

THE *SOUTHERN SPORTS* EDITION

March 2019 Edition

NCAA MARCH MADNESS 2019



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COLLEGE FOOTBALL SIGNING DAY



RONALD ACUNA MVP?

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The Southern Sports Edition was created to offer sports opinions from a southern perspective. The Southern Sports Edition offers some of the top sports minds and opinions from around the South. From coverage on the Glynn Academy Red Terrors, Camden County Wildcats, Brunswick High Pirates, Frederica Academy Knights, the McIntosh County Academy Buccaneers, to a beat on the Atlanta Braves, the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets, SEC, ACC and all southern sports with actual southern opinions. The Southern Sports Edition is currently distributed in three counties...Glynn County, Camden County and McIntosh County and growing everyday.

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THE MADNESS BEGINS

Tourney Time By JJ Lanier

MARCH MADNESS

As the college basketball season winds down and teams on the outside looking in began to focus on what they can do to make the tournament, there are a handful of teams that will begin their preparation for a deep run

in the NCAA Tournament.

Below is a list of those teams I believe have a legitimate shot at cutting down the nets on April 8. Most teams will seem obvious, but there may be one or two surprises thrown in.

My Projected #1 Seeds: Duke, Gonzaga, Virginia, Tennessee Duke- Two of their three losses this year have been accompanied with an injury to one of their freshmen (Syracuse-Tre Jones, UNC- Zion). When healthy, Duke has the most talent in the country and their best will beat everyone else's best.

Problem is they're as top heavy in talent as a weightlifter who has never used a leg machine. If any of the four freshmen are injured or in foul trouble, they're vulnerable.

Gonzaga- Tell me if you've heard this before: "They're an experienced team without any glaring weaknesses, but will their weak conference schedule hinder them come tournament time?" This team may be better than one that played UNC for the title a few years ago.

Virginia- Go ahead and get the UMBC jokes out of your system now, this team isn't losing in the opening round.

They're pace is slow and they're not the most exhilarating team to watch, but they may be the best.

Tennessee- Probably one of the deepest, most complete teams in the country. Unfortunately, their coach is as allergic to winning tournament games as my teenage daughter is to cleaning her room.

In 20 NCAA Tournament appearance with Clemson, Texas, and Tennessee, Rick Barnes has made it past the opening weekend six times- none in the last seven tries. The talent is there to make a run, but is the coaching?

If the Bracket Fits: UNC, Kentucky, Michigan State

UNC- Think of a less talented Tennessee team, but with much better coaching. Obviously, I think there's enough talent for the Tarheels to win or I wouldn't list them here, but after their win in Durham I may be suffering more from "prisoner of the moment" syndrome than anything.

Kentucky- One of Calipari's less talked about teams, in recent years at least. Yet, he always seems to have his players ready come tournament time, and this year's squad is no different.

A lot is going to be riding on PJ Washington's shoulders, but if any one of the Keldon Johnson, Tyler Herro, or Reid Travis trio can step up and play consistently, they are as dangerous as anyone.

Michigan State- I'll be honest, I'm including the Spartans because of Tom Izzo; I just assume his team is going to make tourney run every year. If Izzo doesn't have to face Duke or North Carolina (I'm pretty sure he's a combined 1-2387 against them) Michigan State will probably be in the mix.

Visit from the Fairy Godmother: Marquette

Marquette- It's not always the best team that wins, sometimes it's the team whose best player has the hot hand. Wayne Wade came close to pulling it off when he carried the Golden Eagles to the Final Four in 2003; could Markus Howard be that guy in 2019?

If Duke is completely healthy by the start of the tournament, they're my pick to win it all in Minneapolis. Of course, if my past predictions are any indication, you're better off betting the field.



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ACUÑA JR.
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ACUNA MATATA

Sky's The Limit By Kipp Branch



Ronald Acuna just turned 21 years of age this past December and is the current National League Rookie of the Year.

He is a five-tool player who looks to be the face of the Braves franchise and could be for the next decade or so.

Acuna missed all of April because of the business side of baseball and then a sprained knee that hampered him in June.

The young Venezuelan hit .293/.366/.552 over 111 games and 487 plate appearances, scoring 78 runs, driving in 64, and pounding out 26 doubles, 4 triples, and 26 home runs.

Did I already mention that Acuna missed roughly two months of the 2018 season? If not for that I believe this kid would have been named the National League MVP in 2018.

You probably can already tell by reading this article that I'm a huge Ronald Acuna fan. I think he is the most talented player to arrive in Atlanta since Andrew Jones. That is

saying a lot.

The projected Braves lineup in 2018 looks like this:

LF: Ronald Acuna Jr. (R)

1B: Freddie Freeman (L)

3B: Josh Donaldson (R)

C: Brian McCann (L)

RF: Nick Markakis (L)

2B: Ozzie Albies (S)

CF: Ender Inciarte (L)

SS: Dansby Swanson (R)

Before the Braves brought back Brian McCann, it was looking like Acuna would move to the clean-up spot in the batting order, but now he is back at the leadoff spot where he can lead the 2019 Braves.

