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February 2023 Edition



Jags' Breakout Season



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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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FROG STOMP

UGA Wins National Championship By Kenneth Harrison



Going into the national championship game I thought UGA winning was a slam dunk.

I thought they were forty points better than TCU. I was surprised to see people like Stephen A Smith and Robert Griffin III picking the Horned Frogs to win. They pointed out how they only had one five-star recruit and one four-star on the roster.

It turns out I underestimated the Bulldogs. No. 1 Georgia (15 – 0) demolished No. 3 Texas Christian University (13 – 2) 65 – 7. It was a beat down from the opening kickoff.

Starting quarterback Stetson Bennett IV was taken out of the game with 13:25 left in the fourth quarter. Kirby Smart called a timeout so he could walk off the field for the last time.

Bennett accounted for six touchdowns, four passing and two rushing. He completed 18/25 passes for 304 yards and rushed for 39 yards.

"As simple as it is, just one last huddle with the guys," said Bennett, who finished with a 29-3 career record as Georgia's starter. "That was special, coming off and seeing Coach Smart. That was really cool, and I appreciate that."

"First time he's ever walked off that I was hugging him," Smart said with a smile.

The defense played great, recording 5 sacks. They also recorded three turnovers. They recovered a fumble and had two interceptions. TCU quarterback Max Duggan was also a Heisman finalist like Stetson Bennett, but he struggled.

The Horned Frogs did score their lone touchdown in the first quarter to make the score 10 – 7. They

very briefly made it look like they could compete with the Bulldogs. Both of Duggan's interceptions came in the first half and led to UGA scores.

He threw his second pick with 36 seconds left in the half. Two plays later Bennett threw another touchdown pass to make the halftime lead 38 – 7. It was the largest halftime lead in a national championship game since the 2002 BCS title game when Miami lead Nebraska 34 – 0.

Georgia won their first national title in 41 years last season. Now they've repeated as national champs, making them the first team in the College Football Playoff era to accomplish that.

TCU was 5 – 7 last season, which lead to them hiring head coach Sonny Dykes from SMU.

"We'll learn from it," Dykes said, "and next time we're on a stage like this, we'll handle it better."

Last season's championship team had five first-round NFL draft picks.

"If the team last year played this year's team, last year's team probably had more talent on it," Smart said, "but this year's team was different. They just had this eye of the tiger; they weren't going to lose."

Georgia dominated on the ground, rushing 44 times for 254 and five TD's. Kenny McIntosh was the leading rusher with 8 carries for 50 yards. Branson Robinson had 7 carries for 42 yards and two scores.

Sophomore tight end Brock Bowers won the John Mackey Award this year for the nation's best tight end. He played great in this game, recording 7 catches for 152 yards and a score.

Ladd McConkey also had a big night with 5 receptions, 88 yards and 2 touchdowns.

Dykes compared Bowers to a tight end he coached while he was the offensive coordinator at Arizona. That guy was named Rob Gronkowski.

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OUT OF NOWHERE

Jags' Breakout Season By Jeff Doke



If you had told me a year ago that the Jacksonville Jaguars would be two games away from the Super Bowl, I would have laughed.

Heartily. Out loud, full body laughter.

After the Urban Meyer era (or should we say "error") of Jacksonville football, Jaguar nation was particularly disheartened...and that's saying something, considering the soul-sucking levels of angst & frustration this fan base has had to endure since the Titans went 3-0 against us while we were undefeated against the rest of the league back in 1999.

From the barstool boogie incident to the disgraceful treatment of a beloved kicker, Coach Meyer proved above and beyond that he was 100% not ready for prime time. My OSU friends warned me. Oh, how I hoped they were wrong.

Spoiler alert; they weren't.

The performance of rookie signal caller Trevor Lawrence didn't help the cause. Heralded as a generational talent coming out of Clemson, his less-than-lackluster performance had more than one prognosticator questioning whether everyone was wrong about "Sunshine."

Then came the long, drawn-out offseason. The seemingly unending wait for a replacement head coach, the cries of the Jaguars faithful to hire Teal & Black alum Byron Leftwich away from the Buccaneers, the in-the-moment questionable free-agent signings of Christian Kirk, Zayn Jones, and Even Engram.

All of these had many in the Jaguars fanbase to call for GM Trent Baalke's head on a platter, and saw dozens - nay, hundreds - of Twitter profiles change their picture to the clown emoji sporting the distinctive Shad Khan handlebar moustache.

And yes, mine was one of them. My, my, my, how the tables

have turned.

Enter Doug Pederson. A head coach with not only pro experience but a Lombardi Trophy on his resume.

While the hire was not as flashy as what the Leftwich hire would have been, it's obvious in hindsight how the results were superior.

Pederson brought the Jags their second winning season and playoff appearance in the last 15 years.

He coached the team to a six-game win streak to end the season, including an instantly canonized come-from-behind victory over the San Diego - I mean Los Angeles Falcons - I mean Chargers.

