawks got a big win against Oklahoma City last Saturday, and it was mostly because of Josh Smith. Without Joe Johnson, many assumed it was unlikely that Atlanta would beat one of the best teams in the league. Kevin Durant is one of the top-five players in the NBA, but Smith looked like he belonged in that category after scoring a season-high 30 points and leading the Hawks to a win. J-Smoove seemed to be everywhere, hitting threes, dunking in the face of defenders and grabbing 12 rebounds. The game was won down the stretch as Smith scored 13 points in the fourth quarter.

The eight-year veteran has always shown flashes of greatness but has never been consistent. If Smith can play with the confidence he did against the Thunder for the remainder of the season and into the playoffs, the Hawks will be a force to be reckoned with.

Deighton can be reached at jdeighton@scoreatl.com.



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ACC IN ATL



Philips hosts cherished hoops tradition

By Ryan Caiafa



March has arrived, and, with its arrival, comes the madness of the college basketball postseason. Conference tournaments have already begun and Atlanta will once again play host to the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament. Duke is the three-time defending tournament champion, including 2009, the last time the tournament was held in Atlanta.

The time-honored tradition of the ACC Tournament and its place in the college basketball world cannot be understated. With some of the nation's most storied programs, including one of the biggest rivalries in all of sports in Duke vs. North Carolina, the tournament consistently provides historic moments from some of the greatest players of all time,

including Michael Jordan, Ralph Sampson and Tim Duncan.

CHANGE IS GOOD ...

Since its inception in 1954, the conference tournament has undergone several location changes as teams have shuffled in and out of the conference over time. The tournament has typically found a home in North Carolina, starting out in Raleigh and, in 1967, rotating between Charlotte and Greensboro. With four teams in the conference – North Carolina, Duke, N.C. State and Wake Forest – based in the state, it only made sense that the tournament be played in their backyards.

In the 1980s, the tournament did make its

way elsewhere outside of North Carolina, to Landover, Md., which had hosted the tournament once before in 1976, and Atlanta, at The Omni. Greensboro remained the host every other year during this time frame.

Despite branching out of North Carolina during the 1980s, the tournament stayed in the area until 2001, with Greensboro and Charlotte both playing host throughout the 1990s. It wasn't until the new millennium when more cities such as Washington D.C. and Tampa were given the chance to hold the tournament.

With many of the conference powers being located in the South, the state of North Carolina in particular, it could be assumed that the tournament's permanent home would remain in the region. However, in 2011, it was announced that current Big East conference powerhouses Syracuse and Pittsburgh would be joining the ACC. This expansion represents more than just adding two programs to an already loaded conference. It represents a shift in the culture and demographics of a conference traditionally based in the Southeastern region of the country. The possibility looms that the conference tournament could find its way to an even bigger stage come postseason time.

As the Big East conference continues its decline, we could see the tournament migrate from its traditional Southern home to the bright lights and historic lore of Madison Square Garden, which is the current home of the Big East tournament. While nothing is currently set in stone for the move, the influx of Syracuse and Pitt does open the door for speculation that the Garden may play host to the ACC Tournament down the road. However, the Big East's deal with Madison Square Garden expires in 2016 so any talk of a migration up North is a bit premature and Greensboro is currently slated to host the 2013, 2014 and 2015 ACC Tournaments.

PRESENT DAY ...

For now, however, all sights are set on the present and Philips Arena in Atlanta for what is expected to once again be a hotly-contested tournament. North Carolina claimed the top seed as the regular season ACC champion by avenging its stunning home loss to Duke by dominating the Blue Devils 88-70 in the final game of the regular season, behind a 19-point, 10-rebound performance from ACC Player of the Year Tyler Zeller in Cameron Indoor Stadium. Despite the loss, Duke enters the tournament as the No. 2 seed.

As usual many expect the tournament to come down to the two heavyweights, but there are other teams in the field that cannot be slept on. Florida State is one team that would love to spoil the North Carolina-Duke matchup as the Seminoles beat both teams during the season. FSU humiliated the Tar Heels 90-57 at home on Jan. 14, then ended Duke's 45-game home winning streak on Jan. 21. The Seminoles have to be considered a dark horse to win the tournament and become the first team other than North Carolina or Duke to win the tournament since 2004, when Maryland won.

The hometown Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets enter the tournament as the No. 11 seed, drawing the sixth-seeded Miami Hurricanes as their first-round opponent. Despite an 11-19 overall record and going 4-12 in conference play, the team has played better as of late, despite the absence of leading scorer Glen Rice Jr., who is suspended for the remainder of the season. The Hurricanes defeated the Jackets 64-49 at Philips Arena on Jan. 24.

"We really struggled in a lot of areas during that game," Tech coach Brian Gregory said about the first Miami game. "So we're going to have to play even better than we have been playing over the past few weeks to be successful."

If the Jackets are able to shock Miami, a tough matchup with the aforementioned Seminoles awaits.

Adjusting to a new coach and new system has not been easy for Georgia Tech, but by generating some late-season momentum despite missing its top scorer, the team has the potential to, at the very least, make some noise in the ACC Tournament. Anything can happen in the postseason, and even with a disappointing regular season, the Jackets have shown in the past that they are capable of making a tournament run.