With Acuna, Freeman, Donaldson, McCann, and Albies this batting order has some pop in it. Then you have Tyler Flowers, Charlie Culberson, Pedro Florimon, and John Camargo providing depth that should keep Donaldson and McCann fresh throughout the season.

I think this can be a dangerous, run producing batting order that may allow some of the younger arms in the rotation to flourish.

Back to Ronald Acuna, this kid has superstar written all over him. Acuna moved to the leadoff spot on July 20th last year and he hit .322 with 19 homers and a 1.028 OPS over the last 68 games.

Without that line-up move

the Braves do not win the NL East in 2018. Acuna was the Braves MVP in this writer's opinion in 2018.

With Acuna, Donaldson and Freeman the Braves have three MVP caliber players in the everyday line-up. Acuna could possibly end up batting in the four-hole, but after the excitement you saw in 2018 why would you move him?

Right now, Ronald Acuna projects as the best player in the National League going into the 2019. If you don't believe me look it up. Barring injury I'm predicting Ronald Acuna Jr. to be the 2019 National League MVP.

Excitement for Braves baseball is off the charts right now. If this rotation can hold up and a closer steps up this offense will lead the Braves back to the playoffs.

Who knows who the Braves can pick up at the trade deadline maybe a quality arm or two for a playoff run?

Ronald Acuna is the new face of the Atlanta Braves, and now the Braves must put the pieces together to ensure Acuna retires as a Brave in about 15-18 years.

Baseball is thriving again in Atlanta, Georgia. Ronald Acuna may be the face of Atlanta sports. The Falcons and Hawks are struggling at the moment.



A YOUNG ATHLETE'S JOURNEY FROM DISABILITY TO HOPE



J. Melvin Deese, M.D., reviews X-rays with patient Ashley Chapman before surgery.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, but for Ashley Chapman, each step was excruciating. At age 20, the Canadian athlete sprained her ankle while jogging and injured her calcaneocuboid ligament. Because this ligament supports a joint that stabilizes the foot's cuboid bone, an injury creates a chronically unstable "gliding joint." It's often undiagnosed, but the impact is debilitating. Ashley's injury put her life on hold for four years and transformed her active, happy existence to one of disability and discouragement.

Seeking relief, Ashley saw several orthopaedists, pain specialists, chiropractors and physical therapists. Some provided temporary relief; others said her problem was psychological, not mechanical. Meanwhile, whenever her cuboid bone misaligned, Ashley manually repositioned it herself, only to have it pop out of place again. During one eight-month period, she used a walker, scooter or crutches to get around.

Her lowest point came when an orthopaedist said she might never find a solution to her pain and might not be able to walk again. "I felt very depressed and alone," Ashley recalls.

Finding Hope

Fortunately, Ashley didn't give up. Through internet research, she found a presentation called "Calcaneocuboid Instability: Frequently Overlooked Cause of Lateral Foot Pain." Its author was J. Melvin Deese, M.D., a board-certified orthopaedic surgeon with Summit Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery in St. Marys, Georgia, over a thousand miles from Ashley's Toronto home.

"From my first interaction with Dr. Deese, I thought, 'This is my life-changing chance.' He was the first glimmer of hope I'd had in years. He was empathetic, honest and knowledgeable. I felt like I'd finally found someone who believed in me," says Ashley.

Ashley and Dr. Deese communicated via email and phone calls for several months. "Ashley took every possible conservative measure. You couldn't ask for a better patient, but when she didn't heal, I had to examine her in person," Dr. Deese says. After four years of misdiagnoses, her parents were skeptical, but made the drive to Southeast Georgia, where Dr. Deese won them over, as he had Ashley.

A Mystery Solved

All along, Dr. Deese suspected a calcaneocuboid injury, an uncommon injury that occurs below the area of an ankle sprain. According to Dr. Deese, "As orthopaedic surgeons we are taught to examine the joints carefully, but this one is so rarely injured that it is sometimes overlooked. If an ankle sprain doesn't heal after eight weeks, I examine the ankle below the sprain to isolate tenderness in the joint. Many patients tell me no doctor has ever touched that spot. Next, I inject a small amount of Lidocaine into the joint. If the patient then walks without pain, I know it's a calcaneocuboid injury."

That's what happened with Ashley. The next day, Dr. Deese reconstructed her calcaneocuboid ligament using a donor tendon. The day after surgery, the Chapmans drove back to Canada.

After years of disability, Ashley recovered slowly, but steadily. As she approaches the one year anniversary of her surgery, she's elated. "I just returned from the Grand Canyon, I'm walking two to three hours a day pain-free, I'm playing basketball and I have a new career. Dr. Deese gave me back my life and my future."

