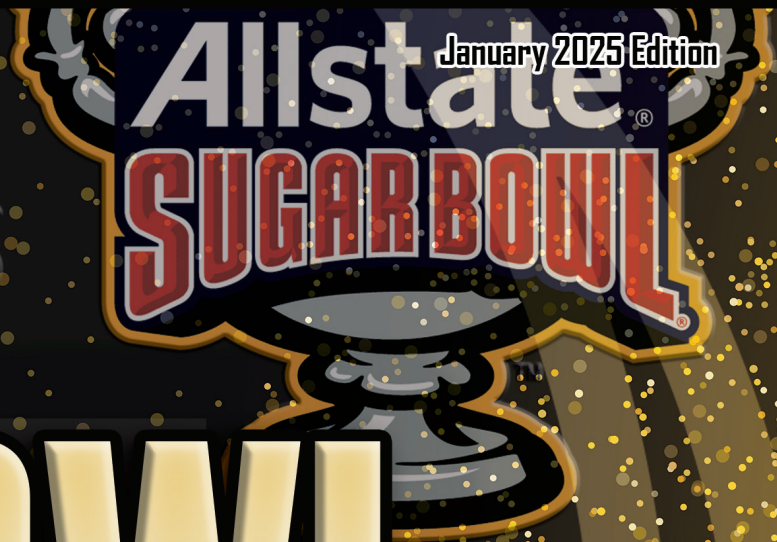


# THE SOUTHERN SPORTS EDITION

January 2025 Edition



# BOWL SEASON



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GET TO KNOW THE WRITERS



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Kenneth Harison Jr is a long time Atlanta native and graduated from Kennesaw State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Communications. Kenneth has a pulse on not only the Atlanta sports scene but the entire southern sports scene as well.



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Colin Lacy is the voice of the Southeast Bulloch Yellow Jackets. Colin also works with Westwood One Sports and Bowl Season radio for National College Football and NFL broadcasts across the country. Colin also calls Georgia Tech baseball for the Georgia Tech Sports Network and also works with the ACC Network.



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Charlie Moon has been the voice for seven highschool football and baseball state championships in South Carolina and Georgia. Charlie has worked with Fox Sports South, SCETV, NFHS and Charlton Sports Network. Charlie is currently the voice of the Richmond Hill Wildcats.



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Jason Bishop graduated from Kennesaw State University and formerly worked at CNN Sports. Jason hosts "The Jason Bishop Show", south Georgia's most listened to sports talk show.

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 all across Southeast Georgia and growing everyday.

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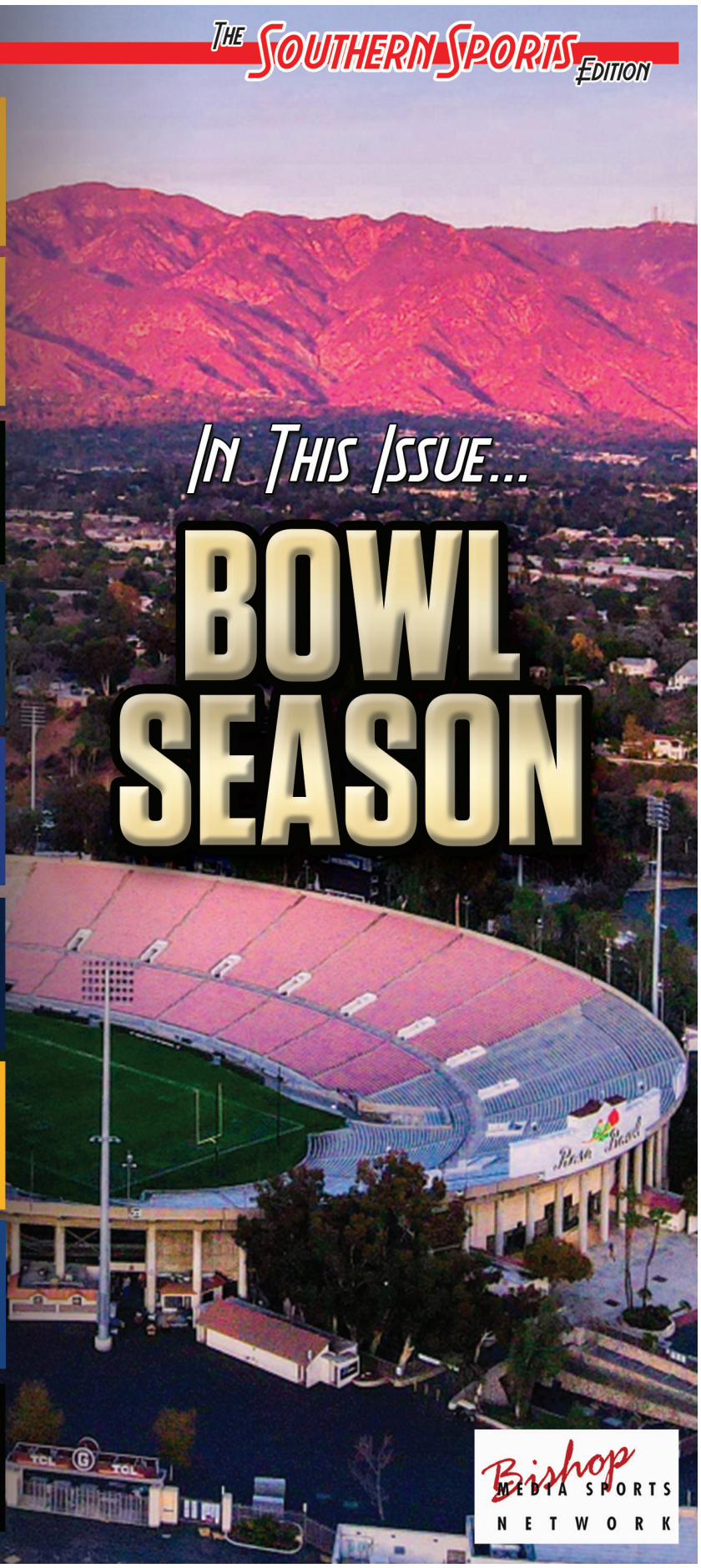
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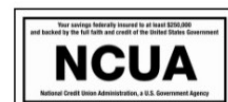