With usual suspects North Carolina and Duke being the clear-cut favorites, darkhorses like Florida State, Virginia and N.C. State will be looking to make their own history by attempting to end Duke's three-year run as tournament champion or knocking out the Tar Heels, who have finished the season on a torrid run, winning 12 of 13 games. The stage is set in Atlanta for a tournament featuring several storylines that could play a key role in crowning a champion. March has indeed arrived and it's once again time to get ready for the most exciting postseason in all of sports.

Photo of Brian Gregory courtesy of GT Athletics. Caiafa can be reached at rcaifa@scoreatl.com.



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WHOS HOT

THUMBS UP TO MARCH MADNESS



The ACC Tournament

It's great to have the SEC football championship in the Georgia Dome every early December, but this week it's all about Peachtree Street, not Tobacco Road. There are more than enough college hoops fans in the metro area to support this historic tournament. Let's put on a good show, Atlanta.

Opening Day

All around the perimeter, youth baseball leagues are heating up. We love it. Yeah, there's something timeless and very cool about the first game of the season on a chilly Saturday with a grandfather throwing out the first pitch. Play ball, kids.

Tiger Woods

Tiger made a furious run up the leaderboard last Sunday at the Honda Classic in Miami. While he's having trouble putting four consistent rounds together, he's still golf's biggest draw. The game doesn't need his "girlfriends" or his fire hydrants, but the planets are aligning nicely for a great weekend in early April at Augusta National.

Hank Haney

Tiger's former swing coach is coming out with a book describing his time with one of the two greatest golfers in the history of the sport. Haney is about to come across as the whiny, jilted high school sweetheart. It's time to let Tiger's past be in the past.

Rain-outs

Sure, we need rain, and wet weather is a big part of spring-time. That said, remember being dressed in your uniform, glove in hand and hearing mom or dad say, "Sorry son, there's no ball-game today. The field's just too wet." Hearing that phrase upsets kids more than anything.

Gray Unis

It's official: gray has become the new black. When sports teams started wearing black as an alternate uniform color, it was kind of cool. But now, to see a historic team like the North Carolina Tar Heels wear battleship gray is just not right. Some fashions are better left in the practice gym.



WHOS NOT

THUMBS DOWN TO UGLY GET-UPS

SCORE LIST

BY BRIAN JONES

- 1** **CHAMPIONSHIP WEEKEND:** It's that time again. High school basketball will conclude this weekend with the state finals at the Arena at the Gwinnett Center as well as the Macon Centreplex. Can the Milton boys win their second title in three seasons? Can the McEachern girls keep their undefeated streak alive? No matter what happens, it should be a fun weekend of basketball and you can catch all the action on GPB and GPB.org/sports.
- 2** **PRO DAY:** Both UGA and Georgia Tech held Pro Days for NFL scouts this week. Some of the winners of the Pro Days were UGA's Aron White and Tech's Stephen Hill. On the negative side, Orson Charles struggled with his 40 time, recording a 4.9 into the wind and 4.75 with the wind. Ultimately, does it really matter how good or bad Charles' 40 time is? He performed at a high level at UGA and there is no reason he won't do the same in the NFL.
- 3** **MAKING MOVES:** With the free-agency period right around the corner, the Falcons are looking to be aggressive because they don't have as many draft picks due to the trade for Julio Jones. The first move they made is putting the franchise tag on Brent Grimes. After that, they agreed to terms with Thomas DeCoud. With not as much depth at secondary, both players are much-needed, most especially Grimes who is arguably the best cover corner on the roster.
- 4** **MINI PRIME TIME:** It looks like Deion Sanders' eldest son will play football here in Atlanta. Deion Sanders Jr. will enroll in the prep school, the Atlanta Sports Academy, which is located in Dawsonville. Like his father, Junior plays wide receiver and cornerback and is enrolling in the prep school to improve his college offers. This is good for both parties because Sanders Jr., has a chance to be in Atlanta more often and this gives the Atlanta Sports Academy more recognition.
- 5** **DOWN TO FIVE:** Here is some good news for Bulldog fans. Robert Nkemdiche, who is ranked the No. 1 prospect for 2013, has narrowed his list to five schools and UGA made the cut. The 6-foot-5, 270-pound defensive end from Grayson also has Alabama, Ole Miss, LSU and Clemson on his list. The next move for Nkemdiche will probably be a visit to UGA when they have their G-Day game in April. If the Bulldogs do sign Nkemdiche, their class will be elite because he is the real deal.

CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

BY FLETCHER PROCTOR

- 1** Win in the Braves' first five spring training games
- 2** Games senior Charles Mann will have to sit out after being ejected from Milton's quarterfinal win
- 3** Wins this season so far for Walton's girls tennis team, stretching its streak to 150 straight wins
- 4** Straight titles being sought by the Buford girls and the Miller Grove boys in the GHSA hoops semifinals
- 5** AAASP titles, including the last four, for the Atlanta Wolfpack who lost to the Gwinnett Heat in the GHSA semifinals
- 6** ACC Tournament championships between Tech and Maryland. Each has three, the most of any program outside N.C.
- 7** Days Braves first baseman Freddie Freeman missed in spring training after dislocating a knee cap
- 8** GHSA state championships for the Wesleyan Wolves girls basketball program since 2002
- 9** The latest ranking of the UGA baseball team, which improved to 11-2 with a win over Kennesaw State
- 10.6** Million dollars that the Falcons will pony up to franchised CB Brent Grimes for 2012

TRIVIA QUESTION

In 58 years of the ACC Tournament, how many times has a school from outside the state of North Carolina won the tournament?