Wise beyond her years, Ashley offers this advice to anyone struggling with an orthopaedic injury: "Don't lose hope. There are good doctors out there. I have so much trust in Dr. Deese and Southeast Georgia Health System."

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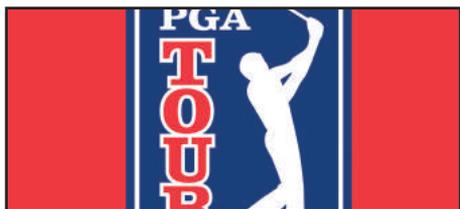
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THE RIGHT MISTAKE

A Deal Is A Deal By Rich Styles





Matt Kuchar has spent his life and his golf career upholding doing the right thing. He holds himself to some pretty high standards. I've had several face to face interviews with Matt and he has always been upfront, honest and grateful.

Many of you have heard stories about Matt's win in Mayakoba, his first win in four years.

His regular caddie, John Wood, was unable to be there. So, Matt got together with a local caddie, "El Tucan", to carry his bag at the tournament. They made an agreement. Matt would pay his local caddie a certain amount if he missed the cut, another amount if he made the cut, a higher amount if he placed in Top 10 and a flat fee if he won.

"El Tucan" carried the bag, which he does at the course and usually receives a few hundred dollars a week for doing that. Matt figured the yardage on each hole, read his own putts, etc. The caddie carried the bag for four days.

Well, as you know, Matt won. He paid the caddie the previously agreed amount of \$4,000 plus another \$1,000 for the win as a bonus. That was the deal.

I interviewed Matt's Dad, Peter, last week, and we discussed the matter. Peter said, "a deal is a deal". He further said, "if I hired a person to paint my house for a certain amount, that was our deal, our agreement." Peter said, Matt has always done the right thing all his life in everything he has done.

Well, since the tournament, social media and friends of "El Tucan", has exploded. It has blown

up. The media, "el Tucan", his friends and family have all said he deserved more money than he was paid.

So, after the negative press from many outlets, Matt through the PGA office, agreed to give his local caddie an additional \$45,000 plus an undisclosed amount to the Mayakoba Classic to use for local charities. Matt paid more than he said he originally agreed upon.

John Wood, Matt's regular caddie, in various publications that "you do not know the real guy". "Matt has treated me fairly during our whole relationship."

Did Matt make a mistake? In my opinion, no. Should he have paid the local caddie more than they agreed upon. I think not.

But with the pressure from social media and discussions with the PGA Tour, the additional funds were paid to do more than the right thing. Matt went out of his way to make things right. He said, "I made a mistake, I was stubborn and hard headed.

In my mind, a deal is a deal. After I won, it wasn't a good deal. In the caddie's case, he did not feel like he won in that situation, and I needed to make that right. It's as simple as that."

This situation with Matt should be over. The media will probably continue to talk about it and attack his character.

I am a Kuchar fan. I met him while he was practicing for the President's Cup a few years ago. He was pleasant and a nice guy.

Every time I have interviewed him or seen him running on the beach on St. Simons Island early in the morning, he always says hi.

The bottom line is that sometimes you make a mistake, but in the end, he will always do the right thing to make it even righter.

Let's move on, please

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NAME BRAND

Alliance of American Football By JJ Lanier



I love Cinnamon Toast Crunch; so much so that for my birthday last year my children gave me a Family Size box of it, with the specific waiver they would not eat any of it.

I am also notoriously cheap, and I only buy “The Crunch”, as it is referred to in my house, whenever it is on sale. During those times it’s not on sale, I’ll opt for the generic store brand. It’s not as cinnamony, or toasty, or crunchy as the real deal, but it gets me through the cravings.

Besides hoping a General Mills employee will read this and bless me with copious amounts of free cereal, there is an actual reason I’m divulging my breakfast eating habits.

Even though the Alliance of American Football (AAF) is in its infancy, I feel like it will be a worthy alternative to the NFL, when the name brand isn’t available.

There have been leagues in the past that were either too gimmicky

(XFL), too devoid of talent and coaching names (Arena Football), or foolishly tried to go head to head against NFL (American Football League), that ultimately folded. On the surface it seems as if the AAF is avoiding most of those pitfalls, at least to start with.

Their “gimmicks” are looser rules when it comes to penalties and allowing listeners to listen in on challenges; neither of which are very gimmicky, but rather things the average football fan would enjoy.

There is big name talent throughout the league, from those in advising positions, to the coaches and players on the field.

And while they might benefit more from starting a little later on in the year, they aren’t competing head to head with the NFL.

I also like, and this may be purely coincidental, but in the case of the Atlanta Legends, there is a certain local flavor when it comes to their roster. 14 of the 52 players on the roster, which equates to 27% of the team, played college ball in the state of Georgia.

Most everyone who follows college football, or any major college sport for that matter, has players they enjoyed watching that either never

made it to the next level or didn’t last very long. This is just another avenue, a more legit one, to give us the opportunity to continue following those careers.

