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October 2019 Edition



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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 High School Football 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 Southeast Georgia and Northeast Florida and growing everyday.

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OCTOBER 2019 EDITION

THE **SOUTHERN SPORTS** EDITION

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# PINK EYED

UGA Fans Show True Class By JJ Lanier





**I** have been a sports fan for the better part of thirty-five years, but over the past few years my enthusiasm has waned.

In part because of the antics that take place within schools, organizations, and players, but also because of the fans; when we get things wrong, we really get them wrong.

However, when fan interaction culminates into what took place in Athens for the Georgia/Arkansas

ties to the program they were about to face. It's one thing to participate in a cause someone else has put together, it's something else entirely to be the place where the idea originates from.

Secondly, the fact it was done by Georgia brought an awareness to the story that frankly, Arkansas State would never be able to replicate.

Outside of the money raised from the pink t-shirts sold for the game, it's difficult to know exactly how many donations came in solely because of the story's exposure; I imagine it had to be a decent number though.

It's like the difference between your local pizza place holding a fundraiser for an employee and Pizza Hut having one for that same employee. Suddenly, a story that had

out their own former players, it seems pretty evident the UGA fan base does a good job of helping others in need.

I realize this type of assistance takes place at most programs across the country, but unfortunately most of those acts of kindness don't get much publicity, and I thought this was more than deserving.

I also understand this type of loss is something that almost everyone has gone through at some point in their lives; many of whom don't have the social support structure to help when it does occur.

It's why things like the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge and the Pink Out are so important; not only does it help raise money, but it lets people know there are things being done on their behalf.



State game, it shows that when we do get it right, we can make an impact.

Georgia's impromptu "Pink Out" in honor of Wendy Anderson—the wife of Arkansas State's Head Coach Blake Anderson— who passed away from breast cancer in August not only says a lot about the Georgia fan base (I'll get to that in a second), but was also a significant gesture.

For one, this wasn't proposed by the team being directly impacted by Anderson's passing; it was done by the opposing school, with little to no

local roots was able to branch out nationwide.

Obviously, the Georgia fans— in particular the Bulldogs' Battling Breast Cancer who initiated everything—deserve the credit for putting this together, something that has become somewhat of a norm in Athens.

Whether it's the already planned "Pink Out" game scheduled for October, raising money for an assistant coach of an opposing team whose daughter was suffering from a rare genetic condition, or helping

No one would have blinked an eye or thought any less of Georgia had they just done a moment of silence in Wendy Anderson's honor and then moved on to the game. Instead, they decided to go above and beyond and do something about it.

As fans, we like to preach about how sports can bring communities together, but are often slow to follow through. That wasn't the case in Athens. For once, it was nice to see fans practice what they preach.





# CHOPPING OCTOBER

Braves Win The East By Jason Bishop





**O**ctober baseball will take place once again in Atlanta. The Atlanta Braves defended their 2018 NL East Crown by clinching the division this past weekend.

Most experts did not have the Braves winning the division in 2019, mostly taking into account all the money the Philadelphia Phillies spent in the offseason. Those Phillies most likely will not make the playoffs at all.

As October approaches, there is still the business of Atlanta setting their playoff roster. The Braves roster suffered a ton of injuries in the last two months of the season. Nick Markakis, Ender Inciarte, Austin Riley, Charlie Culberson and Johan Camargo all spent time in the Injured List and Atlanta will be without Culberson and Camargo in the first round and maybe throughout the playoffs.

The Braves will likely be matched up with the St. Louis Cardinals in the Divisional Round of the playoffs. The Cardinals likely will win the NL Central.

St. Louis, once again, put together a second half run to put themselves into the mix.

The Cardinals will bring with them into a postseason a young starting rotation, headed by Dakota Hudson. Hudson currently has notched 16 wins for the Red Birds with a 3.35 ERA.

Outside of Hudson, the Cardinals will have Jack Flaherty, Miles Mikolas, and Adam Wainwright.

Paul Goldschmidt hit 31 homeruns for St. Louis and led the team.

Meanwhile, the Braves will bring an offense that has carried the team all year long and a decent rotation.

Mike Soroka had a breakout season for Atlanta and along with Dallas Keuchel, Max Fried and either Julio Teheran or Mike Foltynewicz in the rotation.

Realistically, the Braves will be huge favorites to beat the Cardinals in the 3 of 5 series. If that happens, the Braves will get the winner of the NL West Champion Los Angeles Dodgers and the winner of the Wild Card Game.

I believe the Dodgers will get the Washington Nationals in the first round. That series have the potential to go all 5 games.

Last season the Dodgers bombed Atlanta in the NLDS, but the Braves pitching is far better than last season and so is the offense.