Answer on Page 14

SANITY AT LAST

"It can't hurt. You know, it can't hurt. ... A lot of it is confidence and just the idea that the things you're doing are working. So I think that will help."

- Tech coach Brian Gregory on the ACC Tournament being played at Philips Arena.

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.

After a meeting to introduce Centennial's principal to the offensive coordinator that we plan to hire, Dr. Miletto and I discussed a timeline for the hiring as well as the position that he will have in the faculty. The staff is coming together and should soon be finished.

Last Tuesday was an important day as we hosted a "town hall meeting." It was a night that we set aside to invite our varsity and junior programs, along with their parents, in for an informal question-and-answer session. It also served as a meet-and-greet and registration opportunity



for our potential players.

We have established Tuesdays and Thursdays as "speed training days" after school for our players. We are still in the initial stages of the "Speed Tracs" program, but the players are really starting to grasp what we want out of this program.

Other meetings we held last week included one with a sporting good supplier about helmets; one with the senior class to discuss goals and the direction of the program; and one with a parent to discuss fundraising opportunities.

Finally, we hosted a 7-on-7 tournament, sponsored by New Level Athletics last week. Thirty of the best teams from across the southeastern United States as well as teams from Michigan and New Jersey participated. Many of the top prospects for the 2013 and 2014 classes were at the event, which we hope to do next year.



Georgia hoops programs traveling far and wide

By Fletcher Proctor

Some of the elite Georgia high school football programs have been facing off with various national powers over the last few years, with Colquitt County taking on all comers and Camden County, North Gwinnett and Buford taking part in various invitationals. This year, many of the teams still competing for a state championship steered themselves with national schedules that have them in a position to hoist some state hardware.

RUGGED WOLVERINES ...

The Miller Grove boys were one of the teams that took on some of the nation's top teams and lived to tell about it. Sharman White's squad faced ESPN's No. 3 team Oak Hill Academy (Va.) and No. 1 squad Simeon (Ill.) before taking part in the Bass Pro Tournament of Champions in Springfield, Mo.

"You have to embrace (the tough schedule)," said White. "It will pay off when it comes to tournament time."

Miller Grove has several players that

were some of the top recruits in the country, so the Wolverines were an attractive team for national networks, thus opening up opportunities for a national showdown. ESPN wanted eyeballs on Tony Parker, one of the nation's top uncommitted recruits, as well as Tony Evans and Georgia-bound Brandon Morris.

The Wesleyan girls were another team that sought out competition outside of the state's border. Jan Azar's squad, including Jordan Frazier, Holli Wilkins, Kaelyn Causwell and Katie Frerking got the better of quite a few teams in the Nike Tournament of Champions in Phoenix. Wesleyan went 2-2 against some of the nation's best, beating Christ The King (N.Y.) and Incarnate Word Academy (Mo.). Wesleyan would later take out Oak Hill Academy (Va.) in a local tournament.

The Buford girls also traveled to Phoenix for the Nike Tournament of Champions and racked up an important win. Gene Durden's crew edged St. Johns College, an

important win considering the team was without star Andraya Carter. Buford also defeated Germantown Academy (Pa.) in yet another national event. Carter will head to Tennessee next year, where teammate Kaela Davis was scheduled to join her, but now is exploring her options.

Angie Hembree's Norcross Lady Blue Devils participated in a number of events including the Border Battle against Hoover (Ala.), the Crescent Bank Invitational against St. James (S.C.) and Spring Valley (S.C.), the Battle of the Southeast against nationally-ranked Riverdale (Tenn.) and The Kay Yow Girls Night Out, where the opponent was Center Point (Ala.). Hembree believes these events help prepare her team for the tough grind of the playoffs and she appears to be right. Her team, including junior star Diamond DeShields is trying to win a third-straight Class AAAAA crown.

SOARING EAGLES ...

One semifinal team with perhaps the most success against a national schedule is the Milton boys. Coach David Boyd took his team to the Beach Ball Classic in Myrtle Beach, S.C. The Eagles throttled Miami (Fla.), Ballard (Ky.), Bishop Gorman (Nev.)

and Lone Peak (Utah). When Milton, led by Evan Nolte, Shaq Johnson and Tevin Glass, tagged Bishop Gorman, the Gaels were ranked No. 9 in the country.

McEachern has an argument as the Lady Indians have gone undefeated this year, blowing away most of the in-state competition just as they have out of state foes. Phyllis Arthur's squad has beaten teams from Tennessee (Riverdale, Overton-Memphis, Memphis-Central) Florida (Hollywood Christian) and Alabama (Hoover). The 31-0 McEachern Indians, led by Pachis Roberts, have their sights set on a state title, but nationally-tested Norcross awaits in the semifinal round. The two teams on the other side of the bracket coincidentally are Lexie Brown and North Gwinnett (3-0 vs. national foes) and Hillgrove, which has not faced a team from outside the Georgia border.

While these are just a few of the teams remaining that achieved some success, other schools took part in various events that challenged the national elite. Shiloh hosted the Big Apple vs. Big Peach Battle over Thanksgiving.

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

BASKETBALL NEWS



Semis feature metro Atlanta flavor

By Brian Jones

It all comes down to this.

There are no more showcases, Tuesday night showdowns or region tournaments. The state championships take place this weekend, and when it's all said and done, 10 teams will have the right to call themselves the best in Georgia.