Trevor Lawrence showed not only flashes, but blindingly bright moments that showed that yes, Baalke made the right decision in drafting him. Kirk, Zayn, and Engram proved to be extraordinarily productive weapons, and Travis Etienne got the bounce back sophomore season we all hoped was in store.

The much-discussed selection of UGA's Travon Walker as the team's second straight #1 overall pick got some sideways looks, and while his performance has been...shall we say "unpolished" at times this year, it's easy to see why he and Josh Allen (no, not *that* Josh Allen) will be cornerstones of the "Jacksvillians" defense for years to come.

Then there's the trade deadline acquisition of suspended WR Calvin Ridley. If he's even a shadow of the player he was before the suspension (which came, ironically enough, for betting *against* the Jags), he will go down as an all-time free agent steal. That's some next-level management right there by any metric.

I made it official earlier, but I'll reiterate it here; I hereby formally apologize for doubting Trent Baalke.

Byron Leftwich, on the other hand, was fired.

For once, Jaguar fans can say they dodged a bullet, and aren't dismissed as delusional when we say "just wait til next year."

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Innovative Treadmill Defies Gravity to Help Patients Heal

Oftentimes patients must exert a heroic effort to recover from or cope with an injury, surgery or neurological condition. While exercising on a regular treadmill can improve their strength and mobility, some struggle not to fall or falter as they walk or run. Fortunately, the Southeast Georgia Health System Outpatient Rehabilitation Care Center offers patients a unique advantage—the AlterG® Anti-Gravity Treadmill™.

“The AlterG helps patients improve their balance, strength and mobility without strain,” states Brandon DeFeo, DPT, physical therapist at the Health System’s Outpatient Rehabilitation Care Center in Brunswick, Georgia. “The AlterG gives the patient a level of safety and security that in turn increases their confidence during therapy.”



Brandon DeFeo, DPT, assists patient Addie Morris on the AlterG

To understand how AlterG works, imagine stepping onto a treadmill while positioning your lower body into a small, inflatable, pressurized air chamber that’s part of the treadmill. Your upper body is outside the chamber. Based on your body weight, DeFeo calibrates the amount of air in the chamber. In doing so, he reduces the gravitational load on your legs, allowing you to rehabilitate by walking or running without pain. “The AlterG precisely measures the patient’s weight before each use. We can decrease the weight by as little as one percent at a time to reach the desired effect,” explains DeFeo.

Recently, DeFeo has helped a young gymnast recover from a sports injury utilizing the Alter G. Addie Morris, age 11, was a level 4 gymnast with Southeastern Elite Gymnastics and Cheerleading when she sprained her MCL. Having clinched gold in vault at the 2021 AAU Gymnastics National Championship in the Xcel Silver age group, she was looking forward to her 2022 season when she was unfortunately sidelined for the remainder of the year.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Beau Sasser, MD, board-certified orthopaedic surgeon at Summit Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery, Addie healed from her MCL injury and its resulting stress fracture. “Following such an injury as Addie’s, it’s important to strengthen the muscle around the impaired area,” says DeFeo.

“If pain continues even after an injury is healed, walking or running with the assistance of the AlterG helps desensitize the pain, which then allows the patient to regain their strength faster,” DeFeo adds. “In Addie’s case, even after her injury was healed and she was cleared to compete again, she was still experiencing some pain in her knee. I determined that her pain stemmed from a weakened muscle, and by using the AlterG, she’s been able to regain her strength with the goal of resuming her vault run pain-free. I’m confident she will do very well in her 2023 season.”

Reducing weight lessens stress on the joints, which is ideal for patients recovering from a knee injury or surgery, or for those who can’t otherwise run or walk. Athletes rehabilitate faster and can increase their training capacity without further injury. Patients with neurological disorders use AlterG to safely improve their stride, also known as their gait, along with their balance. As they walk, the machine analyzes their gait, allowing physical therapists like DeFeo to adjust the machine as needed. “It provides patients who have difficulty balancing a safe way to work on gait and static standing.” The anti-gravity technology is also ideal for patients struggling with obesity. One of DeFeo’s most inspiring patients, however, is a young woman with an above knee amputation. “She uses the AlterG to practice with her running prosthesis,” DeFeo says.

In the past, the only way to reduce weight and gravity on the joints was through hydrotherapy or using a harness for support. These methods were less safe and far less precise than the AlterG. By combining the weightlessness of swimming with the personalization of air pressure, the AlterG supports a safe journey back to optimal health.

AlterG therapy is available at the Southeast Georgia Health System Brunswick Campus. For information on this and other rehabilitation services, call 912-466-5330.



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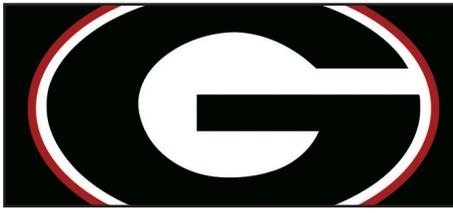
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CHECKING ALL THE BOXES

Kirby Smart Building Something Special By Kipp Branch



Kirby Smart, arguably, is the most popular man in the state of Georgia currently.