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# BOWL SEASON

Postseason History By Michael Spiers





It's almost Christmas, and that means it's time to go bowling—college football style!

For decades, bowl games have been the heart of the postseason for NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) teams.

Before the days of playoffs, national champions were decided by polls from sportswriters and coaches.

To spice things up, cities started hosting regional festivals featuring bowl games. Over time, systems like the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) and the current College Football Playoff (CFP) came along to settle things on the field.

Still, the traditional bowl games remain a big deal.

The term "bowl" comes from the Rose Bowl Stadium, inspired by the Yale Bowl.

Over time, it's become shorthand for major football games. Back in the day, bowl games only featured the very best teams, with strict rules about who could play.

Fast forward to now, and we've gone from just 10 bowl games in 1971 to a whopping 43 in 2023. Eligibility has loosened too, with teams sitting at .500—or even below—sometimes getting the call to play.

The first official college bowl game was way back in 1902, a matchup between Michigan and Stanford organized by the Tournament of Roses.

After a brief pause, it became an annual event in 1916 and eventually found a permanent home at the Rose Bowl Stadium in 1923.

Other cities took note and started their own bowl traditions, drawing tourists to warmer climates. What started as New Year's Day

exclusives has since spread to indoor stadiums and colder regions.

The "Big Four" bowls—Rose, Orange, Sugar, and Cotton—were once the ultimate destinations in college football, all tied to specific conferences.

For example, the Rose Bowl paired champions from the Pac-10 and Big Ten. But these tie-ins sometimes kept the top-ranked teams from squaring off, leaving voters to decide the champion. That messy process earned the name "Mythical National Championship." (Looking at you, UCF!)

In the 1990s, things started to change with systems like the Bowl Coalition and Bowl Alliance.

The BCS followed, introducing a rotating championship game among the major bowls.

Today's CFP has taken it further, with a twelve-team playoff format—expanding from just four playoff teams the previous few seasons.

Bowl games have grown into cultural and commercial giants. Many have corporate sponsors, blending old-school names with flashy branding. (Remember when the Citrus Bowl became the Capital One Bowl for a bit?)

The postseason now stretches from mid-December to early January, with games filling nearly every day of the calendar.

Some things never change, though. The Rose Bowl is still the biggest stage, holding the record for the largest bowl game crowd at over

106,000 fans in 1973.

And while bowl games are mostly a U.S. tradition, they've made their way north. Canadian college football has its own bowls leading to the Vanier Cup, and the CFL features the Banjo Bowl, an annual rivalry matchup.

Bowl games have come a long way, growing from a few exclusive contests into a sprawling postseason showcase.

Even though New Year's Day isn't as packed as it used to be, the excitement of bowl season is as strong as ever.

This year marks the debut of the 12-team playoff format, designed to give the top programs a real shot at the national title.

The playoffs kick off on December 20th and 21st, though the first-round games aren't technically bowl games.

Starting with the quarterfinals, the familiar bowl names return. The Fiesta Bowl leads off on December 31st, followed by the Peach Bowl, Rose Bowl, and Sugar Bowl on January 1st.

The semifinals take place with the Orange Bowl on January 9th and the Cotton Bowl on January 10th.

The grand finale? The National Championship game in Atlanta on January 20th.

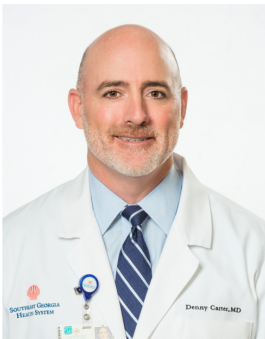
It's the most wonderful time of the year, and bowl season is here to make it even better!







## Growth Plate Injuries in Young Athletes: Essential Information for Parents and Coaches



### Denny A. Carter, MD

A board-certified orthopaedic surgeon, Dr. Carter specializes in Total Joint Replacements and serves as the team physician for the Frederica Academy Knights.

Summit Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery has offices in Brunswick, St. Simons Island and St. Marys.