The Class AAAAA and AAAA championship games will be played at the Arena at Gwinnett Center while AAA, AA and A will have the finals at Macon Coliseum. All the semifinal games have been played on Wednesday, Thursday, and today at the same locations. So this will be a look at the teams that reached from the metro Atlanta area and how they got to the Final Four.

OH, MANN ...

After a disappointing loss in last year's state title game to Norcross, Milton made its way back to the final four and has looked stronger than ever. However, if they do reach and the championship game, they will have to do it without Georgia-signee Charles Mann who was ejected from the quarterfinal win against North Gwinnett and will have to sit out the next two games.

Regardless, the Eagles are still expected to win the title, but they have to watch out for the other three teams that have made the cut (Savannah, Alpharetta and Harrison). Savannah has been in this dance before as the program has reached the semifinals 29 times

since 1926. Alpharetta and Harrison played in their first semifinals, but showed they can play with the best of them. The Raiders did lose 12 games during the regular season, but they got hot once they entered the tournament with wins against Lassiter, Peachtree Ridge and Berkmar. The Hoyas found ways to defeat teams like Norcross, South Gwinnett and Dr. Phillips (Fla.). They lost in the semifinals of the Region 4-AAAAA Tournament, but bounced back in the state tournament with wins against Johnson-Savannah, Valdosta and M.L. King.

It's a DeKalb-Clayton affair in AAAA as Miller Grove, Jonesboro, North Clayton and Southwest DeKalb played in the semifinals. Based on recent history, Miller Grove should be the favorite to win its fourth consecutive title. They have the tools to claim the title as they have one of Georgia's best players in Tony Parker. And let's not forget about Brandon Morris, a Georgia signee.

However, Southwest DeKalb has Memphis-bound Shaq Goodwin and Jordan Price who is an Auburn signee, and North Clayton has Marcus Hunt (Georgia Tech). There has been and will be top-notch players all over the court, so it will come down to experience and coaching, and that's where Miller Grove has the edge.

Columbia has reigned supreme in AAA for the last two years and the three other teams that made the semifinals have little or

no history in the tournament. It is Drew's first semifinal, Washington played in its first semifinals since 1987 and Eagles Landing made the semifinals last year, but lost to Columbia. If the Eagles do win the title, it will be their fifth title in seven seasons, which will be the first time since 1936-42 any boys team has accomplished that feat (Lanier).

Whitefield Academy has been one of the top teams in Class A for the last 10 years and have played in its eighth final four in the last 10 seasons. Led by Georgia signee Kenny Gaines, the WolfPack have a chance to win their first state title since 2009.

GIRL POWER ...

In AAAAA, many believe the state title was played on Thursday when defending state champion Norcross took on undefeated McEachern, as most experts believed the winner of that game will go on to win the state title. The reason for that is the other two teams in the final four, North Gwinnett and Hillgrove, have not played in a semifinal game in the last 40 years. One thing to watch for is if the Lady Indians do win against Norcross and take home the state title, they will have a chance to win a mythical national title as they are ranked No. 2 in the country according to ESPN.

The Miller Grove boys are a favorite to win Class AAAA, and the same thing could be said about the girls who made their first final four appearance. Southwest DeKalb is also back in the final four. The Lady Panthers have won state titles in 2008, 2009 and 2010 but they did not qualify for last year's state tournament. Jonesboro is coming off a huge win against last year's state champion Fayette County in the quarterfinals, and Alcovy made its first appearance in the semifinals.

Columbia is back in the AAA final four and the Eagles are looking to win their first state title since 2010. The problem is Washington County is looking to defend its state title and become the first team since Woodward Academy (1995-96) to have back-to-back undefeated seasons. Washington County is ranked No. 1 in AAA while Columbia is right behind them at No. 2.

The Buford girls are like the football team was the last four of five years years in terms of winning state titles. The Lady Wolves are looking to win

their fourth consecutive state title with the help of Kaela Davis and Andraya Carter, a Tennessee signee. Lovett is in the final four for the first time in school history and looking to score a major upset, assuming they get past Laney in the semifinals and Buford takes down Brooks County.

As dominant as the Buford Lady Wolves have been, the Wesleyan Lady Wolves have been stronger, winning the last three Class A titles and eight GHSA titles in the last 10 seasons. The one team that could stop them from winning a state title for the fifth consecutive year is Southwest Atlanta Christian, the No. 2-ranked team which has lost only three games this season.

Photo of Jordan Price courtesy of Ty Freeman. Jones can be reached at bjones@scoreatl.com.



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PREP ROUNDUP



Buford baseball back on track

By Fletcher Proctor

In baseball, the magic number seemed to be 14 earlier this week as Mason Felt of Hebron Christian struck out 14 batters in the Lions' 1-0 win over Commerce. Just a day earlier, Central Gwinnett's Grant Thiel tossed a complete-game two-hitter in the Black Knights' 4-1 win over Columbia.

One day later, Luis Valdez posted 12 strikeouts in a 11-9 victory over Druid Hills. Valdez one-upped Thiel though by cranking a three-run home run to support his own complete-game cause.

Zack Erwin and Chris Rich each went deep for Duluth as the Wildcats shut down Chattahoochee 11-4. Erwin has signed to play for the Clemson Tigers in the ACC after graduation.