The Georgia Bulldogs just won the 2022 National Championship to back up the one they won in 2021.

In seven full seasons in Athens, Smart has led his Dawgs to an 81-15 overall record with two SEC titles to go along with the national titles.

the NFL in 2022, which included 5 first rounders on the defensive side of the ball. Early projections for 2023 predict that UGA could have as many as 10 players drafted.

If Jalen Carter is the first player selected by the Chicago Bears, then UGA could have players in back-to-back drafts selected as the number one overall pick. Travon Walker was first overall by Jacksonville in 2022.

Kirby Smart develops his football players and gets them ready for the next level or ready for life.

It starts with practice. Nobody works harder than the Georgia Bulldogs under Kirby Smart. His teams are prepared physically and mentally for any opponent they face. The foundation

“Gunner Stockton said, ‘Coach, take my shirt off. I’ll take the hits.’ ”

That is called total 100% buy-in folks. The is what Kirby demands and his roster year in and year old responds to it.

Kirby is already creating a narrative for the 2023 season: “The disease that creeps into your program is called entitlement. I’ve seen it firsthand,” Smart said. “If you can stomp it out with leadership, then you can stay hungry. And we have a saying around our place: We eat off the floor. And if you’re willing to eat off the floor, you can be special.”

Talking about leading by example just 48 hours after returning from the west coast title Kirby and staff were dropping in via helicopter on high schools all over the state of Georgia, and then heading out



Many UGA fans are saying the 2023 team could be better than the current National Champions. I’m thinking how do you get better than 15-0 and a 65-7 rout in the title game?

It is called recruiting. Kirby Smart and Nick Saban are the best recruiters in college football. Year after year of top three recruiting classes allows a program to stockpile talent.

To Smart’s credit he recruits athletes that respond to hard coaching. Players get coached up hard at UGA. The results are stockpiling also.

Fifteen players were drafted by

of that is demanding work.

When you have four- and five-star talent that is willing to work and be pushed constantly you see the results start mounting. Look at the practice leading up to the TCU game.

Gunner Stockton took off the non-contact jersey at QB and replicated Max Duggan for TCU and took live hits from the best defense in the country to get them ready for TCU.

Kirby said this about his QB room after the title game:

“We got one that took a black (non-contact) jersey off and took hits all week so he could be Max (Duggan).

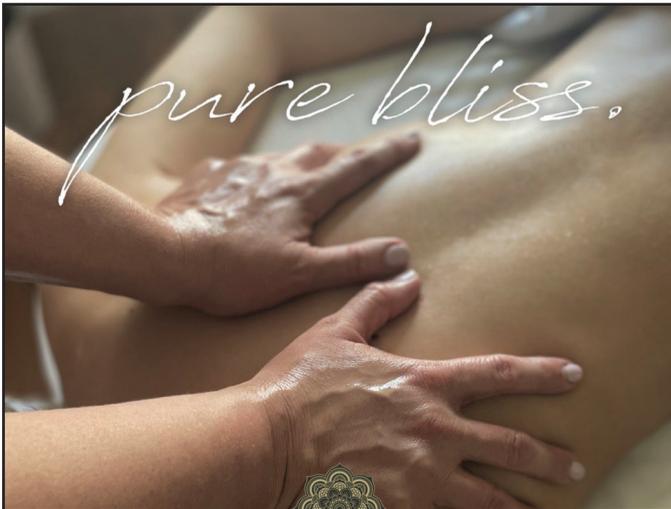
all over the country recruiting national recruits.

Kirby has turned UGA into a national brand now, and UGA has become a pipeline to the NFL. These are glorious times UGA fans. Enjoy this run while it lasts.

UGA has 13-14 starters returning for the 2023 season with a recruiting class that was ranked #2 nationally coming in.

Georgia signed seven of the top 20 recruits in the state of Florida. Florida signed none.

Kirby Smart is checking all the boxes in Athens, Georgia.



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GROUNDING IN 2022

A Look Back At The Falcons' Season By Kenneth Harrison, Jr



Going into the 2022 NFL season the expectations were low for the Atlanta Falcons.

They traded Matt Ryan in the offseason to Indianapolis. Ryan had been the starting quarterback in Atlanta since he was drafted in 2008.

Veteran journeyman Marcus Mariota signed a two-year deal and was named the starter in March 2022. They also drafted Desmond Ridder out of Cincinnati in the third round (74th overall) in the 2022 NFL draft.

I thought the Falcons were good enough to win six games before the season started. They went 7 – 10, primarily because Tampa Bay clinched the NFC South and rested several starters in the final game of the season.

Mariota had an outstanding college career. As a junior at Oregon in 2014 he won the Heisman Trophy, Maxwell Award, Manning Award, Walter Camp Award, Davey O'Brien Award, Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award and was named the AP College Football Player of the year.