The ratings have been better than expected and the commentary for those who are tuning in has been positive for the most part, so the league is at least off to a good start.

Obviously, there are some issues that could pop up down the road: how do they keep the NFL from poaching their successful players and seeing that they’re not a niche league will fans tire of the product? (I’m contradicting myself somewhat, but Arena Football has done a great job of marketing their differences to the NFL, while not being over the top.)

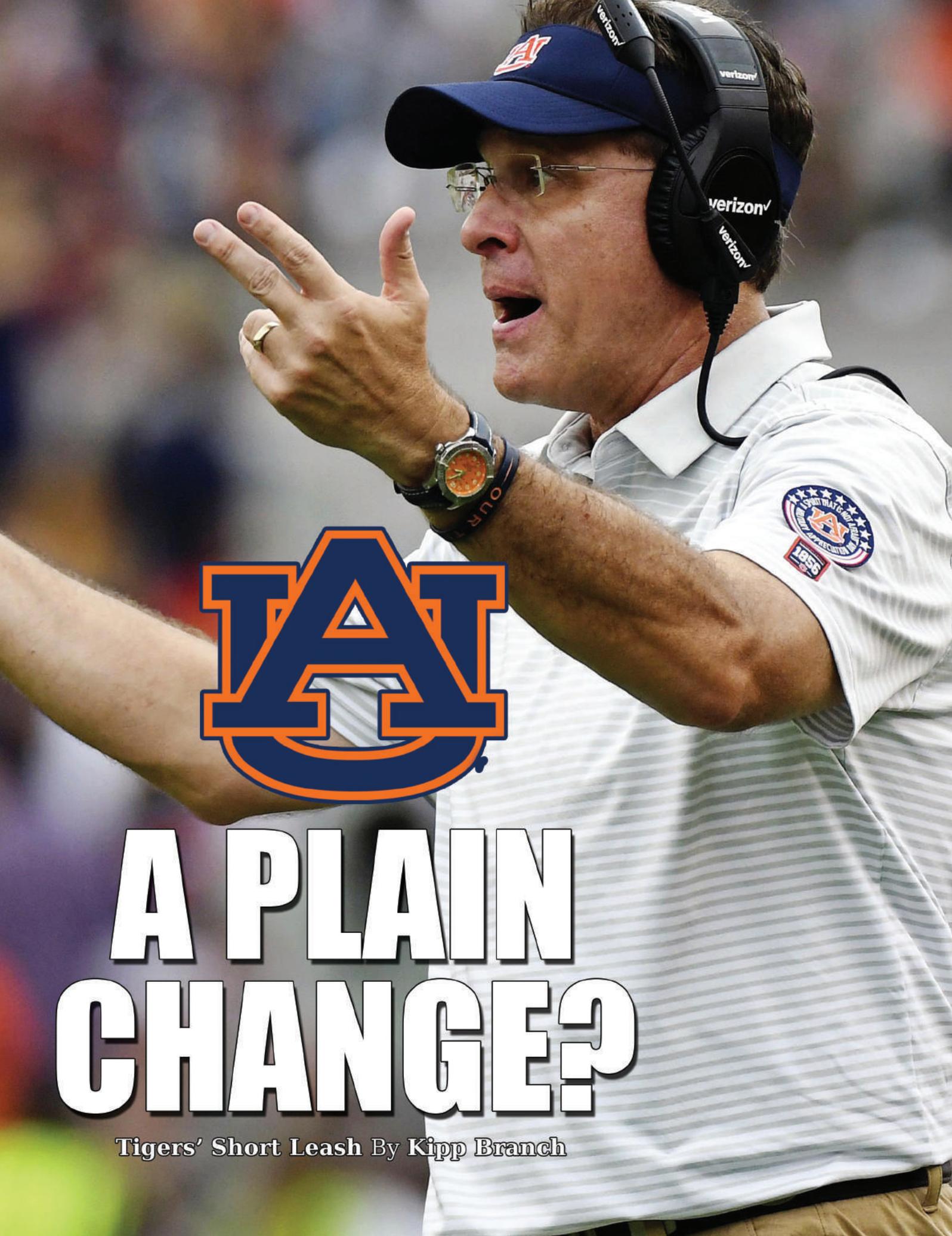
Whether the league folds after this year or is around for the next fifty, it’s giving a group of players an opportunity to showcase their talents. And for the fans, it’s given us another outlet to enjoy the game.

Sure, it’s not the name brand product we’re used to seeing, but if you’re within driving distance of Atlanta it may be worth the time and minimal amount of money it will cost you, and give the league a chance by seeing a game. Sometimes those off brands will catch you by surprise.



ALLIANCE
OF AMERICAN FOOTBALL





A PLAIN CHANGE?

Tigers' Short Leash By Kipp Branch



Auburn started the 2018 season ranked in the top 10 and beat a ranked Washington team the opening weekend in Atlanta.