North Cobb shot itself in the foot with multiple errors, giving Etowah plenty of extra outs in an 11-1 Eagles victory. J.T. Thomas registered three RBI and scored two runs in the win. The defending Class AA baseball champion Buford Wolves seem to have righted the ship after a rough start. The Wolves improved to 2-4 after a 7-3 win over Northview. Josh Bryan went five innings Tuesday to pick up his second win of the year. He also came through with a hit and an RBI at the dish. Brian Malone crushed a two-run home run in the win.

ON THE PITCH ...

Jeremy Rector could not be stopped in Peachtree Ridge's 5-1 win over Newnan. The Lion had three goals in the victory, two assisted by Juan Herrera. Peachtree Ridge's girls also picked up a win over Newnan 1-0 after Jordyn Misset provided the game's lone goal. Brookwood has found a pair of goal scorers early as Adrian Alabi and Trevor Mooney each netted a pair of goals in the Broncos' 5-0 win over Kennesaw Mountain earlier this week.

The Collins Hill girls soccer squad soared to a 10-0 win over

Central Gwinnett. Kelsey Lawrence found the back of the net three times while Paige Hoover, Taylor Donohue and Mariah Dickey each scored twice.

East Hall earned its first win of the year after Tatiana Castillo scored four goals in a 7-0 win.

The Flowery Branch girls tagged Buford 9-1 after Cassidy Elrod tallied three goals and two assists. Kayla Robles notched a pair of goals as well as an assist in the victory as Flowery Branch improved to 8-0 on the year.

Three different players scored goals for Gainesville as the Lady Red Elephants blanked Lanier 3-0. Jazmin Penado, Liza Carpenter and Elizabeth Fischer each found the back of the net for Gainesville.

ON THE COURTS ...

North Gwinnett dusted Parkview 4-1 after Taylor Buchholz, Ryan Duncan and R.J. Clement each contributed a singles point. The Bulldogs earned a doubles win as well. Brookwood was untouchable on the tennis courts with a 5-0 win over Shiloh. Mark Guentert led the rout with a singles victory. The Broncos are 7-0 on the year. The Brookwood girls also posted a 5-0 victory, blanking Central Gwinnett behind the play of Kerry Roome and Maddie Stanitzke.

The Walton girls also extended the Raiders' amazing winning streak to 150 matches with a 3-0 start to the season. The most recent win was a 4-1 decision over Woodstock last Thursday.

NEWS AND NOTES ...

In girls golf action, Hannah Magda paced Mountain View in a win over Peachtree Ridge while Sally Kim helped Duluth top Norcross. The North Hall girls slipped past both Lumpkin County and White County in a tri-match competition. The Norcross boys earned a measure of revenge on Duluth after Zach Healy carded a 36 to pace the Blue Devils. Spencer Cokely led GAC to a win over Wesleyan by firing a four-over 40 at TPC Sugarloaf.

In lacrosse action, Peachtree Ridge dominated the Parkview girls 18-3 with four goals from Michelle Fortier. Meanwhile, GAC's boys smacked Parkview 19-3 behind Eric Reynolds' five goals. The loss for Parkview came one day after Duluth stuff 13 goals into the net in a 13-3 romp over the Panthers. Ben Loyal had four goals and two assists in the victory.

Photo courtesy of Brookwood High School. Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.



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PANTHER PROWL



Bright future ahead for Panthers

By Ryan Caiafa

With a tough 61-59 loss to George Mason in the CAA Tournament, the Georgia State Panthers' goal of making it to the NCAA Tournament likely ended, but despite the tough way to end the season, the team has more optimism that it has had in several years. While the team's season hasn't officially ended, with a possible invitation to the NIT, the College Basketball Invitational, or the CollegeInsider.com Postseason Tournament looming, it's hard not to think about what could have been for the Panthers.

Coach Ron Hunter's goal at the beginning of the season was to revitalize the program and make it relevant again. With a 21-11 record to close out the season, he not only made it relevant, he brought excitement to the GSU Sports Arena again. Students flocked to the arena in droves to see what Hunter had done to turn this team around. The unprecedented eleven-game winning streak, which included wins against Drexel and a win on the road against CAA conference champion VCU, is without question the signature moment of a season that nobody had seen coming. In a preseason poll, the Panthers were predicted to finish eleventh in the CAA and be amongst the bottom-dwellers in the conference. Needless to say, the critics were si-

lenced early and in a big way.

Next season brings even more reason for optimism for the program. Despite losing standout seniors Eric Buckner, James Fields, and Jihad Ali, a stout recruiting class, led by Buford's T.J. Shipes and Hunter's son R.J., comes in to reload a Panthers team looking to continue the program's remarkable turnaround from this season. Even though the team will likely end up outside of the NCAA Tournament field and into a lesser postseason tournament, it cannot be understated the impact Hunter has made on the program in just one season.

AROUND THE DIAMOND ...

Georgia State baseball is now in full swing as the team enters a Wednesday night home matchup against ninth-ranked Georgia Tech with an early record of 6-6. State has faced tough competition early, with three games against ranked teams. The Panthers begin the season looking to bounce back from a disappointing exit in the CAA Tournament last season and reclaim its place atop the conference standings.