He was drafted with the second

overall pick in the 2015 draft by Tennessee, but he never lived up to the hype or expectations. He struggled with injuries and poor play before being benched in favor of Ryan Tannehill in 2019. He was a backup for the Raiders for two seasons before he signed with Atlanta.

He was clearly a short-term option at QB and the Falcons started the season 0 – 2 with losses to New Orleans and the Rams. They won their next two games against Seattle and Cleveland to get to .500. They won two of their next four games, which were against San Francisco and Carolina.

Mariota was serviceable in the thirteen games he started, with a 5 – 8 record. He passed for 2,219 yards, 15 touchdowns, 9 interceptions and completed 61.3% of his passes. He also rushed for 438 yards and 4 scores.

He did play timid and make questionable plays. In the Week 2, 31-27 loss to the LA Rams Atlanta had the ball and was driving in the final six seconds. They were at the 50-yard line and had to throw a Hail Mary. He scrambled around running out the last 6 seconds, got sacked and fumbled.

Ridder started the final four games, going 2 – 2. He did not throw his first touchdown pass until Week 18 against Tampa. In those four games he

threw for 708 yards, 2 TD's, 0 picks and completed 63.5% of his passes. I'm not sure if he has done enough to not make Atlanta consider drafting a quarterback in the upcoming draft.

The future looks bright because they have some talented skill position players. Rookie Drake London (USC) was drafted 8th in the 2022 draft. He had 72 receptions, 4 touchdowns and 3 fumbles.

Fellow rookie running back Tyler Allgier (BYU) was a fifth-round pick and he played well down the stretch. He only started seven games, but he rushed for 1,035 yards, 3 scores and averaged 4.9 yards per carry.

Starting running back/kick returner Cordarrelle Patterson missed five games this season due to injury.

Atlanta ranked 27th in total defense, giving up 362.1 yards per game and 22.7 points per game. They are currently looking to hire a new defensive coordinator.

"It will be refreshing to go in there as we get to more formal interviews and hear other people's perspectives and learn a lot about people," coach Arthur Smith said. "We'll hire the best candidate, but the way we built it won't change."

The Falcons will pick eight in 2023 so they have an opportunity to draft a superstar.



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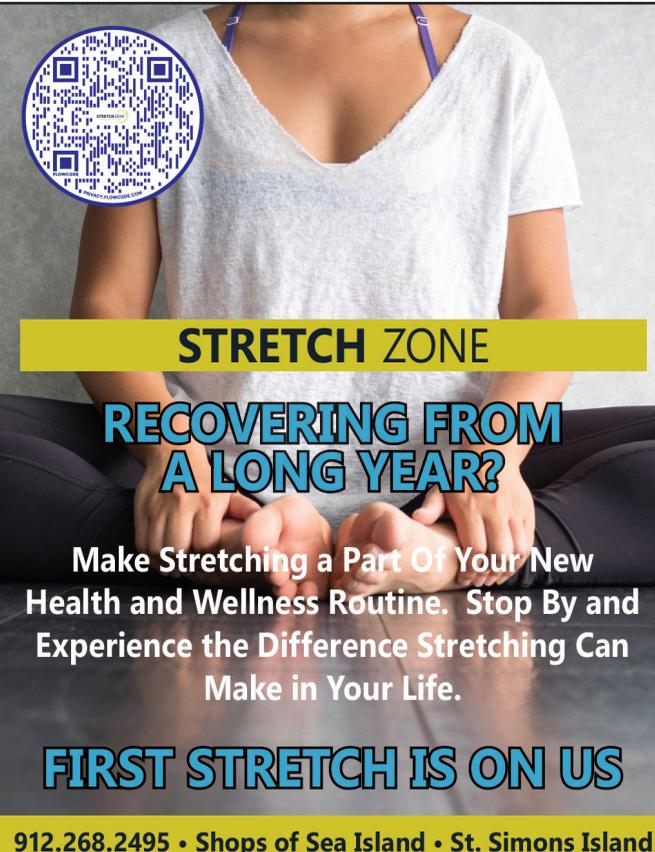
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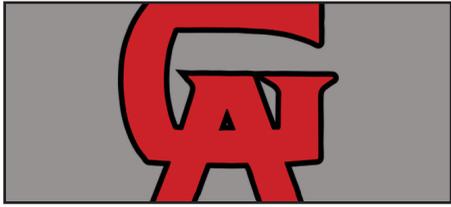
GEORGE ROSE

1942-2023



FAREWELL, GEORGE

Remembering George Rose By Joe Delaney



It's been an incredible time of ups and downs recently.

This world has lost some fine people; Vince Dooley, Charley Trippi, Mike Leach, Devin Willock, and Chandler LeCroy all in just the last 3 months. Just a crazy time.

But to me, this one hurt worse than anything. We recently lost the great George Rose.

Not only was he one of the top athletes to come out of South Georgia EVER, but he was one of the nicest and most genuine people you would ever want to meet.