The Dodgers will be favored to beat the Braves if that is the matchup but Atlanta would be favored against any other team they may play in the NLCS if they get past St. Louis.

In my opinion, the Braves will do no worse than an NLCS appearance and will give LA all they want in the NLCS. On paper, the Dodgers are deeper and better.

The most exciting thing is the Braves will be making plenty of playoff appearances moving forward. They are good and young.

If not this season, a World Series Championship should be on the horizon for the Braves.



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# HEALTH SYSTEM ATHLETIC TRAINERS KEEP STUDENT ATHLETES SAFE BEYOND THE SIDELINES

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Whistles chirp as players scrimmage on the soccer and football fields. Runners stretch before taking to the track. An ace is served across the net. The cracking of bats as batters practice their swing. The swoosh of the net as the buzzer sounds.

Whether it's fall or spring sports season, the Southeast Georgia Health System certified athletic trainers are dedicated to providing area athletes with the best care possible by preventing, recognizing and managing sports injuries, including concussions. As Brunswick High School's athletic trainer, Chantal Pierre, ATC is trained to spot potential injuries and ensure the well-being of student athletes who may one day be awarded a Heisman trophy, or win a World Series pennant.



**Adam Norman, MS, ATC-L; Marissa Turturro, LAT, ATC; Becky Joyner, M.S., ATC, PES; Chantel Pierre, ATC; Shonta Houston, ATC; and Paul Trumbull, P.T., MBA, director, Rehabilitation and Sports Medicine**

"There are a lot of injuries, and it can be anything from simple sprains and strains, to much more complex injuries like concussions," Ms. Pierre said. "But that's why we're here, to make sure injured kids are safe to return to play."

Ms. Pierre is one of five athletic trainers who work for the Health System and partner with area high schools to monitor injuries, speed up recoveries and make sure student athletes are playing safely. Marissa Turturro, LAT, ATC, serves at Glynn Academy, Adam Norman, MS, ATC-L works with Frederica Academy, Shonta Houston, ATC, at McIntosh County Academy and community liaison Becky Joyner, M.S., ATC, PES. Trained and certified to recognize and treat sports-related injuries, the athletic trainers are licensed by the State of Georgia, and supervised by Beau Sasser, M.D., board-certified orthopedic surgeon with Summit Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery, and medical director of the Health System's Sports Medicine program.

Paul Trumbull, P.T., MBA, rehabilitation and sports medicine director, said while injury prevention and management are key components of the athletic trainers' day-to-day responsibilities, there are many more duties. "They primarily make sure the student athletes stay healthy," Mr. Trumbull said. "It's not just injury management, but injury prevention as well. To some degree, they also play an important role with nutrition, conditioning and hydration."

Each school has their own training rooms, equipped with many supplies. "Everything from exam tables to nose plugs for nose bleeds," described Mr. Trumbull. However, athletic training is much more than wrapping tape around ankles and handing out nose plugs. Knowing the student athletes on a personal level is crucial to identifying the warning signs of possibly serious injuries like concussions.

Ms. Turturro said, "As athletic trainers we are with our student athletes every day, so when they are upset over an injury we are their support system, and a liaison with their doctor. A big part of what we do is also education. We help them understand their injury and the treatment and rehabilitation prescribed by their doctor, and teach them how to take care of themselves with proper conditioning, warm up, cool down and nutrition to help prevent injury."

Athletic trainers do a lot of planning and coordinating every year. "We meet at least monthly and discuss medical issues, coverage for events, injury reports, county pre-participation exams and coordination of care for athletes," explained Dr. Sasser. "I also work closely with the coaches to make sure they understand our policies and protocols."

Athletic trainers also work with local emergency management services to stay up-to-date on the latest health-industry trends and best practices. Ms. Pierre said, "That gives everyone a chance to ask questions and understand the roles we all have while managing emergencies during the game or practice, as well as discuss new policies."

"The importance of an athletic trainer goes way beyond taping a sprain or pulling a player off the field for a concussion. The trainers are in constant communication between the athlete, family, coaches and the treating physician in order to understand the treatment of an injury and the time to return to play." According to Dr. Sasser, this continuum of care is invaluable. "I truly believe that the Southeast Georgia Health System athletic trainer program has prevented more serious injuries than we will ever know," he said. **For more information about the Health System's athletic training program, visit [sghs.org/SportsMedicine](http://sghs.org/SportsMedicine) or call 912-466-5745.**

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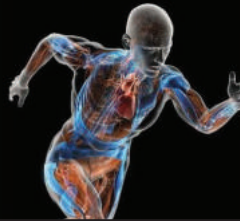
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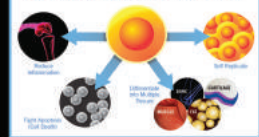
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# AS THE JAGUARS TURN

Drama In Jacksonville By Robert Kraft







**J**ust barely into a long NFL season, and the Jacksonville Jaguars look like a franchise in chaos. Injuries, poor coaching, and a star player demanding a trade hovers over DUVAL.