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OWL OUTLOOK



Owls staying competitive in spring sports

By Chris Lionetti

The Owls (4-7) baseball team started off slow due to an inability to score runs with two losses. They are averaging 6.4 runs per game over their last 10 games with a 4-5 record. Their most recent game was played at Coolray Field, home of the Gwinnett Braves, against the Georgia Bulldogs. Georgia crept past KSU 3-2 victory after a bases-loaded single. Infielder Andy Chriscaden has provided the power for the Owls and leads the team in doubles and RBIs with five and 12, respectively.

NET OWLS ...

The KSU men's tennis team improved to 7-6 this year after defeating St. Joseph in Orlando 6-1 on Tuesday. The team is on a two-match winning streak after dropping its previous three matches. The other win also came in Orlando against Niagara University, 5-2. Freshmen duo Alex Toliver and Matthew Johnson picked up a doubles win in Orlando and improved their record to 2-0.

After a three-match losing streak, the Kennesaw women's tennis team (6-5) found itself in the win column against Flagler. The Owls rolled past the Florida school, 6-1. Alexandra Apostu has been the most consistent

performer for the Owls and holds a 10-1 overall record in singles matches.

NEWS AND NOTES ...

Losers in their past two games, the Owls (10-8) travel to Clearwater, Fla., for the USF Under Armour Classic, where they will play five games in two days. The Owls won two of their five games in the Georgia Tech Buzz Classic and are hoping for better luck in the Sunshine State. Junior Sharon Swanson is leading the team with a .392 batting average as well as eight home runs and 17 RBIs. Her hot bat will be needed this weekend as the Lady Owls try to stop their losing streak.

The men's track team opened its season with 12 top-10 finishes. One of the performances was a first place finish in the Men's 110-meter hurdles by Kendal Parks. The women's team was also successful in their first meet. The Owls broke two school records, one by LaShanna Barchue with a long jump of 5.75 meters and the 4x100 team of LaTia Daniels, Cynthia Davis, Kentrell White and Alicia Whittle with a time of 46.70.

Lionetti can be reached at 404-256-1572.

BULLDOG BEAT



Ranked squads coming off big wins

By Stephen Black

The No. 9 Diamond Dawgs edged Kennesaw State 3-2 on a walk-off hit at Coolray Field in Lawrenceville Tuesday night. Kyle Farmer's based-loaded single won the game for Georgia and sent the 782 fans that made the trip to the Gwinnett Braves' facility home happy.

With the victory, David Perno's squad improved its record to 11-2 and avoided a two-game losing streak. After a 9-0 start, the Bulldogs had lost two of four prior to Tuesday night.

Now the Diamond Dawgs move forward to face UCLA, which will fly into Athens for a weekend series at Foley Field. It is the final weekend series before SEC play starts next weekend against Tennessee.

DAWG-NASTICS ...

The No. 5 Gym Dogs will conclude their regular season this weekend with meets at Michigan and against N.C. State. Georgia is 6-3 in meets this season, although rankings are based on average team score, not wins and losses.

The Bulldogs won perhaps their biggest meet of the season on Friday when they out-pointed No. 3 UCLA 197.7-196.975. Georgia's score was the team's highest this season.

Following the two meets this weekend, the Gym Dogs will travel to Gwinnett for the SEC championship meet. Georgia has won a conference-best 16 SEC titles.

NETTING WINS ...

The No. 4 Georgia men's tennis team defeated No. 10 Florida 4-3 Sunday in Gainesville when Wil Spencer won his singles match to break a 3-3 team tie. Down 5-1 in the decisive third set, Spencer reeled off six straight games and won a tiebreaker to give his team the win. The Bulldogs improved their edge over the Gators to 54-18 all time.

A win over South Carolina Friday gave the Dawgs a perfect 2-0 SEC weekend. Up next for Manny Diaz's squad is a pair of weekend matches against Mississippi State and Ole Miss in Athens.

Georgia is now 11-1 on the season, with the lone loss coming to Southern California at the ITA Indoor tournament in Charlottesville, Va.

SENIOR DAY ...

Georgia defeated South Carolina Saturday 67-55 on Senior Day in Athens. Gerald Robinson, Jr., Dustin Ware, Matt Bucklin and Connor Nolte each celebrated their final home game in Athens.

Georgia played in the first round of the SEC tournament on Thursday, but results were not available at press time.

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TECH TALK



Baseball sweeps Rutgers, ranked No. 12

By Thomas Watson

After sweeping Rutgers at home this past weekend, Georgia Tech's baseball team has now won 10 of its last 11 games following an opening day loss. The Yellow Jackets (10-2) are ranked 12th in the nation and benefited from an impressive offensive onslaught against the Scarlet Knights. Tech outscored Rutgers 31-9 in the series, including 23 hits and 16 runs in the opening game.

"We swung the bat well, jumped on them pretty aggressively early," head coach Danny Hall said. "When those two guys (Kyle Wren and Brandon Thomas) get on, they can really run, and it puts pressure on people and it makes the other team pay. It ends up giving (Daniel) Palka, (Jake) Davies and (Zane) Evans better pitches to hit."

Wren, Thomas and Palka have each had incredible starts to the season. All three players have reached base safely in all 12 games. That streak was in jeopardy in the final game of the series on Sunday, but despite going 0-for-4, Wren was able to draw a walk.

Palka is currently riding an 11-game hitting streak with three homers and 14 RBI in just 48 at-bats this year. Thomas, meanwhile, has been the sparkplug for the Yellow Jackets. Thomas has 16 hits combined with six walks to total 22 times

he has reached base. Of the 22 times Thomas has been on base, he has scored a staggering 14 times and stolen four bases in the process. Wren's .354 batting average becomes even more impressive when his team-high 10 walks are also taken into account; however, he still does not lead the team in on-base percentage. That distinction goes to Sam Dove and his .510 OBP.