To make an appointment with Dr. Carter, call 912-466-7340.



Young athletes possess a remarkable amount of energy and potential. However, this eagerness can lead to pushing themselves harder during practices, games, or competitions, increasing the risk of injuries. According to Denny Carter, MD, a board-certified orthopaedic surgeon, the ligaments, tendons, and muscles of young athletes are still developing, making them particularly susceptible to injuries, especially growth plate injuries.

Growth plates are areas of cartilage located at the ends of long bones, such as those in the thigh, forearm, and fingers. Dr. Carter emphasizes that as children and adolescents grow, their growth plates take longer to harden, which is why injuries to these areas must be taken extremely seriously. If not properly diagnosed and treated, growth plate fractures can lead to permanent impairment or deformity.

If there's a suspicion of injury, Dr. Carter strongly recommends consulting an orthopaedic specialist trained in diagnosing and treating musculoskeletal issues as soon as possible. Young athletes are at an increased risk of sustaining growth plate injuries based on several factors, including:

- The specific bone that is affected
- The pattern of the fracture
- The degree of misalignment
- Gender: boys are at a higher risk than girls
- The sport or activity being performed, with higher risks observed in football, basketball, gymnastics, biking, and skateboarding
- Age: growth plate fractures are more common in adolescents aged 10 to 16

Dr. Carter categorizes growth plate injuries into five severity levels, which an orthopaedist can help identify. It's critical for coaches and parents to recognize the symptoms associated with these injuries, which include:

- Persistent pain
- Decreased range of motion
- Limping
- Warmth, tenderness, or swelling in the affected area

"These symptoms warrant a physical examination, and may require X-rays, MRI, or CT scans for a definitive diagnosis," notes Dr. Carter. Timely intervention is crucial to prevent improper healing of the bone.

It's important to consult a specialist who can differentiate between normal and abnormal growth plate behavior. Dr. Carter points out that "children's bones break differently than adults. What appears abnormal in an adult might be typical for a child."

Depending on the injury's severity, treatment may include wearing a cast and limiting activity to protect the bones and ensure proper alignment during healing. Some growth plate fractures may lead to complications, such as bone fragments, misalignment, or instability, potentially necessitating surgical intervention. However, most cases heal without surgery. Dr. Carter adds, "The youthful energy that makes kids more prone to growth plate injuries also aids in their recovery. Rather than discouraging their enthusiasm, parents and coaches should be vigilant for unusual symptoms and respond swiftly."



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# PLAYOFF PREDICTIONS

Who Will Win It All? By Charlie Moon





This season has been the most incredible and exciting season of my lifetime and I pride myself on NOT being Mr. "Recency Bias."

Here's how I see the inaugural College Football Playoff running its course.

### Opening Round 12/20-12/21 (Home Sites)

**Notre Dame (-8.5) v. Indiana:** As much as people have hated on the Irish in the past, getting special exclusions and entrance into the BCS, the pundits have been right.

They've had a long history of getting smashed in these games. But this time will be different. Honestly, I think Notre Dame is one of the top 4 squads.

And let's be real. If they weren't so stuck on themselves, they'd be ACC Champs and none of this discussion of Indiana, SMU, Bama and South Carolina would be relevant.

The Pick: Notre Dame by 14.

**Penn St (-8.5) v. SMU:** Another blowout. As evidenced by the Vegas spreads, the real experts know the deal.

Sure, they get it wrong sometimes, but here we're just talking about outright winners.

Penn St showed me a lot in their loss to Oregon. They only played two top 25 teams, a fading Illinois and a home loss to Ohio St.

But I was wrong, thinking they had no business in the playoff.

The Pick: Penn St by 17.

**Ohio St (-7) v. Tennessee:** This should be the only close one of the four 1st round games.

Simple.... Nico Iamaleava has shown much improvement in the last 3 games. Without that, this would be a blowout.

But as long as he keeps trending up, the Buckeyes will have trouble stopping Dylan Sampson on the ground. In the end, Ohio St's home field wins out.

The Pick: Ohio St. by 3.

**Texas (-11.5) v. Clemson:** Look, some friends of mine from my home state won't be happy, but this isn't guys sitting around a campfire.

I have to give my honest opinion. And there's a reason why the Tigers are double-digit dog. They deserve all the respect in the world for what they've done in the past. But I believe the Horns might hook 'em hard.

The Pick: Texas by 14.

### 2nd Round Bowl Games (12/31 - 1/1): Peach Bowl Arizona St v. Texas

As much as I love the Sun Devil turn-around from a 2023 3-win season, this will come down to Texas #1 rush defense versus Cam Scattebo.

The Pick: Texas by 3

**Rose Bowl Oregon v. Ohio St:** In this rematch, Oregon won't allow Ohio St to beat them on the ground like the Buckeyes did for over 200 yards in October.

The Pick: Oregon by 7.

**Fiesta Bowl: Boise St v. Penn St:** This won't be quite the Vegas spread mismatch of the 2007 Fiesta Bowl when Boise shocked Oklahoma and the college football world with the hook-n-ladder, a Statue of Liberty and Ian Johnson getting engaged.

But....Penn St will be about a

4-point favorite.