The Jaguars made a huge splash in the off season by signing Super Bowl LII MVP Nick Foles. The deal was a four-year contract worth \$88 million. The deal reportedly has 50 million dollars guaranteed.

Nick Foles' Jaguars debut did not follow script. Foles was injured in the first quarter against Kansas City, suffering a broken left clavicle (collar bone). Rookie Gardner Minshew replaced Foles after the injury.

The Jaguars' aspirations for a revival this season relied on Foles arrival. Many fans believe the Jaguars are one capable quarterback away from being a Super Bowl contender.

Just one quarter into the season, the Jaguars already were left dealing with an injury to Foles and now they will be without him for 8 to 10 weeks.

Game two was filled with drama. First on the field, trailing 13-6 with three minutes remaining, the Jaguars took possession at their 32-yard line. Gardner Minshew led a two minute and thirty second drive capped with a four-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver DJ Chark Jr.

Coach Doug Marrone decided to go for a two-point conversion. Leonard Fournette was stopped inches short of the goal line and the Jaguars fell 13-12.

Doug Marrone must have thought he was a Riverboat gambler, who decided to risk the game on a controversial decision to go for two-point conversion at the end of the game.

From the decision to the actual play call, Fournette run between the tackles. The question remains why go for two?

The Jaguars defense was playing extremely well. Minshew had the hot hand, leading a 68-yard scoring drive.

Coach Marrone just outsmarted himself and his team paid the price. My opinion, the Jaguars should have taken their chances with momentum into overtime.

The headline story Jags camp was the sideline spat between All-Pro cornerback Jalen Ramsey and head coach Doug Marrone.

On a third down play, Ramsey was covering Texans wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins. Hopkins made a diving catch and Ramsey immediately jumps up and waves his arms to signal incomplete.

Ramsey wanted Coach Marrone to have the play reviewed. Marrone did not throw the red challenge flag. The drive continued and the Texans kicked a field goal to take the lead 3-0.

Gene Steratore, the CBS official analysis, stated the it looked pretty clear that it was not a catch. Ramsey walked off the field clearly upset and when Coach Marrone said something to him, he turned around and the two went at it.

Marrone put his hands on Ramsey, who jerked away. Moments later, he walked over to Ramsey and said something that set him off again. Ronnie Harrison had to get between Ramsey and Coach Marrone.

That's when it ended. Not so fast.

On the following Monday, the Jaguars All-Pro cornerback demanded a trade. Ramsey must be taking a line out of Antonio Brown's off-field play book.

Ramsey quoted "the whole city trash. Coaches trash, fans trash too. They only care about crab trays and hard drugs. I'm Out!"