ACC TOURNEY ...

Georgia Tech (11-19, 4-12 ACC) opened up ACC Tournament play last night against Miami. With the ACC Tournament taking place in the Yellow Jackets' surrogate-home Philips Arena, Tech should have an edge; however, Miami has already beaten the Jackets in the arena on Jan. 24. The result was not available by press deadline.

Tech was vying with Miami for the opportunity to take on three-seed Florida State, with the winner of that game likely taking on Duke in the semifinals. After beating Wake Forest 69-62 in the final game of the season, Tech finished its season winning two of its last three games, snapping a streak in which the Yellow Jackets only won once in an 11-game stretch.

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HAWKS HAVEN



Hawks playing well despite injuries

By Robby Kalland

The Hawks have won four of their last five games, including three in a row, despite being decimated by injuries. All-star guard Joe Johnson has missed the last three games with knee tendonitis. Willie Green has missed time with a back injury. Vladimir Radmonovic missed a game with illness and Tracy McGrady has struggled with a sprained knee. These injuries, combined with Al Horford and Jason Collins being out, have left the Hawks with a depleted roster for much of the past week. However, the team has rallied together and gotten great efforts from stars and role players alike.

SMOOVE SAILING ...

Josh Smith has really stepped up, especially on offense, with Johnson out. In three games without Johnson, Smith has scored 81 points and grabbed 40 rebounds. His production and intensity at both ends of the floor has been the catalyst for the Hawks' recent run, and he is proving why he deserved to be an all-star this year. Aside from just pure production, Smith has kept the team's energy level high with blocks and steals on defense and thunderous, electrifying dunks on offense. This was never more evident than in the Hawks' 97-90 victory over the Thunder, who hold the NBA's best record. Smith threw

it down over Serge Ibaka with just over five minutes to play in the fourth quarter and electrified the crowd and the team.

Jeff Teague, Marvin Williams, Kirk Hinrich, Zaza Pachulia, Ivan Johnson, McGrady and Jannero Pargo have all picked up their levels of play to account for the loss of some key contributors. In Tuesday night's 101-96 road victory over the Pacers, Pargo dropped 16 points off the bench to push the Hawks past Indiana. Against the Thunder, Pachulia had a big double-double scoring 10 points and snagging 14 rebounds, including nine on offense, while Teague scored 15 and Hinrich had 10. The total team effort from both starters and role players off the bench has been incredible to watch as this team has come together and not allowed adversity to be an excuse.

The Hawks have four games remaining on the road trip, which ends in Los Angeles on March 14. The next game at the Highlight Factory will be on March 16 when they welcome in the Washington Wizards. The Hawks currently hold down the sixth spot in the Eastern Conference, but are charging hard and could overtake Indiana and Orlando with a solid road trip.

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FALCONS FLIGHT



Grimes receives franchise tag; DeCoud signed

By Sean Conway

And now, let the fun begin. When general manager Thomas Dimitroff announced the Atlanta Falcons would place a franchise tag designation on cornerback Brent Grimes last week, it was the first of many steps in the process of reshaping the Falcons' 2012 roster, the defense in particular.

OPTIMUS GRIMES ...

Grimes developed from an undrafted free agent from Division II Shippensburg into a Pro Bowler in 2010. Listed at 5-foot-10, he grabbed six interceptions in 2009, and five in 2010. Injuries limited Grimes to only 12 games last season, and he intercepted just one pass. A true ball-hawk, Grimes uses his leaping ability and freakish body control to overcome his lack of size.

The "tagging" of Grimes means the Falcons can expect to sign him to a contract in the \$10 million range. Dimitroff has stated publicly that the plan is to ink Grimes to a long-term contract. Grimes' agent, Ben Dogra, has said that Grimes will not sign the franchise tag. Ultimately, though, the Falcons can rest assured that Grimes is in the Atlanta defensive backfield for at least one more season.

Rejoining Grimes in the secondary will be free safety Thomas DeCoud. The Falcons and DeCoud agreed to what is widely be-

lieved to be a five-year deal with a base of \$17.5 million. With incentives, DeCoud could earn up to \$21 million.

A third-round pick in the 2008 draft from California, DeCoud has started every game but one over the last three seasons. In 2011, he intercepted four passes and made 109 tackles (79 solo stops).

Now Falcon fans can turn their attention to speculating about the futures of linebacker Curtis Lofton defensive end John Abraham. Lofton is looked to as a leader and has the numbers to back it up.

A second-round pick from Oklahoma in 2008, Lofton has started all but one game in his career and is the team's leader tackler. The Falcons are negotiating with Lofton and can expect to pay him more than players like Baltimore's Ray Lewis and Chicago's Brian Urlacher. If the Falcons can't re-sign Lofton by the beginning of free agency March 13, he'll find many teams bidding for his services.

Unlike Grimes, DeCoud and Lofton, Abraham is not entering the prime of his career. The Predator has already played 12 seasons in the NFL. Abraham's next contract, with Atlanta or another team, will likely be in the two- to three-year range.