The Tigers went into a week 3 matchup with LSU and ended up being exposed on offense in a 22-21 loss.

Back to back losses to Mississippi State and a bad loss at home to rebuilding Tennessee started the rumblings on the plains and then another loss to UGA in Athens, and having 52 hung on them in the Iron Bowl has Malzahn's future at Auburn being questioned by many around the SEC.

Malzahn's overall record at Auburn now is 53-27 in six years. Outside of the miracle season of 2013 where Auburn went 12-2, won the SEC, and lost the National Title game to FSU, what have the Tigers done that is so special?

Yes, I know Auburn won the SEC West in 2017 and beat number one ranked Georgia and Alabama in a three week span that November. I get that, but this program turned around and lost to Georgia in the 2017 SEC Title game 28-7 and then lost to UCF

in the Peach Bowl to finish 10-4 on that season.

Auburn is 41-25 over the past five seasons, the natives are getting restless in Auburn, Alabama. So basically, Auburn under Gus is a program that is going to lose 4 or 5 games a season.

That is not acceptable at Auburn and they are trying to stay in the same area code as rival Alabama. Alabama is winning 13-14 games a season now under Saban, while Auburn is an 8-5 type team.

Let's take a look at reasons why Auburn is struggling right now: Stubbornness: Gus always says the right things in the media and promises change, but nothing seems to change especially as it centers around play calling on offense.

This is Malzahn's offense at Auburn and now that Chip Lindsey is gone the focus is squarely on Gus. That is all on Malzahn. The offense is his baby.

Jarret Stidham will have a successful pro career, but I don't think Auburn knew how to use his skill set properly. The fan base turned on Stidham, but forgot that without Stidham Auburn doesn't win the SEC West in 2017.

Running Back: How does a school that produced William Andrews, James Brooks, Bo Jackson, Brent Fullwood, Rudy Johnson, Carnell Williams, Ronnie Brown, and Kerryon Johnson, not have a big time

running back? Auburn can't run the football, and it's because they don't have a big time running back. This is squarely on Gus.

Player Development: If you look at five year recruiting ranking averages Auburn is in the top ten, but Auburn has lost, on average, 5 games per season in the same cycle. What is happening to all of that talent? Gus Malzahn is the head coach of Auburn University and the buck stops with him.

Auburn hung 63 on Purdue in the Music City Bowl and Gus was feeling really good about his play calling in that contest. Will that be enough to quiet down the critics on the plains?

If not for The Prayer at Jordan Hare against UGA, or the Kick Six against Alabama in 2013 would Gus still be the football coach at Auburn University?

Keep a close watch on this situation at Auburn. If Auburn struggles early in 2019 will Gus make it to October?

Auburn is a proud football program, but the Tigers have been losing to UGA and Alabama a lot lately. That will not cut it on The Plains.

Tiger fans are praying that incoming QB Bo Nix has the same impact that Jake Fromm has had at UGA. That may be what saves the Gus Bus at AU.





NFC SOUTH DRAFT

Each Team's Needs By Kenneth Harrison Jr.



The 2019 NFL Draft starts April 25, 2019. For the 31 other teams that didn't win the Super Bowl they have a chance to add players and improve their franchise. Let's take a look at the NFC South and see who they might select in the first round.

Tampa Bay (5-11): The Buccaneers have the fifth overall pick. They had a bit of quarterback controversy to begin the season before Jameis Winston came back from his four-game suspension.



It looks like the Bucs will stick with the troubled young QB. Bruce Arians has taken over as head coach and he will try to give Winston protection.

Left tackle Donovan Smith will be a free agent. On the right side, Demar Dotson is entering the last year of his contract and turns 34 in October. That is why Alabama's Jonah Williams should get picked to protect Winston's blind side.

Atlanta (7-9): The Falcons are coming off of a disappointing season that had many injuries on the defense. They need to drastically

improve on that side of the ball and on the offensive line.

Head coach Dan Quinn is on record saying he is only comfortable at center and left tackle.

With the 14th pick guard Cody Ford from Oklahoma makes sense. He's extremely physical and he would help change the identity of the line. He played guard and right tackle so he might also be shifted to that position.

If defensive tackle Ed Oliver (Houston) is still on the board he should get selected. He reminds me of Aaron Donald because he can totally disrupt an offense.

Carolina (7-9): The Panthers started off the season hot before the seven-game losing streak. They are in

seasons. He added 56 total pressures and 30 total stops during his final year. He's 6'4, 265 pounds with great first-step quickness.

New Orleans (13-3): The Saints had a great season, advancing to the NFC Championship game. They should have won the game but a terrible no call for pass interference against the Rams cost them. They traded their first-round pick in the 2019 draft to move up and select Marcus Davenport.

The biggest needs are tight end, defensive tackle, running back and linebacker. Running back Mark Ingram will be a free agent so that may create a need. Alvin Kamara is great but he works best paired up with a physical runner.

an interesting position because star quarterback Cam Newton had surgery on his injured shoulder. Some time tables have predicted him to miss the 2019 season.