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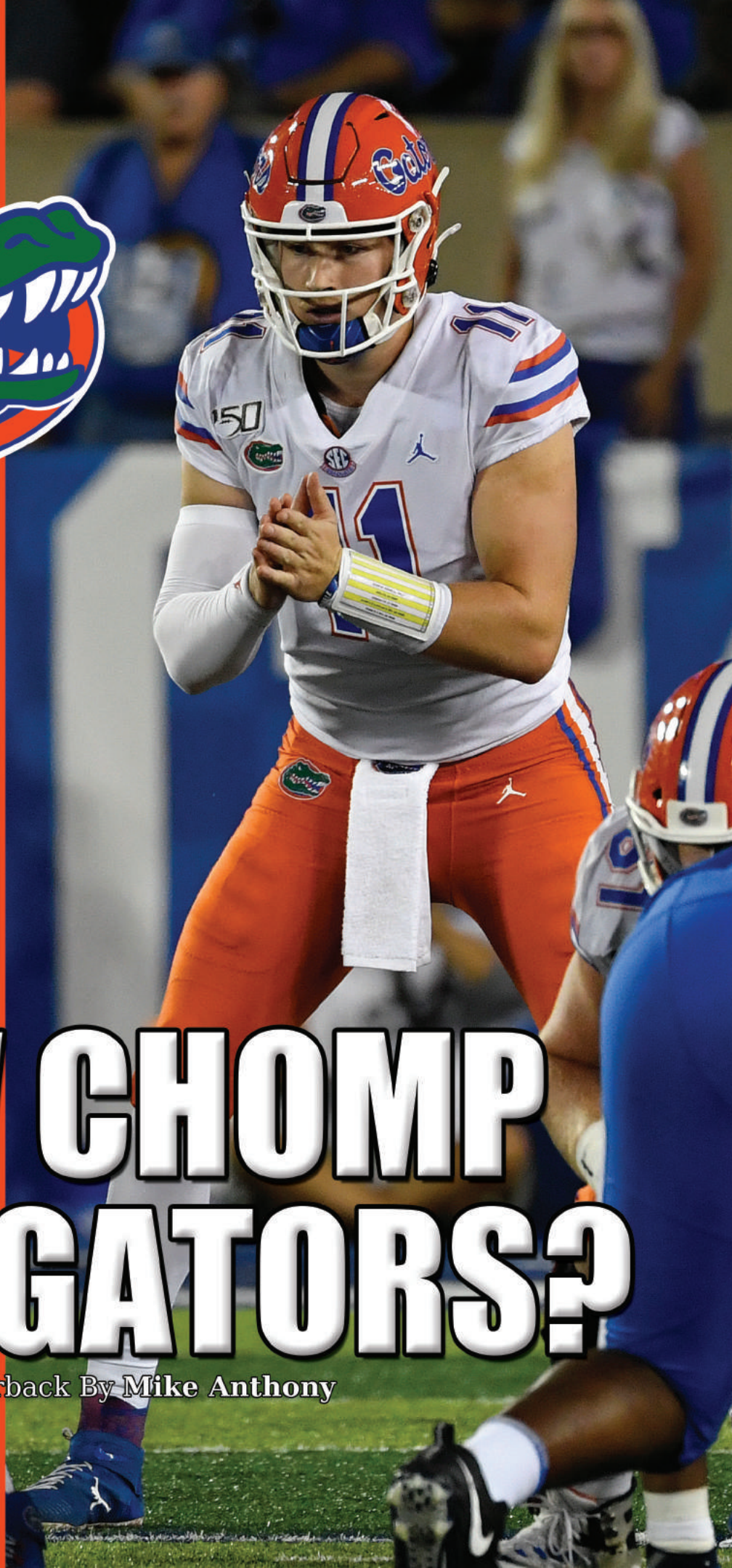



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# NEW CHOMP FOR GATORS?

Florida's New Quarterback By Mike Anthony





Every college football team enters a season with a plan.

Whether the plan is to contend for a national championship or merely try to make a bowl game, every team has a list of things that need to go right in order to end the season where it expects.

And without exception, a starting quarterback in a leg cast is a huge detriment to any team's

injury for a collegiate football team, but Florida has a ton riding on what happens next with Franks out of the picture.

Thrust into the spotlight is redshirt junior Kyle Trask. And - in true Hollywood form - Trask immediately set about pulling the Gators out of the fire.

Florida trailed 24-10 when Franks went down, but Trask ignited the offense, engineering drives that racked up 19 unanswered points that allowed the Gators to escape Lexington with a victory, if not their health.

Trask was able to deal with the immediate problem of replacing

that will cover all of October. That would have been a tall order even with the entire depth chart intact, but now the Gators have the task of navigating that top-10 minefield with a backup quarterback.

If nothing else, Trask is at least the same imposing physical figure that Franks was. Standing 6-foot-5 and weighing 235 pounds, Trask looked poised in hitting on 9-of-13 passing and bowling in for a rushing touchdown against Kentucky.

Replacing Franks' big arm might not be possible, but there's a chance that the injury might force the Gators into a more consistent attack, which is what their fans have been



season goals, regardless of how bold or conservative they may have been.

That's exactly where the Florida Gators now stand. The Gators opened the year with plenty of promise as veteran quarterback Feleipe Franks seemed to have Florida moving in the right direction, but Franks suffered a bad ankle injury in the fourth quarter of the Gators' victory over Kentucky in one of the first SEC games of the season.

It's easy to cite the 'Next Man Up' philosophy following any

Franks on the fly and mounting a comeback, but now sees Florida pondering how it can achieve its goals with Franks done for the season.

For the time being, things should be just fine. Trask proved that he's capable of commanding the offense. The Gators' schedule also helps out as Florida hosts Towson out of the FCS.

Following that, the real tests begin.

Florida will face Auburn, LSU and Georgia in a four-game stretch

hoping for all along. The playbook will be limited in the coming weeks, but that could be a blessing in disguise.

Most agree that the Gators have top-10 talent all over the field, but that hasn't shown on the offensive side of the ball in big games.

It may have taken a bad break - literally - but Franks' injury could unwittingly force Florida into a new offensive direction that keeps them near the top of the rankings and allows them to remain as the only real threat to Georgia in the SEC East.