The Pick: Penn St. by 3.

**Sugar Bowl UGA v. Notre Dame:** I think we saw why Kirby has been hesitant to give Gunner Stockton a shot, as much as Beck has struggled this year. Although he played with guts and tenacity of a Dawg, he's limited.

That 2nd half in the SEC Title game, there were only 3 pass plays more than 10 yards, and one was nearly a game-costing Pick-6. That said, Etienne is healthy and Stockton still brings mobility back there.

The Pick: UGA by 6.

**Semi-finals:** Oregon beats Texas. UGA beats Penn St.

### Championship game UGA v. Oregon:

Look, I know everyone will call me a homer, but it is what it is.

There is no team in America that has shown as much resiliency as the Dawgs. They are NOT the most dominant Dawgs squad ever, but the portal has changed the college game.

It's so hard to make a real prediction with UGA's QB situation, but I just can't get past this team's resiliency.

For a while, I just thought the Dawgs were getting exposed every week. But by season's end, they proved that resiliency and being true Dawgs on the field gets it done.

The Pick: UGA by 3.

Larry Munson gets to smoke another Heavenly cigar.





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**T**he Georgia Bulldogs are heading into the College Football Playoff with a lot of momentum after taking down Texas in the SEC Championship.

What a game that was, a 22-19 overtime thriller that saw quarterback Carson Beck leave the contest with an injured elbow, only to return on the final, game-winning play.

The Dawgs have now landed the No. 2 seed in the 12-team CFP bracket, right behind No. 1 Oregon.

While being the top seed is usually the goal, this time, being No. 2 might actually work out better for the mean machine in red and black.

The Bulldogs have a first-round bye and will kick off their playoff run in the quarterfinals at the Allstate Sugar Bowl.

Their first opponent will be the winner of a matchup between No. 7 Notre Dame and No. 10 Indiana.

Neither team has proven much this season. Indiana only faced one tough opponent, Ohio State, and lost 38-15.

Notre Dame's best win was a road victory over Texas A&M back in Week 1, but they also suffered an embarrassing loss to Northern Illinois at home.

For Georgia fans, even with the uncertainty surrounding Carson Beck, this setup is about as good as it gets.

If Georgia makes it past the quarterfinals, they'll face either No. 3 Boise State, No. 6 Penn State, or No. 11 SMU in the semifinals.

While these teams have had strong seasons, none of them should really scare the Bulldogs.

Georgia's depth, experience, and talent give them the upper hand in

these matchups, setting them up well for a spot in the title game.

The real challenge for Georgia is waiting on the other side of the bracket. That's where teams like Oregon, Texas, Ohio State, Tennessee, Arizona State, and Clemson are battling it out.

Oregon is the toughest opponent in the field, and Georgia would be underdogs against them.

Matchups with Texas or Ohio State would be close, but the Bulldogs are favored against Tennessee, Arizona State, and Clemson.

Looking at the odds, Georgia has a 75.5% chance to beat Clemson, 66.9% against Arizona State, and 63.6% against Tennessee.

Games against Texas and Ohio State are more of a coin flip, with Georgia's chances sitting at 50.4% and 49.6%, respectively.

Oregon is the toughest draw, with Georgia having just a 45.7% chance to win.

The good news? Georgia won't have to face those tougher teams until the championship game, giving them a smoother path than most.

The wildcard in any of these playoff scenarios is the health of Carson Beck. The quarterback is currently dealing with an injury to the ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) in his right elbow, which is his throwing arm. Georgia released a statement on Monday confirming the injury and shared that

Beck and his family are exploring treatment options. At this time, there's no clear timeline for his return.

If Beck is unable to play, Georgia is likely to rely on sophomore Gunner Stockton.

Stockton, a former four-star prospect out of Rabun County High School, stepped in during the SEC Championship game, completing 12 of 16 passes for 71 yards.

While he threw an interception that contributed to Texas tying the game, Stockton also delivered key moments, particularly with his mobility. In overtime, his 8-yard run helped set up Georgia's game-winning touchdown.

After the win over Texas, teammates expressed confidence in Stockton's ability to manage the offense. Georgia appears ready to adapt as they move forward in the postseason.

While no playoff game is ever a guaranteed win, Georgia's bracket setup gives them a solid shot at making it back to the National Championship.

With Kirby Smart at the helm and a favorable draw, the Bulldogs have every reason to feel good about their chances to bring another title home to Athens. It's going to be an exciting ride, but Georgia fans have plenty to be confident about as the playoff kicks off!

The Bulldogs will play next in the Allstate Sugar Bowl on January 1st in New Orleans. Kickoff is scheduled for 8:45pm EST.





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# BIRMINGHAM BOWL

Georgia Tech vs. Vanderbilt Preview By Kenneth Harrison





The 2024 college football regular season is over.

Now we move to bowl season.

Georgia Tech (7-5) will play Vanderbilt (6-6) in the Birmingham Bowl on December 27th.

Tech head coach Brent Key is from Birmingham and played high school football 20 minutes from Protective Stadium, the site of the bowl game.