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CHOP SHOP



Braves get off to rough spring start

By Fletcher Proctor

Sports Illustrated predicted that Braves rookie pitcher Julio Teheran could be the team's second straight Rookie of the Year winner, but the starter was roughed up in his first outing of the spring last Sunday. The Tigers burned Teheran for six home runs in two innings of work. The Tigers managed to nail Teheran for seven runs total and each of their six hits left the yard. Randall Delgado, who started the game allowed four runs on two hits and two walks in one inning of work. Atlanta lost the contest 18-3.

The previous day Mike Minor recorded three strikeouts but Atlanta was outthit 10-1 and outscored 2-0 to lose its Grapefruit League opener. Jordan Parazz had Atlanta's lone hit and followed it up with another hit and RBI the next day. Future Braves third baseman Joe Terdoslavich had two hits in the Braves second game.

ASTROS AND NATS ...

The Braves got off the schneid with a "road trip" to Kissimmee to face the Astros, MLB's worst team one year ago. The bats finally woke up for the Braves as Dan Uggla went deep and Terdoslavich recorded a pair of doubles. Michael Bourn, Brian McCann

and Andrelton Simmons had a multiple hits. The Nationals visited Champions Stadium Tuesday, beating the Braves 5-2. Kris Medlen received the start and flashed a new curveball during his two innings.

HANSON'S HEALTH ...

Braves starter Tommy Hanson threw a brief bit of batting practice earlier this week, his first stretch of pitching to batters since he sustained a Grade 1 concussion in a one-vehicle accident several weeks ago. Barring a setback, Hanson will likely get his first start next week during the second time through the Braves' spring rotation. Fans will be eager to see Hanson's new delivery minus his traditional hitch that he has thrown with for the last few years. Speaking of health issues, Braves first baseman Freddie Freeman returned to the lineup one week after he suffered a partial dislocation of his right knee. It is the second time in his career he has injured the knee, and he will wear a knee brace on the affected area. Finally Chipper Jones missed three straight games earlier this week with an injured heel.

Proctor can be reached at fproctor@scoreatl.com.

GWINNETT GLADIATORS



Back in first after comeback win

By Joe Deighton

Sunday's game with the Trenton Titans started like many games for Gwinnett this year with the Glads grabbing a 1-0 lead. By the end of the contest history had been made, as the Gladiators erased a three-goal deficit for the first time in team history.

Down 4-1, five minutes into the second period, defenseman Stephen Mallaro started the comeback with a slap shot from the blue line that found the back of the net. Later in the second, forward Bryan Brutlag backhanded a shot from behind the net for a goal to cut the deficit to one. The game was then tied 4-4 on a power play goal by forward Nikita Kashirsky. Finally, defenseman Corey Fiehan put Gwinnett ahead with his fifth goal of the season with 15 minutes remaining in the third period. The win put the Gladiators back in first place in the ECHL's South Division. Gwinnett leads the division with 79 points, three more than second-place Greenville.

ON THE MOVE ...

Defenseman Josh Burrows was traded to the Utah Grizzlies for forward Jordan Foreman on Monday. Burrows spent just six games with Gwinnett after being acquired


from Chicago on Feb. 18, recording zero points. This is the second time Foreman has been traded this season. He put up 14 points in 30 games with the Stockton Thunder before being traded to Utah. Foreman tallied just three points with Utah in 10 games.

Defenseman Matt MacKenzie was called up to Rochester after playing just three games with Gwinnett. This is the second go-around with the Americans this season for MacKenzie. He posted one assist in the short stint with the Gladiators and is unlikely to return with only 10 games remaining.

DOWN THE STRETCH ...

The playoffs are quickly approaching and the Glads are in the drivers seat as far as the South Division title is concerned. With 10 games left, Gwinnett holds a three-point lead over Greenville for the division lead. Four of the final 10 games will be against the Road Warriors, two at home and two in Greenville. Those games will make or break the chances for a division championship and one of the top seeds in the playoffs.

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OVERALL STANDINGS

AS OF MARCH 7

CLASS AAAAA

- | | |
|---------------|---------------------|
| 1- Brookwood | 6- Parkview |
| 2- Lassiter | 7- North Gwinnett |
| 3- Mill Creek | 8- Collins Hill |
| 4- Walton | 9- Milton |
| 5- Harrison | 10- Peachtree Ridge |

CLASS AAAA

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1- Pope | 6- Union Grove |
| 2- Marist | 7- Northgate |
| 3- Johns Creek | 8- Loganville |
| 4- Chattahoochee | 9- McIntosh |
| 5- Lambert | 10- Flowery Branch |

CLASS AAA

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1- Allatoona | 6- Columbus |
| 2- St. Pius X | 7- North Hall |
| 3- Carrollton | 8- Dalton |
| 4- Woodward Acad. | 9- Sandy Creek |
| 5- Oconee County | 10- Veterans |

CLASS AA

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1- Blessed Trinity | 6- Morgan County |
| 2- Westminster | 7- Calhoun |
| 3- GAC | 8- Lovett |
| 4- North Oconee | 9- Buford |
| 5- Jefferson | 10- Bleckley County |

CLASS A

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1- Wesleyan | 6- Darlington |
| 2- Bremen | 7- First Presbyterian |
| 3- Gordon Lee | 8- Savannah Chr. |
| 4- Landmark Chr. | 9- Mt. Paran Chr. |
| 5- Holy Innocents' | 10- ELCA |



WATCH.

STATE HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS
MARCH 9 3:00 PM & MARCH 10 9:30AM

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