Throughout our latter time together whenever we saw each other it was....." Hey Coach!!!!!" "Hey Joe!! How's Kim doing?" The guy was just solid gold.

When I learned of his passing it brought tears to my eyes. He was my coach but through everything he was my friend.

If you know anything about Glynn Academy Red Terror football, then you know who George Rose was. I'm not going to list everything here that he accomplished as a player at

Glynn, Auburn and the NFL. It would take up the whole column and more.

Just a few superlatives were, he was a team captain at Glynn, and Auburn. He was the 34th overall pick in the NFL draft and played for Minnesota, New Orleans and San Francisco. He gave up ONE pass completion in his senior year at Auburn as a defensive back, ONE! He was that damn good and just purely fast as hell.

After the pros he came back to Glynn County and coached the Red Terrors during my senior year. I played QB that year for the first time and the truth be told I was pretty good and terrible. George got handed a mediocre bunch of Jimmys and Joes with a few good players sprinkled in that year.

But we worked hard and had a lot of fun. I remember one day at the end of practice we were doing extra passing drills and were all needling coach about playing DB and got him to go over and cover a couple of guys.

We were all laughing and having a good time and I went over to the receivers' line and got lined up with George and he started laughing. I said come on Coach I'm gonna burn you! Well, I looked over at Coach Hudson, who was throwing and nodded my head. Coach Hudson goes "HUT ONE" and I take off..... huh wait a second..... I take one step and all of a sudden, I'm looking at the sky on my back. I don't think they called it bump

and run back then but I guess I'd call it bump and dump because I didn't run anywhere!

Next thing I know George is looking down at me laughing, Coach Hudson is about to fall out laughing and next thing you know I'm laughing with everyone else.

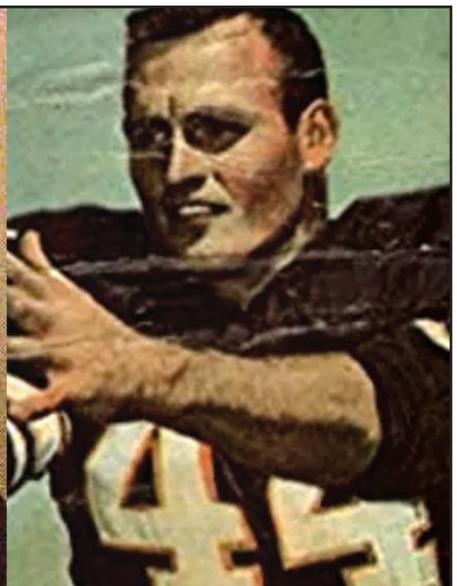
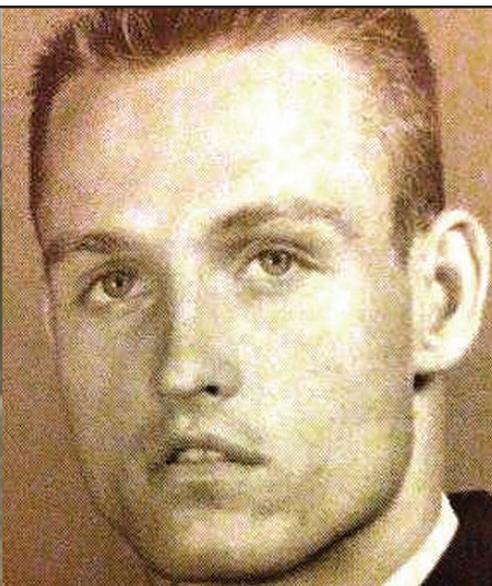
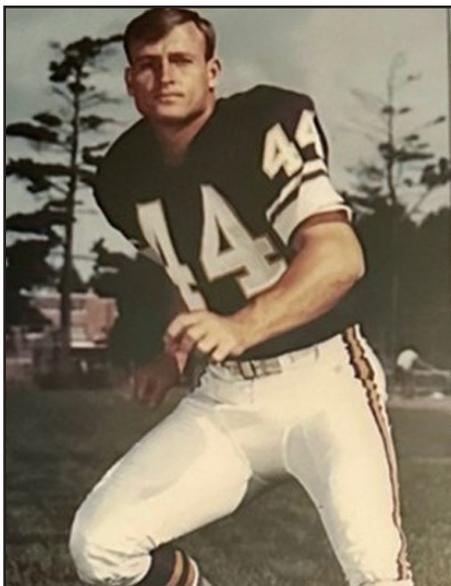
I'd love to say we won all the close games and had a great year, but we didn't. But what we did do was get better. Our last game of the year was against Brunswick High and they were the sub region champs and everyone from Murray Poole to my 12-year-old little brother said they were going to beat the snot out of us. And probably badly.

Well, between George, Marvin Hurst, Herman Hudson and the other coaches, they got us ready.

We beat the Pirates 26-21 at old Lanier Field in front of a standing room only crowd, coming from behind in the fourth quarter. We were the city champs.