“Birmingham’s had a bowl game for as long as I can remember. Probably one of the first football games I ever went to was, ironically enough, the 1985 All-American Bowl (a 17-14 Tech win over Michigan State),” Key said. “Goodness gracious, never would have thought full circle coming back.”

“Birmingham’s a city of grit and toughness. There’s a lot of things about the city of Birmingham that are right in the same parallels as our football team. I know family will be excited; friends will be excited. It’s pretty neat.”

Key went to Tech in 1996 to play football for the Yellow Jackets. He took over the program four games into the 2022 campaign and was named the full-time coach of the Jackets in November of that year.

He’s gone 14-11 in his first two full seasons and he received a five-year contract extension and a raise recently.

“It’s exciting. I think it just shows the leadership here,” Key said of his new deal. “It shows from (Tech) president (Angel) Cabrera to (athletic director) J Batt and then to the coaches, the alignment that takes place here. It also shows the commitment to the future of Georgia Tech athletics.

Couldn’t be more excited. Doesn’t change anything about our day-to-day, but very, very appreciative of those people.”

Georgia Tech beat #10 Florida State and #4 Miami this season. They lost to #6 Georgia 44-42 in an eight-overtime thriller. The Jackets lead 27-13 with 3:39 left in the game before UGA came back and tied the game.

Tech’s top receiver Eric Singleton Jr. entered the transfer portal the first day it opened, December 9th.

The sophomore receiver had 56 receptions for 754 yards and 3 touchdowns. He’s also a member of the Tech track and field team and he’s the fastest player on the football team.

Tech has had three receivers enter the portal in Singleton, Christian Leary and Leo Blackburn, from Westlake High.

Defensive lineman Horace Lockett (also a former Westlake High standout), quarterback Zach Pyron, running back Evan Dickens and offensive linemen Corey Robinson (from Roswell High) and Jordan Brown previously announced their intentions to leave Tech.

The Commodores beat #1 Alabama earlier this season. This is their first bowl game since 2018.

Vandy is led by their transfer QB Diego Pavia. He has 2,133 passing yards, 17 TD’s and 4 interceptions. He is the team’s leading rusher with 716 yards and 4 scores. He only completes 59.2% of his passes.

Yellow Jacket senior quarterback Haynes King played in 10 games this season. He threw for 1,910 yards, 11 scores, 1 pick and completed 72.5% of his passes. He also rushed for 578 yards and 11 touchdowns.

I think Vanderbilt will win this game. Georgia Tech is the better team but I think they lost too many talented players to the transfer portal before the bowl game.



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# GATOR BAIT

Florida's Successful Season By Robert Craft





A year after they failed to achieve bowl eligibility, The Florida Gators (7-5; 4-4 SEC) secured its return to postseason play with a spot in the Gasparilla Bowl on December 20, where it will face Tulane (9-4; 7-1 AAC).

It marks the Gators' second bowl appearance in three years under head coach Billy Napier and their 22nd since the New Millennium (That's the year 2000 for our younger readers).

Florida is 11-10 in postseason games since the turn of the century, excluding SEC championship games.

"We just have access to the players a lot more than we used to in the old days," Napier said of securing a bowl berth. "All spring, all summer you can be on the field. It's a little bit more of a reward for the players. It's another opportunity to create momentum for the program. A lot of our redshirt players that will be able to play in the game which will be big."

The Gators enjoyed their best season of the Napier era in 2024, winning seven total games and four against SEC foes, both program highs under his current leadership.

Florida's success was the byproduct of an impressive run to end the regular season, five wins in their final eight games and each of their last three, including back-to-back wins over then-No. 21 LSU and then-No. 9 Ole Miss.

This was the first time the

Gators had recorded multiple ranked wins in the same season under Napier's watch.

Napier and his players said their bye week in late September was the catalyst for their marked improvement.

"I walked off that field and said, 'That's the best practice I've been associated with in 20 years of college football,'" Napier said. "So, at that point, I'm like, 'We've got to figure this out.'"

He added that the Gators' Oct. 12 loss to Tennessee also provided a motivational boost.

"I think Tennessee was a turning point," Napier said. "I think in that locker room after the game, that was when it was like, okay, we can do this, and I think obviously Kentucky, another open date, what we experienced in Jacksonville. I just think hope is powerful, man. Just proud of these guys, man."

While Florida's 2024 campaign was ultimately successful enough to buy Napier a fourth season at the helm, things looked quite bleak for it at the outset.

The Gators suffered their worst home-opening defeat in program history when they lost 41-17