# COLLEGE FOOTBALL TRADE DEADLINE

CFB's Transfer Portal By Kipp Branch





**A**n all too frequent headline in college football today is player x from named institution has entered the NCAA Transfer Portal.

Listed Below are the rules according to the NCAA pulled from their website:

Transfer Process:

**Academic year in residence:**

Under the basic transfer regulations, you must spend an academic year in residence at the school to which you are transferring.

If you transfer from a four-year college to an NCAA school, you must complete one academic year in residence at the new school before you can play for or receive travel expenses from the new school, unless you qualify for a transfer exception or waiver.

To satisfy an academic year in residence, you must be enrolled in and successfully complete a full-time program of studies for two-full semesters or three-full quarters. Summer school terms and part-time enrollment do not count toward fulfilling an academic year in residence.

**Exception:** If you meet a legislated exception, it means a specific regulation will not apply to you.

The school to which you are transferring determines whether you are eligible and has the authority to apply exceptions.

**One-time transfer exception:** If

you transfer from a four-year school, you may be immediately eligible to compete at your new school if you meet ALL the following conditions:

You are academically and athletically eligible at your previous four-year school.

You receive a transfer-release agreement from your previous four-year school.

**Waiver:** An action that sets aside an NCAA rule because a specific, extraordinary circumstance prevents you from meeting the rule. An NCAA school may file a waiver on your behalf; you cannot file a waiver for yourself. The school does not administer the waiver, the conference office or NCAA does.

After you digest the rules it seems simple right? That's where the lawyers come in and that's where the NCAA has lost total control of the entire process.

**Questions/Thoughts:**

What extraordinary circumstance allowed Justin Fields to be ruled immediately eligible at Ohio State?

Did the NCAA deem Fields was mentally scarred because of his botched fake punt attempt at UGA last fall with the SEC Title game hanging in the balance?

Yes, we all know OSU's quarterback from last year now plays for the Washington Redskins.

Why wasn't Jacob Eason granted immediate eligibility at Washington after he left UGA last season?

Former UGA TE Luke Ford was denied immediate eligibility at Illinois because he wanted to be closer to a sick relative. Are you kidding me NCAA?

Former Auburn QB Malik Willis transferred to Liberty University. He was waiting for a ruling on his eligibility from

the NCAA.

Liberty learned this week that Willis's appeal had been denied. Really NCAA? Was Liberty a threat to make the College Football Playoff this fall, or are you still mad at Hugh Freeze for breaking the rules at Ole Miss?

GT head coach Geoff Collins blasted NCAA's decision not to grant former Florida defensive end Antonneous Clayton immediate eligibility at Tech saying that the NCAA does not have the best interest of the student athlete in mind.

Well coach the NCAA seems to have Ohio State's best interests in mind and apparently not the best interests of student athletes who want to attend GT, Washington, Illinois, or Liberty.

The NCAA created this mess, and now it is time for them to clean it up, or have they allowed free agency to settle in for college football?

Maybe it's a coin flip by the NCAA to determine eligibility and Ohio State adopted the tails never fails policy to get Fields cleared to play. You just never know.

Maybe put Jake Fromm in charge of the portal after he is done at UGA. He created a lot of this mess by winning the UGA QB job, or mandate NCAA member institutions to not post depth charts until 24 hours before the first scheduled game each season.

Fix this mess NCAA, your exceptions are not consistent. Where you stand on a college football depth chart is not an extraordinary circumstance.

At this rate college football will have an October 15th trading deadline in the next 10-15 years.







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# STRONG SILENT TYPE

Julio Jones Not For Show By JJ Lanier







**F**or the better part of a decade at the wide receiver position, there has been almost a direct correlation between a player's ability to perform on the field and his antics off it. The crazier the antics the more talented the player must be, otherwise why put up with it.

That said, it's somewhat poetic that on the same day Antonio Brown is turning in a diva performance the entire cast of "Real Housewives of New York City" would've been proud of, Julio Jones is signed a contract making him the highest paid wide receiver in the NFL.

I say this because when a player like Jones- someone who doesn't throw sideline rants, blames losses on his lack of targets, or post videos on social media demeaning the organization he plays for- becomes the highest paid, it almost catches you by surprise. (During the stretch when Jones wasn't getting many red zone targets, could you have pictured him posting a video of all his touchdown catches in Atlanta followed by the words "Remember Me???" as the video fades to black? Now how about Brown?)

I'm sure Jones is more vocal behind closed doors, but if so that at least seems to be where those conversations stay. And while some may look at him holding out as diva-like behavior I have no issue with it, especially when you consider the way it's been handled by both Jones and the Falcons.