They also need help on defense. Mario Addison led the team with nine sacks. They need help getting to the quarterback and that is the direction they will go with the 16th pick.

They can draft a local player like Clemson's Clelin Ferrell. The defensive end registered 50 career tackles for loss and 27 sacks in three

New Orleans will pick 62nd in the second round. I think they will want a pass catching tight end. I'm not sure who will still be on the board by the time they make the pick. The best-case scenario is Irv Smith from Alabama. The best available might be Dawson Knox of Ole Miss.

Prior to last year the NFC South was the toughest division in the league. The Saints were the only playoff team so the other three teams need to get better. It will be exciting to see how everything plays out.



TB

OPENING ACT

Rays Winning Ways By TJ Hartnett



The Tampa Bay Rays find ways to win. That has been their modus operandi since they dropped the “Devil” and changed their color scheme.

Without much in the way of payroll and in a consistently competitive division, along with some giant franchises like the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox, the Rays have always scrapped, scratched and clawed their way to September and even October from time to time over the past 11 years.

Last season was no different, though one of their bold strategies has courted no little amount of controversy – the “Opener.”

If you have not been following the Rays, the Opener is basically – as you might imagine – the opposite of a Closer.

“But TJ! Isn’t a starter the opposite of a closer?” You might ask. You might very well think that – but an Opener is something a little more specific and a little more parallel to what a Closer does at the end of a game.

Basically, when reliable pitchers like Blake Snell aren’t starting a game, Rays manager Kevin Cash begins the

game with an Opener; a relief pitcher in any other context who is slotted in as the starting pitcher but is only ever expected to pitch an inning or two.

Then another pitcher comes in to eat up innings and hopefully (since the “starter” would not have pitched the requisite five innings) pick up the win.

Tampa started using this strategy in May of last year, starting with veteran closer Sergio Romo but primarily using pitchers Ryne Stanek and Hunter Wood in the role. Then guys like Ryan Yarbrough would enter the game and (ideally) shoulder the bulk of the work.

It was 2018, so obviously reaction and opinion on this strategy was divided, though Tampa’s success can hardly be argued against.

Their ERA dropped after they started using Openers, and had the team not played in a division that saw not one but two 100-game winners, they would very likely have seen the playoffs again.

The past few weeks in particular have seen a rise in anti-Opener rhetoric from Major Leaguers in particular, including Giants ace Madison Bumgarner, who said he would leave the ballpark if San Francisco manager Bruce Bochy tried to use an opener before MadBum entered the game.

More damningly, Bumgarner’s teammate and fellow pitcher Jeff Samardzija called the concept of the Opener “a load of crap” in an interview

with the San Francisco Chronicle. He also criticized the Rays’ pitchers for what he perceived as their lack of “moxie” in failing to push back and demand that they go seven innings.

The irony in the vitriol coming from Samardzija is that the Giants won a paltry 75 games in 2018, 15 less than the Rays, who sat at 90. This is not to mention the fact that the Giants hurler has managed a 22-31 record in his three seasons in San Fran with an ERA of 4.33 – much higher than the 3.97 ERA posted by Tampa Bay’s Openers last year.

The Rays have made it clear that they aren’t turning away from the Opener and after Snell, Charlie Morton, and Tyler Glasnow, Kevin Cash will indeed be penciling in a pitcher to throw just an inning or two.

Despite the negative reaction from some players, the notion has actually been spreading.

The Milwaukee Brewers opened up a game in the NLCS by have having Wade Miley throw to just one batter and the Oakland A’s put their entire season on the line in the AL Wild Card Game by using Liam Hendricks as an Opener.

The new General Manager of the Giants, Farhan Zaidi, even said that his team might consider adopting the practice when it makes sense. Though I get the sense that it will be over Bumgarner’s and Samardzija’s dead bodies.





**THE
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College Football Signing Day By JJ Lanier



Outside of the opening weekend of March Madness, I'm not sure there's a weekday in college athletics that deserves to be labeled an "unofficial holiday" more than a college football signing day.

For all the buildup, all the phone alerts, all the sneaking away to the bathroom so you can see if your team signed that three-star backup punter, it always seems to end the

Alabama bringing in a recruiting class rated either first or second. I would say they always finish first, much like this year according to most sites, but Georgia has become Alabama 2.0 in almost every facet of their program and I'm pretty sure they had the higher rated class last year. Either way, when it comes to recruiting it's been Alabama, Georgia, and then everyone else.

Of the other three SEC teams that finished ranked in the top ten, one is a regular participant (LSU), one is a familiar face we haven't seen for a couple of years (Florida), and the third, is a new addition thanks to a head coach going through his first full recruiting cycle with the program (Texas A&M).

since they were able to put together the type of class Jeremy Pruitt was able to this year, and it will be intriguing to see if that success translates onto the field.