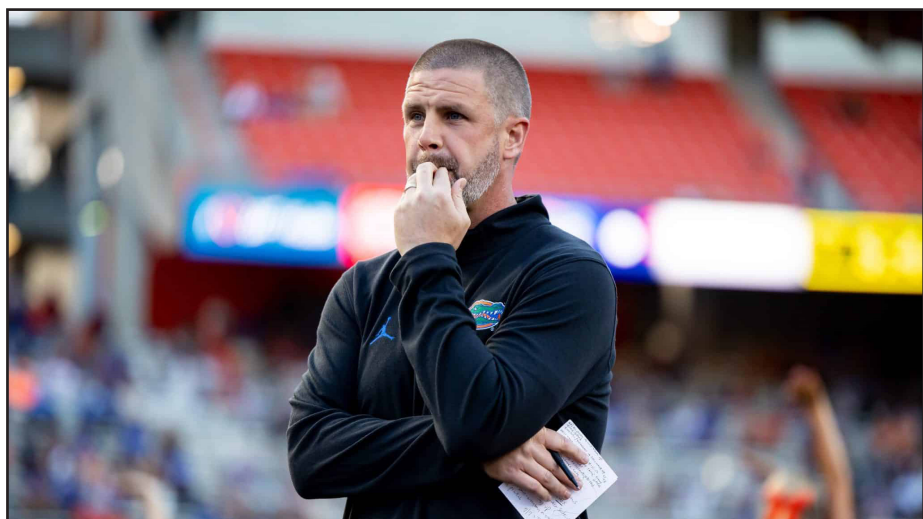
to Miami on Aug. 31 and endured a second blowout loss two weeks later at The Swamp against Texas A&M.

Looking back, Napier said those matchups bettered his team, too.

"Sometimes you've got to go through stuff," he said. "They're different because they went through that. They don't really care what anybody thinks. They care what the people around them think. They care about doing their job and being accountable and being responsible to the people around them. I think what they've been through has forced them to do that, and I can say the same thing."

The Gators could keep their hot streak alive in their bowl game with many of their key contributors likely to participate, including freshman quarterback DJ Lagway, junior center Jake Slaughter, freshman running back Jaden Baugh, junior edge rusher Tyreek Sapp and sophomore defensive back Bryce Thornton.

Florida is looking for its eighth win of its season for the first time since 2020. Did anyone predict this ending 5-6 weeks ago?







# FLYING TO BOWL

Georgia Southern Bowl Preview By Colin Lacy





**W**hile 2024 didn't end in a Sun Belt Conference crown like the Eagles were still fighting for just a few short weeks ago, Georgia Southern finished the 2024 regular season 8-4 and have been invited to the Big Easy for the R&L Carriers New Orleans Bowl in the Caesars Superdome on December 19th to face the C-USA's Sam Houston State Bearkats who will make their first FBS Bowl appearance in their second season at the FBS level. Georgia Southern will appear in their 7th appearance in a postseason bowl game since moving up to the FBS in the 2014 season.

Because of the NCAA rules on transitioning teams, Georgia Southern couldn't participate in a bowl in 2014, but set the standard straight in the first-year bowl eligible with a dominating win over Bowling Green in the 2015 GoDaddy Bowl in Mobile to the tune of 57-27.

The Eagles are 3-3 in the previous bowl matchups and have come up short in the last two meetings (Last year falling 41-21 to Ohio in the Myrtle Beach Bowl and 2022 to Buffalo in the Camellia Bowl 23-21). The last triumph in the post season for the Blue and White came...in the same bowl game they're heading to this season.

The 2020 season was capped off with a convincing 38-3 victory over Louisiana Tech in the R&L Carriers New Orleans Bowl.

Shai Werts was named MVP for his efforts in the Big Easy running for three touchdowns while the Eagle defense amassed four interceptions of the Bulldogs to capture the New Orleans Bowl title under then Head Coach Chad Lunsford.

Since that 2020 NOLA Bowl, the landscape of college football has changed drastically and now the biggest question going into any bowl game outside of the College Football Playoff is... Who is actually playing in the game?

Because of the Transfer Portal window opening a week before Bowl Season officially starts (this year it opened Monday the 9th), most teams are being gutted with players entering the transfer portal and opting out of the game.

Luckily for Georgia Southern, the Eagles have been one of the least affected teams in the country by the portal to this point with only three players entering the portal. Wideout DeAndre Buchannon, defensive back Deontre Morris, along with quarterback Dexter Williams II (who decided to forego the last few games of the season to enter the portal) are the only casualties Georgia Southern has seen decide to elect for free agency.... I mean the portal.

On the flip side, Sam Houston State has been slapped across the face by the portal. Eighteen Bearkats have decided to look for greener pastures in the portal including virtually the entire running back room with the only four running backs with a carry on the season entering their name into the transfer jar including DJ McKinney who was

named C-USA Freshman of the Year.

The Bearkats also have seen eleven players that have played a factor (not all starters) on defense this year have also joined the list. With all of that said, the decision hasn't been made yet of how many of them still play in the Bowl game despite being in the portal. Each team decides how to handle that scenario where some coaches will, and some won't allow someone in the portal to still play for that school. Indications are that at least some (again no idea how many) will suit up against the Blue and White.

In addition to all of the portal departures, Sam Houston State is battling through also losing their head coach, K.C. Keeler who was hired as the next head coach at Temple on December 1st. Keeler had spearheaded Sam Houston in their transition from the FCS to FBS and after eleven years in Huntsville, Keeler hands the reigns off to Interim Head Coach Brad Cornelsen who was the Offensive Coordinator for Keeler the past two years.

So, while stability is the name of the game for Georgia Southern in the meantime, there are a lot of unanswered questions on the scouting report for the Bearkats. We have seen magical moments in the Bowl Season for Georgia Southern many times and can't wait to see what this one turns out to be in the Big Easy for Big Blue!