There are several different avenues to venture down when you discuss making a 30-year-old the highest

paid wideout in the league, but the real story that will have implications across the league are the terms of the extension- \$66 million over the next three years, all guaranteed.

Regardless of what side of the argument you fall on- whether contracts should be guaranteed or not- you must admit Jones' contract could be the turning point for how those contracts are handled in the NFL.

How many times have you heard of a deal stalling out not because of the length or total money involved, but because of the guaranteed dollars?

As annoying as it is, there's a reason "The number of years or total dollar amount doesn't matter, it's all about what's guaranteed" comment is ingrained in our minds. I understand why NFL money isn't guaranteed, but it's a huge hurdle that sometimes can't be overcome.

In a profession where contracts are built upon existing contracts with other players, why in the world would another player of Jones' caliber settle for anything less than a fully guaranteed contract, or at least something close to that. If I were him, I wouldn't.

I'm not saying this is something that will happen overnight, or take place for every player in the league, but the precedent has been set and I imagine there will be a line of football players waiting to follow in Jones' footsteps.

Whether or not you believe Jones is worth the money at this stage of his career, or if you think he'll have lived up to his contract five years from now may not even matter.

There's a good chance we'll look back at his signing as a change of the times and something that may alter the way the NFL handles contracts from here on out.

And it all happened without the use of Instagram.



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# PROGRAM KILLER

The Legacy Of Chris Rix By Kenneth Harrison, Jr





**W**e're all ecstatic that college football season is back.

We normally reflect on past greats and talk about their amazing performances. I think of guys that won national championships or Heisman's like Tim Tebow, Tommie Frazier, Matt Leinart, Vince Young and Ken Dorsey.

There is another side to this, people that were highly recruited but never lived up to the hype in college. We can even go far enough to say they set their program back for several years with their poor play.

The top name that comes to mind is Chris Rix.

He was in the inaugural Elite 11 QB Camp. He led the California team to victory over Florida in the CaliFlorida Bowl 1 at the Rose Bowl and was one of the top quarterback prospects in the nation.

Rix arrived in Tallahassee in the Fall of 2000 and was red shirted. He got to watch Chris Wienke's senior season, a Heisman-winning campaign that ended with a loss to Oklahoma in the national championship game.

Florida State was an amazing

program during this time. The Seminoles finished the season ranked in the top five for 14 consecutive years at the end of 2000.

They won the ACC Championship 9 times, one for every year they were in the conference. They won two national championships during this time. They also played in the first three BCS national championship games from 1998-2000.

It's safe to say expectations were high going in to the 2001 season. Rix was the only four-year starting QB Bobby Bowden ever had but that was not the plan.

Florida State typically had quarterbacks play backup for two years then play for two years, normally taking a redshirt to make that happen.

That was how it worked for Peter Tom Willis (started 1988-89), Casey Weldon (90-91), Charlie Ward (92-93), Danny Kanell (94-95), and Thad Busby (96-97). Redshirt junior Jared Jones would have been the starter but he got in off the field trouble.

Mark Richt gave him the option to sit another year and lose that year of eligibility or leave the team. Jones bolted to play minor league baseball.

Rix was forced to start and coincidentally the program took a nosedive. We can say that FSU dynasty ended September 22, 2001 against North Carolina.

Going in to that game they

never lost to UNC and had only lost two conference games since joining the ACC in 1991. The year before they beat the Tar Heels 63-14.

The 0-3 Heels destroyed No. 6 FSU, 41-9. Rix threw an interception and lost 2 fumbles. Miami snapped a 54-game home winning streak in a blowout, 49-27. Rix lost 2 fumbles and threw 4 picks against the Hurricanes.

The 'Noles lost to NC State at home which was the first home conference loss, snapping the 39-game streak.

Rix was still named ACC Rookie of the Year in 2001. His best statistical season was in 2003 and he passed for 3,107 yards with 23 touchdowns and 13 interceptions.

He was a turnover machine that seemed to really crumble in big games. He finished with a 25-11 record as a starter. He's also the only QB to lose to the same team 5 times in his career (Miami).

He missed the 2003 Sugar Bowl because he overslept and missed an exam, which caused him to get suspended from the game.

On a positive note he ranks second in school history in passes attempted, completed, and touchdowns thrown.

The team was actually worse from 2005-2009 after he left. In retrospect maybe he was a good player in a bad situation?







# THE WILD AL WILD CARD

Tampa's Run At The Playoffs By TJ Hartnett





Well, here we are again. In what seems like an increasingly annual tradition, the Tampa Bay Rays are making a run at the MLB playoffs.

Indeed, it feels like I'm writing an article about the unexpected contention and postseason push of that love-able overlooked and under-dogged Rays every September.