After the game I went over to George and hugged him and told him thanks for everything he had done for us that year. He looked me straight in the eyes, smiled and said "Joe you played your best game tonight." I'll never forget that..... It brought tears to my eyes then.....and it brings tears to my eyes now.

God bless you coach, War Damn Eagle! Rest easy.





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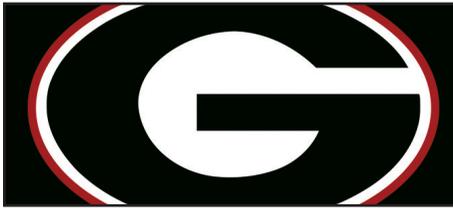
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SOMETIMES

How It All Came Together For Georgia By Joe Delaney



SOMETIMES it just all comes together..... For the 2022 Georgia Bulldogs that was the case.

They started the 2022 season ranked third in most polls. While the Dawgs consistently played winning football throughout the year, they set the stage for a great season beginning on September 3 with a 49-3 pasting of the Oregon Ducks at the Benz in Atlanta.

There's an old saying "Ducks on the Pond". Well, the Georgia offense and defense just sat on the bank and picked

others was a big L..... Only once in the season did the train even slow down. That was in Missouri and all it taught those Dawgs was to keep going and going FAST.

By the end of the regular season the entire country knew who was number ONE and the Dawgs did too.

It showed again in the SEC championship game when Georgia rolled LSU to the tune of 50-30. BUT..... that great Georgia defense gave up 500 yards passing in the game.

Forget that most of those yards were gotten after the game had been decided. Could the train get derailed in the playoffs?

Well, the one team that could match up talent wise with the Bulldogs got to take their shot on December 31st in the Peach Bowl at the Benz.

Ohio State had talent and a great future NFL quarterback in C. J.

field goal attempt later the Dawgs were headed to Cali and another shot at the Natty.

Everyone knows what happened next. The Dawgs ran all over TCU like they were a Frog on the train track. It was ugly, fast and ruthless. The largest blowout in the CFP ever, 65-7 and it wasn't that close. The starters were eating chicken wings on the sideline in the fourth quarter. So back to Athens with another Natty in hand. Time for curtain calls and happy endings.....

BUT SOMETIMES..... This life doesn't go the way we feel it should. At 2:45 am on Sunday January 15th, mere hours after thousands of Dawgs rejoiced in the streets of Athens with the team, coaches, and staff, 2 players and 2 support staff were involved in a terrible accident in Athens.

It claimed the life of Chandler



em off one by one. The country then knew that the Dawgs weren't back..... they had never left.

With all the talent that had gone off to the NFL, the Dawgs had simply reloaded and Dan Lanning and the Ducks got in the way and got blasted.

From there, it was like Amtrack blowing through Nahunta..... Saturdays throughout the fall the Dawgs would show up. The warning lights would go off, the gates would go down and that Red and Black bullet train would blow through at 60 mph running over anything in its path.

Then, whoosh they were gone. The gates went back up the warning lights went off and all that was left for South Carolina, Auburn, Florida, Tennessee, Tech and the

Stroud. Combine that with great overall team speed and a chip on their shoulder from getting their butts handed to them by hated rival Michigan and the Buckeyes came in and played flawlessly.

They almost derailed the Athens Express. After Stetson Bennett led the Dawgs back out of a 14-point hole in the fourth quarter, the Dawgs held a slim one-point lead 42-41 scoring with under a minute to play.

From there, the Buckeyes and Mr. Stroud went to work. With a combination of passing and Stroud's scrambling, the Nuts drove down the field and lined up for a game winning field goal with seconds left. Looked like the train was about to run outta track.

BUT SOMETIMES things just go your way and a duck hooked 50-yard

LeCroy a recruiting staffer and OL Devin Willock. It left Victoria Bowles in serious condition and our own Warren McClendon with less than serious injuries.

The joy throughout the Bulldog Nation quickly turned to sorrow with everyone associated with the program stunned by the turn of events. It was just horrible.

Dawgs everywhere will relish and savor this run with Kirby and the Dawgs but there will always be an asterisk placed on the championship parade of 2023.

Two wonderful young people taken too soon. A stark reminder of what is really important to us all.

SOMETIMES..... It just doesn't seem fair. Rest in Peace Devin and Chandler.