# PIRATES VOYAGE

Brunswick High Season Recap By Teddy Bishop





The Brunswick High Pirates 2024 football campaign came to an end at the hands of the Coffee County Trojans in the second round of the AAAAA state playoffs, finishing 10-2 for the season.

The Pirates opened the season with a loss to Camden County, but then reeled off 10 consecutive wins before losing to Coffee.

The 10 wins included a region championship (with a perfect 8-0 region record), a City Championship (beating Glynn Academy, 49-7), and a #1 seed in the state playoffs.

Coach Garrett Grady's BHS Pirates scored victories over Wayne County, Effingham County, Evans County, Greenbrier, Glynn, Statesboro, Lakeside, South Effingham County, Bradwell Institute, and Villa Rica (1st round of playoffs).

Accolades and awards were also plentiful for the 2024 Pirates.

This year's squad set a BHS regular season scoring record with 517 points (that's 46 points per game), eclipsing the 459 scored by the 1999 Pirates, which made it to the state championship game before losing to Lowndes.

1999 was also the last time Brunswick High made it past the second round of the state playoffs.

Including Brunswick's two playoff games, Coach Grady's 2024 Pirates scored 517 points—more than 43 per game.

Defensively, BHS gave up 237 points—fewer than 20 per game.

More than a dozen Pirates were named First Team All-region.

Unofficial stats show senior running back William Heck was the leading rusher for BHS, running for

1441 yards.

Junior quarterback Grant Moore passed for 2525 yards and 22 touchdowns, with only 5 interceptions.

Tight end Hezekiah Kent, also a junior, was Moore's favorite target with 41 receptions totaling 983 yards.

Other All-region selections on offense included senior Jamarious Towns and sophomore Waseem Murray. Towns had 33 receptions for 635 yards. Murray totaled 31 catches for 642 yards.

Juniors Chase Richardson and Kasiyah Charlton anchored the offensive line and also earned All-region honors.

Senior linebacker J'Shawn Towns was selected as the Defensive Player of the Year in region 1-5A. Towns was the leading tackler for the Pirates, recording 125.

Other All-Region Pirates on defense include senior linebackers Caleb Butler, Jeremiah Robbins, and Gregg Richardson; senior defensive lineman Lance Brown; senior defensive back Sehki Ashley; and junior defensive back Aviyon Addison.

Butler recorded 84 tackles for the Pirates, and Robbins had twelve tackles for losses.

The BHS defense scored *eleven* touchdowns this season.

Coach Grady noted that interceptions returned for touchdowns and fumbles returned for touchdowns were keys to the Pirates success.

Selections to the All-Region second team included: Nigel Gardner, Josiah Gibbons, Aiden Watford, Garrett Wiggins, and Chris Wingster on offense; Chris Kimp, Antwan Kirk, Zay Knowles, Chozen Owens, Josh White, and Adrian Volland on defense.

Gardner, a sophomore, rushed for 874 yards and seven touchdowns.

Gibbons, also a sophomore, scored eight touchdowns while averaging over 14 yards per carry.

Pirates noted for Honorable Mention in region play included Evan Ali, Chris Cullins, Samir Dobbins, Xavier James, Jack Kennedy, Trent Lee, Tyler Ray, Andrew Riley, Antwan Thomuse, Nick Wisneski, and Jeremiah Woodward.

Even with all of the accomplishments, Coach Grady acknowledged the loss to Coffee "kind of leaves a bad taste in your mouth."

Still, 10 wins is a good season, and Coach Grady lauded the hard work of his coaching staff and players and are already working hard for next season.

"We have to hit the weight room and improve in the trenches," Coach Grady commented.

Grady was named Region Coach of the Year.

It says here the Pirates will do even better next season than they did this season, making a deep run in the state playoffs.







# FROM THE JUMP

The Start of SEC Dominance By Charlie Moon





I'm not crazy, but....Pat McAfee (yes, the same one permeating ESPN now) and long-time sports radio legend Colin Cowherd, had a major role in the country in introducing college football in the South, as the dominating national force.

Let me reset it for you. An undefeated, #2-ranked West Virginia was hosting long-time NFL coach Dave Wannstedt's 4-7 Pittsburgh Panthers. The Mountaineers were 28.5-point favorites. WVU's Pat McAfee missed not one, but two field goals.

To be fair, it was under 30 degrees and very windy. Pitt ran the ball out of the back of their own end zone as time expired and won 13-9.

My brother, Chad and our friends were going crazy. We called our parents, who were at some loud party in Athens. Why? Because the Dawgs, ranked #3, were going to be in the BCS Championship game!

Then....they weren't. Why? Long story short, the Dawgs were jumped by Florida, pitted against the Buckeyes on January 8, 2007.

Some can argue it began way before that. But that was the defining moment when a 7-point favored mighty Ohio St was supposed to show the country the Big Ten ruled the country.

But then SEC power and speed was on display and the country got to see just what pundit Colin Cowherd had been saying for a decade on his then ESPN radio show.

He had been saying for a decade that the SEC was already better than everyone, by a mile - and it

would start showing soon. Most folks just shewed him off like they do now. But the guy knows his stuff.