This is no different (the Rays are over 90 wins with a week to play and are currently tied for the second American League Wild Card spot) but there are a few extra wrinkles this year. Particularly, how close the three-team Wild Card race is in the junior circuit this year.

Entering the second to last weekend of the regular season, Tampa Bay is tied with the Cleveland Indians for the second Wild Card slot, two games behind the Oakland A's.

All three clubs are on good-to-great tears right now, with Oakland in particular smoking hot, having won 9 of their last 10 contests.

With three teams so closely competing for two postseason berths, there are a number of different ways this could shake out for Tampa Bay.

The simplest (and, assumedly,

preferred by the team) assurance of a longer season is for the Rays to win one of the two spots outright. They get that one-game Wild Card playoff and they're off to the races.

Tying with either Oakland and/or Cleveland (and/or Minnesota, which is mathematically still possible) is where things get complicated and interesting.

If one team were to fall off and the Rays tied with, say, Oakland, then whoever won the season series would be the host team in the Wild Card Game (Tampa would visit the A's in this scenario, having lost the season series 3-4). That one is fairly simple as well.

The real fun begins when you think of the likelihood that two teams end up tied for the second Wild Card spot.

If Tampa and Cleveland end the season dead even but still behind Oakland, they would play a one-game play-in contest (which Tampa would host, as they won the season against the Indians 6-1), the winner of which would go on to the Wild Card Game in Oakland.

If all three teams have identical records on Sunday, things get very tricky. Oakland, having the highest winning percentage against the two other teams, would get to choose to be designated Team A, Team B, or Team C. Tampa, having the next highest winning percentage, would choose between the remaining to

designations, and Cleveland would be assigned the remainder.

Team A would play Team B, with the winner moving on to the Wild Card Game. The loser of that game would then play Team C for the second Wild Card spot.

The question then becomes: what would Oakland prefer? Team A gets two chances, sure, but Team C gets a day off and wouldn't need to prepare for the possibility of three straight days of must-win games (four, really, counting what is sure to be an intense final day of the season that leads to this mess).

Tampa, getting to choose second in this scenario, makes essentially the same choice: choose designation B and give yourself the chance for redemption if they lose the first game; or designation C, where they could potentially line up the likes of Charlie Morton to carry the burden of the season.

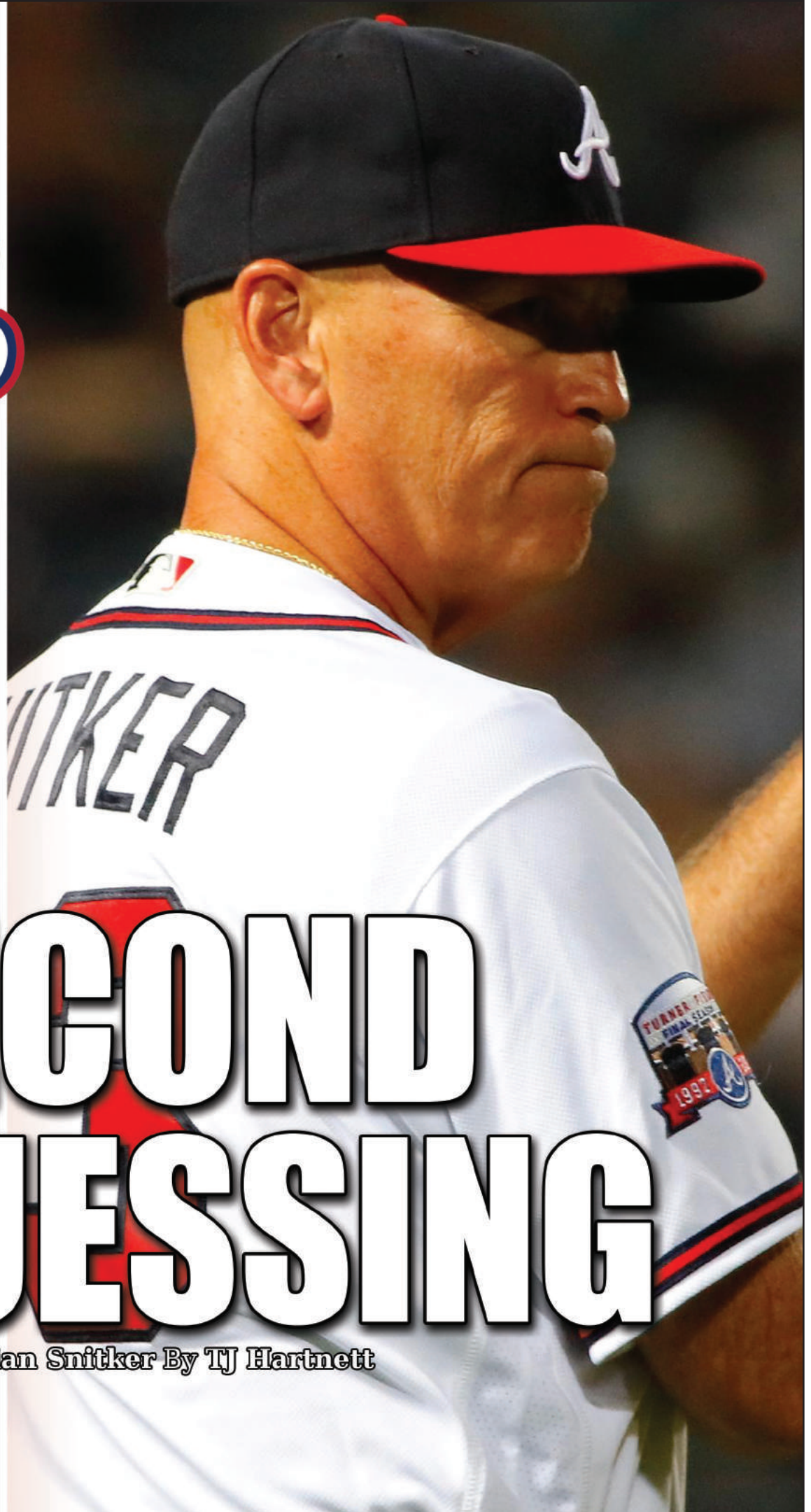
I've always been a supporter of the second Wild Card and the implementation of the one-and-done Wild Card Game.