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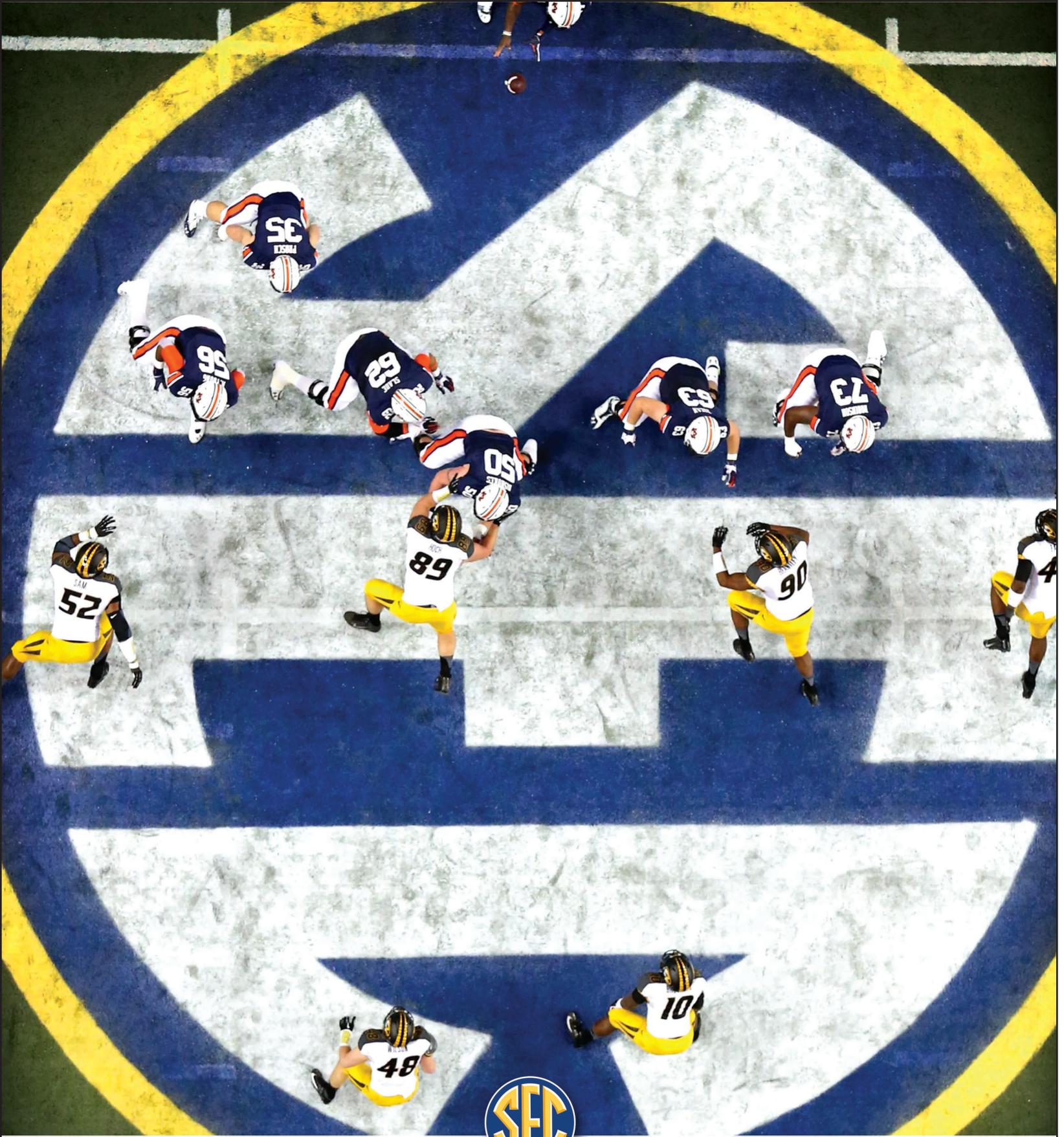
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IT JUST MEANS MORE

Something Special About The SEC By Steve Norris



If there's one thing that truly confuses fans of college football teams from other conferences, it's why many fans of SEC teams pull for other SEC teams against non-conference rivals.

The chant of "SEC!! SEC!!" can be heard in stadiums all over the country almost every week and especially during the bowl weeks.

In fact, the SEC Network uses that chant to promote itself pretty regularly. But why? Why do fans of other conferences not feel that way about their conference members?

For me, when I'm watching another SEC team play a team outside the conference, it comes down to this...when in doubt, pull for the SEC neighborhood, and it started when I was little.

I grew up in a Georgia household. Both of my parents graduated from the University of Georgia in 1969 and married right after graduation. I came along about a year later.

My mother is definitely a Bulldog fan but it was my dad who truly burned red and black in my formative years.

My dad hated Florida, Tennessee, and Auburn as much as anybody. But one thing he truly hated more was what he referred to as "The Midwest media bias

against the SEC."

In the 60's and 70's, sports journalism was dominated by the writers from the Midwest. When it came to the polls, the Heisman, and naming the national champion, teams like Notre Dame, Penn State, Ohio State, and the Big Ten, in general, always seemed to receive the benefit of the doubt.

It all began to change in 1984, when the University of Georgia, along with the University of Oklahoma, sued the NCAA in the Supreme Court over TV rights and won.

The victory meant that conferences and schools could immediately begin negotiating their own television deals.

Once the SEC was able to get their product in front of many millions of more viewers every year, the building of the SEC dynasty began.

Fast forward to present day. In the last fifteen years, the SEC has had a team in the national championship game every year but one. Five different SEC teams have won the national championship game.