One particular show hinged on one aspect. To most football purists, it was the craziest thing they'd ever heard.

It made perfect sense to me, though. He was talking about how the 90s saw the birth of 7-on-7 off-season football tournaments, similar to what happened with AAU basketball, and what we now deem "travel ball."

Football showcase camps were popping up nationwide, and where were most of those camps? Yep, you guessed it.

The South. After all, why would a kid want to go to a March showcase event in lovely, icy St. Paul, Minnesota? So.... more kids from all regions, were coming down South.

His next point had nothing to do with football, but it rang clear. He talked about more kids visiting colleges down South, during these camps, and what did they see?

I can almost remember his exact words, but for emphasis, let's quote it anyway.

"Imagine a kid from Syracuse, New York coming down south and visiting a college campus in sunny

Florida. What do you think he saw? Yep, the college co-eds. And what do you think he thought? Do I want to stay in cold Syracuse, or go where the campuses are filled with sun and gorgeous co-eds?"

I get it, there are many reasons why college football in the South has been great for so long, well before 2007. But Cowherd's argument was nearly a decade ahead of its time. College football in the South had been better for a long time, but it hadn't yet dominated on a national scale.

In that 2007 BCS Championship Game, it was clear. The Gators were bigger, stronger and the biggest factor???.....speed!

The speed difference wasn't even close. Gator defensive lineman were chasing down speedy Ohio State QB Troy Smith and running backs in the backfield all night long. Ohio State receivers could never break away from Gator DBs.

Sure, this game wasn't a 1-game tell-all. And Pat McAfee and Colin Cowherd surely didn't invent football in the south.

But they both had a say in what might be the turning point of the southern college football show on display for the country.







# GUS BUS LEAVES

Malzahn Moves On By Robert Craft





**G**us Malzahn is resigning after four seasons as the head coach at UCF.

He will become the offensive coordinator at Florida State University, multiple sources with knowledge of the hiring have confirmed.

Malzahn, 59, went 28-24 with the Knights. After two nine-win seasons in the AAC, UCF fell to 10-15 in its first two years in the Big 12.

UCF finished 4-8 in 2024, ending the season with a 28-14 loss at home to Utah.

Malzahn and Florida State coach Mike Norvell have known each other for almost 20 years. Malzahn was the offensive coordinator at Tulsa when he heard about Norvell through a friend.

Malzahn hired Norvell (then a graduate assistant at Central Arkansas) as a GA with the Golden Hurricanes before the 2007 season. Norvell rose the ranks after Malzahn left to become an assistant at Auburn.

Malzahn will be taking over a Florida State offense that heads into its season-finale against Florida, and they are ranked 131st nationally in both yards per game and points per game.

Malzahn is 105-62 in 13 seasons as an FBS head coach with one season at Arkansas State and eight at Auburn.

The Arkansas native went 68-35 at Auburn, with a BCS championship game appearance in 2013, his first season as head coach.

He never had a losing record there and went 3-5 against Nick Saban's Alabama Crimson Tide teams in the Iron Bowl, but he was let go after the 2020 season, with the school paying a then-record \$21.5 million buyout to get rid of him.

Malzahn was also a successful offensive coordinator in the SEC, first at Arkansas and then at Auburn, helping Cam Newton and the Tigers win a national title in 2010.

UCF athletic director Terry

Mohajir rushed in as soon after Malzahn was let go by Auburn, a splashy move to replace Josh Heupel after he left for Tennessee.

Malzahn seemed invigorated by the new challenge. He bought into the branding and underlying idea that UCF was the future of college football as a growing program in the center of one of the nation's biggest football states.

Malzahn's 2024 recruiting class was the best in program history, finishing 39th in the 247Sports Composite.

His staff fended off one of Florida to sign defensive lineman John Walker, the nation's No. 95 overall prospect and the top recruit in program history.

Even during two seasons in the AAC, UCF failed to meet the elevated expectations of a program that went to back-to-back New Year's Six Bowls in 2017 and 2018 under Scott Frost and Heupel.

The Knights went 18-9 his first two seasons, losing the American title game in 2021 before beating Florida in the Gasparilla Bowl.

All three former AAC schools, including Houston and Cincinnati, have struggled to win since entering the Big 12.

UCF had the best first season by reaching a bowl game. But the Knights had one of the season's biggest collapses when they blew a 28-point second-half lead to Baylor in their first Big 12 home game.

Year 2 was expected to bring solid results with Arkansas transfer KJ Jefferson, a promising match for Gus's offense.

Instead, it brought a quarterback carousel, a midseason firing of Defensive Coordinator Ted Roof, Malzahn handing off play-calling to offensive coordinator Tim Harris, and several close losses that could have flipped the season.

UCF issued the following statement: "We would like to thank coach Malzahn for his contributions to our football program over the past four seasons, including our transition into the Big 12 Conference. We appreciate his professionalism and dedication to our student-athletes throughout his tenure at UCF and wish he and his wife, Kristi, the very best in their future endeavors."

Malzahn had three years left on a contract that would have paid him about \$5.5 million annually.

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