It's like having a pair of Game 7s to kick off the postseason every year. This year, with a tightly contested race for the AL Wild Card spots, we've got a possibility of seeing four such games.

That's probably not the way the Rays would like things to shake out, but as a baseball fan, it's hard to root against it.







# SECOND GUESSING

Defending Brian Snitker By TJ Hartnett





**M**onday morning quarterbacking is a very real epidemic in sports fandom and it's certainly not limited to football fanatics.

That's where the term comes from, of course, but the desire to second guess any team's coach and manager's every move is so alluring and satisfying that it has permeated into every sport in which decisions are made.

Baseball is, of course, included. Fans of every team revel in post-correcting their favorite(?) manager's lineups, defensive alignments, rotation choices, and bullpen management.

Managers are mortal men, mind you, so mistakes can be (and are) made. I would never claim otherwise. For the record, I also do some managerial criticism from time to time.

Even reigning Managers of the Year get criticized for anything and everything; one such person is Atlanta Braves' manager Brian Snitker, who I hear get criticized constantly by friends, by family, and by sports radio hosts.

Folks in Braves Country always have one thing or another to complain about when it comes to Snit and his managerial decision-making.

I'm not here to tell you that you can never criticize Brian Snitker again. He will, someday in the future, maybe soon, make a decision you disagree with. You are allowed to share your disagreement. But today I want to celebrate him. Because I just watched him get thrown out of a game, and I'm fired up about how much I like the guy.

The game I just watched was against the Washington Nationals. You'll know it as the horrific game

in which Charlie Culberson took a fastball off his face on a bunt attempt. Insanely, it was called a strike.

Brian Snitker really didn't like that.

MAYBE second to the Jose Urena Incident, this was far and away the most pissed off I have ever seen the usually-calm Snitker.

At the time, I was far too shaken from Culberson's injury to really appreciate the fight Snit was putting up against a godawful call.

Looking back on it now, I see the Snit that these Braves players love to play for. He was arguing about a strike, but under the surface you just knew that Snit was channeling the fear and love that the whole clubhouse has for Charlie into that tirade.

Snitker seems like a paternal figure to this team in a way that Fredi Gonzalez never was – and before you get ahead of me, he's not quite Bobby Cox either.

The Braves under Cox, whom I love, were always professional to a fault.

Snit's team is allowed to be little more expressive. There's a lot of youth and excitement on the team, but Snitker seems to encourage it. He's also going to provide a firm hand when necessary, like pulling Acuna for lack of hustle just a few weeks ago. And yet, I feel confident that Acuna wouldn't have an ill will for his skipper.

And at the end of the day, the thing that matters is that these Braves want to play for Snit. Guys like Freddie Freeman notably advocated for Snitker to get the full-time job after his interim stint a few years ago.

His bullpen usage will be what it is – he'll make whatever decisions he thinks will help the team win or will help a player in one situation or another – but the guys on the field want him filling out the lineup on a daily basis. They want to win for him. And they are.

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