The SEC arguably has the best teams, the best coaches, the best recruiting, the best stadiums, the best tailgating, and most of all, the best and most rabid fans, which is why ESPN begged the SEC to take their money.

All of this adds up to bring me to my point: The SEC is a pretty nice neighborhood to live in. It's so nice that blue blood programs Oklahoma and Texas told the Big 12 to pound sand last year and abruptly announced that they were

leaving as soon as possible.

The reason, of course, is money (it usually is). The SEC TV rights net each school some serious bank every year and it continues to go up.

In 2021, each SEC school got approximately a \$55 million payout. In 2024, it's expected to be around \$70 million.

Currently, the Big 12 is expected to pay out around \$28 million per school. And that, Ladies and Gentlemen, is why Oklahoma and Texas can't wait to be a part of the neighborhood.

Now, just because you live in a nice neighborhood, it doesn't mean you have to like all of your neighbors. But it's still important for your neighbors to keep their part of the neighborhood looking good.

It's important to pull for that. This is why I always say, "When in doubt, pull for the SEC." For some of you SEC fans, there is never any doubt. You pull for your team and everybody else can burn.

I have a Georgia buddy that always says, "I wouldn't pull for Florida if I was on the team plane and both engines went out." I certainly understand that and as a Georgia fan I could never pull for Florida, either.

However, I always want the neighborhood to look good and the best way to do that is with money. You only get a lot of money from the likes of ESPN if the product is really good from top to bottom. So, when in doubt, pull for your neighbor. All the other neighborhoods can burn.





BACK TO BACK
NATIONAL
21 CHAMPIONS 22



THE **BARN** SIGN

A Georgia Tradition By Steve Norris



Ross Smith had seen enough... and decided to let the world know about it.

It was Saturday, October 28th, 2000. Smith's beloved Georgia Bulldogs had just suffered another frustrating loss to Steve Spurrier and the Florida Gators. It was the Dawgs' 10th loss to the Gators in 11 games dating back to 1990, and Dawg fans were getting tired of it.

"We were angry that (Head Coach) Jim Donnan had decided to play Quincy Carter at quarterback over Cory Phillips."

The week before, Carter was out due to injury, so Cory Phillips stepped in and led the Dawgs to a road victory over the Kentucky Wildcats, throwing for 400 yards and four touchdown passes.

"We thought for sure that Phillips had earned the chance to play against Florida," said Smith. "Instead, Donnan went with Carter, who went out and threw three interceptions and looked horrible in yet another loss (to Florida)."

And that's how The Barn Sign was born.

That night, Smith bought some red, white, and black paint and brought the dilapidated former corner

store to life with its first message to Dawg fans everywhere: "TO HELL WITH CARTER...PHILLIPS FOR PRESIDENT"

"It was an election year, so going with "President" made sense to me," said Smith.

The "barn" doesn't actually belong to Smith. It is owned by his first cousins, James and Jonathan Hitchcock, who live on and operate the farm across the street. It was originally a corner store from the mid-50's to the late 70's, according to Smith.

"There was a family that ran it and lived in a small room on the side of the building," said Smith. "I'm not sure how they did it all those years. The room they lived in wasn't as big as my truck and there's never been any running water."

After the first message in 2000, Smith began changing the sign a few times a year.

"I would change it at the end of the season, on National Signing Day (which was in February then), two weeks before the season to get Dawg fans pumped up, and then after the Florida game.

If we lost the Florida game, I would put up a message ribbing Gator fans, and if we'd won, I'd just put up the score. Unfortunately, I didn't get to put the score up very much the first ten years or so," Smith said laughingly.

Around 2010, the building began to rot in some places due to water leaks when it rained. Smith came home from a trip one day and noticed the building

was leaning badly. "I just figured that was it. I was done painting The Barn Sign," said Smith.

What he didn't realize was how popular the sign had truly become. "People were sending me messages on Facebook asking me when I was going to fix the sign and paint it again," said Smith. "I was fresh out of college and didn't have a lot of money. I told the fans that if they wanted the sign back up, I needed them to donate money to help me pay for it.

I figured I needed around \$1500 to make repairs, so I set up a PayPal account and raised \$1700 in ten days. In fact, I had to turn the account off because money was coming in so fast." Smith said.

Once the sign was repaired, its popularity began to grow exponentially. Smith has been interviewed by ESPN along with other large newspapers.

The Barn Sign Facebook page is approaching 55,000 "likes" while Smith's daily page posts attract a lot of traffic.

Even while I was interviewing Smith in front of the sign, located on Highway 15 between Tennille and Wrightsville, around 15-20 people parked on the highway next to the sign to get a glimpse and take pictures in front of the iconic building. Of course, the current sign has a lot to do with that. Today it reads:

21-22 BACK-TO-BACK NATIONAL CHAMPIONS.

For Smith and all Georgia fans, it's truly the best message ever and a "sign" that like Georgia football, The Barn Sign has a lot of great years ahead of it.



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