Ohio State signed some of the blue-chip athletes you would expect (plus a particular transfer from Athens), but where they "struggled", was with quality depth. It would've been unrealistic to expect them to do much better than they did with everything that has transpired over the past year, but when you have a new coach you have to wonder if it's a blip on the radar, or the beginning of a trend?

As for Florida State they just lost their primary target at quarterback



same; with the SEC on top.

Once again college football's best conference (according to those in the Southeast, at least) treated this year's signing day like a sumo wrestler at a Chinese buffet. As soon as the doors opened, they bum rushed the buffet line, grabbed all the Sesame Chicken and General Tso's they could get their hands on, leaving nothing for left for anyone else except the beef and broccoli that had been sitting under the heat lamp since early that morning.

And just like death and taxes, the one thing you can count on is

Having said that, it's very easy to speak rhapsodic about a program that brings in a top ten recruiting class- they've all brought in talented players that should help their team, that's why they're rated where they are.

There are three teams however, that stuck a little bit as I was reading over the final outcomes: Tennessee, Ohio State, and Florida State.

For Tennessee, they've been just good enough on the recruiting trail recently to be able to have the product they put on the field not live up to expectations. It's been a few years

to a Maryland program so toxic Montgomery Burns wouldn't even have Smithers touch it.

I have nothing against Willie Taggart and I know he says he has a plan, but unless it includes owning stock in U-Haul, I don't have much faith in it.

To absolutely nobody's surprise the SEC puffed out its chest and dominated signing day. The national title may reside in another conference, but when it comes to pure talent, the SEC is first in line, and they're not leaving many leftovers.



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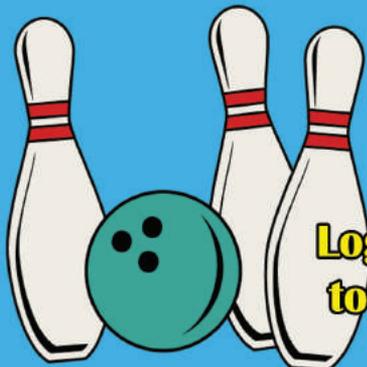
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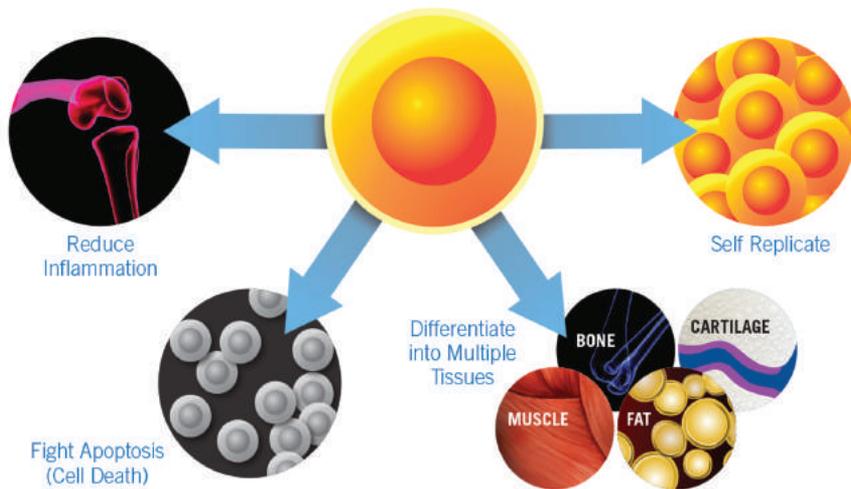
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BOTTOM FEEDERS

Mediocre Marlins By TJ Hartnett



Spring Training – the place of eternal hope.

Each year teams (and fans) travel south (or North, in the case of one particular team that we'll be discussing today) to warm up and throw a baseball around a little.

Eventually that evolves to playing meaningless games as teams begin to wind up for the upcoming regular season. Everyone is fresh, and the possibilities are endless.

The Grapefruit league has gotten underway, ushering in the true beginning of baseball season. The players may be unrecognizable, but there is baseball on television again and all is right with the world.

The Marlins, new color scheme and all, kicked off the Spring Training schedule on the wrong end of an 11-1 thwacking by St. Louis, not that it matters. For one, it's an exhibition game, and secondly Miami is almost certain to finish dead last in the NL East in 2019. But that's okay, it's all part of the plan.

A key of that plan was trading J.T. Realmuto. The move that dominated any and all news relating to the Marlins before and after it happened (that aforementioned new color scheme? Completely forgot about it before I started researched for this story).

However, moving the best catcher in the league for a pair of pitching prospects and a replacement backstop was far from the only thing the Marlins did this winter.

Notably, they went out and got some veterans to sprinkle in amongst the youth in the clubhouse and on the field.

Three stars with bright pasts and possibly a little spark left in them joined Miami during the offseason: right-handed pitcher Sergio Romo, infielder Neil Walker, and outfielder Curtis

Granderson will suit up for the Marlins in 2019, offering name recognition, years of success, and a few experiences winning World Series to the Fish.

These guys serve two purposes: to show the young players the ropes of Major League Baseball, and to be traded in July for more prospects. It's the way rebuilds work, and it is relatively proven.

Also proven is striking gold in unexpected places, like the Rule 5 Draft. Miami struck gold here before, with arguably the greatest Rule 5 success story ever in Dan Uggla. They hope to get good production out of righty Riley Ferrell in 2019.

Ferrell was plucked from the Astros during the Winter Meetings. While he can't possibly be happy about being moved from Houston to Miami, he'll at least have a better shot to make the roster and stay there (otherwise Miami will have to offer him back for cheap).

Lastly, and maybe most impressively, the Marlins went out and picked up what was probably the best international free agent (and also his brother). Beyond that, the international free agent in question, not only has two first names, but it's the same name twice!

Victor Victor Mesa and his brother, Victor Mesa, Jr., defected from Cuba last year and Miami snatched them up during the offseason. Victor Victor is a center fielder that Marlin fans should get incredibly excited about.

He's got a high ceiling at the plate and in the field and could evolve into a stellar player. Being Cuban in Miami won't hurt as a draw, either.

These moves aren't going to mark the difference between a winning season and a losing season, that is all but set in stone. However, they are moves with the potential to improve the team in both the short and long term. That should be exciting for the (admittedly few) Marlins faithful. They have something to look forward to.

Well two things, actually: the development of these players and the eventual fire sale that will follow.



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March Madness

2019 Schedule

First Four

Date	Team	Team	Time	T.V.
Tue. 3-19			6:30 PM	truTV
Tue. 3-19			9:00 PM	truTV
Wed. 3-20			6:30 PM	truTV
Wed. 3-20			9:00 PM	truTV

Round of 32

Date	Team	Team	Time	T.V.
Sat. 3-23			12:10 PM	
Sat. 3-23			2:40 PM	
Sat. 3-23			5:15 PM	
Sat. 3-23			6:10 PM	
Sat. 3-23			7:10 PM	
Sat. 3-23			7:45 PM	
Sat. 3-23			8:40 PM	
Sat. 3-23			9:40 PM	
Sun. 3-24			12:10 PM	
Sun. 3-24			2:40 PM	
Sun. 3-24			5:15 PM	
Sun. 3-24			6:10 PM	
Sun. 3-24			7:10 PM	
Sun. 3-24			7:45 PM	
Sun. 3-24			8:40 PM	
Sun. 3-24			9:40 PM	

Round of 64

Date	Team	Team	Time	T.V.
Thu. 3-21			12:00PM	
Thu. 3-21			12:30 PM	
Thu. 3-21			1:20 PM	
Thu. 3-21			1:50 PM	
Thu. 3-21			2:30 PM	
Thu. 3-21			3:00 PM	
Thu. 3-21			3:50 PM	
Thu. 3-21			4:20 PM	
Thu. 3-21			6:45 PM	
Thu. 3-21			7:00 PM	
Thu. 3-21			7:15 PM	
Thu. 3-21			7:15 PM	
Thu. 3-21			9:15 PM	
Thu. 3-21			9:30 PM	
Thu. 3-21			9:45 PM	
Thu. 3-21			9:55 PM	
Fri. 3-22			12:00PM	
Fri. 3-22			12:30 PM	
Fri. 3-22			1:20 PM	
Fri. 3-22			1:50 PM	
Fri. 3-22			2:30 PM	
Fri. 3-22			3:00 PM	
Fri. 3-22			3:50 PM	
Fri. 3-22			4:20 PM	
Fri. 3-22			6:45 PM	
Fri. 3-22			7:00 PM	
Fri. 3-22			7:15 PM	
Fri. 3-22			7:15 PM	
Fri. 3-22			9:15 PM	
Fri. 3-22			9:30 PM	
Fri. 3-22			9:45 PM	
Fri. 3-22			9:55 PM	

Sweet 16

Date	Team	Team	Time	T.V.
Thu. 3-28			7:07 PM	
Thu. 3-28			7:27 PM	
Thu. 3-28			9:37PM	
Thu. 3-28			9:59 PM	
Fri. 3-29			7:07 PM	
Fri. 3-29			7:27 PM	
Fri. 3-29			9:37PM	
Fri. 3-29			9:59 PM	

Elite 8

Date	Team	Team	Time	T.V.
Sat. 3-30			6:09 PM	
Sat. 3-30			8:49 PM	
Sun. 3-31			2:20 PM	
Sun. 3-31			5:05 PM	

Final 4

Date	Team	Team	Time	T.V.
Sat. 4-6			6:09 PM	CBS
Sat. 4-6			8:49 PM	CBS

Championship

Date	Team	Team	Time	T.V.
Mon. 4-8			9:20 PM	CBS

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